

Case studies (with active links)

**Co-operative Network
Infrastructure**

Outlandish Co-operative

Dulas

**South Manchester Credit
Union**

Equal Care Co-op

Belfast Cleaning Society

Suma Wholefoods

Arla Foods

East Marsh United

Delta-T

Câr-Y-Môr

Unicorn Grocery

Fox & Goose

Lilac Housing Co-op

GlenWyvis Distillery

Newfield Medical Group

Lambeth GP Food Co-op

Sharenergy

NOTE: This icon in the top-right of each case study slide will return you to this list





CO-OPERATIVE NETWORK INFRASTRUCTURE

OVERVIEW

Registered Name	Cooperative Network Infrastructure Limited
Date of Incorporation	06/02/2018

Legal Form / Structure	Society
Ownership class	Multi-stakeholder (Organisations)
Type	Thin-layer co-op

Number of Members	49
Number of Employees	0
Number of Volunteers	0

Turnover (2022/23)	~£294k
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Location
Ashton-under-Lyne, Tameside, England (Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Sussex)



DESCRIPTION

- CNI describes itself as a new type of co-op called a 'thin layer model co-op'
- Offers shared access to assets, mainly fibre networks, that are worth a lot of money (>£1m) without 'taking ownership' of those assets, instead mediating access
- Where many co-ops are about democratic control and shared ownership, CNI are about neutrality – a 'co-operative neutral host'
- Democratic but key point about the co-op structure and governance is that it guarantees neutrality – people talk about 'asset locks' and 'mission locks', this is a 'neutrality lock'
- Members are organisations, drawn from public, private and to some extent, third sector. Some members provide assets and earn a return for providing those assets and some members pay to access those assets
- CNI only adds a very small amount of value in between, hence the term 'thin layer cooperative'.



Cooperative Network
Infrastructure



KEY MILESTONES

Due diligence and founding

- Report commissioned from PwC into the state aid implications and viability of model
- QC sign-off on interpretation of state aid rules

Persuading key members

- Making use of a shared infrastructure not commercially disadvantageous
- Shared infrastructure enables capital to be used better

Expansion

- Second local authority, Blackpool
- Signing-up Virgin Media and City Fibre

Break-even

- Hit break even a couple of years ago, took about 3 years
- Now making a surplus and approaching £1,000,000 worth of assets

Capabilities

- Able to install fibre infrastructure in public and private sector ducting assets as well as Openreach
- Could be covering the country, the model is entirely scalable

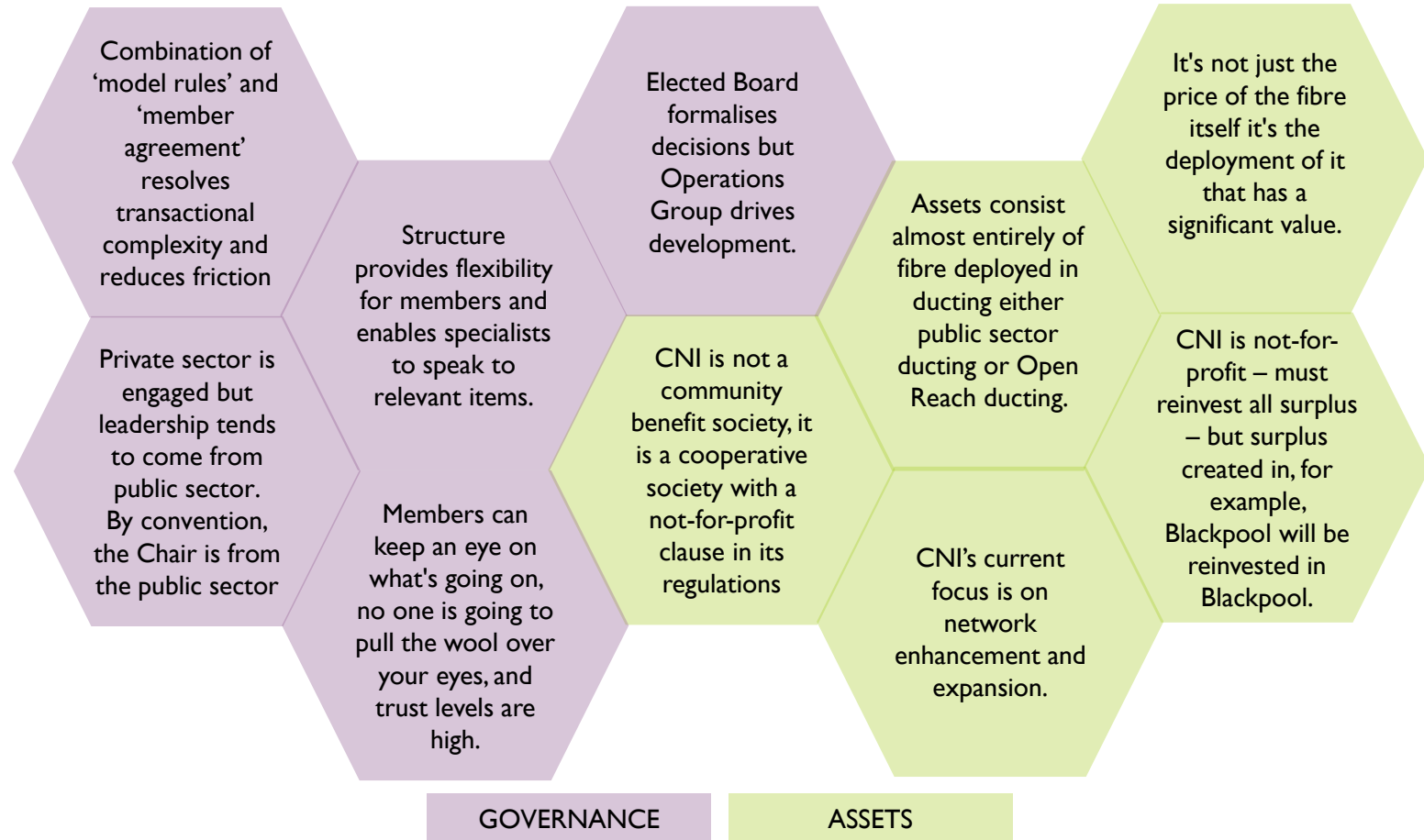
BACKGROUND

NEED: Tameside General Hospital needed to connect its data centre to its disaster recovery centre, needed point-to-point connection running at 10 gigabits. Calculated the money that they would spend over five years would be enough to build their own bit of fibre connecting the two places together and at the end of the five years, the costs will fall off a cliff. Moreover, because now you have your own fibre, why run it at 10 when you can run it at 40 gigabits or at 100 gigabits?

GROWTH: Tameside Council went through a similar process. They built a fibre network so why not join them together and make something bigger? How do you do this without creating some kind of complicated joint venture special purpose vehicle? You use a co-op! That way, you're not giving anything up, you're just saying, let's provide access to this joint network.

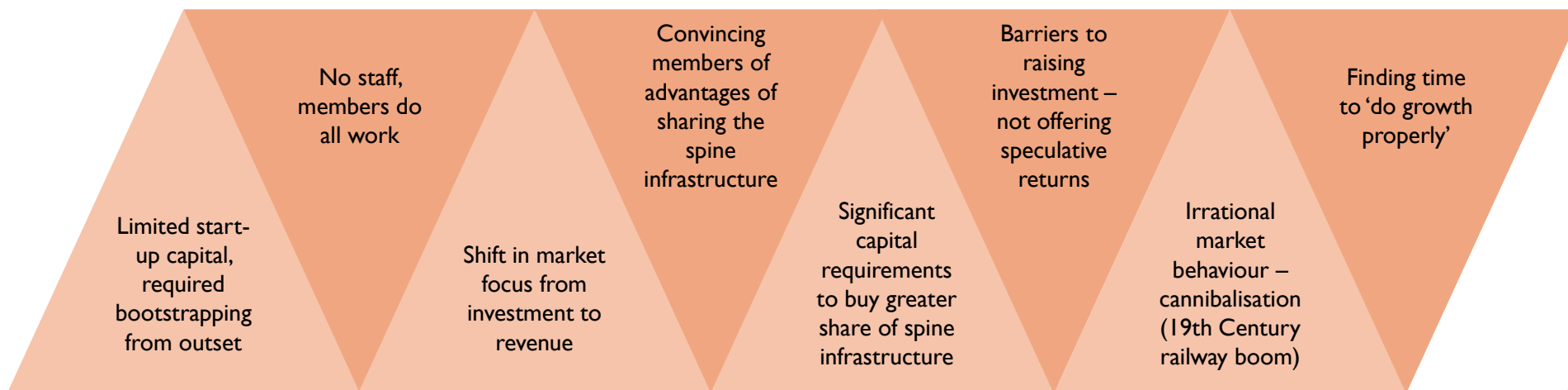
PRIVATE SECTOR: It's possible to open this up to the private sector because the model satisfies procurement and state aid rules by establishing certain key value transactions between members outside of the state and those inside the state. The model resolves the subsidy control problem which had prevented councils from intervening in digital infrastructure development.

KEY FEATURES





CHALLENGES



SUPPORT

Just one thing, a 'can do attitude' in the local authority, nothing more than that

- Some local authorities 'get it', others don't – the idea that if you build and own some of your own infrastructure it gives you all kinds of options you otherwise wouldn't have, including working with a model like CNI
- Blackpool and Tameside have received significant investment from the government on the basis that they were using the CNI model.

RELATIONSHIPS

Member of Co-ops UK

Member of INCA

The Independent Networks Cooperative Association – an industry body representing most of the alternative sector and does some of the political heavy-lifting

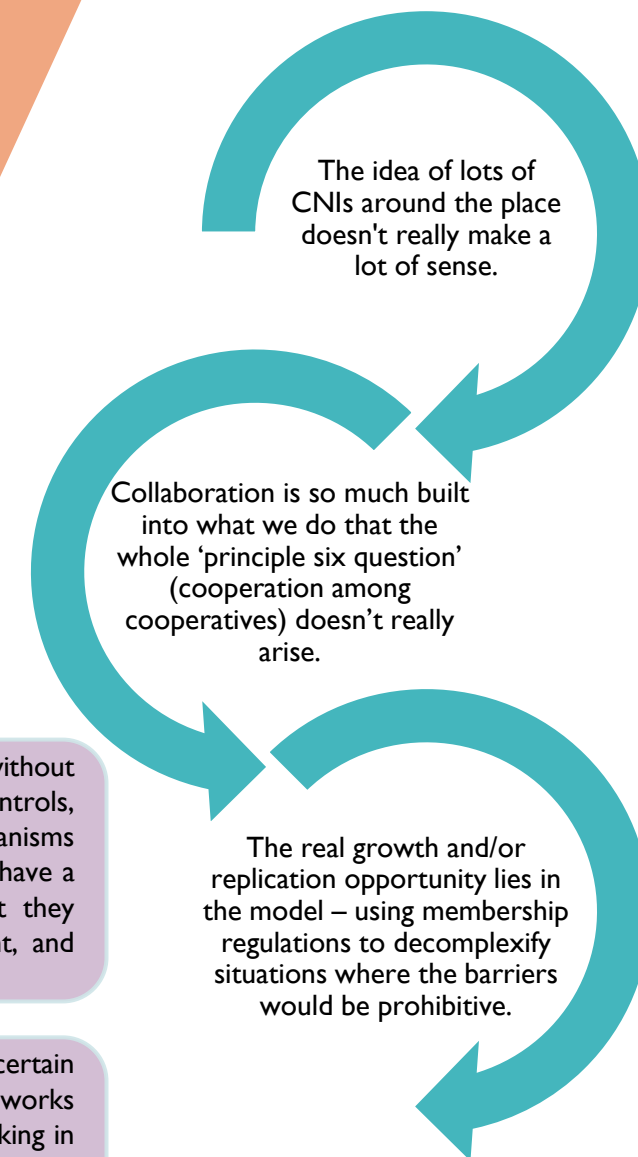
TO LOCAL
AUTHORITIES

They can make a very significant intervention without getting entangled in complicated subsidy controls, concession arrangements, and clawback mechanisms without having to spend public money. This can have a transformative effect, totally in line with what they want to do in terms of economic development, and local wealth creation.

TO
OPERATORS

It's in your mutual self-interest to collaborate in certain areas, no one is going to 'eat your lunch'. It works commercially and gets the market economy working in a way that's a bit more collaborative and resource efficient, which can only be good for the planet. Overall, CNI and the 'thin layer model' reduces friction by increasing trust.

GROWTH AND/OR REPLICATION





OUTLANDISH CO-OPERATIVE

OVERVIEW

Registered Name	Outlandish Co-operative Limited
Date of Incorporation	19/04/2016

Legal Form / Structure	Society
Ownership class	Workers
Type	Worker co-op

Number of Members	4
Number of Employees	10 freelance collaborators
Number of Volunteers	0

Turnover (2022/23)	£1.2m
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Location
Islington, London, England



DESCRIPTION

- A workers cooperative in the tech sector building websites, data tools, and software – originally founded in 2011 then converted to a co-operative society in 2016
- Most clients are 'somehow for good', they work with trade unions, large charities, universities, and researchers, along with other progressive companies
- Currently have 4 members and about 10 collaborators (not employees) who are freelancers, collaborators who are on the journey to membership are referred to as 'Outlanders'
- Predominantly based in London, but since the pandemic have become more and more remote/hybrid
- Use consent-based decision making, Sociocracy
- Don't have a flat pay structure, instead use a 3:1 ratio, but it's much lower than that
- Key player in establishing and running CoTech, a network of UK-based tech-focused workers co-ops
- Established Space4 in 2017, a co-working and community space, as kind of a way of 'doing the principle six thing' in terms of reaching out and putting back into the community.



KEY MILESTONES

Founding (2016)

- Setting up the coop in 2016.
- Setting up CoTech – helped root culture in cooperativism and helped meet a lot more people

Space4

- Originally established in 2017, led to taking on a 10-year contract with Islington Council in 2019, worth £600,000 in rent over 10 years, probably worth a lot more in other ways

Major projects

- Overthrowing a government – a piece of technology that was instrumental in changing the government in Papua New Guinea
- School Cuts website – the campaign influenced many thousands of votes in the 2017 election

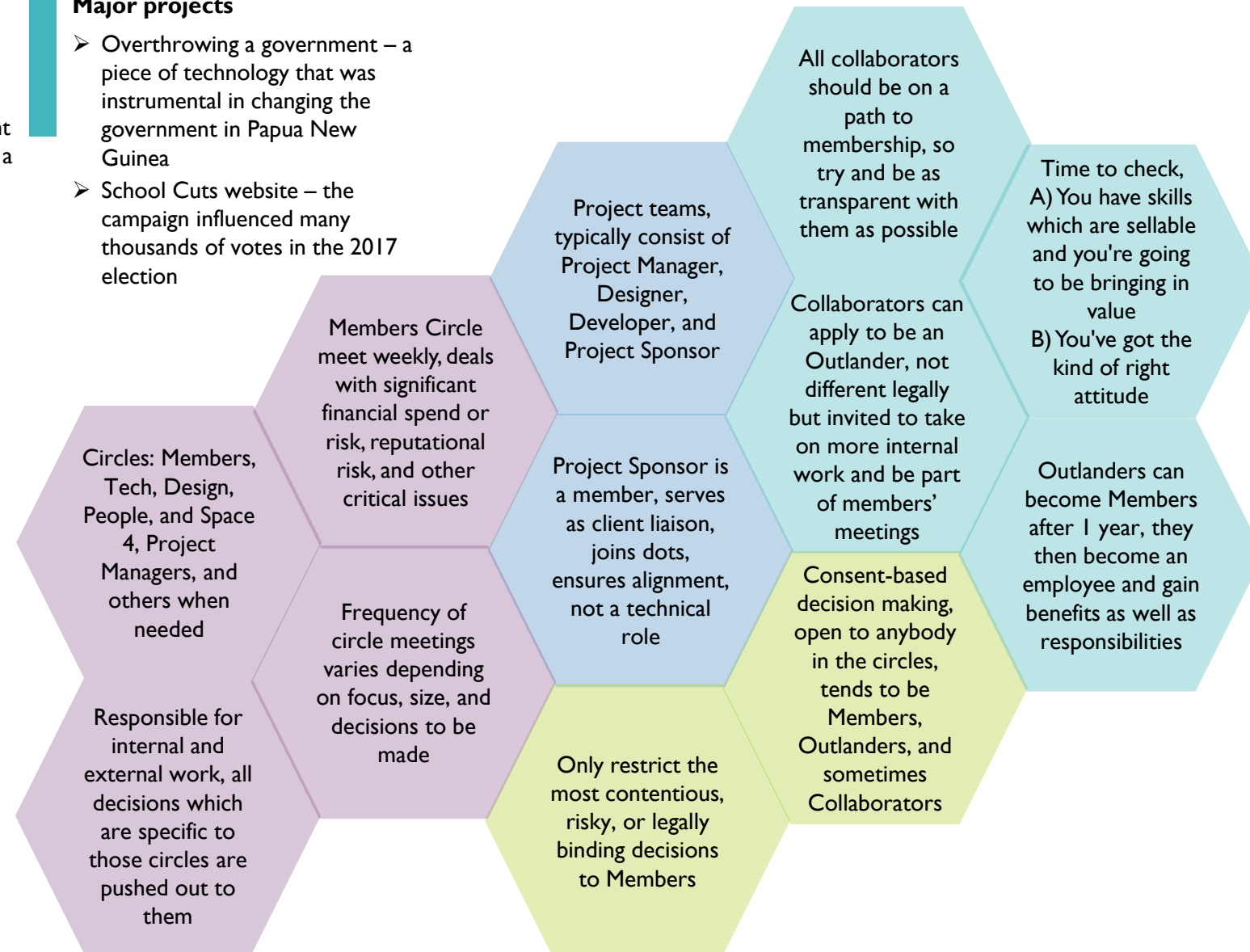
BACKGROUND

ORIGINS: Group of three friends working in digital teams in the BBC. Frustrated by the bureaucracy, realised if they set up an agency they could supply tools to the BBC, would be better paid, and have more control over their work and lives. Initially formed a limited liability partnership building digital tools. Founders were interested in politics and activism, so they started taking on more clients who shared similar interests, values, and missions.

