Ecological
Land
Cooperative

For a living, working countryside



Social Impact Report

July 2018 – June 2019

Contents

It's been another busy year for the Ecological Land Cooperative with two very positive planning results, sensitive planning preparations, development of our second site in Sussex, the purchase of our fourth site in Somerset and the negotiations for our fifth site in Cornwall. We were successful in our fundraising and other finance raising and we also had lessons to learn about our application process and how we can find and support those new entrants to farming who would like to become ELC smallholders.

Read on to see what impact our work has had and how we dealt with the year's challenges.

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The Objects of ELC

The objects of the society, as described in our rules for co-operative ownership, are to benefit the community by pursuing this mission: to widen 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 co-operative 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, encouraging participation from and responding 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 empowering members and other stakeholders at the most local level possible.
* To educate its members and employees and of supporting 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

Based on a piece of analysis for last years social impact report of our vision, mission, aims and objects as described in our co-operative rules, in this report we have thought about our impact as an organisation under three broad headings which are outlined below.

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.



Lauren planting trees at the ELC's newest site in Sparkford, South Somerset (photo credit: Oli Rodker)

Widening access to land for affordable, sustainable use

New site developments and planning updates.

Arlington
In August 2018 we were asked by Wealden District Council to submit a second planning application for our second site in Arlington, East Sussex, and, just a few days before we were due to present our case at a public enquiry appeal hearing for the first application, we received an officer delegated decision in favour of our second application for a 5 year temporary planning permission for 3 rural worker's dwellings and a shared barn on the site. The decision made reference to the inspector's decision for our first site at Greenham Reach in Devon and represents a big step forward for the ELC's model of developing clusters of ecological smallholdings. We received 25 letters of support for this second planning application.

Greenham Reach
In April of 2018 we submitted three applications to Mid Devon District Council for permanent permission for each of our tenants to live on their smallholdings at Greenham Reach. This was after 5 years of temporary permission during which our tenants had been working very hard to build up their ecological land based businesses and demonstrate that they were financially viable. In December we heard that we would receive another set of positive officer delegated decisions and in June 2019 all three tenants gained permanent planning permission to live on their farms.

Furzehill
It has taken us longer than we had hoped to get started on the planning application for our third site in the Gower, Swansea. This is in part due to the relationship that we have been building with our current partners and tenants on site, Cae Tan, who have been successful in getting planning permission for permitted development of a polytunnel and small barn for their holding. We have worked with Cae Tan over the last year to agree a Memorandum of Understanding that lays out our plans for the site, which we now hope to turn into a Farm Start project along with two separate smallholdings with permission for rural workers' dwellings.

We have also been respectful of Cae Tan's relationships in the local community and the need to take a cautious approach to meeting local people, many of whom are Cae Tan's members and customers. We held our AGM last year in the local church hall which gave community members a chance to learn more about the ELC and our mission. Conversations with local Welsh Assembly members and individual Community Council members have been positive. With the appointment of our Planning Manager in June 2019 we are now making preparations for a community meeting in July and we hope to submit a planning application by the end of this year with a sensitive approach to the buildings on site which will be designed to be in keeping with the local vernacular for buildings in the AONB.

Sparkford
We completed the purchase of the 20 acre site on the edge of the village of Sparkford, South Somerset in October 2018. We were required to commission odour assessment tests because of the relative proximity of a sewage treatment works a few hundred

metres away, shielded by a woodland copse. The results of these tests concluded that there was no significant impact to our development and we're now forging ahead with our temporary planning application.

We have been asked by Somerset council to include case studies and business plans for the small farm businesses that will be based on the site with the application.

We are working with a number of potential stewards who have made/are in the process of making an application for a plot on the site to support this planning application which we are hoping to submit in July 2019.

Measuring Site Progress in 2018

Sites	Acres
Greenham	21
Arlington	18.5
Furzehill	18
Sparkford	21

	At 1st Jan 2018	At 31st Dec 2018
Acres secured	57.5	78.5
Consultation complete	39.5	39.5
Management plan submitted	39.5	39.5
Planning application validated	39.5	39.5
Planning application decision	21	39.5
Planning conditions / appeal completed	21	39.5
Let to smallholders	21	26
First accounts / wildlife survey	21	39
Profitability achieved	21	21
Permanent planning permission	0	21
Total 'points'	281	383
Progress for the year (in points)		102

This will serve as the baseline for next years measurement of progress

Producing food, forestry, fibres

Our smallholders create rural produce with minimal inputs and work to rebuild local supply chains.

All the ELC smallholdings at Greenham Reach continue to grow and produce well. We are happy that the holdings are now a part of the local landscape and community, and income levels from local food and produce sales are increasing for all of them. All holdings are now making a profit and have at least one full-time equivalent person active on the farm, in line with the requirements of the lease.

