Ecological Land Cooperative

For a living, working countryside

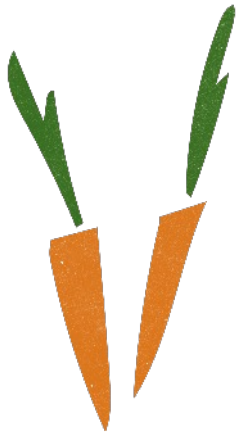


Social Impact Report

July 2020 – June 2021

The Ecological Land Cooperative's Social Impact Report for the period from June 2020 to July 2021

In this report we look at the work carried out by the cooperative over the last twelve months to understand the impact that this has had in line with the organisation's mission and objectives. It is an opportunity to reflect on the year and think about what we did right, what we could have done better and what we should be doing in the future. We have surveyed our stewards, our staff, and the people who have contacted us throughout the year to learn about their experiences of interacting with the ELC. The report is also an opportunity to tell you what we have been doing and how the organisation is developing.



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ELC's Mission

The objects of the society, as described in our rules for the cooperative's management, are to benefit the community by widening access to land for sustainable land-based uses including but not limited to:

- local food, grown with minimal inputs.
- renewable energy and fossil fuel independence.
- reconnecting people and place though social and cultural activities.
- forestry, fibres and other rural produce
- homemaking and community,

And the general cooperative aims described below:

- To build membership within its stakeholder groups, and ensuring that its membership fully reflects the diversity of those groups and of the wider community.
- To consult with, encourage participation from and respond to its membership.
- To create a common wealth, building an indivisible reserve and providing a return on investment no more than is necessary to attract and retain the capital it requires.
- To maintain its autonomy and independence and empower members and other stakeholders at the most local level possible.
- To educate its members and Employees, support education in the wider community and promote co-operation.
- To support the development and growth of the cooperative movement.
- To evaluate its impact on the community and the environment in which it operates, and develop policies that reduce harmful impacts and increase positive impacts.

How we measure our impact
We consider our impact as an organisation under three broad headings.

Food sovereignty and democracy

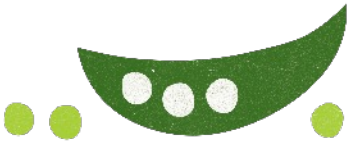
1. Widening access to land for affordable, sustainable use.
2. Producing food, forestry, fibres and other rural produce with minimal inputs.
3. Working with producers to rebuild local supply chains.

Social impact and community resilience

1. Supporting the development of resilient communities (inc. reconnecting people and place though social and cultural activities).
2. Supporting the sharing of knowledge and training (inc. ecological literacy/nature connection).
3. Building links with and between ecological/educational/agricultural organisations, communities, and projects.
4. Providing employment.
5. Building membership and member participation.

Ecological impact

1. Working towards renewable energy and fossil fuel independence.
2. Maintaining and enhancing habitats, species diversity, landscape quality.



Site Progress

Making progress with development on our sites has been challenging over the last 12 months.

This has been in part because the Covid-19 pandemic meant that local authority staff were working from home and planning teams were diverted onto Covid-19 responses, putting planning assessments on hold. This, coupled with the complicated nature of our developments, has meant waits of over a year longer than we had hoped for. The situation varies with each authority that we are working with and we have been able to make progress with our Cornwall site which had a positive pre-application response, and where we have been able to carry out local consultations by letter rather than public meeting. The slow progress is reflected in the numbers below. We have also found it difficult to find suitable land to purchase as there has been very little available to buy and when land does come up for sale it is highly sought after, often pushing up prices. The Covid-19 lockdowns also affected our ability to visit suitable sites and reduced our staff capacity to look for land.

Measuring Site Progress in 2020-21 (using acreage as points)

Our sites are Greenham Reach (21 acres), Martinsfield (18.5 acres), Furzehill (18 acres), Sparkford (21 acres) and Orchard Park (20.4 acres)

	At 1st June 2019	At 1st June 2020	At 1st June 2021
Acres secured	78.5	98.9	98.9
Consultation complete	39.5	78.5	98.9
Pre planning Application submitted	39.5	78.5	98.9
Planning application validated	39.5	78.5	78.5
Planning application decision	39.5	39.5	39.5
Planning conditions / appeal completed	39.5	39.5	39.5
Let to small holders	26	39	48
First accounts / wildlife survey	39	57.5	78.5
Profitability achieved	21	21	39.5
Permanent planning permission	21	21	21
Total 'points'	383	551.9	641.2
Progress for the year (in points)		168.9	89.3

New ELC Stewards

Allwood Farm at Martinsfield, Arlington, East Sussex

In January 2021 we were finally able to welcome our newest stewards, Bryony and Ben Allwood and their very young son, Pheonix, to the third plot at Martinsfield, Arlington.

The Allwoods are experienced growers who have worked in horticulture for many years and spent the previous year growing wholesale vegetables in Devon before taking on a 150 year lease for their new farm. They are also keen herb growers and have carried out extensive research into wholesale herb growing across the world.

They are committed to regenerative agriculture and have got off to a flying start with two polytunnels enabling them to grow vegetables for *Shrub Provisions* who take produce to London restaurants, the *Sussex Peasant* mobile farm shop, *A Share of the Crop* Sussex veg box scheme and *Farmdrop.*

They employ a no-till method that mimics the natural process of building the topsoil from above as happens on forest floors



and with animals on pasture. This creates the perfect conditions for vegetables to thrive in. Ben and Bryony say:

'No-Till means we never plough the soil or leave it bare, in fact we hardly disturb the soil at all, we don't see bare soil in nature. With no till we can add organic matter to the topsoil to naturally build fertility and soil life, along with locking carbon into the soil.'

You can find our more about the farm on their website **www.allwoodfarm.com**

Photos: Above: Ben in the polytunnel at Allwood Farm

Below: Allwood Farm **Credit: both Allwood Farm**



The ELC Stewards' Farm Businesses

This year we have been joined by stewards on three new farms*.

Greenham Reach, Mid Devon

Elder Farm
www.elderfarm.co.uk

Steepholding
www.steepholding.co.uk

Wild Geese Acres
www.ecologicalland.coop/James-Dexter

Martinsfield, East Sussex

Allwood Farm*
www.allwoodfarm.com

Aweside Farm
www.awesidefarm.co.uk

Fanfield Farm
www.fanfield.farm

Furzehill, Gower

Cae Tan CSA
www.caetancsa.org

The Rowan Tree*
www.flowersfromthefarm.co.uk/members/the-rowan-tree

Sparkford, Somerset

Cider Apple Trees*
www.ciderappletrees.co.uk

Below: Cider Apple Tree's orchard credit: the Whitticks





Above: Fanfield Farm credit: Fanfield Farm

Below: Tom and Lizzy , growers credit: Cae Tan CSA





New Zealand Kunekune pigs are a feature at Wild Geese Acres, Steepholding and Fanfield Farm credit : Anna K Brown



New growing beds at The Rowan Tree credit : The Rowan Tree

The Steward Survey

We asked our stewards to give us some feedback on our service to them and also to gauge their impact in a range of areas related to the ELC mission. 90% of our stewards responded and the results are below.