CO-OP: Founders didn't want to become bosses and didn't want all the responsibility. They wanted to do the work and to work with people who were also trying to push themselves, who shared their vision, and who were up for participating so started investigating models, got some advice through Co-ops UK, eventually Siôn Whellens (Principle 6) supported their conversion to a co-op.

PROCESS: Tried to get everybody working for the company to join. Turned out that people had slightly different visions and some didn't really "get it". There was a phase of ironing-out some of the processes and politics in the beginning.

KEY FEATURES



STRUCTURE

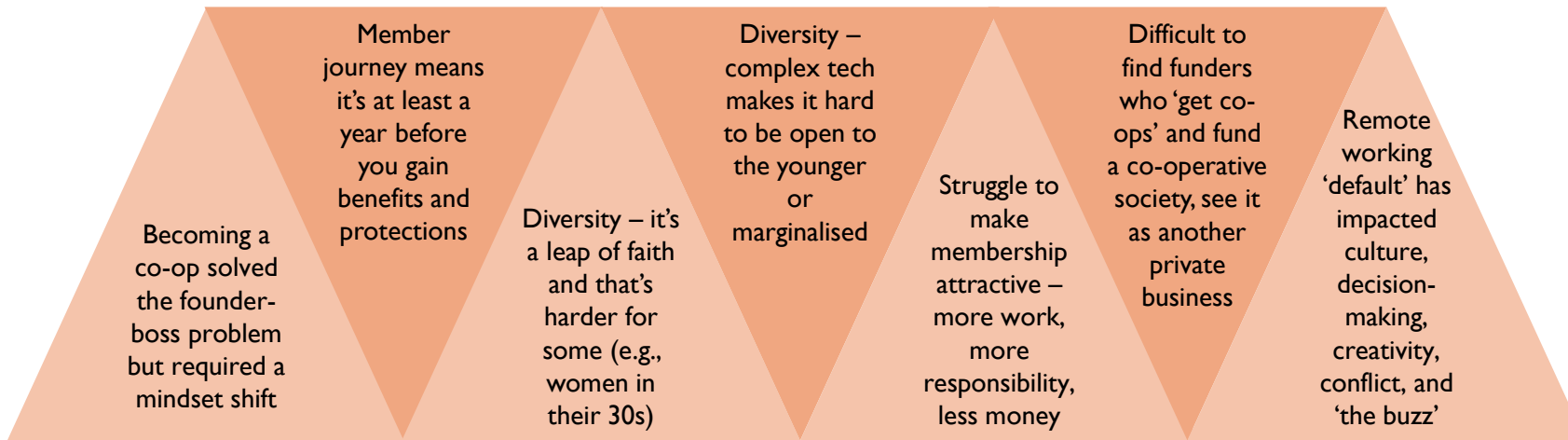
OPERATIONS

DECISION-MAKING

MEMBERSHIP

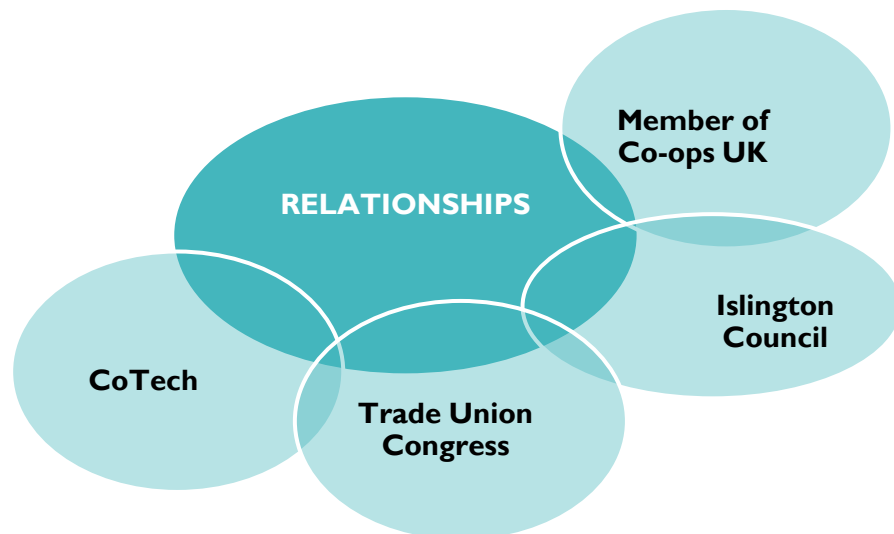


CHALLENGES



SUPPORT

- Co-ops UK provided initial port of call and ongoing touchpoint
- Siôn Whellens (Principle 6) supported conversion to co-op
- Islington Council via 10-year rent agreement for new Space4 location
- Private philanthropic support

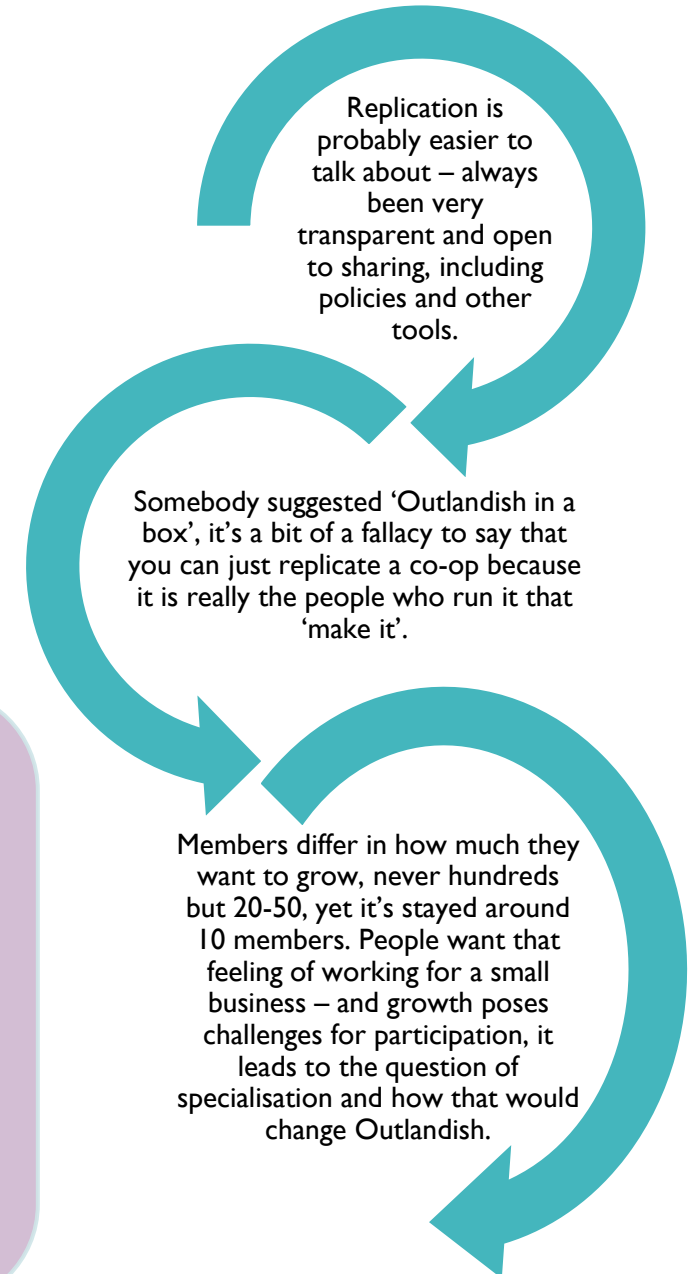


TO LOCAL
AUTHORITIES

KEY MESSAGES / TAKEAWAYS

Forming the bond with Islington Council has been fantastic. Demonstrating that they can source more of their digital products locally has been great. While you can't necessarily have a highly localised community wealth building model in London, because why shouldn't they buy from neighbouring boroughs, trying to shorten those supply chains and, probably more importantly, make those supply chains more ethical and democratic is good. Most tech agencies don't feel rooted in their local community, so it is quite a special feeling to be engaged in the politics and working with the Council.

GROWTH AND/OR REPLICATION





DULAS

OVERVIEW

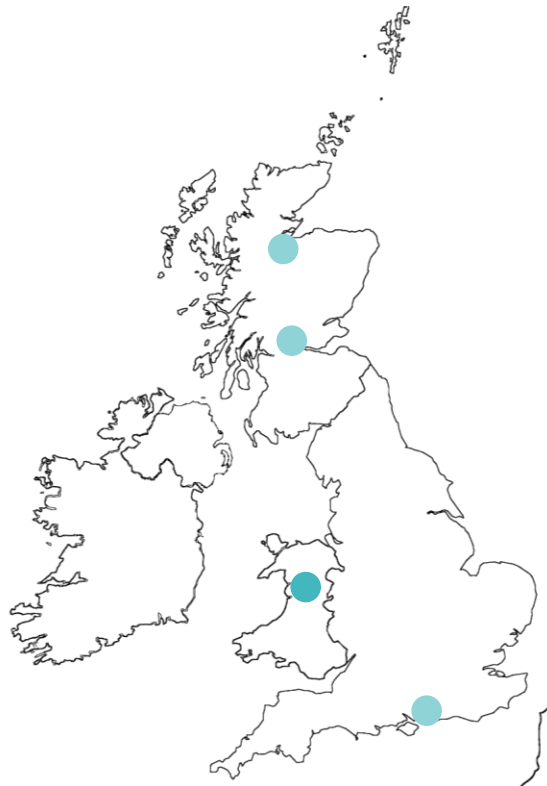
Registered Name	Dulas Ltd
Date of Incorporation	15/04/1982

Legal Form / Structure	Company limited by shares
Ownership class	Workers
Type	Worker co-op

Number of Members	52
Number of Employees	90
Number of Volunteers	0

Turnover (2021/22)	~£12.8m
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Location
Machynlleth, Powys, Wales (Stirling, Inverness, Bognor Regis)



DESCRIPTION

- A workers' co-operative in the renewable energy and manufacturing sectors, founded in 1982
- Originally created as a kind of renewable energy lab at the Centre for Alternative Technology
- Highly qualified and experienced multi-disciplinary team encompassing all aspects of renewable energy from policy, market stimulation and resource assessment right through to research, design, training, and the implementation of wind, solar, micro hydro and biomass projects
- Based across two sites in Machynlleth, where it was set up, but it's also in Inverness and Stirling, as well as in Bognor Regis through a recent manufacturing acquisition
- Guiding set of values since 1982, commitments to:
 - ❖ Creating sustainable and meaningful employment and training and developing its employees
 - ❖ Its community and environment
 - ❖ Improving people's lives using appropriate technology
- Held to these values through challenging times and major successes alike.





KEY MILESTONES

Leaving home

- Moving away from the bigger collective and having to go it alone, but keeping with that cooperative vision and the market it was operating in

New people, new ideas

- Brought in a wider range of engineers and allowed them to explore what they were interested in, taking Dulas away from operating completely in solar

Reflective governance

- Explored a governance structure 'befitting' a financially successful company **BUT** *"milestone isn't that we went down that road, it was the realisation that it wasn't what we needed and rejecting it"*

BACKGROUND

ORIGINS: Founders had been at CAT since 1977, a collective of people had taken over an old slate quarry. Started off wanting to practice alternative ways of living and develop renewable energy but more and more people wanted to visit so they created a visitor centre to demonstrate and educate.

NEED: There was a lack of technical products for renewable energy systems. Four engineers were tasked with developing these products (e.g., solar controllers and inverters) to test the market. CAT was a worker co-op and educational charity, so a limited company was set up to mitigate risk. The charity took a share, and the workers took a collective share.

CO-OP: After a few years making significant losses, CAT was evolving further, so Dulas was encouraged to go it alone, move off site and see if they could survive without the support of the charity. Created additional shares so that all the six employees could take a share each. They took the co-op structure and the way of working they had learned at CAT and started to achieve some financial success. Could have easily changed that model, decided to convert into real value shares, but they didn't. They kept the collective vision. As more staff joined, they just kept offering membership until it's got to this point.

KEY FEATURES

Built into articles that you're a member or a member in waiting from day one

6-month probation then 12 months of engagement as a potential member – 18 months in total

Come to all the member meetings, receive member information, access all member intranet and messaging boards – you're invited to participate!

Only thing you can't do is vote on resolutions or approve directors' remuneration and don't receive a dividend, if a dividend is awarded

Instituted a board of 'member elected directors' after reaching ~22 member-directors

As turnover increased, identified need for Managing Director, Finance Director, and Operations Director

Enables clearer collaboration with conventional organisations and provides long-term vision and strategic direction

Manufacturing – solar, hydro, wind energy products, EV charging, and vaccine cabinets (fridges)

Consultancy – Renewable energy, environmental impact, and 'net zero'

Land – Own two sites in Machynlleth, lease Stirling, lease Inverness (since early 90s), Bognor across 8 units all leased

Plant, machinery, and vehicles (1) – Electric vehicles, 4x4s, and monitoring equipment, turbines, solar PV, refrigeration, EV charging

Research & Development – Renewable energy technology and products, including EV charging

Support services that go with all the technology are kept in house along with IT, Personnel, and Finance.

People – Value employees, the training and development programmes available, the tacit knowledge that nurtured and harnessed

MEMBERSHIP

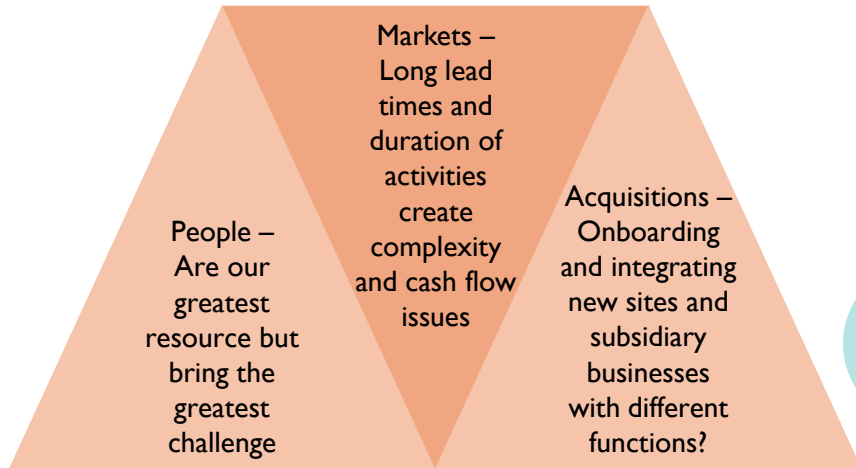
STRUCTURE

OPERATIONS

ASSETS



CHALLENGES



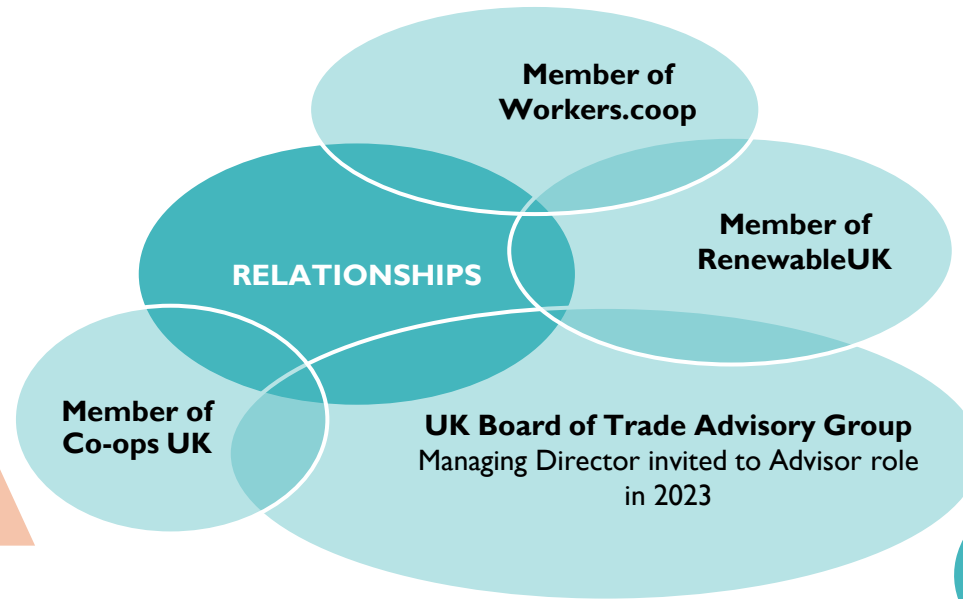
SUPPORT

- Limited direct support since leaving CAT
- Sense of disconnect between North and Mid-Wales and South Wales, where the national government and development organisations are based
- Local councils have been supportive but there's a limit to what they can offer or do
- National government is supportive, but it seems to be a reciprocal relationship – if they're going to do a big trade thing overseas or an expo, or commitment to net zero, then it's, let's go to Dulas!