Elder Farm
Elder Farm received its organic certification early in the year getting things off to a good start. They sold their organic skullcap crop, after it passed various tests. Thirty more fruit trees were planted in the orchard and have done well, as have the perennial thyme beds, planted on mounds to keep them out of the wetter ground. They have brought in more ducks to aid with pest control. The business profits almost doubled since last year.

Elder Farm has been very active in the development of a UK herbal growers' network. A huge percentage of the herbs used in the UK come from overseas, so it's heartening to see this network of local growers 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.

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 have put on girth and are looking stronger with individual wooden protection around each one to guard against the sheep.

The market garden has made steady progress. This year saw an extended season of growing and more bulk selling, getting away from individual salad bags in order to save time on handling and packaging. The polytunnel has had 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 this 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. It is hoped that they will breed in the summer. A local beekeeper now also keeps bees on the site. The geese continue to do a good job guarding James's best salads from all comers. 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 planning permission during the year, and they hope to get this built over the winter. This will allow them to create a small scale commercial goat milk dairy. Ruth had a major operation in the late summer of 2018 which meant they had to reduce 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 veg production. The box scheme has stayed at around 30 weekly customers, but now has the capacity to increase a little more. The online fruit tree business has continued, and new fruit trees have been added to the orchard. They also have seen sales and profits increase again this year.

Furzehill

Since the purchase of the land at Furzehill in Gower, local social enterprise Cae Tan CSA have begun growing vegetables on a 5 acre plot on site to supplement their market garden nearby where, for the last five years, they have been providing weekly veg boxes for over 120 households, making them the largest community supported agriculture scheme in Wales.

Cae Tan are focussing on field scale crops such as potatoes, brassicas, alliums and squash on their new plot. Having access to this new land has enabled them to dramatically reduce bought in vegetables over the winter as they work towards supplying their own crops all year round.

This new land has also enabled them to support an apprentice grower, Francesca, to start a sister project growing salads for retail and restaurants nearby. Since leasing the land they have applied for planning permission and constructed a polytunnel and barn under permitted development rules.

Cae Tan has reached its capacity for members with 50 customers on the waiting list to join their veg box scheme, showing an increasing demand for ecologically grown vegetables in the Swansea/Gower area. Cae Tan will soon release a film (made by our own Lauren & Phil) about CSAs as a 'how-to-guide' for others interesting setting up similar projects.







Top - Golden Guernsey Goat at Steepholding (photo credit: Steepholding)

Middle - Geese at Wild Geese Acres (photo credit: J Dexter)

Bottom - Tom O'Kane of Cae Tan (photo credit: Lizzy Walshaw)

Supporting the development of resilient communities

We recognise that a shift towards a more ecologically sensitive and regenerative agriculture system requires the development of regenerative culture, in terms of our internal working culture at ELC, the wider culture of the sector we work in and the culture of the society in which we live.

Organisational culture and strategic development
In November 2018 the ELC directors and staff team met for two days of workshops and strategy sessions, exploring a whole range of issues and questions. These included an assessment of how we're measuring up to our 2017-2020 strategic plan as well as sessions about our land donation campaign, incubator farms, how we can make our plots more affordable, our valuation policy, understanding how we can engage better with the wider sector and the development of a more clearly defined social impact evaluation process. It was an opportunity to take time for frank and constructive discussions about a number of key aspects of our vision and strategy, which relate directly to our social impact as an organisation, not least how we reach potential tenants for our small farms.

Just as importantly it was an opportunity for the entire team to spend time together. We work well as a team of mostly remote workers (Sonia and Oliver are both based in the Brighton office) and the efficiency of our monthly board and staff meetings is improving all the time, but being in the same geographical space to explore the big questions that influence our strategic plan is a critical part of our reflective practice.

In February the staff team met again, this time without the directors, for a day of strategic discussions focussing on the new open application process for prospective tenants for our smallholdings. Kindly hosted by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation at their central London offices, the first part of the day was spent summarising the conclusions of our research into the causes of the disappointing results of the first recruitment process to find tenants for our Arlington site.

Having identified some of the barriers to people applying, we used the session to co-create the new open application process to encourage applications for all ELC sites, which we launched in April. In the second part of the day we explored our key messages, how we can communicate them better, and the implications for our digital communication strategy using our website, social media and newsletter.

Building relationships with funders
We continue to have a good relationship with the A-Team Foundation who have provided loan funding to buy land. We have also formed a strong partnership with the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation who have provided a core grant and a social investment facility to enable the ELC to buy land for development into small farms in the future.

Our Fundraiser, Mary Hogan, has been in post for a year and has made some good relationships with new funders including Elizabeth Creak, a farming foundation who have given a core grant which we used for work at Arlington, and Polden Puckham who funded our low impact development planning campaigning work.