Our Stewards like:

The financial support the ELC offered during the pandemic;

Friendliness of staff;

Our ability to accommodate the needs of stewards.

What we could do better:

Offer more support to the farm businesses;

Keep stewards better informed of progress as we wait for planning permission;

Find a way to bring steward voices into the decision making processes of the ELC.

Results of the Land Steward Survey

We asked our land stewards to let us know how they felt about the following statements: the scores shown are an average of all scores.

	June '21
The ELC has been supportive of me and my farm business and land stewardship over the last 12 months. (Max. 10 - strongly agree)	7.5
The ELC has been supportive of OTHER farm businesses and land stewards over the last 12 months. (Max. 10 - strongly agree)	7.5
What kind of impact has my farm had over the last 12 months in each of the following social impact areas: (Max. 5 - impact)	
Widening access to land for affordable, sustainable use	2.5
Producing food, forestry, fibres and other rural produce with minimal inputs	4
Working with producers to rebuild local supply chains	3.5
Supporting the development of resilient communities	3.3
Supporting the sharing of knowledge and training	3.5
Building links with and between ecological/educational/agricultural organisations	3
Building membership and member participation	2
Working towards renewable energy and fossil fuel independence	2.4
Maintaining and enhancing habitats, species diversity and landscape quality	4

The Steward Survey - feedback

It was a difficult year all round, the drop in ELC's staff capacity during lockdown meant fewer staff on the ground, whilst not being able to travel made it difficult to stay in touch with stewards, and many of their comments reflected this. Other issues raised are covered below.

We asked the stewards how the pandemic had affected them:

'We were able to deliver veg boxes to many extra people unable to access food during the pandemic and support other local food links. We were unable to have our usual school visits. We were able to provide four or five virtual tours for students of practical sustainability'

'... We're selling flowers (and will be selling veg and herbs from June) to a local organic shop, a box scheme and a local bakery. Considering we arrived here less than a year ago during a pandemic I'm extremely pleased to have made so many connections to other local businesses!'

'We weren't able to supply a lot last year mostly due to growing conditions but sent things into London and to the local pub that we're working on to grow the bulk of their veg for.

In Feb 2021 we decided to portion off a patch of the land and dedicate it to developing a social enterprise C.I.C. and non profit where the produce grown by volunteers will go towards food aid projects ...'

'I think having realistic expectations of what we can do early on - a comment we had was we hadn't been doing much community engagement, which in a pandemic was quite hard and not something we were comfortable with...'

We also asked for suggestions for how we can better meet our aims:

'...acknowledging that the farms aren't starting with good conditions and managing the expectations of how quickly we can 'thrive' given the conditions. Would also recommend things like field management before stewards move on, for instance, the two no dig farms here are experiencing huge leatherjackets issues which have eaten 80% of our spring crops setting us back 5-6 weeks. Their key breeding time is September in short grasses, and flail mowing on this site has ...creat(ed) the perfect breeding ground for a devastating pest...so it would be good to do field management ... (to) turn the degraded land into slightly better conditions for stewards to move onto '

'This is a very difficult and busy time for growers to fill in a form in great detail... it may be worth working towards these report forms being sent in Winter or off-season, April-Oct is all focussed on growing especially in early years.'

'Stop concentrating on off grid as the best system for energy use. Look at OPD policy on this. Off grid is for people who don't have to compete in an open marketplace where competitors have all the power they need.... When resources are scarce people stop cooperating and think about them selves.'

We will be looking at the survey results and talking about the range of issues that stewards have raised, during this year..

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

Community supported agriculture (CSA) is a partnership between farmers and consumers designed to address increasing concerns about the lack of transparency, sustainability and resilience of our food system. CSA members are closely linked to the farm and the production of their food, and provide support through investment in the farm, providing labour on the farm and accepting a share in the harvest.



Farmers receive a more stable and secure income and closer connection with their community, and consumers benefit by eating fresh healthy local food, feeling more connected to the land where their food is grown, and learning new skills. There are three CSA's operating on ELC's sites. They told us about their experiences during the pandemic when demand for locally grown food rose as people worried about food shortages in supermarkets. Getting a locally produced veg box was a way of ensuring a healthy supply of food and many people joined waiting lists for schemes.

Steepholding, Greenham Reach

Ruth O'Brien and Alex Wilson

We went up from about 60 to 85 weekly boxes during the first lockdown. This was mostly due to us making concessions for people who were very vulnerable and had no other alternatives. We were receiving many requests daily during early lockdown from people wanting a veg box. Most of those new members trickled away when things opened up again,so were only in it whilst no other alternative. It was financially a strain as the first lockdown began just as we were going into the hungry gap, where we have to buy in more produce than normal - April, May and early June, but didn't stay for the summer and autumn where we produce 90% of our box contents (we buy in local organic potatoes which are more sensible grown at a field scale) and often have surpluses.

We are currently back to 60 weekly boxes and have a waiting list of about 30. We were also still able at some points to send outgraded veg to community re-distribution, but not as much as usual. Four veg box members worked voluntarily for a half or whole day a week in exchange for produce whilst on furlough.

Fanfield Farm, Martinsfield

Chris and Emily Huskins

The pandemic meant that the local area not only wanted more home deliveries but also cared more about the amount of hands that had touched their food and where it came from. We went from having a "waiting list" of about 40 people before March last year, to around 150 people within months of the first lockdown. We up'd our production and opened up more space as soon as we could and were producing 35 - 40 veg boxes for local families per week through the growing season.

We were grateful for this additional market influx and the customers it has provided us, however we reflected on the negative impacts this has had on our health, both mentally and physically as we felt the pressure on the food system throughout these times and put pressure on ourselves to produce more and feed more. This has led to us cutting back in our business expansion this year to 60 boxes per week which we are now providing.

An additional reflection is that many (but not all) that signed up to a veg box as a reaction to the pandemic did not really read through our CSA shares scheme information and so have been more difficult to work with. For example many were looking to substitute products they didn't like, and didn't understand the seasonality of the boxes so were surprised to get lots of root veg through the winter etc. This has made us re-look at the way we enrol people, but we do feel a lot of these came from "reactionary purchases".

Cae Tan CSA, Furzehill

Ruth Evans

We were full at the start of the pandemic but interest increased dramatically in the first lockdown. We have 125 household members and over 80 on our wait list. Those at the top of the list have been waiting almost 2 years. We have a very low turnover of members. Other CSA's are now sharing advice on how to manage waiting lists and I've read that interest in all box schemes has increased dramatically over the last year.

I think we have higher numbers of volunteers this season as people are appreciating being outdoors and benefits for mental health. Our education project had to be put on hold for all of 2020/21 and is only just starting up again. But Jessie who runs the program is telling us how badly the children she works with have been affected and how much the type of work she does with them is needed.

