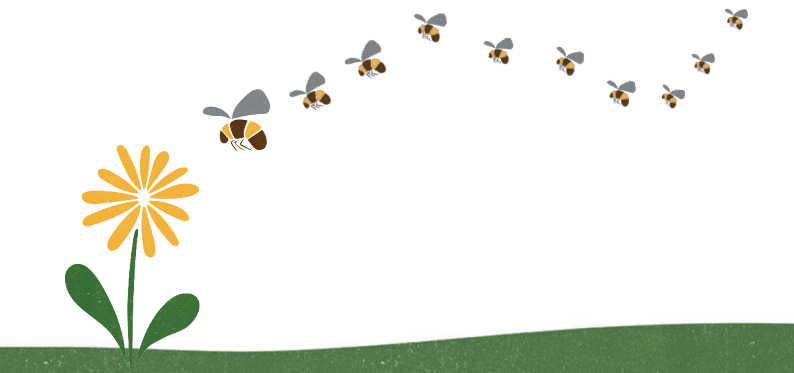
Greenham Reach
Annual Monitoring Report
Year 5

19th November 2017 to 18th November 2018

Report prepared by the Ecological Land Cooperative detailing progress to date against the aims and objectives of our site Management Plan for Greenham Reach smallholdings.



Ecological
Land
Cooperative
For a living, working countryside

Greenham Reach
An aerial view



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The transformation of Steepholding's market garden.

About the ELC

The Ecological Land Cooperative (ELC) is a social enterprise, established to address the lack of affordable sites for ecological land-based livelihoods in England and Wales. We work to address a range of complex and deep-rooted social and environmental challenges in a uniquely simple, pragmatic way: by removing barriers to land access for sustainable uses.

Our mission and core business is the creation of residential smallholdings aimed at new entrants to horticulture and mixed farming. We protect our sites for affordability and ecological agricultural use in perpetuity. Greenham Reach is our first cluster of smallholdings.

Our vision is of a living, working countryside, providing sustainable rural livelihoods to smallholders alongside a range of benefits to communities and ecosystems. Small-scale ecological production protects the environment and reduces greenhouse gas emissions by reducing fossil fuel use. Such businesses help build a vibrant, living countryside in which people flourish alongside our cherished landscapes and natural biodiversity, and have a crucial role to play in ensuring food and energy security.

They also provide employment, access to local, sustainable food and crafts and educational opportunities for urban visitors, helping to maintain rural skills and to improve ecological literacy.

Our model is to create clusters of smallholdings. This helps us to keep costs down through the provision of shared infrastructure, shared planning applications and subsequent site monitoring. It allows the smallholders to work together and provide mutual support.



About This Report

This report relates to Greenham Reach, the Ecological Land Cooperative's (ELC) first project. Greenham Reach is a cluster of three affordable smallholdings in Greenham, Mid Devon.

This is the fifth annual monitoring report for Greenham Reach, the ELC's first cluster of farms. GR is made up of three small farms for new entrants into ecological agriculture, in Mid Devon. A temporary 5 year permission was granted in 2013 and in 2018 this permission became permanent.

Since 2013 three families have been developing their smallholdings. Elder Farm is a business centred around herb production; Wild Geese Acres focuses on intensive salad production and has expanded to include sheep, pigs and flowers; and Steepholding is a mixed enterprise including fruit tree propagation, a vegetable box scheme and a micro dairy herd of Golden Guernsey goats.

For more information about Greenham Reach, please visit our website, www.ecologicalland.coop

As in previous years this report is structured to reflect the Greenham Reach Management Plan.

Overall, we are still happy with progress on the three smallholdings. The heavy, late winter, coupled with a long and dry summer meant difficult weather conditions again, especially for farms with only basic infrastructure. Across the site as a whole there have been some big steps forward, although of course much work is still needed to maintain and improve what is there.

Landscape Character

Management Plan Objective: ' It is important that Greenham Reach will maintain and enhance Mid Devon's typical landscape features as well as the specific nature of the locality and the site itself.'