These relationships provide strong support for our strategic objective of ensuring the stability of the ELC in the future so we can continue to deliver the social benefits of our work. Capital grant funding for the development of shared infrastructure contributes to making our small farms affordable for new entrants to farming.

Community events and engagement

Our preparation for our new development in Sparkford, South Somerset built on learning from our previous work, in particular engaging with local communities.

Sparkford
Before we made the final decision to purchase the Sparkford site our communications team, Lauren and Phil, spent a day visiting 50 neighbouring houses and speaking to 26 people with an overwhelmingly positive response to our proposal of creating small farms for new entrants. We also contacted the local parish council to talk about the plan for the field, present our work to them and answer questions. We have since followed up with letters and emails to neighbours keeping them updated on the progress of the development.

We completed the purchase of the 21 acre site on the edge of the village of Sparkford, Somerset in October 2018, a month after meeting with the parish council who expressed mixed views on our proposal to develop three small-scale farms. As evidence that our early engagement had produced positive results, the community meeting we held in February 2019 was attended by over 50 people, many of whom lived locally and were supportive of our project, including three local couples with existing farm businesses who are now in the process of applying for a plot at the site. Opposition was minimal when compared to our previous experience at Arlington and the general atmosphere of the meeting was very positive and congenial.

In early June 2019 we organised an open afternoon for potential applicants for all our upcoming sites at our Sparkford site. Meeting the ELC at one of our sites is a



Sparkford community meeting at the Sparkford Inn (photo credit: ELC)

requirement of our newly designed open application process (see below) and we will be holding similar events to coincide with our AGM at Arlington and our community meeting at Furzehill.

The Sparkford open afternoon took place on the same weekend as the nearby Green Scythe Fair which we attended in 2019 for the second year running. It is a popular event, and was a great opportunity for Oliver and Zoe to speak about ELC and our plans for our Sparkford site to many local people who are supportive of small-scale agriculture.

Furzehill
Later this year we will be hosting a community meeting on the Gower inviting local residents and organisations, stakeholders and potential applicants to hear about our plans for this site, ask any questions and raise any concerns. We will be promoting the event locally with posters, emails and a press release with the support of Cae Tan in reaching the local community.

Greenham Reach Open Day
We ask our tenants to engage with their local communities in the Management Plan and each year Greenham Reach opens its gates to the local community. In September 2018, on a lovely late summer day, more than 70 people visited the site and took part in activities including farm tours, a tombola, and a 'guess the weight of the marrow' competition. They consumed tea, cake and produce from the farms, including welcome watermelon from Wild Geese Acres, all of which raised £115 for Refugee Aid Taunton.

Volunteers
Volunteers have again played a crucial role in work activities across all three holdings at Greenham Reach. 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 local volunteers who have a regular day each week. They have helped the businesses grow, whilst also gaining work experience, skills and health benefits from being part of the community. Elder Farm calculate about 3,000 volunteer hours over the year, Wild Geese Acres about 1,200 and Steepholding about 595 hours.

The Arlington barn build project which took place in April-May 2019 utilised a number of volunteers, as well as some paid contractors. There was around a week's worth of volunteer labour, which was gratefully received and very useful. One of the volunteers even said they left feeling refreshed, despite the 12 hour work days! We also had the help of some volunteers at a tree planting day in March, when we planted a variety of apple trees on the land retained by ELC at the Arlington site as well as taking care of the hedgerow trees planted in early 2018.

We continue to explore ways in which we can utilise the help of people who offer to volunteer their time to support our office-based operations. We receive fairly regular offers from young people looking for a week of work experience or skilled professionals who are interested in moving into the agroecological sector.

We recognise the potential of volunteers to contribute to all aspects of our work. There are particular areas that would be ideal discrete tasks for volunteers such as maintaining our website resources, other IT projects, such as the installation of a database, and small research projects. However, it can be difficult to balance effectively managing the capacity of our busy staff team whilst providing the support that volunteers inevitably need and the experience they seek.

We would like to make better use of volunteers in the future and will look at ways that this can be done using the resources that we currently have to support them.

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

Recruiting stewards: "Failing forwards"

In autumn 2018 we began the application process to find farmers for our 18.5 acre site in Arlington, East Sussex.

Having received temporary planning permission in August, we publicised the opportunity far and wide within the agroecology farming sector. More than 2,000 people visited our website to find out about the opportunity and 160 people downloaded our application pack, which contained a broad range of resources designed to help new entrant farmers to develop their thinking and their business plans whether they ended up applying for an ELC lease or not.

We were surprised when we received only six applications by the closing date. After an initial assessment of these six by our selection panel we decided to interview two and offer support to another two to be ready for future opportunities. Following interviews and negotiations with the two strongest applicants, we concluded that one needed more farm level growing experience before being ready to start their own business and the other decided that the opportunity was not right for them.