Finding and supporting new ELC Stewards

Interest in the Ecological Land Cooperative's small farms remains strong with enquiries coming in on a regular basis.

Many enquiries are for land outside of our current areas of availability and we try to connect people to local organisations who may be able to help them.

We also signpost potential applicants to other organisations that can help them get the experience they need to be ready to take on an ELC plot in the future.

As we gain more experience of supporting new entrants as they get started in their farm businesses we are learning just how challenging it is for our new farmers and therefore how important it is that they have the skills and support that they need to thrive.



Kumar and Molly visit Sparkford as part of the steward assessment process credit: ELC

Steward Enquiry Survey Results 2020-21

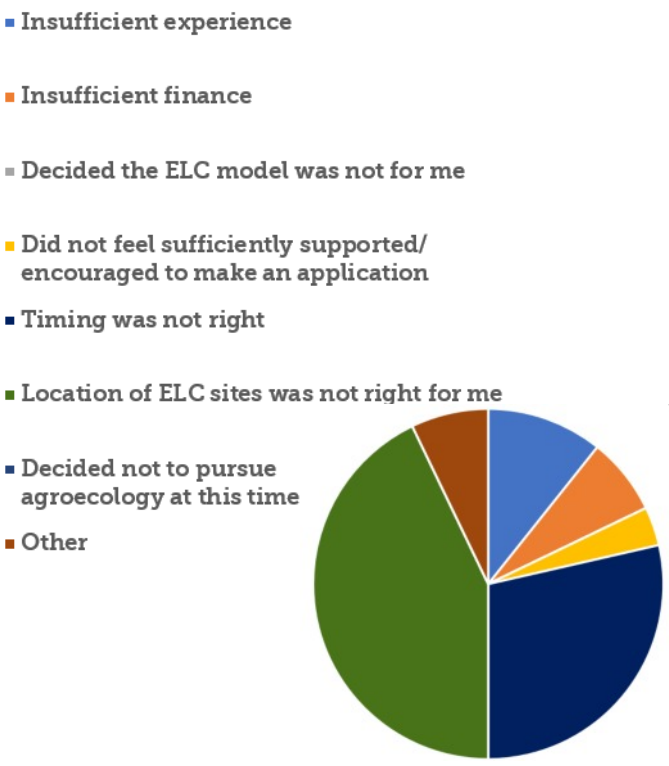
Was your engagement with ELC helpful in guiding you with future plans? (19 responses)



How likely are you to make an application for an ELC farm in the future? (20 responses)



If you decided not to apply for an ELC farm lease, which of the following statements apply to you? (17 responses)



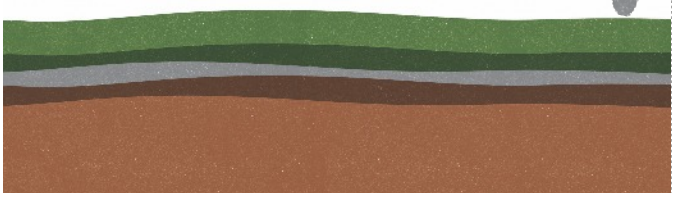
We received a total of 4 complete applications for 3 plots between June 2020 and June 2021, all of them at our Orchard Park site, which until recently has been the only site where plots were available.

We received a similar number of enquiries from prospective applicants compared to the previous year. However, these enquiries led to significantly fewer initial phone interviews and full applications (4 compared to 8 in the previous year). We think that two main factors have contributed to this reduction in applications. Firstly we have fewer plots available at fewer sites. Secondly, improvements in our first stage vetting processes have more effectively identified those who are not ready to make a full application.

We continue to invite applications for two plots at Orchard Park in Cornwall. We have also recently had an applicant withdraw from taking a plot at our Sparkford site due to a change in their plans and so we have one plot newly available which we are now advertising.

We are keenly looking for new land for our developments of small farms and hope to buy at least two suitable sites in the coming year.

The Ecological Land Cooperative are looking for land to create small ecological farms - find out more on page 28 of this report, and if you have land to sell or donate, or know of available land, please email: stella@ecologicalland.coop



Steward applications, June 2020- June 2021

	Arlington	Furzehill	Orchard Park	Sparkford	TOTAL
Interviewed/ withdrawn	1		1	1	3
Not interviewed/ withdrawn	3	1	4	1	9
Offered lease				1	1
Second stage applicant		1	2		3
Second stage / withdrawn				1	
Signed full lease	1				1
Signed short term lease		1		1	2
TOTAL	5	3	7	5	20

Farming the Future Collaborative Projects

Last year we were very fortunate to be part of two successful funding bids to the Farming the Future Fund for projects which brought a number of organisations together to work on building the capacity of the agroecological community to create opportunities for acquiring land for ecological farming. There were two distinct beneficiary communities with some shared themes.



Scaling Up Community-owned Land for Agroecology

ELC is the lead organisation in a collaborative project with the Scottish Farm Land Trust and Community Shares Scotland (CSS) in a project that is designed to build the capacity and inform the development of the Scottish Farm Land Trust (SFLT).

SFLT are setting out on their journey to create affordable access to land for agroecology in Scotland. Whilst there are differences in legislation between Scotland and England that may mean they use a different model to the ELC, there are many aspects of the work they plan to do which the ELC has already experienced and is uniquely in a position to offer guidance on.

The project has enabled us to meet together - on Zoom rather than face to face as had originally been planned - to share information and answer questions that will get the SFLT to the point where they can launch a community share offer to raise funds for land purchase.

They will be supported in this by Community Shares Scotland who have a wealth of experience of preparing organisations to raise funds through community shares.

The final stage of the project will be for the ELC to build an online toolkit, sharing the information gathered in this project, which can be used by people across the UK to set up their own agricultural community land organisations.

Jumping Fences

For Jumping Fences, ELC and the Land Workers' Alliance (LWA) are partners of Land In Our Names (LION) who are leading on the project.

The first stage of the project is research to identify the barriers that Black people and people of colour (BPOC) face when considering a land based livelihood in Britain. We will seek out BPOC led land-based businesses and organisations and talk to them to discover what challenges they have experienced and how they overcame them to create their farms.

The reason for doing this is to try to uncover the reasons for the under-representation of BPOC in the British agriculture, environmental and horticulture sectors, and in agroecological farming in particular. The report will consider ways to address them to increase BPOC's access to land and other support, to start land based enterprises for food growing and also open up rural spaces to BPOC for enjoyment and wellbeing.

The second part of the project will be the dissemination of the research findings through a range of media and a series of workshops aimed at the agroecology sector.

The final intention of the collective effort is to strengthen the capacity of the relatively newly formed LION to become a community land trust that provides access to land for BPOC land stewards.