TO
GOVERNMENT

KEY MESSAGES / TAKEAWAYS

- **Expectations:** Need to understand and put aside expectations, sense of being caught up in expectations of rapid growth, instant success, instant profit
- **In for the long-haul:** Dulas' success has come from long term commitment to the vision and mission, KPIs tend to drive short-term behaviour, Dulas could have grown faster but in doing so lost its sense of purpose and meaning
- **Boom and bust:** Companies with tax breaks, property deals, and subsidies promising job creation have come and gone, leaving communities in difficulty and local businesses struggling
- **Faith in the process:** Focus on mission has brought benefits to the organisation and its community – it takes time and patience to build strong businesses that make their communities stronger and healthier too and this comes from the co-operative approach to business



GROWTH AND/OR REPLICATION





SOUTH MANCHESTER CREDIT UNION

OVERVIEW

Registered Name	South Manchester Credit Union Limited
Date of Incorporation	19/09/2000
Legal Form / Structure	Society
Ownership class	Consumers
Type	Credit union

Number of Members	~5,000
Number of Employees	9
Number of Volunteers	~6+

Turnover (2022/23)	Assets ~£4.5m ~£20,000 Surplus
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Location
Manchester, England



DESCRIPTION

- A community credit union created by ordinary people with limited external support
- Operating for 24 years
- Now have approximately 5,000 members and assets of £4.5 million
- Used to run everything from the back room in a church but now has a main office on a very ordinary street in South Manchester
- Staff team of equivalent to 9 full time employees
- Authorised by the Prudential Regulatory Authority (PRA) and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), and the PRA
- Saving is encouraged because 1) Provide capital and 2) It's life changing, many members don't believe they can do it
- At the smaller end, loans are typically made for things like a fridge, a lot of white goods or perhaps a bill, even a parking fine that's suddenly ballooned, larger loans could be for a car or home improvements, there has also been a rise in members taking out loans to cover the cost of visas or for master's degrees.



KEY MILESTONES

DWP Growth Fund

- Initiative driving growth through distribution of small loans
- Smaller loans but at high volume
- Linked to benefits scheme
- Attracted new members who are now loyal, long-term members

Highstreet presence

- Establishing a presence was quite an identity change
- Involved lots of change, including establishing a management structure and becoming more professional and harmonised

New tech solution?

- Involvement in a national programme developing a platform for UK credit unions
- Existing systems are functional but “coded in hieroglyphs”
- Project failed badly but switched on to the need for adaptation
- Since integrated a chat platform

Collaborative solution

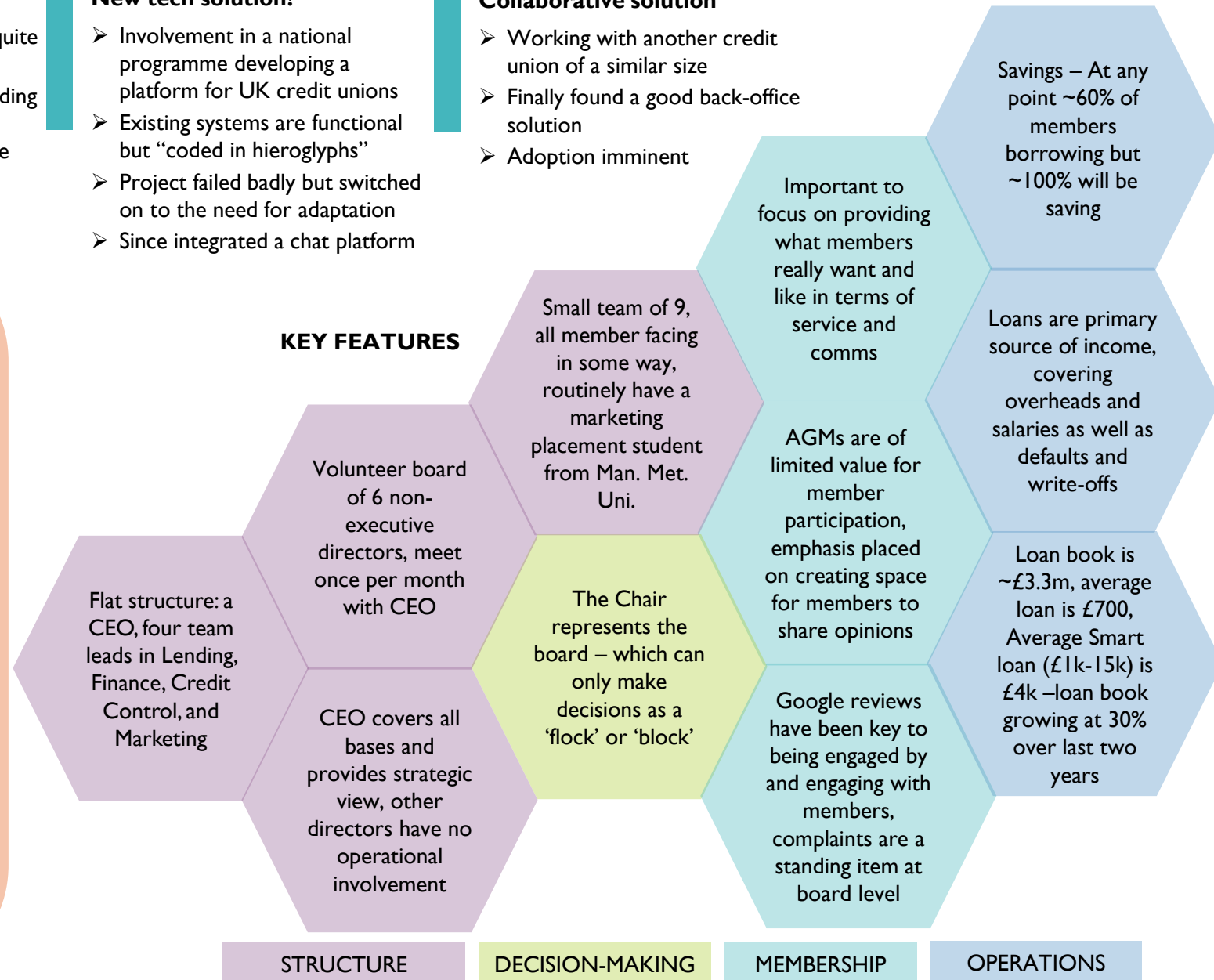
- Working with another credit union of a similar size
- Finally found a good back-office solution
- Adoption imminent

BACKGROUND

ROOTS: Our roots are tied with those of the UK credit union movement, which was started by the Windrush Generation. We're very much there for people who have been on the outside or marginalised and not been able to find their way into affordable finance. That's at the heart of who we are. The people who started us, they believed there was a need for alternative community finance that was human-centred and focused on serving people's needs, getting to know them, being present in the community.

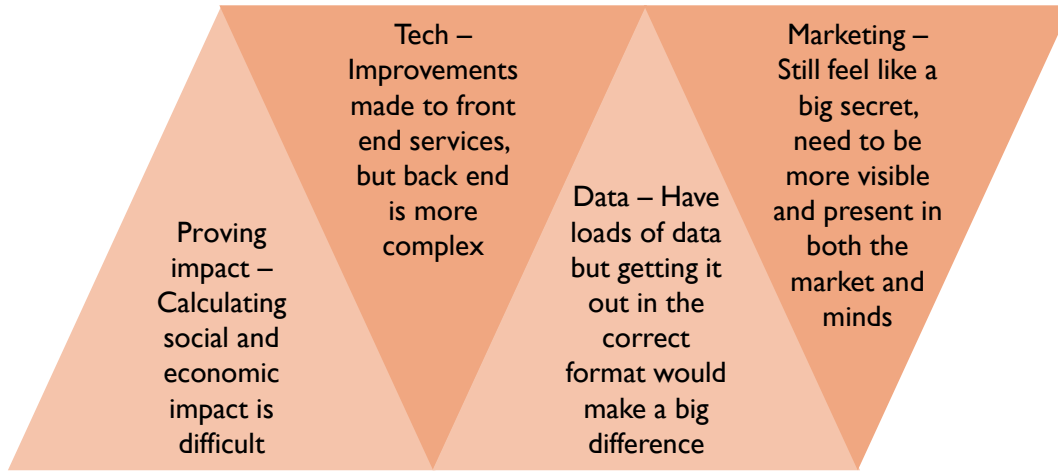
EFFORT: There was a core group of people who met every week for two years before they even knew that it was going to work, they put their time in alongside everything else they were doing. Pure volunteering, it was big commitment. The first chair stayed on our board for 24 years and alongside serving on the board, he had a full-time job as well for all that time. Our directors also ran 10 collection points, the only direct points of contact with the community until 2012, which was a 4-hour weekly commitment. We had a small office in the back of a church for paperwork and accounting. We didn't have any external investors; it was developed in a kind of entrepreneurial way by people investing their own time.

KEY FEATURES





CHALLENGES



SUPPORT

- A local church gave a room for peppercorn rent plus series of community centres doing the same for outward-facing outlets
- Funding and investment including DWP Growth Fund, Lloyds Bank, Fair for All finance dormant asset fund
- 10 years of partnership working with Southway housing trust to provide innovative lending scheme based on them investing a small amount of capital and paying a fee for each loan – interest set aside in development fund that has been used to fund things like the marketing placement student programme

GROWTH AND/OR REPLICATION

There is some pressure from the FCA and PRA for smaller credit unions to merge and simplify the sector but many credit unions are keen to remain independent and localised.

Tech is one key area where small credit unions can be agile and innovate to maintain their relevance and fuel sustainable growth, the other is 'getting the marketing right'.

Strategically focused on building and enhancing collaboration, including a commitment to the Greater Manchester consortium. It may also be possible to establish a Credit Union Service Organisation for sharing core functions and skills. This is just one of the routes being explored to enable growth without losing their local personality, flavour, independence, confidence, and expertise.

KEY MESSAGES / TAKEAWAYS

- Proactively facilitate collaboration between credit unions and with other community organisations (e.g., housing providers)
- Look to regions such as Greater Manchester where a culture of cross-borough collaboration has developed over many years (including Manchester Airport) and use this to create more cohesion
- Progressively invest in credit unions, they are a key mechanism for alleviating financial difficulties but also helping people learn to save and believe they can save money
- If you can't afford to invest directly, use your influence and outreach to promote credit unions

TO LOCAL
AND
COMBINED
AUTHORITIES

RELATIONSHIPS

Southway
Housing
Trust

Lloyds
Bank

Member of
Co-ops UK

SoundPound (network
of credit unions in
Greater Manchester)



EQUAL CARE CO-OP

OVERVIEW

Registered Name	Equal Care Co-op Limited
Date of Incorporation	09/02/2018
Legal Form / Structure	Society
Ownership class	Multi-stakeholder
Type	Platform co-op

Number of Members	219
Number of Employees	27 employees +59 independent
Number of Volunteers	9
Turnover (2022/23)	~£858k Est. £1.5m 2023/24

Location
Hebden Bridge, Calderdale, England (+ project in London)



DESCRIPTION

- A multi-stakeholder platform cooperative providing care and support at home and in the community to a very broad range of adults experiencing a wide range of scenarios, illnesses, and challenges
- Equal Care offers a trusted, accessible care and support matching and management platform, delivering 5,000+ hours of care per month
- Caregivers and receivers get full choice and autonomy over their care, including the opportunity to be in both roles: care users can share their skills, support others and be fairly rewarded for this.
- Care workers can choose employment type and decide their hours and clients, contributing to a low staff turnover (4.5%)
- 31% of workers are completely new to care
- The company and the technology is owned by the participators and the creators of value
- Equal Care is a Real Living Wage employer
- Regulated by Care Quality Commission (CQC)
- Built a piece of technology and designed a model that enables power to flow away from the usual sources of it in social care, i.e., funders, commissioners, and managers, towards people who are receiving that support and the people who are giving that support, whether that is in a paid or unpaid capacity.





KEY MILESTONES

Founding

- 2017 – Met with founding group
- 2018 – Incorporated and received a few small grants
- Managed to employ co-founders on part-time minimum wage in mid-2018

Raising funds

- Late 2018 managed to launch and complete first community share offer
- Raised £410,000 and employed the core team by the end of 2019

Rough terrain

- Core team started in January 2020
- Pandemic hit in March 2020
- Co-op flatlined for 2 years

Recovery

- Emergency recovery share offer to avoid closing door, raised £300,000
- Managed to work out how to grow and found rhythm, ~10-15% growth per month

London calling?

- Developed project in London with £100,00 grant from London Office of Technology and Innovation
- Outcomes include service specification for councils and a playbook for councils and new groups exploring care co-ops

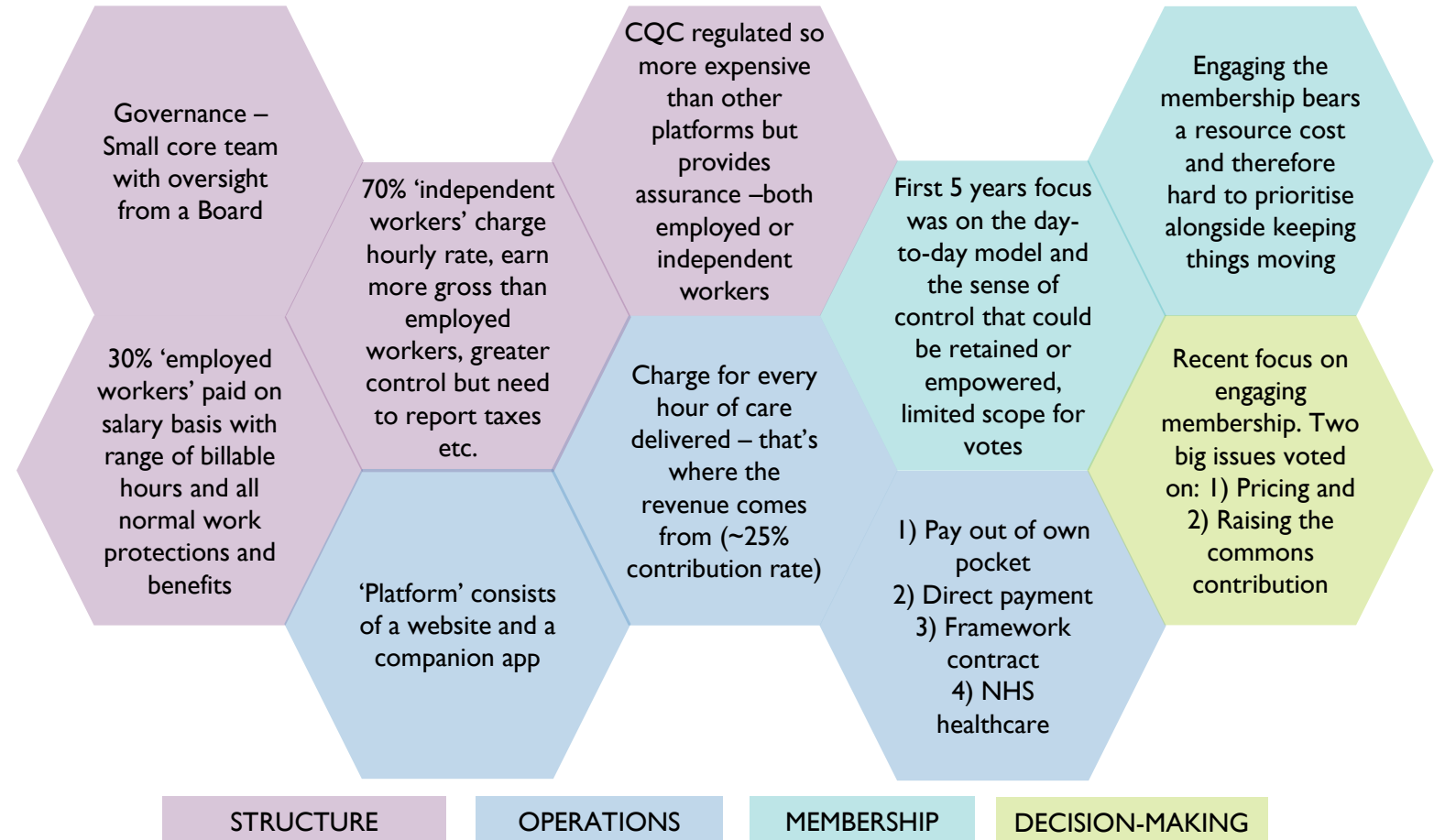
BACKGROUND

IDEA: It was "one of those things that wouldn't go away" The reasons were threefold: 1) Working in social care and seeing all the abuses, problems, and issues from both a worker and support recipient perspective, 2) The power organisational structures had to either contribute to people's sense of empowerment or, more commonly, to take it away, 3) The increasing distance between the people who are the subject of decisions and where decisions are made. Key influences included the sharing economy, co-production, and time-banks.