This disappointing experience led to serious reflection by the whole team on the application process and our model. Our initial belief was that there were many people who were waiting for our plots to become available. In fact, we needed to better understand what the situation was for new entrants and why they had not come forward to apply for a plot at Arlington at this time.

To understand what had happened we asked those people who had downloaded the application pack but not applied to give us feedback on their experience of that process through an online survey. The outcome of this research led us to identify the following reasons why people decided not to apply:

*Lack of finance ("It costs more than we thought. We don't have any savings")
*Wrong time ("We'll be ready next year")
*Not enough time ("I only saw the opportunity a week before the deadline")
*Wrong location ("We don't want to move so far")
*Wrong offering ("I'm a farmer not a builder, I want to be provided with a dwelling")
*Lack of experience/confidence ("I don't have enough experience yet")
*Lack of understanding of the offering ("I thought it was for established farm businesses")
*Not enough flexibility in the offering ("I'm a single person and I want to work with others")
*Accessibility of the pack ("I was overwhelmed by all the information")

We also held external meetings to talk to potential applicants about the ELC offering, to understand why they might not have applied for a site and also what they would need in terms of support to be able to make an application in the future. We spoke with other organisations in the farm start and training sector to find out if our experience was unique and consider what other factors might have influenced the lack of applications.

The Open Application Process

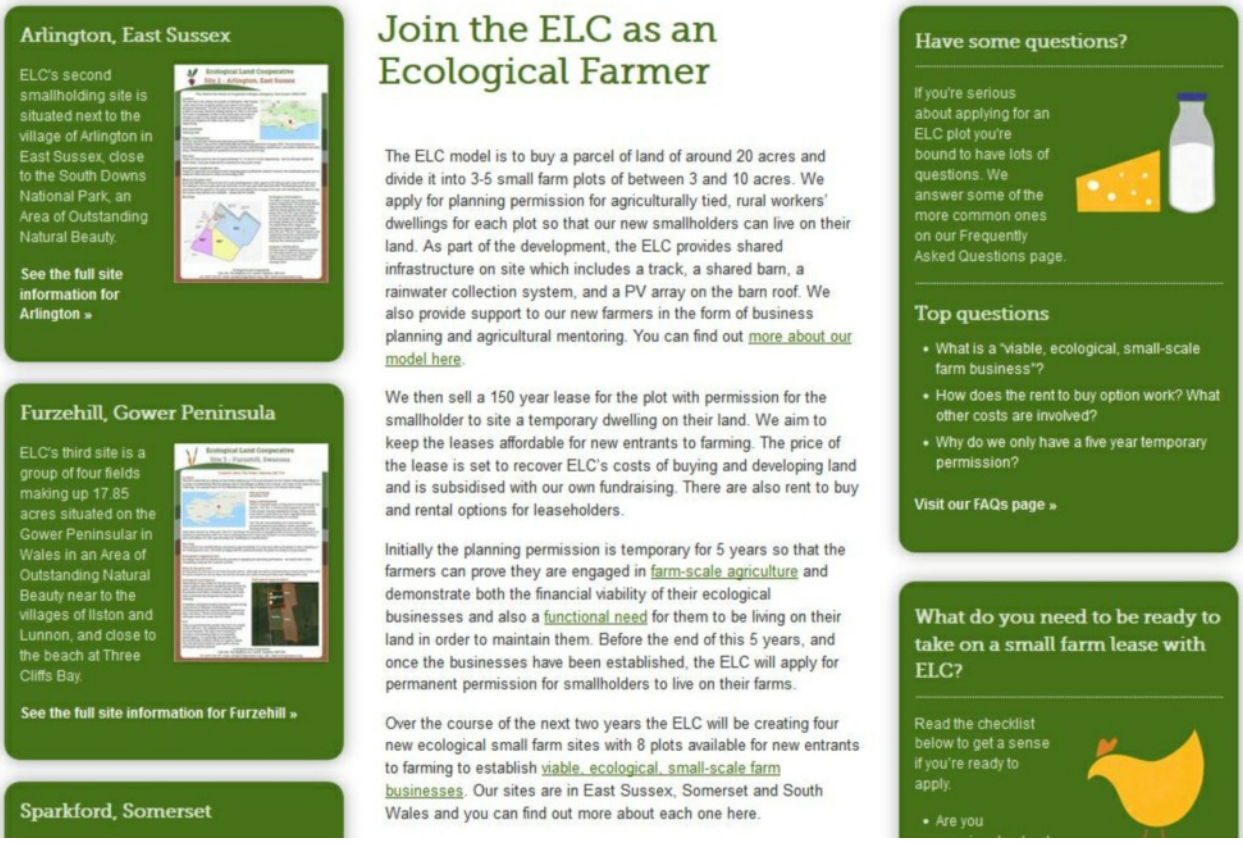
The outcome of this reflection, research and strategising was our open application

process which we launched in April 2019. The aim of this open process is to identify and develop relationships with stewards for all our upcoming sites at as early a stage as possible, working closely with them where appropriate to support the development of their business plans, with the opportunity to utilise these plans to support our planning applications and site developments.