Organisation Development at the ELC

Last year was a challenging time for all of us and although the ELC is a remote working organisation, we still felt the strain of isolation and coping with changed family situations that the Covid-19 pandemic brought with it. Our small staff team was reduced to half its capacity as a result of Covid-19. Not being able to travel to our sites to support stewards who were experiencing hardship was particularly difficult, for them and for us.

We also recognised that we needed to bring in extra capacity in some new roles to best serve our members and continue to grow the organisation to deliver on our mission. In September 2020 we held two strategic planning days, one online and one in person, and we made a plan for a new staff team to take on the challenges of the growing ELC.

We began the process by carrying out an audit of all the current job descriptions and looking at the way roles had changed since those job descriptions had been devised. What became apparent during this process was that as the organisation had grown many staff had taken on more work which was not reflected in their job descriptions requiring capacity that they didn't have.

The impact of this was that some in the current staff team were starting to feel overstretched. Coupled with the restrictions on time caused by lockdown and the closure of schools, this was starting to have a negative effect on our ability to manage all the tasks required to keep the organisation on track. It was also beginning to take its toll on staff well being.

In creating the new staffing plan for ELC we wanted to get into a good position to manage the challenges ahead as we grow the organisation over the next 3 to 5 years.

There were a number of personal considerations to make as members of staff reviewed their own situations and thought about what they wanted to do going forward. Many were looking to reduce the number of hours worked whilst remaining committed to the ELC. This afforded us the opportunity to create new roles to tackle the pressing issues for the organisation whilst retaining the expertise and experience that has been built up in the staff team over the years.

Our strategy days gave us opportunities to consider what these pressing issues were and also to refine our strategies to address them. The new staffing model that we have developed is based on having more part-time remote working staff members who are specialists in their particular areas of work.

This is a model we have employed to good effect so far for most of our staff roles. The exception to this has been the Operations Manager role, a full time position for the last four years that has grown to become more than a full time workload.

The New Staff Roles

Land search to find suitable land for new smallholding sites is a key area of work that we have identified as needing more capacity in order to be successful. We have discussed using local contacts to try and find land and this would be coordinated with support from the Land Search Committee (a subgroup of the ELC board) by the **Site Development Manager** (3 days per week). They will be responsible for moving each site through the development process to completion.

Site monitoring of both the farm businesses and environmental improvements on our sites will provide data that supports our model of regenerative agriculture and successful farm businesses in small clusters. The new role of **Site Monitoring Manager** (1.5 days per week) will focus on coordinating this work across all our sites, using local site managers and expert consultants to gather the data to produce the annual monitoring reports for each farm/site as well as coordinating a range of surveys to

measure ecological improvements on our sites.

The Site Managers (2 days per site per month) will be consultants recruited for each site and will work with the Site Development Manager and the Site Monitoring Manager to carry out all necessary tasks as sites are developed. This role will change as stewards go on site, for example to support new Stewards, or to assist with site monitoring and local communications. This role also varies from site to site depending on the need.

Steward selection has been a key improvement over the last few years and we want to continue with our open application process and increase the capacity we have to support our new entrant stewards as they get started on ELC smallholdings. We also recognise the importance of the stewards' voice in the ELC and want to increase our stewards' participation in the decision making of the organisation. Working with the new communities of farms to build resilience and a structure for the community to work together requires some expertise and time. The new post of **Steward Support and Community Development Manager** (2 days per week) will focus on this work.

Currently the Operations Manager role has a wide range of responsibilities which have grown with the organisation. A dedicated **Finance and Administration Manager** (3 days per week) will give the right amount of expertise and time to the finances and organisational administration and provide adequate admin support to all team members and the ELC board.

The **Coordinator** (3 days per week) will concentrate on holding the work of the organisation together, ensuring that the organisation stays on track with implementing its plans, providing support and supervision for staff members and remaining one of the links to the staff team on the ELC board as a non-voting member.

The Coordinator will also lead on developing monitoring and evaluation systems for the ELC and will coordinate production of the Social Impact Review each year.

The **Information Systems Manager** (1 day per week) role is a reduction of the current Membership and Engagement Manager role which will concentrate on developing and maintaining the database and website functions necessary to automate our membership administration and communications. This work requires specialist technical skills.

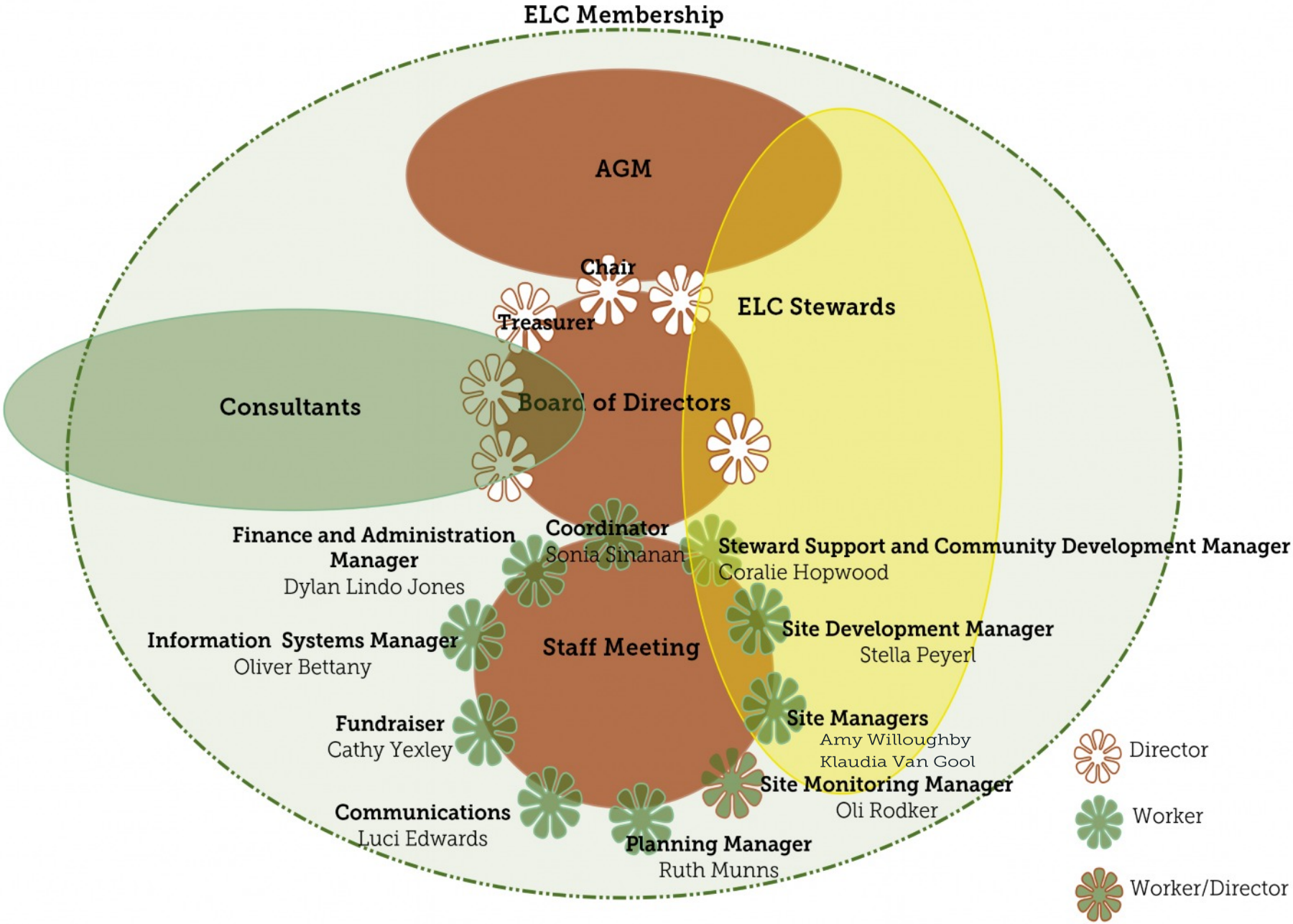
The **Communications Manager** (1 day per week) and **Fundraiser** (2 days per week) roles remain as important support roles within the organisation.