CO-OP: A charity might have been the obvious option but wouldn't have enabled the sense of equity desired. The multi-stakeholder platform structure fitted the aspirations of the co-founders much better, and this was further confirmed through a series of 'care conversations' that brought together the founding group of people receiving support, family members, unpaid carers, and a couple of care workers.

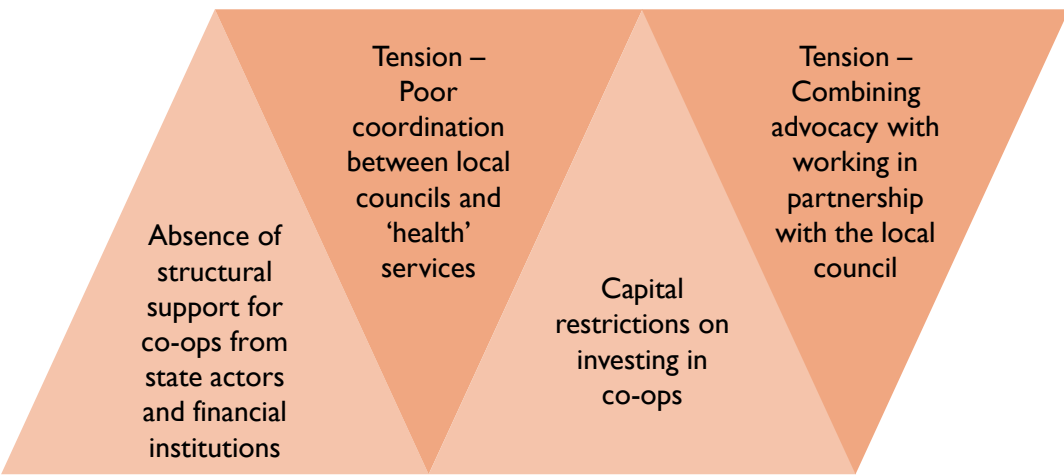
MODEL: It might have developed differently and been more technology focused if they had moved faster but the first year deprioritized the importance of technology and prioritised the people involved – "That was when we worked out that it was about power. Fundamentally, this is about power."

KEY FEATURES





CHALLENGES



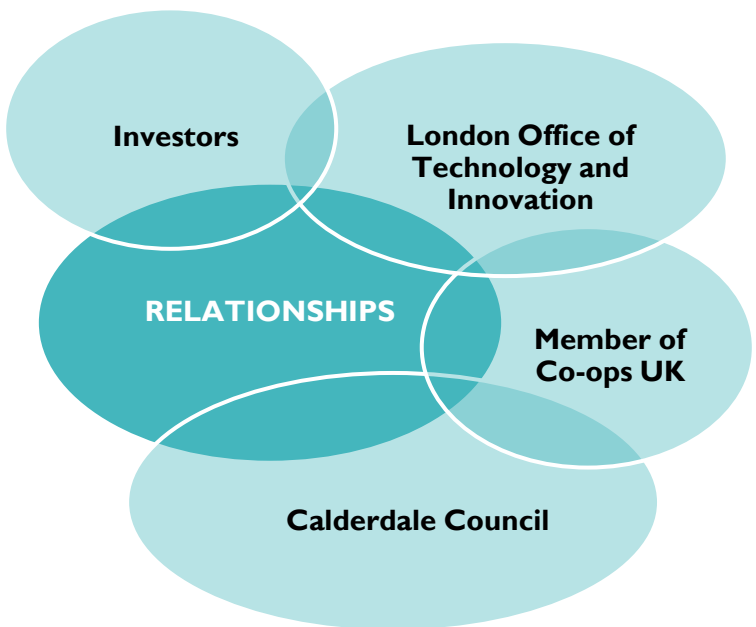
SUPPORT

- UnFound Accelerator (Co-ops UK)
- UnLtd grant
- Finance Innovation Lab
- Care Quality Commission Innovation Sandbox
- Key investor-members
- Current Chair is “closest thing to an angel investor”

GROWTH AND/OR REPLICATION



KEY MESSAGES / TAKEAWAYS



TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES

- **Excuses** – Many local authorities shy away from any positive action around assisting social enterprise-like businesses and particularly co-ops because they think it breaks procurement rules or whatever. Like what? And lazy excuses get trotted out.
- **Favour** – Councils have a big challenge in being able to show preferences, but even if they just commissioned with favour toward businesses that have an asset lock, charities, social enterprises, anything that is mission, that would help.
- **Can do** – The Welsh Government have shown that's all lies. Of course you can do it. If there's a political and administrative will, then you can do it.



BELFAST CLEANING SOCIETY

OVERVIEW

Registered Name	Belfast Cleaning Co-operative Limited
Date of Incorporation	03/05/2012

Legal Form / Structure	Society
Ownership class	Workers
Type	Worker co-op

Number of Members	13
Number of Employees	2
Number of Volunteers	0

Turnover (2023/24)	£151k
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Location
Belfast, Northern Ireland



DESCRIPTION

- A successful workers' co-op based in Belfast founded by a group of members from “both sides of the interface”
- Have members and employees who are refugees, disabled, and otherwise marginalised – and it’s not just a women’s co-op, there have been men working at the society too, despite what people’s stereotypes of cleaners may be
- “There’s no discrimination whatsoever and it doesn’t matter where you’re from, as long as you’re a good cleaner and you get the idea of a co-operative, and you strive to understand the seven principles and join as a member.”
- Cleaning is viewed as menial, it is looked down upon, it is badly paid, and it is usually zero-hour contracts – the founding members wanted to break all these structures, they wanted real living wage, which they have been from day one, they wanted hours that fit with the life of the women who wanted to return to work but couldn’t, and they wanted to ensure that everyone had a voice and a say in decision-making.





KEY MILESTONES

The founding group

- Five founders came together in 2011 and established the co-op in May 2012 with support from Trademark and Co-operative Business Consultants

Big contracts

- 2016/17 tendered for a 146-office block with communal spaces worth >£250k over 5 years – providing job security for three cleaners

COVID-19

- 60% of contracts closed but BCS kept servicing key customers
- Bought six fogging machines and top-quality PPE, offered a new service using non-furloughed cleaners
- When furlough was reduced, no workers lost any salary

Awards

- Living Wage Award 2016
- Key Worker Industry Award 2022
- SENI Co-operative of the Year 2023

BACKGROUND

ORIGINS: Trademark Belfast, an anti-sectarian unit of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions was working with community organisations, women's groups, young people all along 'the interface', 60-foot walls dividing communities. They were delivering training with a group of women from the Shankill area, which is the Protestant loyalist Orange area, and Catholic National Republicans on the other side of the wall. This included human rights, inequality, conflict resolution, and history and identity. Yet, funding always runs out eventually.

IDEA: Most of the women were cleaners and they were working zero-hour contracts for below the living wage, being treated very badly, and were often looked down upon or ignored. In 2011, a phone call came from an events manager looking for good cleaning companies for the MTV Awards. A group of women, Protestant and Catholic, came together to deliver the cleaning and thus the idea for a co-op emerged.

CO-OP: In May 2012, the Belfast Cleaning Society became the first cross-community workers cooperative in Belfast, probably in the whole island of Ireland. Of the five founding members only one remains but there are 15 workers across contracts including Women's Aid refuges, the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland, Lighthouse Charity Belfast, and the Innovation Factory office block.

KEY FEATURES

If you're honest, know about cleaning, learn the co-op principles, you can be a member

Never discriminate – No bank account, ex political prisoners, disabilities, refugees, it doesn't matter

15 workers, 6 core members, two casual workers

6 key members are the 'pushers' driving the strategy and coordination

Every single worker has a say in the business, all are included in 'Co-op Member Chat' group

Co-operative values and principles are emphasised and practised

The structure works because the core group has evolved, only one founding member left but there's always active members 'coming up'

Principle 7, Concern for Community – If there's any surplus, workers can nominate charitable or local causes to fund and support

Surplus can also be used to pay bonuses – everybody gets a bonus based on the hours they work

Solidarity – Making sure everybody gets paid, customers are happy, sick leave gets covered, care for each other

Operational flexibility – For big one-off jobs such as festivals can take on as many as 100 employees

Principle 6, Cooperation among Cooperatives – Whether it's printing, catering, or training, always try to contract other co-ops

MEMBERSHIP

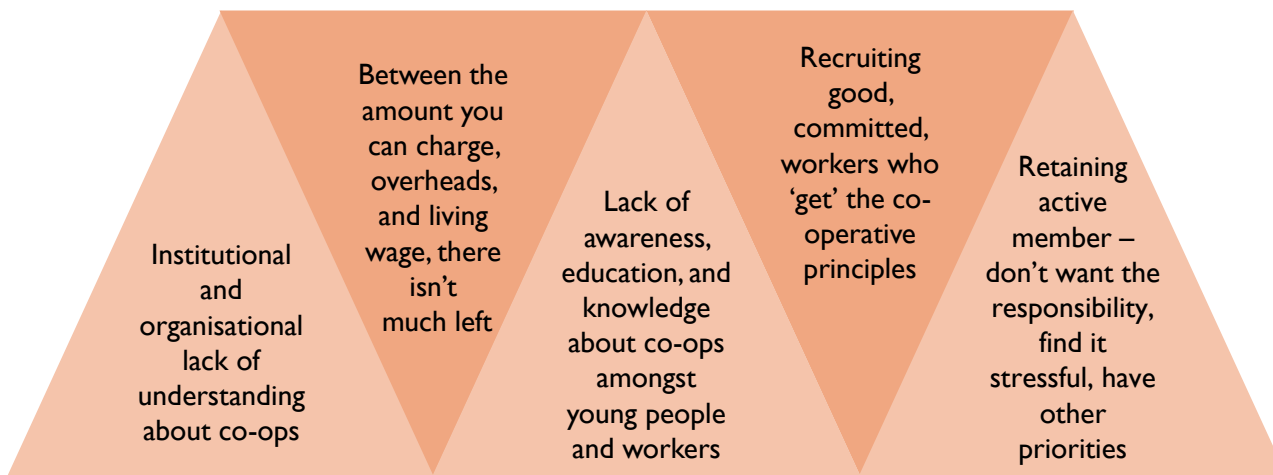
STRUCTURE

DECISION-MAKING

OPERATIONS



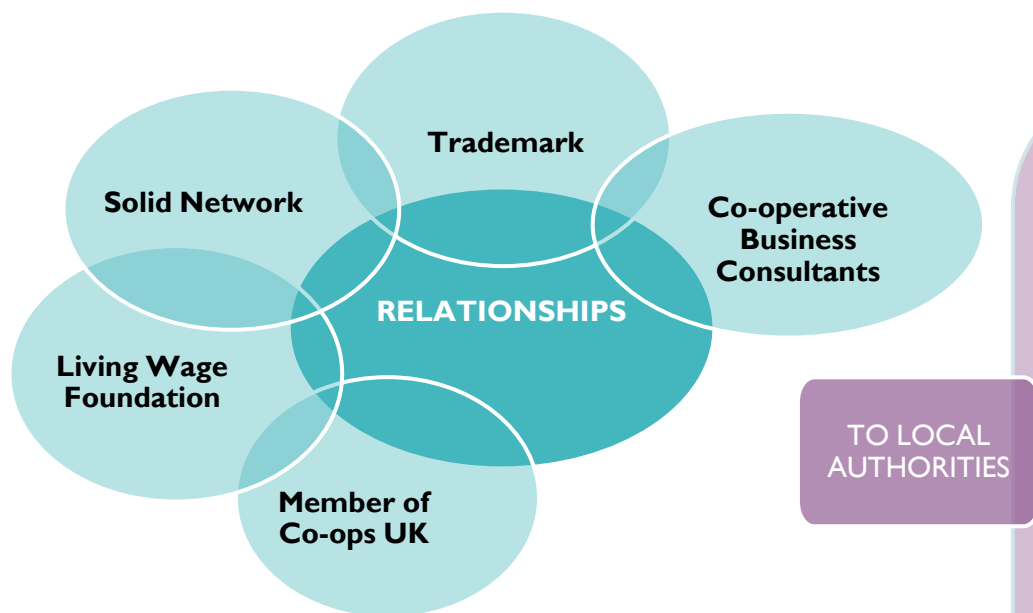
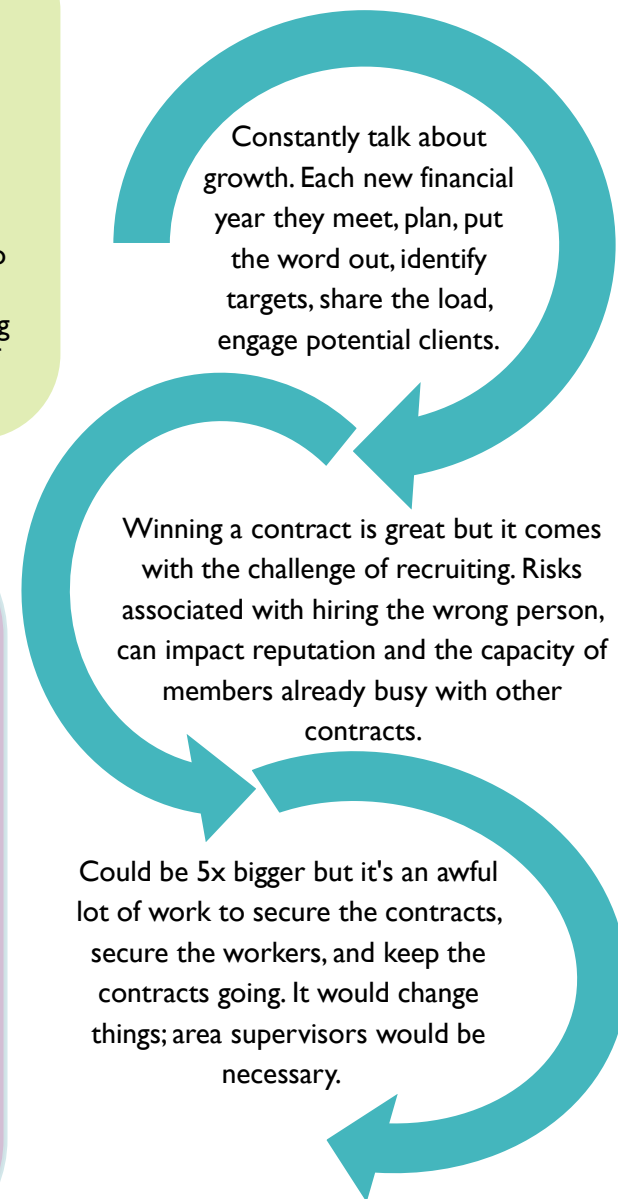
CHALLENGES



SUPPORT

- Trademark have been there from day one, supporting and resource sharing. Now a paid supplier of storage space and, more importantly, back-office support including payroll, ordering, bookkeeping, VAT return, and other admin.
- Co-operative Business Consultants with some funding from Co-ops UK was able to provide support, guidance, and signposting
- However, did not receive any money, no big grant, it was down to the determination of the women

GROWTH AND/OR REPLICATION



KEY MESSAGES / TAKEAWAYS

- **Education and signposting** – Young people and workers need to know about co-ops as an alternative for empowerment and emancipation
- **Support (with money)** – Funding needs to be made available for co-ops like it is for other forms of start-up
- **Connect** – Strong co-ops are connected to other co-ops and support organisations, locally and nationally
- **Promote** – Awareness is one thing but actively promoting and advocating for co-ops is key to both developing sustainable businesses and creating new co-ops. "If you go to a working-class area and find a bunch of cleaners who are working for less than a minimum wage, who've got zero-hour contracts, and they're getting treated very badly, that is a group of men and women who could easily come together and say, do you know what? Let's do it ourselves."
- **Understand co-operative principles** – For co-ops and co-op development to be effective, you need to understand the co-operative principles and how they work in synergy, as do the members who form the co-ops along with anyone involved in supporting them.