There has been a strong response to the open application process and we have now conducted around 25 preliminary interviews, getting to know potential applicants at various stages in their journey of being ready to take on an ELC small farm lease, including an encouraging number who potentially have the agricultural experience, business plans and finance to be ready in the next 12 months. Others who are serious about the opportunity but not so far along on their journey have been guided accordingly and may well make excellent applicants in the future.

It's been a significant learning process for the organisation, not without its disappointments and frustrations. Increasingly we are appreciating that we need to be as adaptable as possible as we evolve the way we work. One member of the team described the experience as "failing forwards", a positive perspective that was reflected in the transparent way in which we conducted research over the winter period, running collaborative workshops at both the Landworkers' Alliance AGM and the Oxford Real Farming Conference to frankly discuss the experience and test our theories about its causes.

There is no doubt this has been a significant hurdle for ELC. What we offer is so distinct that there are few examples of other organisations from which we can learn. However we will continue to adapt our processes to ensure that we support as many new entrants to farming as we can. The positive outcome of this experience is that we now have evidence that there are many aspiring new entrants to regenerative farming out there and we need to continue to develop our services to meet their needs and get them onto the land to create successful enterprises.



A screenshot of the Open Application Process for potential applicants for ELC plots from ELC's website. (photo credit: ELC)

Supporting the sharing of knowledge and training

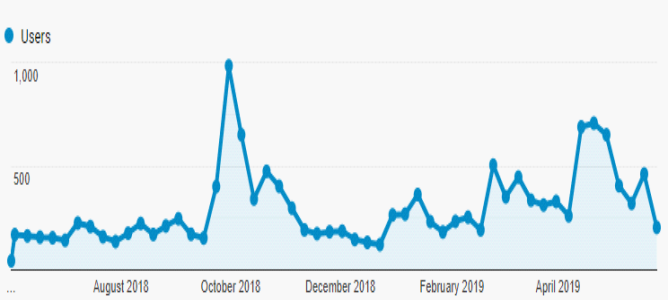
The information pack we created for the first application process was full of resources which would be useful for anyone considering establishing a small-scale farm with the ELC.

However, the feedback we received from some people who downloaded the pack was that the amount of information was overwhelming. We took this into account in the design of our open application process and we now begin by initially sharing enough information to allow applicants to understand the offer. We encourage potential applicants to contact us and then we conduct a short telephone interview with them to establish if they're ready. Then we share more detailed information with applicants who move on to the next stage of the process.

The half hour telephone interview supports our process in a number of important ways, we can start building a strong relationship with potential applicants and offer useful signposting and advice for new entrant farmers, no matter where they are in their journey to establish farm businesses. We see this as a significant way in which we can support the wider sector, signposting people to training, volunteering and other opportunities that will enable them to get the experience they need to get started, whether at an ELC site or elsewhere.

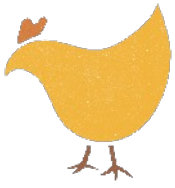
Digital communication
A significant role we play which supports our core aims and objectives is the role of sharing knowledge about our work and the work of others in our sector via our constantly growing online communications platforms.

Website
Since June 2018 we've started tracking visits to our website. Over the last year we've seen a steady rise in traffic and two significant "spikes" which relate to the launch of our Arlington application process in September of 2018 and our open application process in May 2019. Over this period the website has received visits from over 14,000 unique users.



Our website is a hub of useful information for people interested in small-scale agriculture. To quote a recent applicant for our Arlington site, "I have spent every spare moment on your website for the last two weeks". Adding to the many existing resources already available on the site, this year we've uploaded all our Arlington appeal documents and evidence for others to view and learn from.

A whole section of new content was added to the website to support our open application process, including an in depth interview with ELC steward James Dexter (a useful piece of qualitative research in itself), a plain language guide to our lease, info sheets for each of our upcoming sites, an FAQ page and improvements to the website homepage and navigation.



Social media and ELC in the news

The ELC uses social media to connect with our community. As part of our social impact reporting, we record data relating to our "digital reach" as an organisation.

For example we record the number of people we are communicating with via facebook, twitter, instagram, mailchimp (which we use to send our quarterly email newsletter and occasional one off updates to supporters and members) and our website.

In 2019 we developed a social media strategy with the intention to start using instagram to complement facebook and twitter. Since we set up the account in March 2019, over 350 people have followed us, increasing our engagement with a new, and younger, audience.