The **Planning Manager** (2.5 days per week) job description also remains the same, however in recognition of the importance of planning permission processes in the work of the ELC, the role became permanent in May 2021.



ELC Staff and Board meet on zoom for a strategy 'awayday' in September 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic credit: ELC

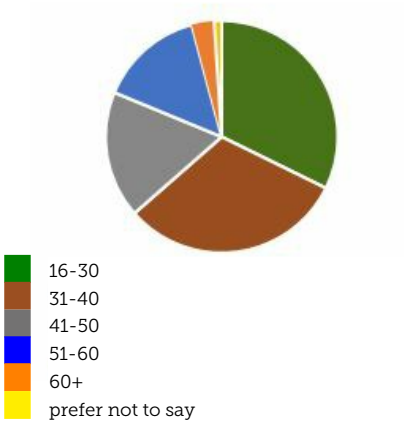
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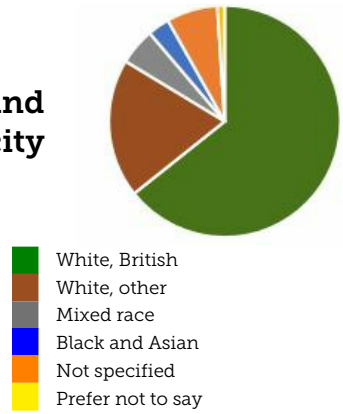
Job Applicant Monitoring

As part of the recruitment process we asked applicants to complete a self identifying monitoring form which was detached from their application before assessment. Our aim was to better understand who we were reaching with our publicity and who ultimately applied to work at the ELC. We received 98 forms and the data is as follows:

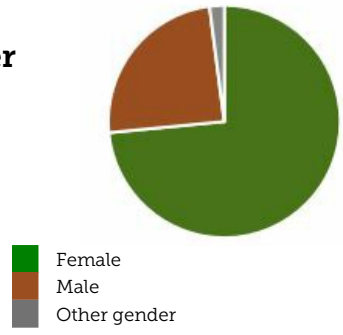
Age



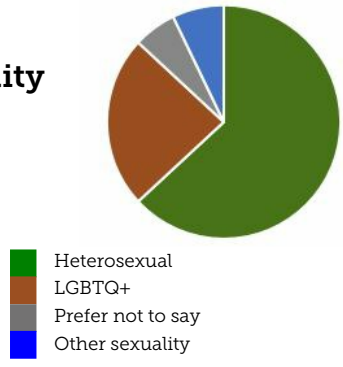
Race and ethnicity



Gender



Sexuality



Results of the Staff Satisfaction Survey 2020-21

We asked our workers to let us know how they felt about the following statements: the scores show how much they agreed with the statement and are an average of all scores . The maximum score is 5 - strongly agree.

	June '20	June '21
Everyone at the co-op is working toward the same organisational goals.	4.55	4.44
I see a clear link between my work and the ELC's goals.	4.8	4.6
Management is sincerely interested in the needs and welfare of the employees.	4.5	4.5
When conflicts arise at the co-op, they are effectively resolved.	4	3.4
Employees are treated fairly regardless of differences.	4.4	4.3
I receive good levels of support in my work from co-workers and management.	4.4	4.55
I am fairly paid for the work I do relative to other local opportunities.	3.8	4
Employee ideas often result in changes at the ELC.	4	4
I am proud to work for the ELC.	4.75	5
Working at the ELC is good for my personal career development.	3.75	4.44
ELC workers' overall satisfaction score.	4.29	4.32



New tree saplings planted at Arlington 2021 Photo Credit: ELC

Improving Habitat and Biodiversity



Tree planting at Sparkford in February 2021

In February, we hosted two socially distanced tree planting days led by site managers Amy and Klaudia. Over 800 trees were planted including oak, alder, beech, silver birch, blackthorn, hawthorn, field maple, willows and rowans. 25 volunteers attended, with staggered time slots meaning people could work at a suitable distance.



Tree planting at Orchard Park in February 2021

Baseline Ecology Report at Martinsfield, Arlington

In 2020 we commissioned The Ecology Co-op to establish an ecological baseline for our land at Arlington, East Sussex to form the basis for monitoring ecological change as our smallholdings develop on a former intensively cropped arable field. The aim of the ELC is to provide land for sustainable agriculture and farming practices that take into account ecosystem services, and maximise biodiversity value on our sites.

The purpose of the baseline ecological surveys, including those for breeding birds, earthworm and other soil fauna, and pollinating insects (bumblebee and butterfly numbers are measured over specific sections of the site) is to document the biodiversity value of the site before the establishment of the smallholdings. The baseline surveys revealed that the site currently supports very limited biodiversity, and that the bordering hedgerows represent the highest value habitat for breeding birds and invertebrates. The earthworm density is very poor with only two species present. The site supports an exceptionally poor pollinating insect population.

The ecologists found that the small farm development represents a significant opportunity for biodiversity enhancement and habitat recreation and discussed measures to realise this. They recommended that further surveys to monitor progress are undertaken in 2022, 2026 and 2030 and that pollinating insect surveys are undertaken annually. The full report is available on request.

Site Monitoring Reports for 2020

The following reports cover the year 2020, and were begun early in 2021. But due to disruption caused by Covid-19 and the effect this has had on our capacity, this work has only been completed in the summer of 2021.

Greenham Reach

This is the seventh annual monitoring report for Greenham Reach in Devon where we have permanent permission for our farms. The three businesses here are now well established and embedded in the local landscape.

Landscape

There are now quite a number of buildings and structures across the whole site. These include mobile homes, sheds, polytunnels and the barn. We remain happy that they are broadly well screened by the tree planting and landscaping works. The mixture of trees, new hedges, cultivated areas, orchards, ponds and grazing pasture is creating an ever more elaborate and intricate mosaic of habitats, and is exactly what we would hope to see from a small group of agroecological farm enterprises. Overall the area of grassland is slowly diminishing as new areas are planted with trees or brought into production. The MG5c grassland on the slope at Steepholding is satisfactory and still grazed at a low level.