We continue to be satisfied with the landscape character.

Visual amenity

The increased work and production across the 22 acres means more buildings, more materials and more human activity – with the expected result that the fields look a lot busier than they did when they were purely arable and pasture fields. This is a sign of regeneration and productivity and as last year's ecology reports show, has gone alongside a significant increase in wildlife and biodiversity.

There is one additional polytunnel on the lower slopes of Steepholding's market garden, a new small caravan behind the polytunnel at Wild Geese Acres, and a new lean-to shed on a caravan at Elder Farm.

Alongside the existing buildings and polytunnels these structures are small and/or hidden, and the planted hedges, orchard trees and shelter belts provide both weather and visual protection whilst also creating more habitat.

From the roadside gate one still sees a broadly open field, a track and young trees — a very pastoral sight.

Hedgerows and Trees

These continue to grow on well. Some of the shelter belts are at a significant height now, and will soon need to be cut back to ensure they don't interfere with sunlight.

Grassland

This has continued under similar management as in the previous years. The field areas in Wild Geese Acres and Steepholding have been stocked with a shared herd of sheep and have been topped and mowed. The field area in Wild Geese Acres that was suffering heavily from weeds has been flail mowed three times over the summer and is looking significantly better; the grass is flourishing, and the weeds are smaller and thinner.

The steep MG5c meadow was not monitored by an ecologist this year, but is being well managed. Large areas of bramble and scrub on this slope were removed from encroaching areas this year.

There are no concerns with waste management, the riverside edge or with invasive species.



Steepholding's meadow

Ecosystems and Biodiversity

Management Plan Objective: 'The enhancement of the site's existing ecosystem and biodiversity.'

The flourishing of human activity at Greenham Reach has given rise to a marked increase in habitat and biodiversity as indicated by Dr Wilson's report last year (Audit Year 4).

More planted shelter belts, trees and small buildings has meant more edges where different ecological niches interact and more micro-habitats. Together with a lack of large scale cultivation this appears to be increasing the beneficial environment for insects and therefore all the predators that follow on from those.



New trees growing on the ELC communal land

Soil fertility

The soil continues to be well cared for. There is very little exposure of bare soil to weather elements, and no fungicides or poisons being used. The soil tests this year showed no significant changes and no cause for any concern. Elder Farm has continued to remove the rushes from the field and plant trees to improve the ground and flow of water. The pig field area in Wild Geese Acres has been fallow and under plastic since the summer and will be given over to plant production next year.

Water

The management of water at Greenham Reach continues to be a major challenge. Periods of prolonged drought or persistent heavy rain seem possible at almost any time. The dry summer meant that water levels in the borehole went down, and the water pump struggled at times. This confirmed the need for a much larger system of on-farm ponds and reservoirs – but they have cost implications.

Wild Geese Acres has filled the pond behind the polytunnel, using waste water from the water filtration process, and also has a new small pond in the poultry area. This is simply made from old tyres and strong black plastic.

Steepholding has carried out a good deal of work on drainage at the bottom of their market garden, making ditches and swales to carry away water. No contamination issues have been observed.

Energy, Carbon Emissions and Bio-Sequestration

Management Plan Objective: 'Sustainable development requires that households use significantly less fossil fuel... the ELC [also] aims for its sites to be exemplars of bio-sequestration (the absorption and storage of carbon dioxide).'

The wind turbine was erected at the beginning of the year and has been busily adding to total generated power which has been a very useful addition. However, all the businesses are still being held back somewhat by a lack of electricity. To some degree this is partially because of the increased power needs of the water filtration, but in any event, all the holdings are doing well to manage their homes and business on a shared system of 4.3 kW. The total usage up until mid-November 2018 was 18330 kWh, with 6311 kWh used on the communal supply.

Greenham Reach continues to be an excellent example of productive farms with good soil care, widespread tree planting, and plenty of perennial vegetation — all indicators of good carbon sequestration. We continue to hope for funding to help us monitor this area more effectively and see where improvements could be made.