Platform	June 2016	June 2017	June 2018	June 2019
facebook	1843	2717	3139	4027
twitter	1500	1900	2320	2549
instagram	*	*	*	369
mailchimp	*	1247	1674	1896

Media coverage

As and when we have opportunities to disseminate significant pieces of news - such as planning permission secured or a new piece of land purchased we make a concerted effort to communicate this as far and wide as possible.

We have a strong network of organisational and media supporters in the agroecological sector and have a good take up of our press releases by them. A selection of coverage over the last year includes Permaculture Magazine, Indie Farmer, Sustainable Food Trust, Sustain, The Land Magazine and Smallholder Magazine.

When we have localised events or opportunities we also make an effort to research and contact local press and organisations - for example to promote our Sparkford community meeting or the planning permission secured in East Sussex. This generally has less take-up but it works to support the events. This year ELC director Alex Lawrie featured on BBC Radio Somerset in the lead up to our Sparkford event and attendees of the meeting mentioned that they found out about it in the local community magazine.

One area we need to improve on is securing articles / news items in the mainstream media. In the past we have been featured on BBC Radio 4's Farming Today and we maintain a good relationship with the programme.

We are also currently in discussion with producers of BBC's Countryfile who are interested in filming new stewards at our Arlington site as they develop their businesses.

In order to improve our mainstream coverage and to support our goal of reaching beyond the established agroecology sector to reach potential land stewards and promote agroecology, work needs to be done to build our press contacts and networks and to builld relationships with mainstream farming journalists.

Land Donation Campaign

We also need to focus more time and resources on our Land Donation Campaign if we are to be successful in securing donations of land to create affordable land based opportunities in the future.

Engaging with, and supporting, the wider cooperative and land justice sectors

Building links between organisations, communities and projects.

Oxford Real Farming Conference
It was a busy time for us at ORFC because as well as running an ELC stall we also ran three sessions. The first we jointly organised with Shared Assets and brought together a panel of experts including Simon Ruston of Ruston Planning Associates, Jacqui Banks of One Planet Development Council and our very own Oli Rodker to explore ways of bridging the gap between planning policy and food growing.

The other two sessions focussed on the work of ELC itself, the first being a general introduction to our model and update on our progress over the last year. The second, entitled "Is ELC fit for purpose?" was an exploratory workshop designed to support the development of our open application process and an opportunity to invite honest feedback from participants on how we can improve the ways we support and engage with potential stewards.

Cae Tan AGM
In November 2018, Lauren and Phil attended Cae Tan's AGM and offered a ten minute presentation to their members on who the ELC is, our model and our plans for the site at Furzehill working with Cae Tan. Their was a positive response with pertinent questions about the detail of how our model works from participants.

Ctrl Shift 2019
Ctrl Shift is a new, annual event which brings together change-making organisations to help build the movement for positive social, economic and environmental change. The event is co-ordinated by the Permaculture Association and Transition Towns and was held in Stoke-on-Trent in May. This year ELC's Zoe Wangler ran a Solutions Session, sharing the ELC's work with partners and other collaborators at the event to build partnerships, share solutions and get input into the ELC's work.

Extinction Rebellion Spring Uprising
The ELC were invited by the Big Green Gathering to participate in the Extinction Rebellion's solution zone in March. We provided a stall of information over a weekend and ELC director Alex Lawrie gave a talk on the role of cooperatives within a climate emergency.

Farming the Future
In April 2019 Oliver attended a networking event and funding programme launch for key influencers in the sustainable food sector organised by the Roddick Foundation and the A-Team Foundation. The event brought together over 50 people from a wide range of organisations with the aim of encouraging greater collaboration. An outcome of our involvement in this process is two funding proposals produced in conjunction with the Landworkers' Alliance, CSA Network and other organisations to support projects focussing on lobbying for national food and farming policy change and the development of a UK wide new entrant mentoring network.

Farm Start Network
ELC is part of a Joseph Rowntree funded project to create a Farm Start Network. Led by LWA, we are collaborating with Kindling Trust, Tamar Grow Local and Organic Lea.

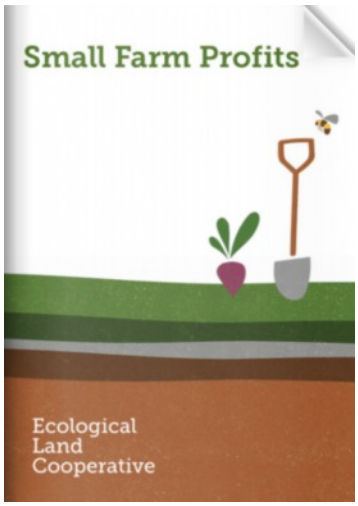
Supporting Growers Looking For Land
We continue to offer support and advice to numerous individuals who are either landless and looking for land, or have land and are looking for people to work it. Unfortunately it is never simple to put them together. We will be researching whether to develop a simple matching service for landowners and those seeking land to be hosted on the ELC website.