Biodiversity

We are happy that biodiversity will be increasing as habitats become more established. There is no sign of soil erosion or soil loss. The bore hole continues to provide water with the grey water disposal going through various soakaways and used for irrigation.

In January 2020 Wild Geese Acres and Steepholding hosted a tree planting which planted 1,200 trees in the lower fields. Over 40 people participated. The trees were partly sourced through a Woodland Trust grant for which everyone at ELC is very grateful.

Animals

Livestock continues to be kept across the three farms in a small way. There are goats on Steepholding, with two pigs and a small flock of poultry. On Wild Geese Acres there are two Kunekune pigs, 10 geese and a small number of chickens and ducks. Elder Farm has two sheep and a small number of geese, hens and ducks. The Kunekune pigs continue to be a success, eating mainly grass and needing little supplementary feed. There are no reports of mistreatment of animals.

Open days and volunteers

The three farms continued to host volunteers, although no open day was held due to Covid-19.

Assessment

The three businesses at Greenham Reach continue to evolve and adapt. Covid-19 of course brought various challenges, but alongside the difficulties it also meant new customers and new enthusiastic support for local food producers. Wild Geese Acres found there was more local support for them over the lockdown.

All three businesses continued with their core production:

Elder Farm growing herbs and making and selling herbal products;

Wild Geese Acres selling salads, veg and flowers to a variety of retail outlets;

and Steepholding with their 'CSA' weekly veg box and fruit tree business.

We continue to closely monitor the farm

businesses to ensure that they are wholly or mainly engaged in agriculture. It is central to ELC's mission that our residents are mainly running an agricultural business, and that is also key to the planning permission which is agriculturally tied.

However, the question of what exactly constitutes an agricultural business, both on the ground and in law, is a complex one and has become a quite complicated issue here. ELC continues to work with one of our stewards to ensure they are fulfilling the requirements of the Management Plan.

There are also continuing issues related to the shared resources at Greenham Reach. Having a single shared source of water and a shared off grid electricity supply has presented difficulties for three businesses and families who use resources in different ways. The low agricultural incomes and low impact nature of the development have certainly been a challenge for all concerned. ELC continues to work with the three businesses to find a good and lasting solution.

Despite the challenges of Covid-19 and the unpredictability of the weather, the farms continue to produce good quality food and look after the land well.

The fields are transformed from their recent former lives as simple arable fields and pasture , and have returned to much older lives as a rich mix of human and non-human activity...



New vegetable beds at Steepholding photo credit: Steepholding

Martinsfield, Arlington

This is our first report on our Martinsfield site at Arlington, East Sussex. We bought the land there at the end of 2015. It is one broadly level field on the edge of the village, of 18.4 acres.

This report is structured to reflect the Management Plan that is in place on the site, and to which ELC is tied by a Section 106 Agreement with Wealden District Council.

The main aims of the Management Plan are to protect and increase biodiversity, and provide low impact sustainable livelihoods. This report gives a summary of the activities over the year and an assessment of the state of the land.

About Martinsfield

Prior to being purchased by ELC, the field was farmed for arable crops within a conventional farming system. The development of land based businesses, together with residential dwellings and associated buildings, entails a great deal more activity than was previously seen there. The hope and intention is that this activity will benefit nature, the local community and the local food economy.

ELC obtained temporary planning permission for the field in August 2018. This permission is for five years, while the farm businesses prove themselves, and is for a barn with PV solar array, a new entrance splay and hardstanding, and three agricultural workers' dwellings for new entrants to farming.

2020 Activities

Fanfield and Aweside Farms, began work in November of 2019 and moved into mobile homes on their smallholdings. It was a tough winter and was immediately followed in March 2020 by the Covid-19 outbreak. This obviously had a big effect on everyone within ELC, office staff and stewards together, and the disappearing restaurant trade meant that new markets for produce had to be found.

The plan was for a mains water connection to be installed at the start of the year - but due to various Covid-19 related delays this was still not completed by the end of 2020. That meant water had to be ferried in by various means and it was in short supply for irrigation, creating an additional workload.

It was a difficult year for weather, with heavy rains, periods of drought, and strong winds affecting crops and work plans at various times. Despite that very challenging combination of events, both Fanfield Farm and Aweside Farm put in a huge amount of work over the year. By the end of the year the field was transformed.

In February, ELC organised a tree planting to both complete the shelter and screening to the north of the barn, and to plant trees along the boundaries and shelters on the holdings. This was a great success and saw over 1000 trees planted by 40 volunteers.

Throughout the Spring the stewards set up their homes, marked out their site design, planted along boundaries and began cultivating growing beds. Both businesses are basing their cultivated beds on rectangular blocks divided into strips, a system developed by various other successful small market garden businesses.

Polytunnels were put up, with small glasshouses for propagation, and future growing areas covered with black plastic mulch.

Fanfield Farm already had use of a pond area that was originally installed by the solar park based in the next door field. This they had dug out and extended, both in depth and width, so it would be more likely to stay a source of irrigation and habitat through the summer.

Aweside Farm also put in a couple of small ponds to encourage wildlife. Alongside the growing areas, toolsheds and cold storage areas were installed.

Fanfield Farm fenced off various areas to

house a flock of about 24 hens for egg production, and small numbers of ducks and geese to help with guard duty and pest control.

By the end of the summer, all this hard work was paying off with good levels of production on the first growing blocks and the farms starting to take shape.

Fanfield Farm had their veg box scheme up and running, supplemented with their own eggs and some bought in produce.

Aweside Farm had to adapt their business plan considerably due to the closure of restaurants and concentrated instead on building up the physical foundations of their edible flower business to be ready for when their markets returned.

Assessment

Landscape

It is key to the vision of ELC that the farm holdings we own become a natural part of the landscape they inhabit, and it is part of our management Plan to minimize visual impact. However we do have to acknowledge that in the first few years the field will be going through a lot of changes, with people working intensively on site, the buildings they inhabit and work in being erected, use of plastic mulches and polytunnels - and so on. These are all part of having working farms producing fresh food in the countryside, a local food economy rather than importing all our food from similar or more hazardous farms overseas.

In the medium and longer term, the thousands of trees that have been planted as hedges, screens and shelter belts will grow up and these elements of farming practice will be far less visible. Buildings and polytunnels will gradually disappear behind vegetation, and the overall feeling will be one of a mosaic of features rather than single crops in otherwise empty fields.

The test for ELC is whether any adverse visual impact has been minimized and whether any buildings or impact are out of scale or out of character. With respect to this, we can say that we are happy with how things stand at the end of 2020.