SUMA WHOLEFOODS

OVERVIEW

Registered Name	Triangle Wholefoods Collective Limited
Date of Incorporation	15/09/1977
Legal Form / Structure	Society
Ownership class	Workers
Type	Worker co-op

Number of Members	212 (~15 trial members)
Number of Employees	54
Number of Volunteers	0

Turnover (2022/23)	£63.6m
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Location
Elland, Calderdale, England (+ London distribution centre)



DESCRIPTION

- Suma is
 1. A worker co-op
 2. A wholesaler of vegetarian and sustainable food
- It is the largest equal pay worker co-op in Europe
- Members set the direction of the business, everyone has an equal say
- Members all get paid the same wage and take responsibility and each do a range of jobs each week, from truck driving to cooking to accounts
- Always tried to maintain quite a diverse customer base but majority of sales are wholefood and health food shops (though decreasing in number over 20 years) with sales also going through online retailers of various kinds, some exports (detrimentally impacted by Brexit), and across a range of restaurants, bakeries, and bigger retailers such as 'the Co-op'
- Key 'social impact' is in the number of people employed in what are mostly manual jobs but with very good wages, far more than normal in the sector or the national average wage, this brings benefits to the local community.





KEY MILESTONES

Born in Leeds

- Established in Leeds and operated there until the early 1990s

Next stop, Halifax

- Moved to Halifax in the early 1990s to a purpose-built warehouse

Rapid growth

- Early 2000s, strategic shift regarding the decision to grow membership and expand the business
- Started recruiting 10-15 people at a time every three months
- Moved to current location in Elland, bigger warehouse just outside of Halifax

Distributed distribution

- By 2015 Suma had established a distribution centre near London with ~10 workers, mainly drivers, some of them members but others not

BACKGROUND

Suma was founded in 1977. Around that time, there were a number of similar groups exploring the concept of 'wholefoods' and a more sustainable approach to food and lifestyle more generally. The early members and those who joined throughout the 80s were what you'd probably call 'hippies' – they'd call themselves that. They were hippies, communists, rebellious types, vegetarianism at that time was a lot more 'out there' than it probably is now, even if it's still relatively niche. So, it came about through a movement of those people, the way they wanted to live their lives, and the way they wanted to eat – or rather, what they wanted to eat! They were living in different parts of the country so started to move stuff around to supply the food and goods they wanted and then that became a sort of business and a way of life. There's a sort of very mundane story about this guy called Reg, who started Suma. He would travel in amongst these places with vans full of big bags of oats and seeds and stuff. While Suma grew from his activities, you can find different food-focused worker coops around the country from around the same time. Some of them don't exist anymore, but a lot of them do in these different parts of the country. They probably all have slightly different origin stories but that's the broad brush of where it came from. The founders stuck around for quite a while, although there are none of them still at Suma.

KEY FEATURES

~5 years ago reviewed structure and established a Board and Member Council

Board – 9 elected members, no external directors, focused on business strategy

Member Council – 9 elected members, focused on member needs and participation

Since becoming a 'large organisation' have given Board more power to make decisions that 10-15 years ago only members could agree

Electing members to the Board and Member Council is the primary mechanism for democratic participation

Membership is not 'automatic', employees can become members through application, at times there has been a waiting list

Member Council is responsive to developing member proposals

3 or 4 General Meetings each year where members can bring proposals and have them voted on

Minimal fixed assets, do not own the land or buildings but do buy the trucks (which are expensive) and own a lot of machinery

A significant amount of money is in the stock held at any given point (make money, buy more stock, stock goes out, make money, etc.)

While Suma sometimes distribute money to support projects, no formal 'fund' held for this purpose

STRUCTURE

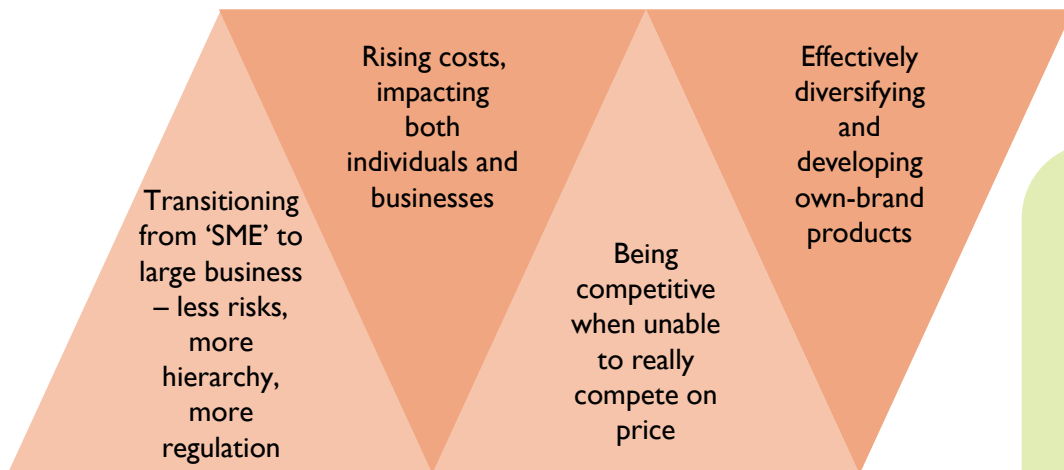
DECISION-MAKING

MEMBERSHIP

ASSETS



CHALLENGES



SUPPORT

- In the 1990s received support and consultant services to understand how to grow as well as set up the management committee – before Suma developed its own strategic capabilities
- Support via the local authority around EU funding ~10 years ago
- Increasingly receive support through subscriptions or memberships to Co-ops UK and other organisations

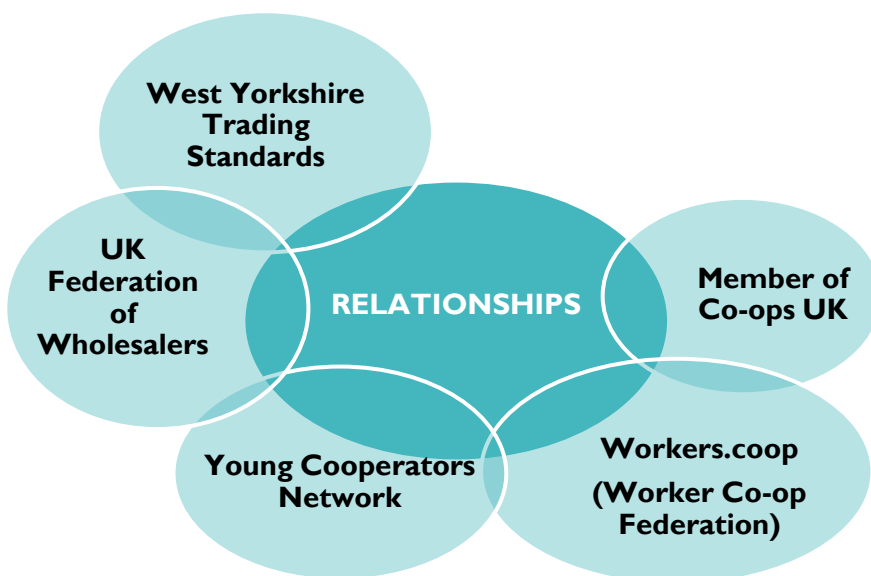
GROWTH AND/OR REPLICATION

For a long time, it was almost a straight-line, with growth just increasing annually by approximately the same amount. Since the pandemic, things have been more up and down. However, Suma has continued to grow its business and expand its operations.

Some members will look at how Suma has grown, how much things have changed, and pine for the days when there were 100 members, who all knew each other, and you could have general meetings in the canteen. However, there are many others who want to see more growth in a variety of ways – more employees, more members, more profit, more wages.

Replication is a point of frustration. Suma is just a warehousing operation in a small northern town and a worker co-op that runs in this way, and we have proven it can grow and scale – there seem to be no barriers there, it should be easy to replicate.

So, the issue seems to be more cultural but, then again, there's not a lot of people walking around Suma thinking it's this 'special thing', most are just coming in and getting on with the work they have to do...



KEY MESSAGES / TAKEAWAYS

That the model works. Co-ops aren't necessarily this weird, unsustainable, impractical thing started by hippies. It works and it's a viable model for paying decent wages, providing benefits, and working in a way that gives workers control. They might take a bit of work to set up but once running, co-ops can self-sustain.

TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES



ARLA FOODS

OVERVIEW

Registered Name	Arla Foods Limited
Date of Incorporation	2003
Legal Form / Structure	Company
Ownership class	Enterprises
Type	Producer co-op

Number of Members	2,000 in the UK 8,000 in total
Number of Employees	4,000
Number of Volunteers	0

Turnover (2021/22)	~£2.5bn
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Location

Leeds, West Yorkshire, England
(Aylesbury, Hatfield, Lockerbie, Melton, Oakthorpe, Oswestry, Settle, Stourton, Taw Valley, Westbury)



DESCRIPTION

- Arla is a dairy cooperative headquartered in Denmark which operates all over the world
- It has 8,000 farmer-owners across seven northern European countries: Denmark, Sweden, UK, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg.
- 2,000 members in the UK, which represents around about 25% of all dairy farmers and around about 30% of the UK milk pool
- It is the third biggest food company in the UK
- One of Arla's key messages is 'one co-op': all the farmer owners have the same rights and are represented through the same democratic structures; the milk price is the same for all of them too
- Farmers are responsible for the strategy and direction of the cooperative via the elected board of directors. A professional management executes the farmers' strategic decisions on a day-to-day basis.





KEY MILESTONES

Founding

- In the late 19th Century, the co-operative was established in Sweden and Denmark while the Express Country Milk Supply Company was established in London, near Kings Cross

Lurpak incoming

- Arla first came to the UK when Lurpak, which is its most well-known brand, was introduced to the market more than 100 years ago

Arla express

- 2003: Arla Foods merged with Express Dairies
- 2006: Arla took over what was left of the UK business and the joint venture became wholly part of Arla Foods

Milk link co-op

- 2012: Arla merged with Milk Link, a pre-existing co-op and it was at this point that several farmer-owners were brought into membership
- 2014: Other farmers were allowed to join and that almost doubled the membership in the UK to around about 2.5 thousand farmers

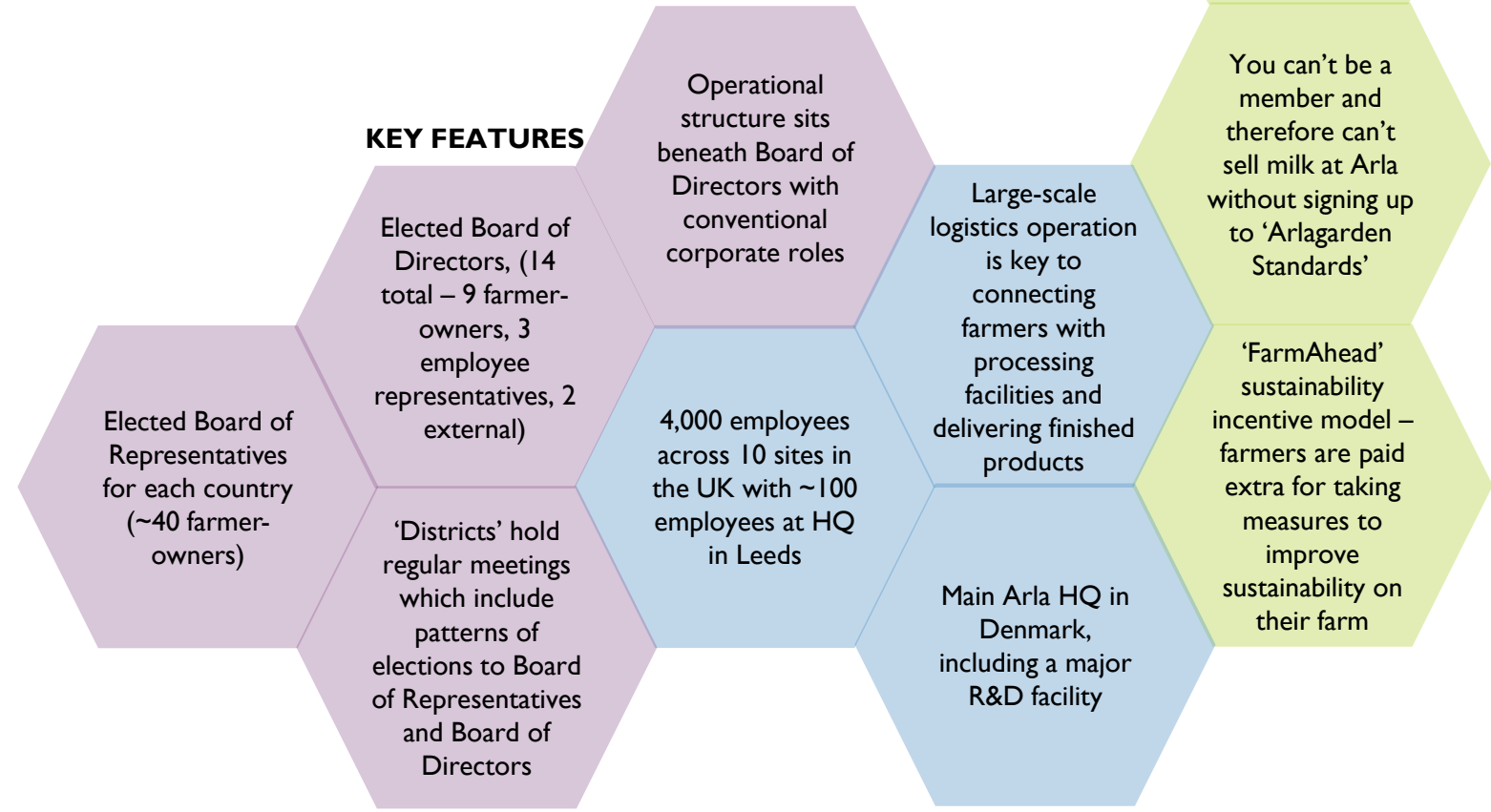
BACKGROUND

ORIGINS: The Co-op was set up more than 100 years ago in Sweden and Denmark. At its very core was and is a focus on fairness in the market. In this case, specifically farmers receiving a fair price for their milk. Evidently, none of the founders are still around, the company grew over quite a long period of time.

NEED: Typically, in agricultural sectors individual farmers have very little bargaining power versus retailers and processors. If you're not a member of a co-operative, you are likely to have to sell your milk either to a processor or direct to a retailer; these can be large organisations with significant pricing power.

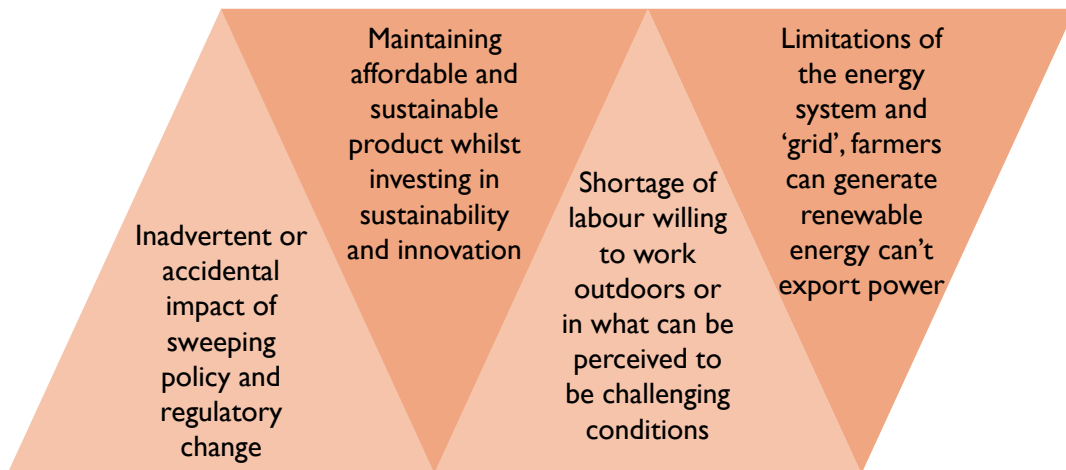
ARLA IN THE UK: Arla expanded into the UK initially as a supplier of dairy products to the market, but then bought into the country and its dairy industry, including through the acquisition of an existing cooperative. Over time, the farmers who were members of that cooperative were brought into ownership of Arla and other farmers have subsequently been recruited or asked to join and that's how the membership reached over 2,000.