The wind turbine at Greenham Reach

Animal Husbandry

Management Plan Objective: ' The ELC believes that animals should be managed with care for their welfare and health. As set out by the Farm Animal Welfare Council, animals should be managed in such a way as they enjoy the five freedoms from: malnutrition, physical discomfort and extremes of temperature, injury and disease, fear and distress, and unnecessary restrictions on behaviour.'

There have been no reports of mistreatment or cruelty to animals. Elder Farm has its six geese and a flock of runner ducks for slug control, plus four chickens.



Wild Geese Acres has no more Oxford Sandy and Black pigs. Though popular they did make quite a mess of their field and James has now opted for Kunekune pigs. These are a breed from New Zealand which are smaller than many other varieties, who cut up the ground less and eat more grass. James currently has two pigs and aims to add more. There are also the geese keeping the grass down around the market garden and the hens for eggs. The sheep are shared with Steepholding.

Steepholding has reduced their goat herd and stopped milking over the latter part of the year (see livelihood section) but still have five nannies and the shared sheep flock with Wild Geese Acres, as well as their 30 hens with eggs for the box scheme.





A new kid at Steepholding, Kunekune pigs at Wild Geese Acres and geese on Elder Farm

Next page - the shared sheep at Steepholding and Wild Geese Acres



Open Day

Management Plan Objective: 'The objective of the annual open day is to spread understanding of the ELC's approach to sustainable agriculture and living.'

There was a busy open day on September 15th. There were around 70 people on the day which included: farm tours, a Tombola, a 'guess the weight of the marrow' competition, tea and cake stall, and £115 raised for Refugee Aid Taunton.

There were two school visits, to Elder Farm, from Westminster Boys school in October.



Steepholding's Ruth shows open day visitors around the farms

Transport

Management Plan Objective: 'The project provides an integrated livelihood and residential scheme which will by its very nature result in a low traffic development. However, smallholders will be limited on the number of vehicles on site and number of vehicle journeys.'

There are three vehicles for road use at Greenham Reach, one for each holding. The electronic count of vehicle movements at the gateway was 5863 this year. That is a figure very similar to the previous year, with an increase of 25, or 0.43%. This is still more than our target of 4380, but less than the average for three comparable rural UK dwellings.

Renewably powered vehicles or other strategies to reduce fossil fuel use would require considerable financial investment that neither ELC nor the farm businesses currently have, but we will keep this situation under review.

Volunteers

Volunteers have again played a crucial role in work activities across all three holdings. All the holdings have had a mixture of WWOOFERS (people staying on the farm as part of the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms network) and volunteers who come for the day.

As in previous years, volunteers play a crucial part in many activities at Greenham Reach. They have helped the businesses grow, whilst also themselves gaining experience and skills and health benefits from working there.

Elder Farm calculate about 3000 volunteer hours over the year, Wild Geese Acres about 1200 and Steepholding about 595 hours.



Land Based Livelihoods

Management Plan Objective: 'The ELC exists to support the creation of land-based livelihoods. At Greenham Reach this comprises the growing of crops and/or livestock and/or bees for personal use and for sale'

All the holdings continue to grow in their own way and all have at least one FTE person working on them.

Elder Farm

Elder Farm received its organic certification early in the year to get things off to a good start. They sold their skullcap crop after it passed various tests, to the Organic Herbal Trading Company (OHTC). Thirty more fruit trees were planted in the orchard and have done well as has the perennial thyme beds planted on mounds to keep them out of the wetter ground. They have got more ducks to aid with pest control.

Elder Farm has been very active in attending and supporting the growth of a UK herbal growers network. A huge percentage of UK herb use comes from overseas, so it's heartening to see this network expand. The issue of drying herbs is a challenge for many, as the processing facilities do not widely exist — for Elder Farm there is also a lack of electricity to power heaters to dry plants at scale. The profits from the business have nearly doubled since last year.