Biodiversity and Soil

We have had two sets of soil tests done at Martinsfield, one in 2016 and one in 2019; in both cases the soil was tested in a handful of places around the site. They both indicate that the soil is generally low in the tested nutrients: Potassium, Phosphorus and Magnesium, and that organic matter is between 4 and 5% and that pH is between 5.9 and 6.5, which is generally a little low. Further soil samples taken in 2020 showed that the field had pretty low earthworm populations.

We know from experience that the soil has a lot of clay and was ploughed and compacted for many years before we took it over. That all means that it will take a while for the soil to really recover, regenerate and build biological activity.

It is also the case that this is a low level of baseline data, as soil is a living organism and results can change with temperature, recent weather conditions and so on. We know that the farms are building soil with green manures and imported fertility from other farms, and that using a lot of hand tools and low levels of mechanization means limited tilling and no erosion or soil loss.

As a generally flat site, managing water flow across the land is one of the main challenges, and this has an intimate connection with soil. With the growth of trees, annual leaf litter, green manures, aeration and other careful management, the soil should slowly improve and build fertility.

It is too early to have any data on increases in diversity, as the farms are only getting established. However we know from the two baseline ecology reports that the main field area was of low ecological value and the hedgerows had better possibilities, being of a considerable age.

The addition of what are effectively numerous new hedges, new areas of woodland , and varied grassland habitat should help enormously over the next few years.

Energy

The 10kw solar PV system on the barn roof provides electricity for the whole site. It has been working well, but is providing power for two families and their businesses,

which is sufficient for basic use but will become a stretch when the third family joins in 2021. Disparity in how much different people and business use power also raises issues for how to share the power fairly.

It is likely that the different businesses will supplement this system with their own renewable provision as they develop.
The generator has not been needed much, but the test will come in the winter of 2021/22 with more activities in operation.

Animals
Only Fanfield farm as had any animals on the farm. This has consisted of poultry - hens, ducks and geese in very low numbers. A more settled system of rotating these poultry and the fencing for them is still being developed.

Livelihoods
Given the unexpected challenges of Covid-19 disrupting business, and the huge amount of work that goes into setting up the infrastructure for mixed micro farms like these, it is to be entirely expected that the business are not providing a profit yet.

Indeed they are more likely to be continuing to require high levels of investment for the first couple of years. Setting up ecological businesses that can also be viable income generating activities within a global food system where the majority of money goes to retailers not producers, is no easy task.

Given that, Fanfield Farm had already got a number of customers for its veg box scheme and this grew well throughout the year. Further produce is going to markets and retailers in Brighton and regionally.

Conclusion
The impact of Covid-19 plus various extreme weather events through the year has certainly made for a very tough start at Martinsfield.

Still, great progress has been made with a huge amount of work put in by the two farms. At the beginning of 2021 a third family business, Allwood Farm, is scheduled to join them which will complete the cluster of small farms. This will provide a greater diversity of growing activities on site and bring more expertise to the team of growers as well as an opportunity to work together to manage the communal aspects of the site.

As trees grow and diverse habitat is created, more niches for different species will appear, and we hope that this will be revealed in the data from future ecological surveys.

As the farmers become known in the area and their businesses are better networked, more sales will become possible, alongside continued growth in support for local food economies.

So, despite the hardships that the stewards have been through in their first year, we are hopeful that there is a brighter horizon.





Top: Martinsfield in 2017, before any development credit: ELC
Bottom: An aerial view of Aweside Farm's growing beds in 2021 credit: Aweside Farm

Furzehill Green, Gower

This is our first report on our site at Furzehill Green. We bought the land there at the end of 2017. It is four, roughly rectangular, fields to the north of the village of Lunnon on Gower, South Wales, making up 17.8 acres.

Furzehill Green does not currently have the full Management Plan that will be in place once ELC stewards have signed a long term lease, after planning permission has been granted. Instead we have short term leases with two stewards which set out a basic level of care and maintenance of the site and the landscape there. Land not in those agreements is overseen by our own site management process.

This report therefore just gives a summary of the activities over the year and an assessment of the state of the land.

About Furzehill Green

At the point of ELC's purchase the fields at Furzehill Green were uniformly made up of improved pasture surrounded by native hedgerows. There were points of access onto the road from the two westerly fields. Prior to ELC's purchase they were grazed by sheep, although further back there is a history of market gardens on this site, which indicates that the quality of the soil is relatively good.

A baseline ecological survey was carried out in April 2018 and this indicated there were no features of particular ecological value within the fields - although the potential for improving biodiversity in this location was high. The hedgerows feature a range of native species and therefore had some ecological value, but had been heavily flailed back.

Further surveys are planned so that changes to habitat and species diversity can be measured.

In early 2019 we began renting out 5 acres of the fields to Cae Tan CSA, a local, established Community Supported Agriculture project. They had an existing site nearby at Ilston, but wanted to expand, and so this was a great partnership for us both. Aside from growing vegetables Cae Tan are very active in the local community; involved with local training, hosting volunteers and working with schools.

Our planning application for a One Planet Development (OPD) of two farm holdings, which would sit alongside the Cae Tan land, was submitted in the summer of 2020. The Cae Tan land does not form part of the OPD application because they do not need the residential accommodation which an OPD permission will give.

Cae Tan has a shed and polytunnel erected prior to 2020, near the entrance to their main field.

2020 Key Activities

The year started with a communal tree planting event in February 2020. This saw around 750 native trees being planted in the northwestern field, whose old name is Pit Park (due to the strange circular depressions in the field). These trees will go on to form a new hedge dividing the rented land of Cae Tan from the rest of the field, and an addition to the boundary hedge in the NW corner. The new hedge was planted in an 'L' shape, with access gateways at both ends.

Around 30 people from the local community came out and helped on the day and it was a great success. In addition to the native hedgerow, 10 apple trees were planted in the NW corner, inside the native planting. There was even a couple of apples on these trees by the end of the summer.

In the summer, prospective ELC leaseholders, Trevor and Bettina Davies, with their business 'The Rowan Tree', signed a short term lease to take on 1.5 acres of the land in the south easterly field. Their business is producing fruit and cut flowers. They immediately started work on marking out, preparing and mulching growing beds.

At the end of the year they applied for, and

received, permission to put up a polytunnel and shed to give them protected growing space and a tool store. In July the new hedge and tree planting was fenced by a local contractor.

Cae Tan's vegetable growing continued, seeing good harvests, working with lots of local people, and also being swamped with demand due to Covid-19 and people's changing perceptions of the food system.

The fields that are not cultivated have been managed by cutting for hay with additional removal of docks and thistles by hand where that was warranted. ELC has attempted to find a balance between allowing nature to flourish on lightly managed land, and not letting the fields get too out of hand and become burdened with dock or bramble. That is a delicate tightrope and we will keep the situation under review while we await a decision from the local authority on future developments.

The hedges have been cut by a local contractor, but in such a way as to balance some control with increased growth. This has allowed for the hedges to grow in height, but to take an angled cut on their sides to prevent too much sideways growth into the fields.