KEY FEATURES





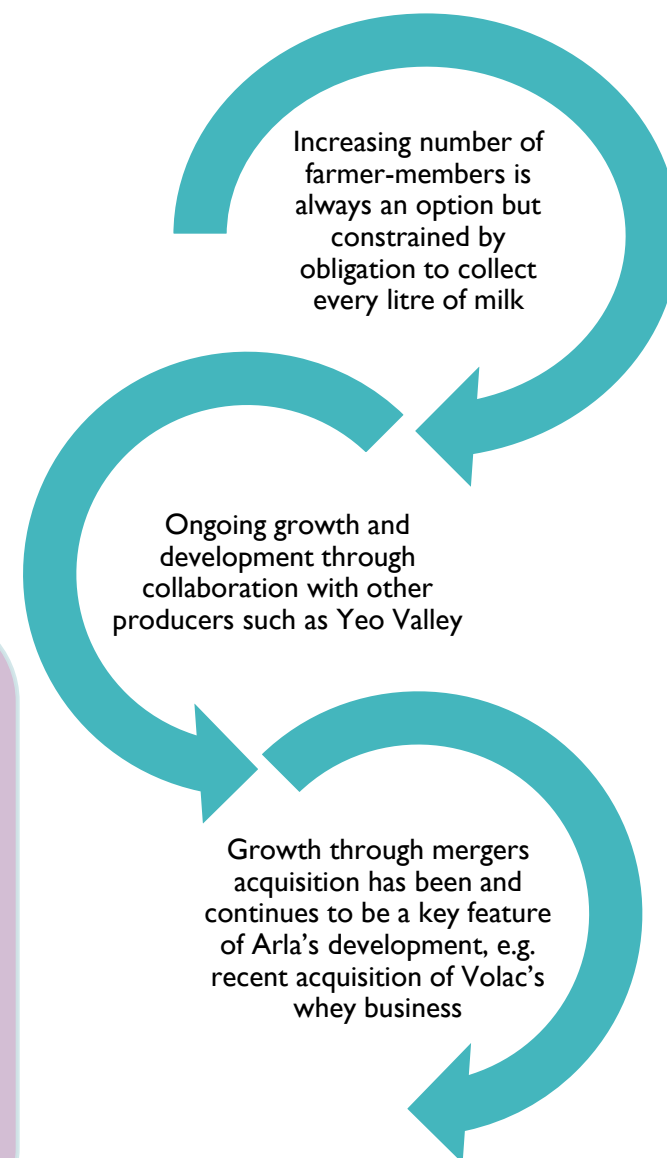
CHALLENGES



SUPPORT

- Farmer-members receive a range of government support and subsidies
- Advice, guidance, and collaboration with agencies such as DEFRA
- Good relations with national and devolved governments
- Good relationship with Co-operatives UK, although not a member

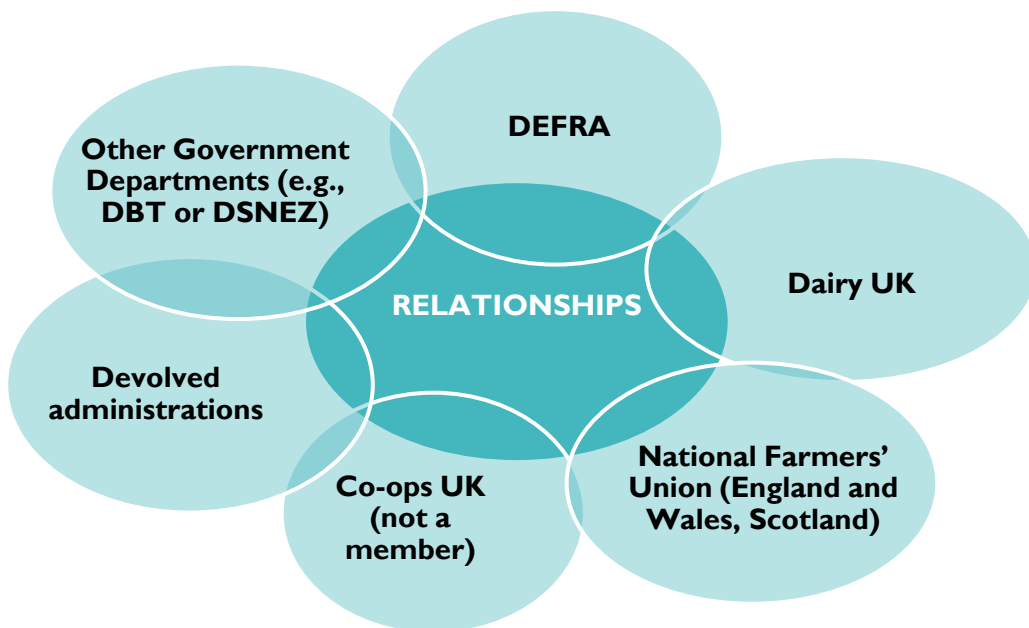
GROWTH AND/OR REPLICATION



KEY MESSAGES / TAKEAWAYS

Do not be limited in your ambition. Just because you are a co-op doesn't mean you are not-for-profit. Focus on your core purpose, Arla's was and remains to ensure fairness in the dairy supply chain. Co-ops should stay ruthlessly focused on how they deliver the ultimate fairness to their members. Likewise, while being profitable is important, you aren't driven by quite the same pressures as other organisations and therefore you are able to take a longer-term view, consider wider interests, and be more holistic. These are your strengths. Lean into them. Celebrate them.

TO CO-OPS





EAST MARSH UNITED

OVERVIEW

Registered Name	East Marsh Community Limited
Date of Incorporation	04/02/2020

Legal Form / Structure	Society
Ownership class	Community Benefit Society
Type	Community co-op

Number of Members	~400
Number of Employees	(10 in CLG)
Number of Volunteers	0

Turnover (2022/23)	£68.6k (£189,783 shares)
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Location
Grimsby, Lincolnshire, England



DESCRIPTION

- The 'mothership' is East Marsh United (EMU), which is a Company Limited by Guarantee with charitable objectives, soon to be a full Charitable Incorporated Organisation aka 'Charity'
- However, the CLG was not able to raise a community share offer and therefore needed a Community Benefit Society (CBS).
- Both the CLG and CBS are 'asset-locked', which is essential for getting public funding and providing long term security for the project.
- EMU serves as the umbrella organisation and coordinates across a multitude of projects. The CBS focuses on housing.
- It grew out of a profound need and a desperate housing situation on the East Marsh with many houses being in a terrible state of repair or abandoned and boarded-up.
- Activities include buying, repairing, retrofitting, and renting out good quality houses that improve the quality of life for both tenants and the wider community.
- Currently EMU has 10 properties and are working towards buying another 10.





KEY MILESTONES

An unexpected grant

- 2022: Received offer from Council and £150k grant from Homes England to buy first three houses

Raising shares

- 2022: Raised £500k share offer which provided the resources, bought the assets, and raised the profile of EMU – positioning it as an organisation to be taken seriously

Social investment

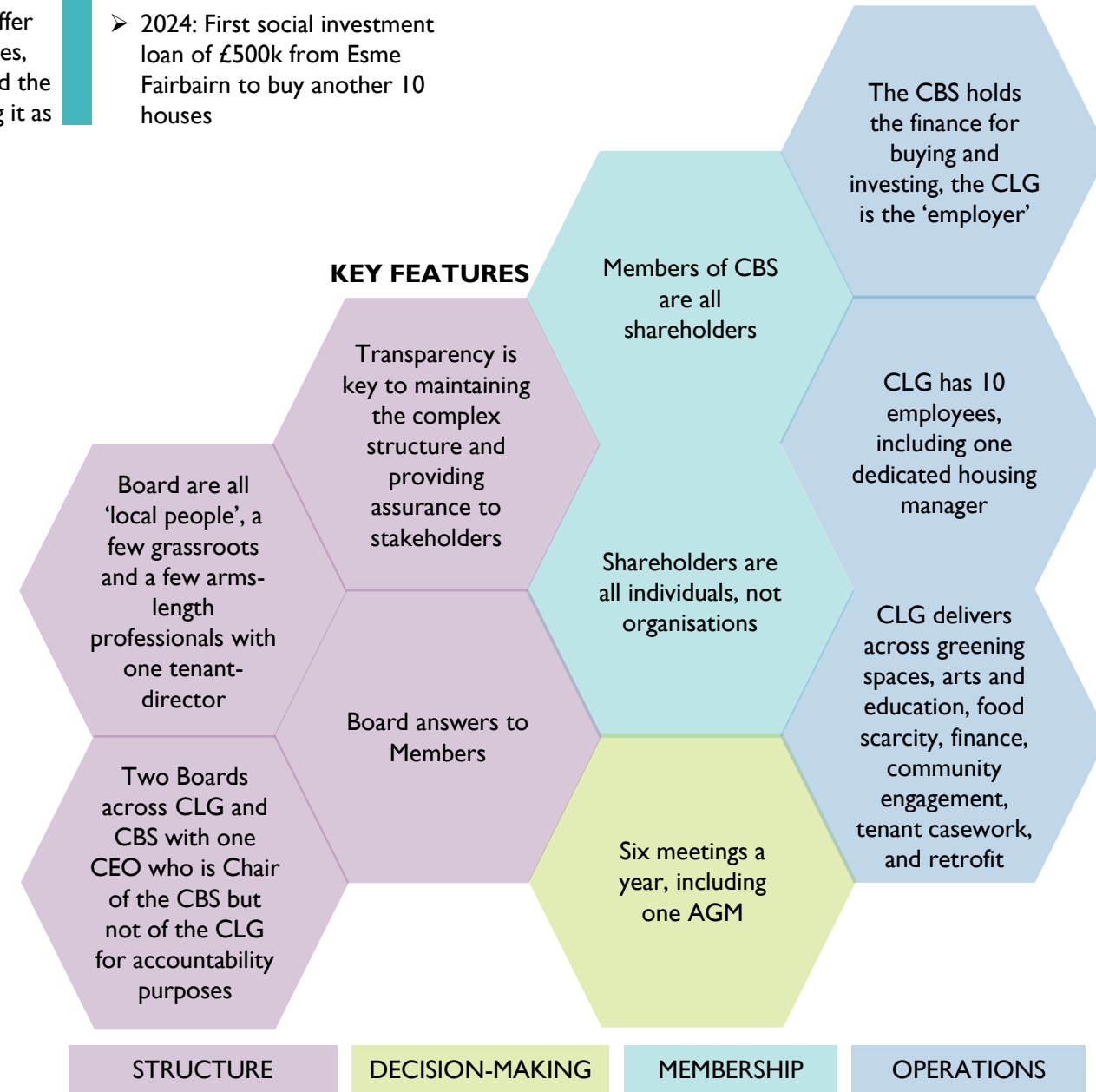
- 2024: First social investment loan of £500k from Esme Fairbairn to buy another 10 houses

BACKGROUND

ORIGINS: The East Marsh was built in the 1850s on drained marshland to serve the fishing industry using a grid design of two or three-bed terraced houses straight onto the pavement with little canopy cover, but decent sized back gardens and narrow alleys behind. Men used to go fishing, women formed a tight-knit community to care for each other, raise children, and support the industry, often by braiding nets. 100 years on and the industry was in decline with nothing to replace it. Thatcher's 'right to buy' provided an opportunity for people to leave, many wanted to, and the council also bought into privatisation of social housing – they got rid of all of it. This resulted in private landlords owning most of the houses. Houses go without repair for years; the boilers don't work, there are holes in the floors, they've routinely got rats and black mould in the bathroom. The windows often don't open or shut properly, and the back-alleys are full of junk and refuse. Tenants might stay for three months, and then they'll clear off. When people move in, they will find the previous tenants have left all their belongings and this will end up on the street. Landlords often 'flip' multiple houses at a time, sometimes with tenants in them and sometimes after serving Section 21 notices.

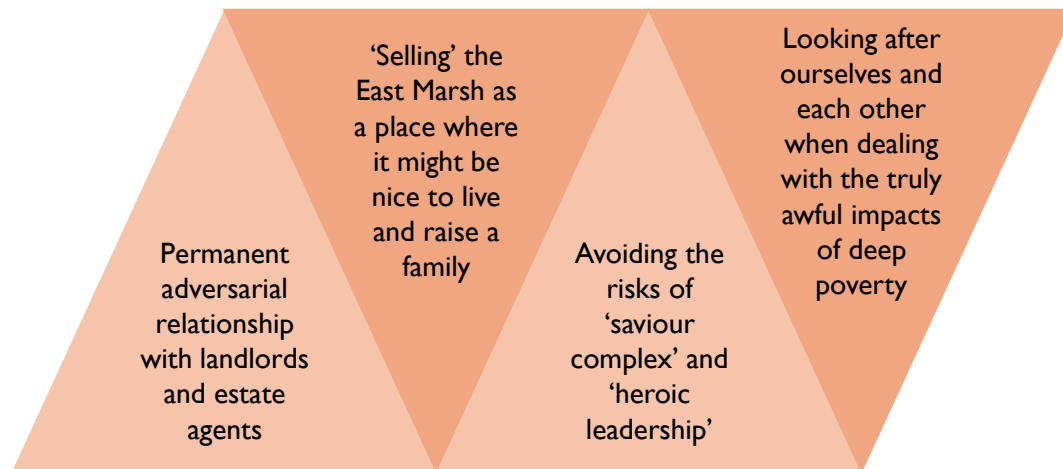
OPPORTUNITY: In 2022, the Council had some funding from Homes England to get empty homes back in use and said they would work with EMU. They gave a substantial amount of money to buy three houses. It was always part of EMU's aspirations and what EMU needed more than anything was a secure long-term revenue stream. If they could develop an ethical housing model and create a substantial portfolio of homes for their use value, not exchange value, then they could both ensure the future of the organisation and the community. So, they got some houses, which became community assets, and they are there for use value, for a decent family home, there for people for the long-term and EMU decided that they would house whoever is in need, not turn people away if they've got the kinds of issues that other landlords would not take on.