Getting ready for herb growing in 2018





Trees growing at Elder Farm (above) At the Green Scythe Fair (below)

Wild Geese Acres

Obvious progress has been made with the agroforestry field this year. The (kindly donated) flail mower has been put to good use and the grass crop is looking lush and a lot less weed burdened. The trees may also have benefited as they have put on girth and are looking stronger with individual wooden protection around each one to guard against the sheep.

The market garden has seen steady progress. This year saw an extended season of growing, and more bulk selling, getting away from individual salad bags, to save time on handling and packaging. The polytunnel has a new gutter fitted to it, meaning less flooding problems inside and less issues with mould. The trial flower sales have been steady, proving there is a market and good possibilities, so production will be expanded next year.

The new Kunekune pigs have settled in and so far, seem to be living up to expectations to eat more grass and do less damage to the soil; James has purchased two pedigree Kune Kune sows for breeding purposes. he will be breeding from the better of the two sows in july and expects 8 -10 piglets. The males will go for meat at 10 months old, their meat is highly prized in the charcuterie sector, and the females can be sold on as weaners for breeding stock. Due to their pedigree they will command a good price, over double that you would get for a regular rare breed. A local bee keeper now also keeps bees on the site. The geese continue to do a good job guarding James's best salads from pests. Wild Geese Acres' sales have increased, and profits have nearly doubled since last year.





Steepholding

Steepholding continues to expand its operations and push on with developing a range of produce.

They have been working on plans for a new dairy, processing and packing shed, which received permission during the year, and hope to get this built over the winter. This will allow them to make the goats cheese a proper part of the business.

Ruth had a major operation in the late summer which meant they reduced their goat herd and the subsequent milking regime. This will expand again next year.

The new market garden area in the lower field has come into operation and has grown a good crop of squash, brassicas, alliums and others. New swales and ditches have been put in to manage the water at this lower location in the field. The new lower polytunnel has also allowed for increased vegetable production. The box scheme has stayed at around 30 weekly customers, but now has capacity to increase a little more. The online fruit tree business has continued, and new fruit trees have been added to the orchard.

They have also been developing exciting plans for tree planting in the lower field, to increase tree forage for the goats and make better use of that wet field. They have also seen sales and profits increase again this year.









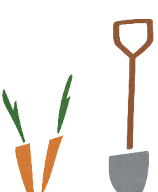


Pumpkins, aubergine, fennel and tomatoes grown on Steepholding.

Previous page: onions in the market garden.

Monitoring

There have been no areas for concern this year.



Get in touch:

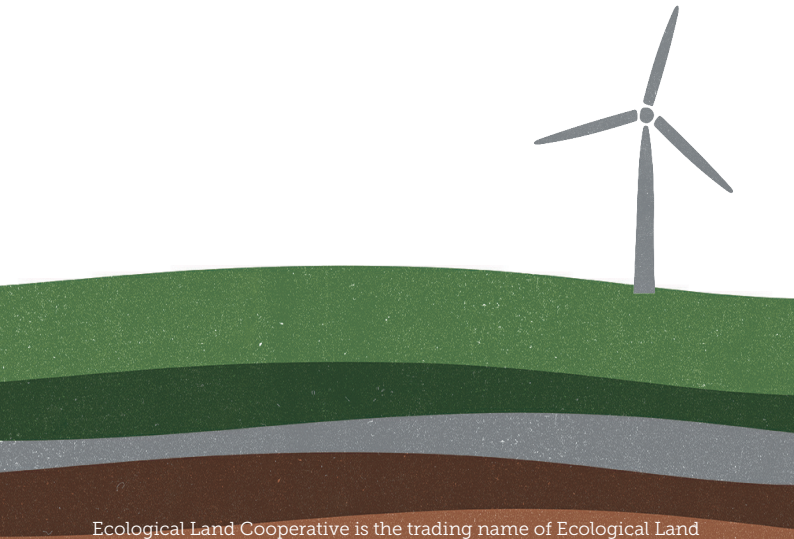
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