Assessment

In December 2020 a site monitoring visit was carried out by Ruth Hancock , a small scale farmer and market gardener from Devon. Her summary assessment was very positive. She said:

"Overall the whole site looks tidy and purposeful, those enterprises already established are moving forwards well."

and:

"The soil looks in good heart and well cared for."

Ruth reflected that the businesses were looking after the land, the fields looked well cared for, and the farms were progressing. The Rowan Tree had made good progress given it was their first year, and she was also able to give some advice on the fruit trees.

Cae Tan looked: "*productive, well maintained, and the growers are clearly capable and knowledgeable."*

Ruth did suggest that there could be an increase in the mowing regime to manage the weed burden in the pasture. The 'correct' amount of times to cut a field of grass is an interesting question, given the balance ELC tries to maintain between nature and productivity. We do not want the fields to become unmanageable, but mowing costs money and until we have a conclusion to the planning process, exact timescales for future work on our fields is hard to predict.

Community and social elements

Cae Tan had two full time volunteers between March and October, plus around 20 local people coming on a regular basis.

They also give advice to other regional prospective CSA businesses and offer training to local young people. Their veg box distribution is based at the local Gower Heritage Centre where it sits centrally within a range of local businesses including a bakery and educational centre.

Their box scheme, which currently produces over 120 boxes a week, continues to have a big waiting list, showing both its quality and the high demand in the area for local, sustainably produced food. It's worth noting however that the produce also comes from their other site and they buy in vegetables when necessary, for example in early spring.

Cae Tan provides full time agricultural employment for two people throughout the year, and two additional paid workers over the summer.

Conclusion

There are two avenues for progress at Furzehill. With our planning application we are in a holding pattern while we wait for Swansea LPA to go through their process. In the meantime we are taking a minimal management approach to the field areas not in cultivation, in order to give some space for nature.

On the cultivated areas we have two agroecological businesses both making good progress. Cae Tan is an established business whose reputation is growing and who is making good productive use of the land.

The Rowan Tree is only in the initial set up phase but has made excellent progress in their first few months.

With increased areas for wildlife, high rates of employment for such a small agricultural area, good local reputations, and highly valued integration into the local economy, these businesses are so far a good model of the benefits that agroecology can bring to rural regeneration.



Growing beds at The Rowan Tree credit: The Rowan Tree

Seriously Seeking Land

In 2021-22 we want to increase our reach into more mainstream farming media to support our search for land to create clusters of small farms for agroecologically minded new entrants to farming.

We are looking for land in England and Wales south of the line from Aberporth to Banbury to Kings Lynn.

- **Between 5-40 acres**
- **Up to £10,000 per acre - total price under £375,000**
- **Reasonable grade, cultivable land, below 250m altitude**
- **Ideally flat ground, or southern aspect (or SE/SW)**
- **A water connection - either mains or a verifiably strong ground source**
- **Direct vehicle access off the road**
- **Situated where our development would not seriously affect the visual amenity of others**
- **No overage, claw back or uplift provision attached**
- **If a piece of land does not meet all the criteria, but is excellent in other ways, we're interested.**

Over the course of the year we visited many parcels of land as part of our search for new ELC sites. Unfortunately we were not successful in any of our bids to buy land. The scarcity of suitable land across England and Wales has meant that when land does come onto the open market it is highly sought after and competition has pushed up land prices, often out of our price range.

Our experience has made us realise that searching on the open market when land is in short supply is not necessarily the best way to identify suitable land and we would like to open a dialogue with landowners who are supportive of our work that could lead to a private sale or donation of land.

With this in mind we have begun work on a communications campaign which we will launch early in 2022 to tell the world about our need for land and pique the interest of landowners who might be able to help us to pursue our mission to create ecological small farms.



Social media and website reach to June 2021

	June 2020	June 2021
Facebook	5,464	6,312
Twitter	2,977	3,642
Instagram	1,865	3,753
Website	45708	71,988*

** Website visitors over the 12 month period covered by this report*

Adapting to a changing world

Many things have not gone according to plan this year. So we have had to think hard about how we can take the organisation forward in challenging times.

It is hard to characterise the year that we have just had.

It has sometimes been frustrating. Our planning applications have taken much longer to be assessed and reach the point where a decision could be made than we had hoped. Our plan to turn our developments around more swiftly has been thwarted by the global pandemic, and we now have two sites with outstanding planning applications that have taken more than a year to determine.

Being unable to find land to buy at a price that we can afford has also hindered our plans to expand the number of small farms in our portfolio.

Many of the projects that we started in the previous year have taken longer than anticipated to get started and we have had to adapt to not being able to meet face to face to network and discuss issues, an important part of the development work that we had planned with partners in the two projects funded by Farming the Future.

Being unable to meet in person also affected our recruitment which was carried out entirely remotely in January. Luckily for the ELC we were able to attract excellent candidates for the new roles and found ways to build the new team online, eventually getting together for the first time at the AGM in June.

Being able to work with new people who bring new perspectives and energy to our work has been a positive experience. This year we have welcomed new staff members, new stewards and new board members to the organisation.

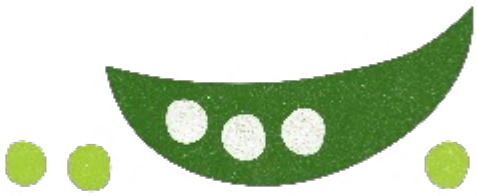
We have also been encouraged by the resilience of our stewards in the face of adversity that came in the form of damaging weather conditions, pests and blights all of which made for difficult growing conditions. Each and every one of our stewards has been working hard to increase the volumes of produce they grow in challenging times and this is very inspiring for those of us that support them.

Watching the farm sites develop as they produce good food and become welcoming havens for wildlife and biodiversity is inspiring for us all.

Going forward we will continue the dialogue with our community members, and in particular our stewards and workers, to ensure they are represented in the decision making processes of the organisation.

We will also begin a strategic planning process to update our business plan and test out potential new models for our small holdings that will enable us to adapt to the changing environment of land scarcity and the increased cost of land purchase.

One thing that we are sure about is that there is an ever increasing need for the work of the Ecological Land Cooperative, and organisations like us, to enable those who seek a land based livelihood to access affordable land and provide good, healthy, locally produced food for the communities that they are part of.



Many thanks to all of the funders and supporters who have worked with us over the past year.

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation

Elizabeth Creak Charitable Trust

Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust

Thirty Percy

REACH

Glastir

patagonia

treebeard trust

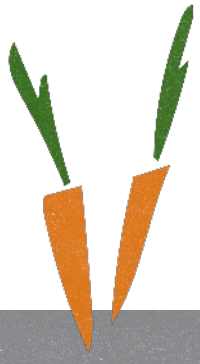
DIG TREES
In collaboration with OVO Energy & The Conservation Volunteers

The A Team Foundation

Farming the Future

Ecological Land Cooperative

For a living, working countryside



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