KEY FEATURES





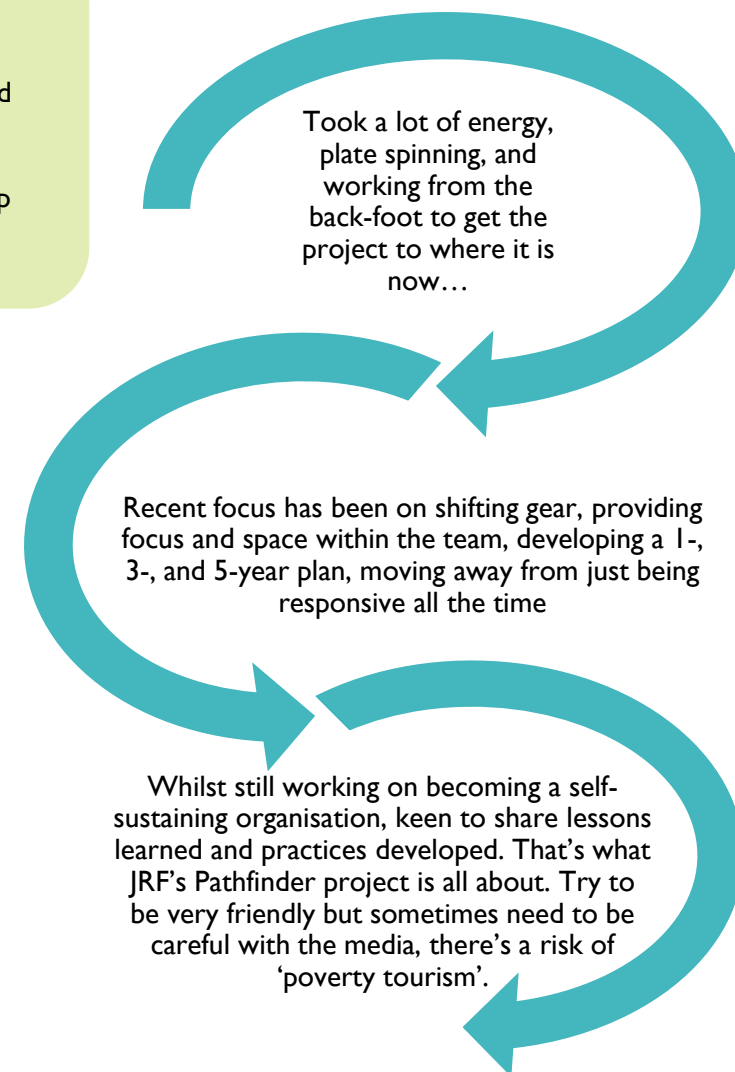
CHALLENGES



SUPPORT

- Funding received from:
- Homes England
 - Esmée Fairbairn Foundation
 - The Henry Smith Charity
 - Joseph Rowntree Foundation
 - The Mercers' Company
 - Tudor Trust
 - Create North East Lincolnshire
 - Arts Council England
 - UK Research and Innovation
 - UK Skills Partnership
 - The Clothworkers' Foundation

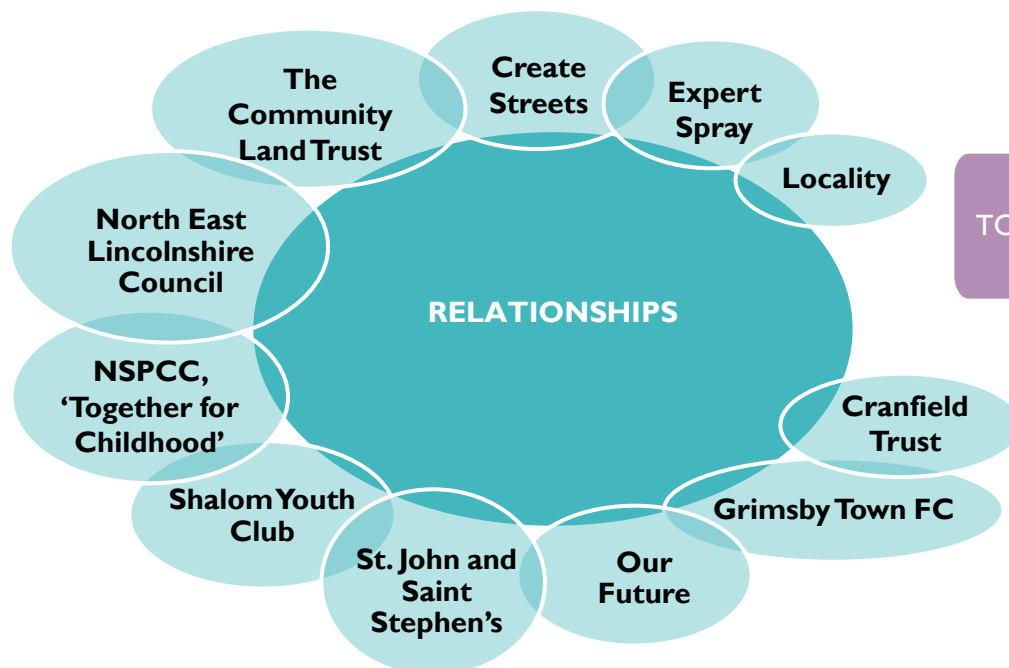
GROWTH AND/OR REPLICATION



KEY MESSAGES / TAKEAWAYS

Let's talk about poverty, what it really is, what it really does to people, and let's all take responsibility for that. We're not just individual units operating in silos and living our life. We're all connected. We all share one planet, we live in towns, we live in communities, we don't know what's going on behind other people's doors. Let's stop judging, start being honest, and acknowledge that the level of poverty that our communities are living in is wholly morally unacceptable. So, how can we work together to create a more equitable, kinder, compassionate and understanding future for our kids and our grandkids?

TO EVERYONE





DELTA-T

OVERVIEW

Registered Name	Delta-T Devices Limited
Date of Incorporation	20/03/1980 (originally est. 1971)

Legal Form / Structure	Society
Ownership class	Workers
Type	Worker co-op

Number of Members	29
Number of Employees	1
Number of Volunteers	0

Turnover (2022/23)	~£5m
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Location
Burwell, Cambridge, England



DESCRIPTION

- A worker co-op specialising in environmental science measurement technology, Delta-T has gained a global reputation for innovative high-performance sensors
- In-house R&D team collaborates with academic institutes to develop impactful new technologies
- Focus on providing high level of customer service and after-care is key to maintaining high levels of trust in instruments and advice
- All members have one equal share in the business, which must be relinquished upon leaving
- A small business that hasn't really expanded in recent years, instead opting to prioritise stability and maintain a consistent membership
- The founder, Edmund Potter is still a member; working part-time and taking a great deal of interest in the co-op and its operations

KEY MILESTONES

50 years of Delta-T

- In 2021 Delta-T turned 50, a major achievement for a small business that emerged from a commune in the early 70s – though it did not formally become a co-op until the 1980s

Over £5 million in sales

- In 2022 Delta-T achieved over £5m in sales, underscoring the business' vitality and strong position in the environmental instruments market

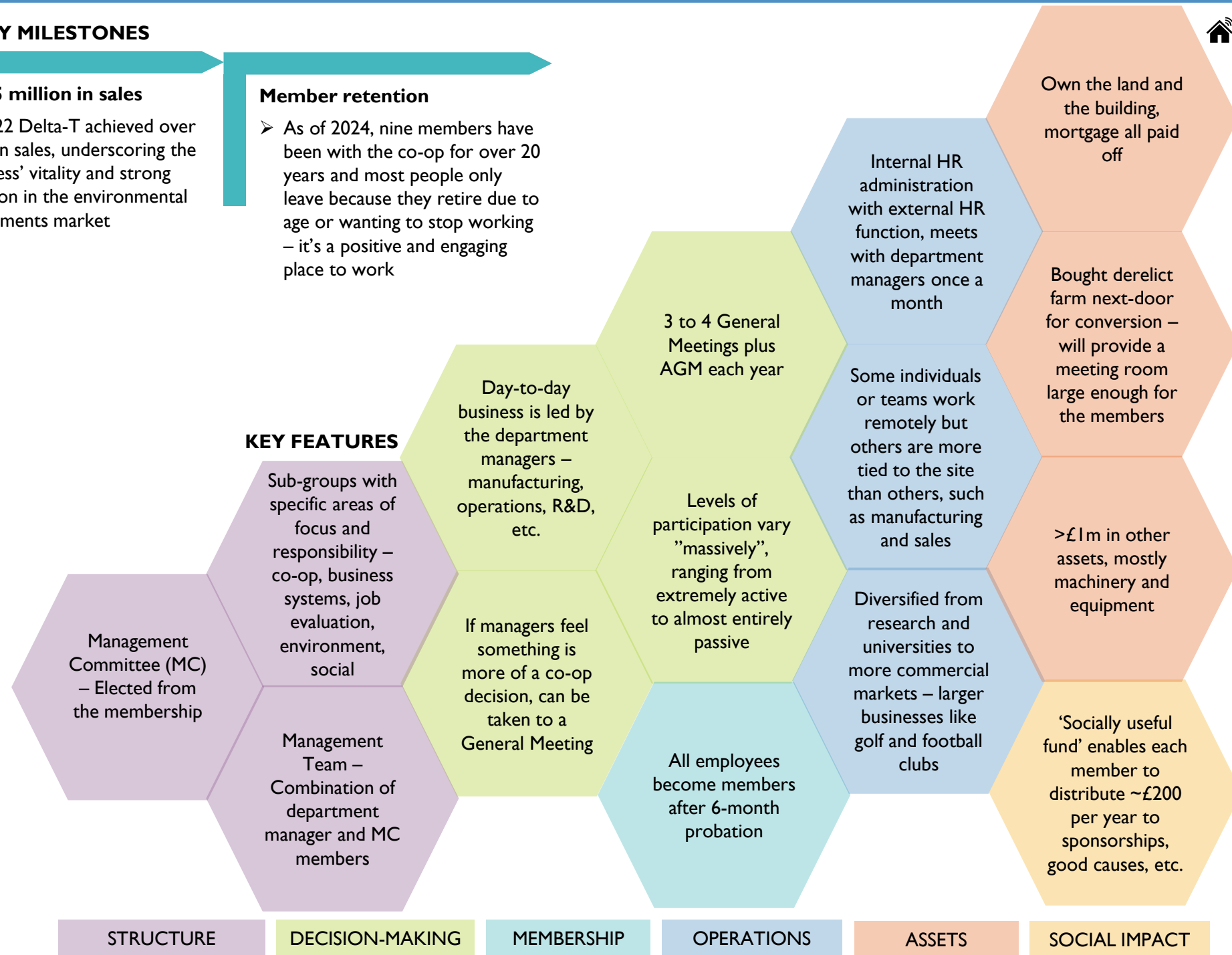
Member retention

- As of 2024, nine members have been with the co-op for over 20 years and most people only leave because they retire due to age or wanting to stop working – it's a positive and engaging place to work

BACKGROUND

Edmund was a bit of pioneer in the field. The business was set-up by a group of people who were part of a commune, for want of a better description. Even before it was a co-op, the intent was to make it fair for everybody with lots of multi-skilling and role overlap. From a love of aeroplanes and the technology that went along with them, Edmund turned his attention to sensors. It started with an idea relating to the sensors that are put on your fingers at the hospital to monitor pulse. He thought it would be a really good idea if you could put them onto a leaf and see what moisture levels were like. Essentially, Delta-T was established to do research into things that were not yet being researched. At the time, there was a lot of pushback, nobody was interested in this man with his crazy ideas. Gradually, he managed to get some people interested and the company evolved from there, starting with just one product which they still sell a version of 30 years on – the AP4 – and Kew Gardens has just bought one so it must be useful.

KEY FEATURES



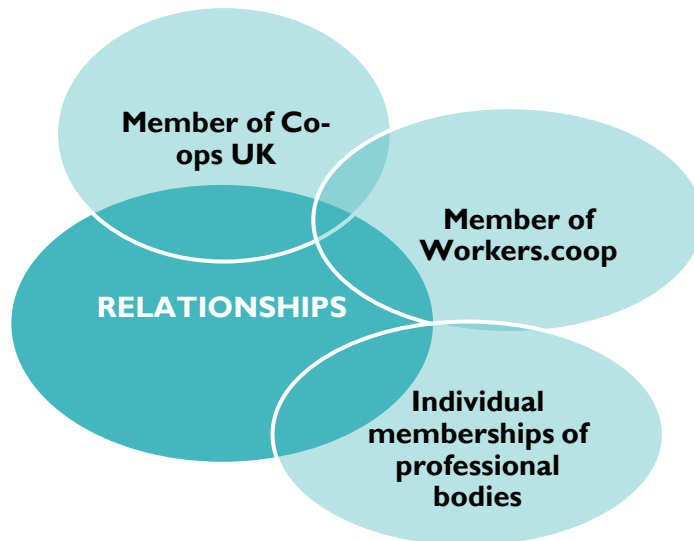


CHALLENGES



SUPPORT

- Co-ops UK provides advice and guidance for changing rules, e.g. proxy voting
- All new MC members go on the Co-ops UK relevant training courses



TO LOCAL
AUTHORITIES

KEY MESSAGES / TAKEAWAYS

There isn't necessarily the understanding of what challenges and complexities co-ops face. Local councils often just see co-ops as another business and make assumptions based on that understanding. The model is intrinsically different, its potential beneficial impacts far greater, particularly in terms of long-term economic, social, and environmental factors. Co-ops are very undervalued and a big part of that is a lack of understanding. However, co-ops do present something of a challenge in terms of the level of member engagement required to make them work well and the lack of clear investment mechanisms that don't undermine member ownership and control. So, there is a real need for education around what co-ops can do but also how they can be supported and nurtured.

GROWTH AND/OR REPLICATION





CÂR-Y-MÔR

OVERVIEW

Registered Name	For the love of the sea Limited
Date of Incorporation	01/08/2019

Legal Form / Structure	Society
Ownership class	Community Benefit Society
Type	Community co-op

Number of Members	415
Number of Employees	14
Number of Volunteers	~150hrs per week

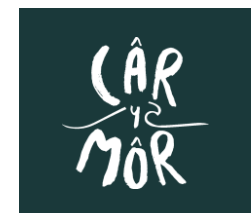
Turnover (2022/23)	£437,4189
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Location
Upper Cleggyr, St Davids, Wales



DESCRIPTION

- Community benefit societies are often parks, pubs, or post offices, Câr-Y-Môr is the first community-owned regenerative ocean farm for seaweed and shellfish
- Members have equal ownership of the business, it is not set up to pay dividends and it is designed to prevent buyouts or takeovers, there is also an asset lock that ensure all assets would be transferred to the community or other community organisations in the event of failure
- Câr-Y-Môr looks to drive greater profit to put that money back into the business and do more for the community, whether through putting a percentage of profit into local projects or to invest in creating more jobs
- The business aims to:
 1. Improve the coastal environment
 2. Improve the wellbeing of the local community
- Regenerative ocean farming is based on using integrated multi trophic aquaculture, moving from monocultures to polycultures where several different species grow together and adopting a zero-input approach – no pesticides, fertilisers, or fresh water





KEY MILESTONES

Trial sites

- In August 2020, after three years of applications and lobbying, Câr-y-Môr received the necessary 5-year Licenses for two trial Restoration Ocean Farms.
- In just three months, Robust Boats deployed and seeded both sites

Pioneer share offer

- In 2021, Câr-y-Môr launched its 'pioneer share offer' for investments of £1k - £10k
- Key activities associated with this offer included further developing trial sites, purchasing Solva Seafoods, establishing a Seafood Market

First license

- In 2022 Câr-y-Môr was at long last granted a 20-year license for their first 3-hectare site in the Ramsey Sound, off the St David's Peninsula in Pembrokeshire

Defra grant

- In 2023, Câr-y-Môr received £1.1 million to expand seaweed production facilities by developing a seaweed processing unit with storage, equipment, shop, and an educational hub

BACKGROUND

Originally conceived in 2017, For the Love of the Sea Limited (Câr-y-Môr) was officially founded and registered in 2019 by founder-members – and extended family group – Owen Haines, Chimene Haines, Francois Beyers, Joanne Haines, Alice Rogers, Jon Haines, and Meg Haines.

Since then, membership has grown to over 200 members. 87 of which are pioneer share investors. Câr-y-Môr has also operated a trial seaweed and shellfish farm for two years and in 2022 installed a 3-hectare ocean farm. The society also employs 13 people living in the local community.