Supporting Low Impact Development
In January 2019, we submitted a letter of support for Pete Wright's planning application for an agricultural dwelling on his land in Somerset tied to his horticultural business.

We were successful in securing funds from Polden Puckham Charitable Foundation to create guides for planning professionals in how to assess low impact developments and this project will begin later in 2019.

Research

*Our newly published Small Farm Profits booklet, researched by the team in 2018, features short case studies of 10 profitable small-scale farms operating on 5 hectares or less. The booklet has already proved useful in campaigning work and has been given to numerous members of the DEFRA team.



*We conducted extensive research following our Arlington application process, including a survey and interviews of people who downloaded the application pack but chose not to apply, and workshop sessions at the Landworkers' Alliance AGM and the Oxford Real Farming Conference.

*After conducting a valuable interview with ELC steward James Dexter for our open application process about his journey of setting up Wild Geese Acres, we are proposing to conduct similar interviews of all ELC stewards as a resource for people who wish to follow in their footsteps.

*Sonia attended a meeting held by Sussex University researchers into sustainable food production to look at the potential of utilising Brighton and Hove's farmland holdings for horticulture.

*We are in ongoing discussions with Sussex University about how we can utilise students to help us undertake research into ecological and soil carbon changes at Arlington.

Publications

*In August 2018, Oli Rodker was interviewed for LowImpact.org about the future of land ownership.

*In April 2019 the A-Team Foundation published a blog by Lauren and Phil: From single crops to species rich mosaic — how Agroecology helps biodiversity

*In April 2019 Oliver was interviewed for the Life in Transition podcast series (yet to be published)

*In February 2019 ELC director Alex Lawrie gave an interview on BBC Radio Somerset talking about the needs of new entrants to farming in advance of the Sparkford public meeting.

*In May 2019 ELC featured in the Sustainable Food Trust's blog about the intractable issue of access to land for new farmers.

*Published in May 2019, Zoe Wangler and Rebecca Laughton co-wrote a report on planning barriers faced by new organic horticultural businesses in England (available on request).

New entrant workshop with Defra

The ELC invited staff from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to participate in a day workshop with organisations working in support of new entrants to ecological farming.

The day was attended by The Kindling Trust, The Landworkers Alliance, OrganicLea, Tamar Grow Local, Trill Farm Market Garden and the ELC.

Those attending from Defra included staff from their New Entrants, Innovation, and Horticulture teams. Staff from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the ministry responsible for planning policy, also attended.

The workshop was highly constructive with Defra asking that we provide them with detailed information so that they can consider making a case to the Treasury for subsidies to support agroecology and new entrants.

ELC will now be working in partnership with the Landworkers' Alliance and others to develop detailed materials for Defra.



Representatives from the Kindling Trust, the Landworkers Alliance, OrganicLea, Tamar Grow Local, Trill Farm Market Garden and the ELC meet at Defra (photo credit: Zoe Wangler)

Providing opportunities for employment

We created the new positions of Planning Manager and Sparkford Site Manager. We also created three new plots for low impact small farm businesses in this period.

In June 2019 we welcomed Ruth Munns to the organisation in the role of Planning Manager. We also welcomed James Ambrose to the role of Sparkford Site Manager.

Staff Satisfaction Survey
For the first time we asked all staff to let us know how they were feeling about the organisation in a short survey.

The results are presented below.

Results of the Staff Satisfaction Survey - 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.

1. Everyone at the co-op is working toward the same organisational goals.



2. I see a clear link between my work and the ELC's goals.



3. Management is sincerely interested in the needs and welfare of the employees.



4. When conflicts arise at the co-op, they are effectively resolved.



5. Employees are treated fairly regardless of differences.



6. I receive good levels of support in my work from co-workers and management.



7. I am fairly paid for the work I do relative to other local opportunities.



8. Employee ideas often result in changes at the ELC.



9. I am proud to work for the ELC.



10. Working at the ELC is good for my personal career development.



ELC workers' overall satisfaction score is 4.48 out of 5

Building membership and member participation

Our membership has grown during the year. Our open share offer has resulted in a steady stream of new members and investment.

However we have not been able to actively seek new steward members and this remains a goal for the future.
We enjoy a tremendous amount of goodwill and support from our membership.

However we recognise that the potential of our membership network (how we engage with our members to further our social aims) is currently somewhat under utilised. A more structured membership engagement strategy is something we'd like to develop in the coming year.

Members	2016	2017	2018	2019
Stewards	19	19	21	24
Workers	8	8	5	7
Investors	111	120	248	257

ELC Board of Directors

We're also very happy that Lynne Davis has joined our board of directors in 2019. With a background in software creation, regenerative agriculture and food system policy, Lynne has been working on land and food system transformation for the past decade.
The board of directors is still in need of new members and more work will be done in 2019 to recruit new directors and increase the experience and diversity on the board.







Erecting the wind turbine at Greenham Reach (photo credits: tenants' own pictures).

Working towards renewable energy and fossil fuel independence

ELC were able to support the tenants to submit a planning application for a wind turbine that was erected at the beginning of 2019.

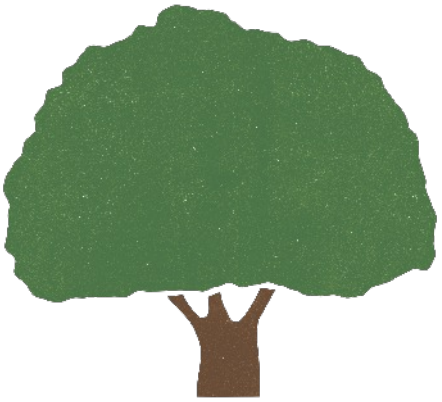
Greenham Reach
The wind turbine has added to total power generated and is particularly useful when there is limited sunlight (and some wind!!) A lack of electricity is still an issue for the site, to some degree this is because of the increased power needs of the water filtration system. In spite of this all the holdings are doing well to manage their homes and business on a shared system of 4.3kw. The total usage up till mid November 2018 was 18,330 kwh, with 6,311 kwh used on the communal water supply.

Bio Sequestration
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. We will also look for ways to quantify this carbon sequestration in future reports.

Transport
There are three vehicles for road use at GR, one for each holding. The electronic count of vehicle movements at the gateway was 5,863 in 2018. This is very similar to the previous year, with an increase of 25, or 0.43%. This is still more than our target of 4,380, 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.

ELC office
Staffed by Sonia and Oliver, our office is at the Brighton Eco Centre. With excellent public transport links (it's a stone's throw from Brighton railway station), the building is managed by the Ethical Property Company and shared with The Green Party, Friends of the Earth and other like minded organisations. Gas and electricity for the building are provided by Green Energy, LED lighting with motion sensors are used throughout the building and there is an efficient recycling process.

Travel to meetings
We hold more than 50% of our board and staff meetings virtually, reducing the travel costs and impact. We encourage sustainable travel to meetings by train and car share wherever possible.



Maintaining and enhancing habitats, species diversity, landscape quality

The flourishing of human activity at Greenham Reach has given rise to a marked increase in habitat and biodiversity.

Greenham Reach
More planted shelterbelts, trees and small buildings has meant more edges where different ecological niches interact, and more micro-habitats. Together with the huge variety of smaller crops grown on site this has increased the beneficial environment for insects and therefore all the predators that follow on from those. Hedgerows and trees continue to grow on well. Grassland has continued under similar management as previously.

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.

Other sites
In February 2018 we planted 50 hedgerows trees in line with an old degraded hedgerow on the Sparkford site and a further 100 hedgerow trees in Arlington. We've recently recruited James Ambrose, a local new entrant farmer, as a site steward for our Sparkford site. We'll be working with James in the coming weeks and months to put together a land management plan for the site for the period prior to the establishment of the holdings there.

We were able to mow the fields at Furzehil for hay in the summer of 2018 and we flail mowed for mulch later in the year.







Left - an aerial picture of our Arlington site (photo credit: Hugh Kermode) Above top - Learning about soil at Cae Tan with Iain Tolhurst, below - Soil from Furzehill complete with worm (both photo credits: ELC)

Future challenges for the ELC in monitoring the social impact of our work

There are still areas of our work that we need to gather information about to understand whether there are communities we are not reaching and to identify ways that we can ensure that anyone who might wish to be part of the cooperative and/or benefit from our work is able to do so.

Increasingly we're appreciating the challenging nature of this task. It's an ongoing process, and we continue to look at ways to improve our data collection and our reach so that we become more inclusive and remove barriers for anyone who wants to become more involved in agroecology and a land-based life.

This process has been a critical aspect of the way we've been working over the last 10 months to evolve our understanding of the most effective ways to identify and begin developing strong and lasting partnerships with the land stewards we want to be working with on our upcoming sites.

There is a long journey between receiving an initial excited enquiry from a new entrant farmer who's just come across the ELC for the first time and that same farmer signing a lease and moving onto one of our sites - and that's just the prologue to the working relationship we'll be developing with them over the years!

We believe that our work has a variety of benefits for people and communities as well as the environment and biodiversity. One of our challenges for the upcoming year is developing the tools to continue to better measure this.

ELC 2019

Ecological Land Cooperative

For a living, working countryside

Unit 204, Brighton Eco Centre, 39-41 Surrey Street, Brighton, BN1 3PB
info@ecologicalland.coop | www.ecologicalland.coop | 01273 766 672

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