KEY FEATURES

Board consists of members – a couple are employees but most not

Used to have a very flat structure but now have two department managers to improve functional coordination

Day-to-day decision making is fast-paced and has evolved rapidly in response to the pressures faced by the start-up

Member involvement varies greatly, some are super engaged and heavily involved but others just receive the newsletter

Big decisions are made by members, each has one equal vote

Members are from across the UK and Europe. There are a few in America, a few in Australia, all over the world really

14 full-time employees working across the operations – office, farming, processing, sales

Membership is distinct from the share offer structure, it costs £1 per person to join and just need to agree with the aims of the organisation

The share offer is set to between £1k and £10k. Once the business is commercially viable, shareholders will receive 3% per year

Clocking ~150 volunteer hours per week, could be admin, carbon monitoring, farm-work, all-sorts

All shareholders are members, but all members are equal regardless of the amount they invest

All employees are paid the same flat-rate, no matter their role, experience, or age – £13 per hour

Sell both shellfish and seaweed both B2B and B2C

CBS model offers social investment mechanism and eligibility for state grants

STRUCTURE

DECISION-MAKING

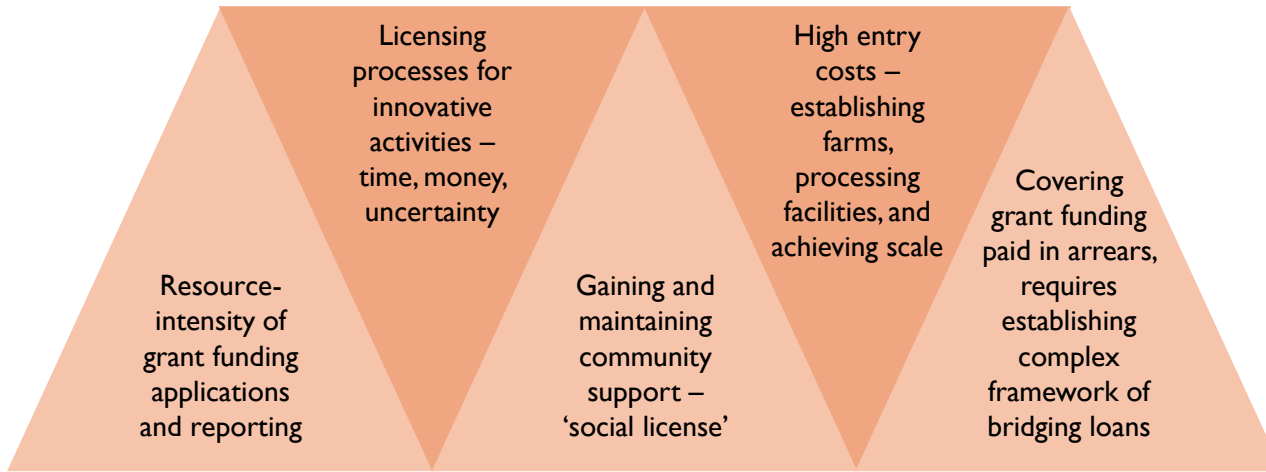
MEMBERSHIP

OPERATIONS

INCOME



CHALLENGES



SUPPORT

- Funding received from:
- World Wildlife Fund
 - Wales Council for Voluntary Action
 - Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
 - NatWest
 - Esmée Fairbairn Foundation

GROWTH AND/OR REPLICATION

Câr-Y-Môr is still working towards key parts of its core vision – namely a much bigger farm, or several farms, and getting the seaweed processing plant working to supply farmers locally and nationally with bio-stimulant (natural fertiliser)

In 10-years, massively increasing the scale of production, the number of jobs created, and the levels of funding being invested back into the community

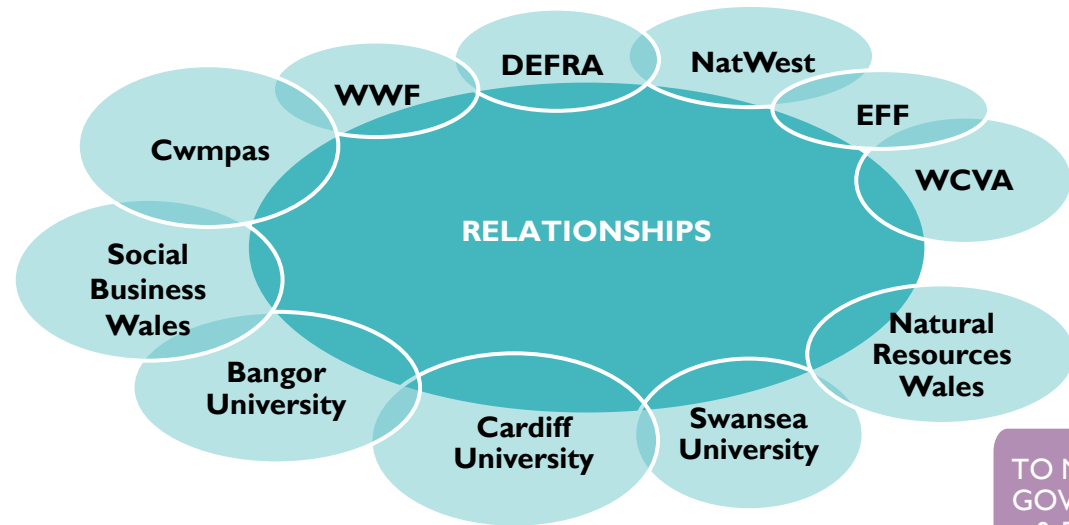
A medium to long-term aim is to become an open resource for others to set-up seaweed farms in Wales and around the UK – to provide a template that people can follow as well as guidance to support their journey

KEY MESSAGES / TAKEAWAYS

Better understanding of community-owned businesses is essential to both enabling the creation of more businesses and putting the foundations in place to enable them to innovate, grow, and make the most positive impact possible. There is lots of interest in sustainable businesses, but that interest needs to come with effective funding and support mechanisms, with an emphasis on the funding. It's all well and good saying that this is a great idea but if you are then going to make the journey more difficult by putting up barriers to development and not appreciating the resource pressures on small, highly innovative projects then it's likely even the best ideas won't end up getting anywhere.

TO NATIONAL GOVERNMENT & FUNDERS

RELATIONSHIPS





UNICORN GROCERY

OVERVIEW

Registered Name	Unicorn Grocery Limited
Date of Incorporation	08/08/1995

Legal Form / Structure	Society
Ownership class	Workers
Type	Worker co-op

Number of Members	53
Number of Employees	2 (+ full time equivalent of 11 casual workers)
Number of Volunteers	0

Turnover (2022/23)	~£8.1m
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Location
Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Manchester, England



DESCRIPTION

- Unicorn is a small wholefoods supermarket that is run as a worker co-op and serves ~6,000 customers a week
- Sells fresh fruit and veg, organic and mostly local, as well as general groceries, tinned goods, dried goods, fresh ready meals, hot soup, bread
- It is a place where a really wide range of wholesome, tasty food, sourced with care, is sold at affordable prices as well as a friendly, diverse and welcoming space that would act as a hub in the community.
- In recent years Unicorn has been named 2017's Best Food Retailer at the BBC Food & Farming Awards and the Soil Association's 2018 Best Independent Retailer, Lancashire Life's 2019 Independent Retailer of the Year award, and Manchester Food & Drink Festival's 2019 Food & Drink Retailer of the Year, and and came top of Ethical Consumer's national supermarket ranking.
- Co-op members aim to run the kind of shop they love shopping in – and hope you enjoy it too.





KEY MILESTONES

Buying the building

- In 2001, the building Unicorn was based in was put on the market, the members decided they wanted to buy it but needed to raise £1m
- Through a mechanism called 'loan-stock', the co-op was able to raise the funds from various co-op specific organisations and customers

Paying it back

- By 2009, building purchase loan-stock and CCF loans had been repaid
- New loan-stock was issued to buy some farmland
- Unicorn continued its longstanding practice of investing locally and internationally through its 1% and 4% solidarity funds

Peak membership

- By 2018, Unicorn had reached around 70 worker-members, the most members it has had so far
- There were hopes of buying the building next door and expanding the site, a bigger membership made sense in the context of this intended growth

Striking a balance

- Since the COVID-19 pandemic, as members have left, Unicorn has consciously decided not to replace them and to allow some natural attrition
- Because of the size of the premises and the additional bureaucracy required, it just doesn't make sense to keep growing the membership

BACKGROUND

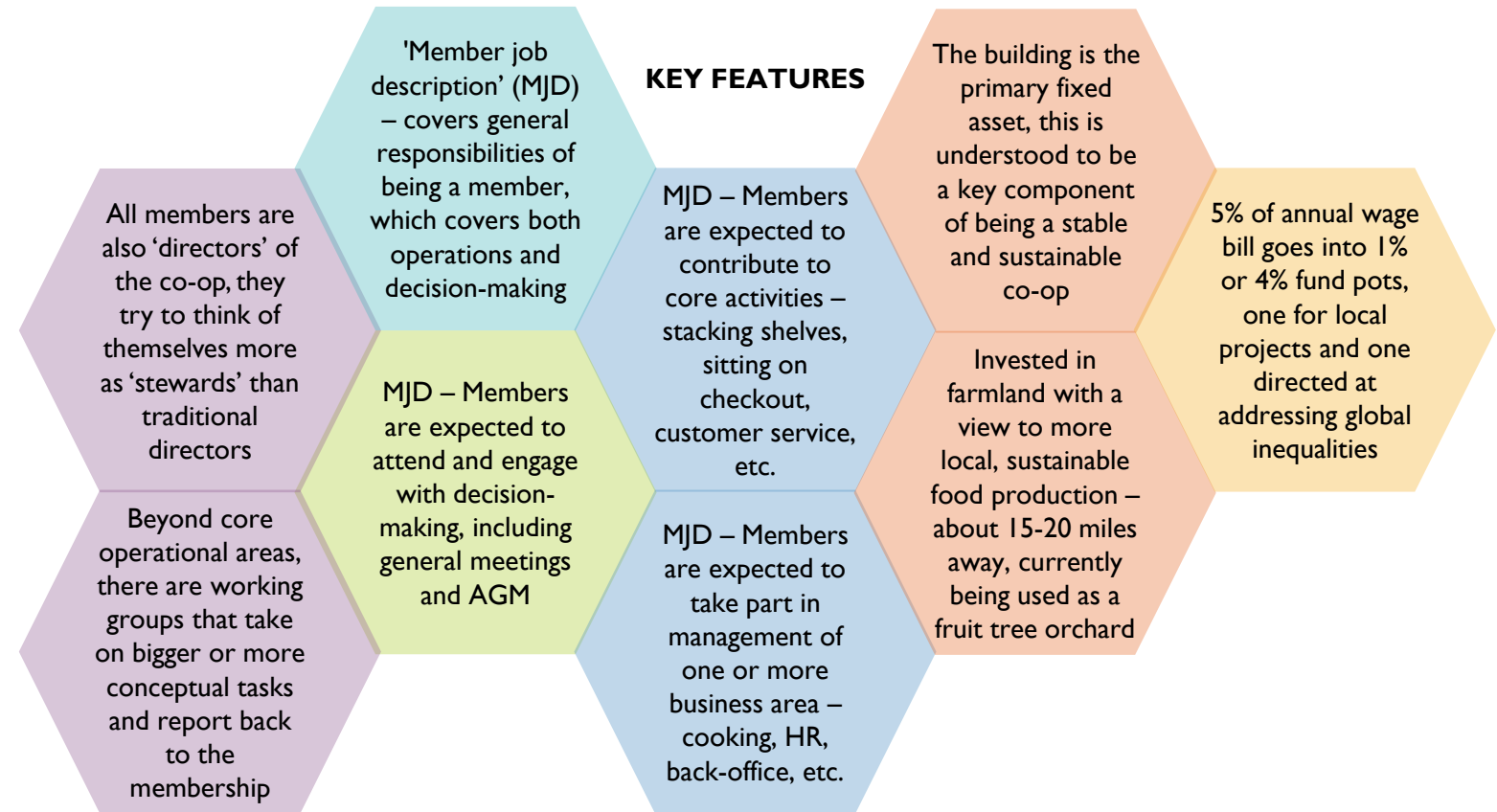
Unicorn was established by a small group of people committed to social change. It was the product of three things coming together.

First, there was the 'classic idea of a co-op' providing good food at a reasonable price – going back to the origins of the movement with the Rochdale Pioneers but updated for the 1990s.

Second, there was the interest in what are referred to as 'wholefoods', minimally processed, more natural, ideally organic, but also trying to ensure the produce is accessible, avoiding premium pricing.

Third, was 'good work'. That means work that is fairly paid and paced as well as satisfying. Work that makes you feel like you're doing something good in the world while also being able to rely on the income – it's not going to be out-sourced or off-shored and doesn't feel precarious.

KEY FEATURES



STRUCTURE

DECISION-MAKING

MEMBERSHIP

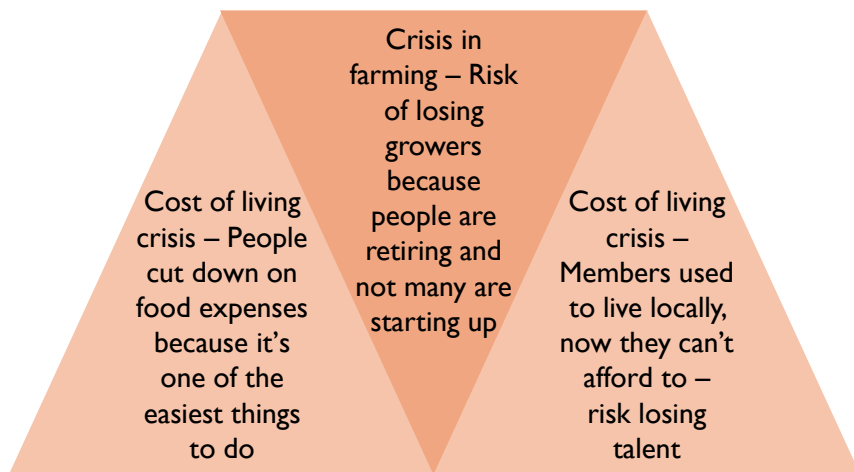
OPERATIONS

ASSETS

SOCIAL IMPACT



CHALLENGES



SUPPORT

- A range of support from co-op development workers over the years, specialist consultants with extensive knowledge of the model(s) and options available
- Co-operative Community Finance, a specialist lender for co-ops
- Useful engagement from academics studying co-ops, who have written about Unicorn and other co-ops, a good opportunity to reflect and learn
- Local councillors have been supportive over the years, very keen on Unicorn

GROWTH AND/OR REPLICATION

Members explored both over the years, realised some time ago that Unicorn has probably grown as much as it can on the current site – an opportunity arose but didn't come through in the end, it would have resulted in being 20-30% bigger

Also considered opening a second branch in Manchester but there isn't huge amounts of enthusiasm, people recognise it could be good, but it could also be challenging for the cohesion of the membership and the sustainability of the co-op

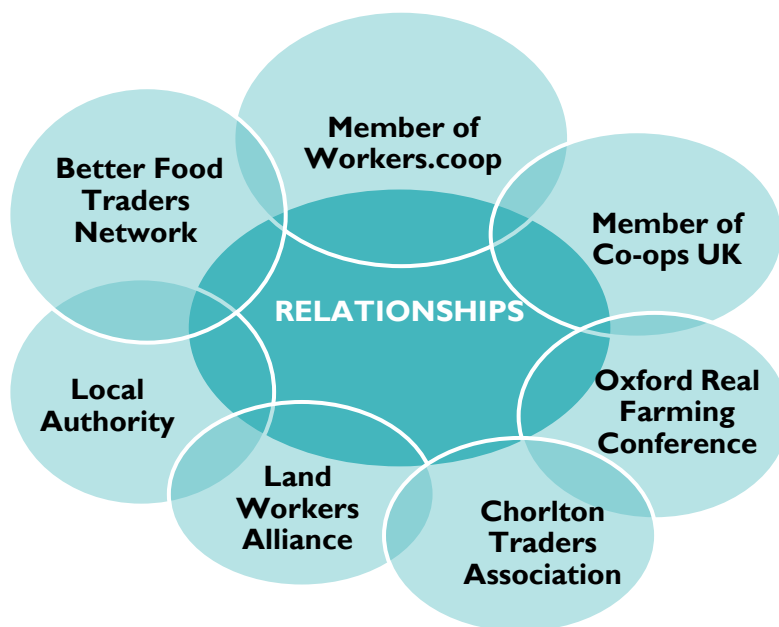
Keen on replication, they would love to see versions of Unicorn all around the country – they wrote a guide with the Sustainable Food Trust that's available on the website, it has recently been updated and is full of all the key information and resources people would need to get going

KEY MESSAGES / TAKEAWAYS

Understanding how co-ops can benefit both the workers and the local area. Having a co-op that is very fixed in place and embedded in the locality for a long time – providing good work, excellent customer experiences, and nurturing strong local connections is powerful and impactful. Bars, cafés, retail, these aren't businesses known for good wages or working conditions, but places like Unicorn prove that it needn't be that way.

One way councils could help, especially new co-ops, is by providing low cost, medium to long-term access to space, potentially housing multiple co-ops in or near each other – taking a major pressure off them and enabling them to find their feet and learn from each other would have huge benefit to the co-ops, which would then have huge benefit to the local community.

TO LOCAL
AUTHORITIES





FOX & GOOSE

OVERVIEW

Registered Name	The Fox and Goose (Hebden Bridge) Limited
Date of Incorporation	28/03/2013

Legal Form / Structure	Society
Ownership class	Community Benefit Society
Type	Community co-op

Number of Members	328
Number of Employees	12
Number of Volunteers	7 Directors, 5 Others

Turnover (2022/23)	£329,362 (£118,656 shares)
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Location
Hebden Bridge, Calderdale, England



DESCRIPTION

- Established to safeguard the Fox and Goose co-operative pub for the benefit of the community, aims to have/be:
 - ❖ A reputation for great drinks, snacks, and events
 - ❖ A friendly, safe, and inclusive place
 - ❖ A great team of staff and a great place to work
 - ❖ An attractive and well-maintained venue
 - ❖ Ethical and environmentally sustainable
 - ❖ Part of the community (rooted in community)
 - ❖ Financially sustainable
 - ❖ Co-operative and democratic
- One of the first “assets of community value” registered with Calderdale Council and the first co-operative pub in West Yorkshire
- Activities go beyond drinking, with space for artists to exhibit work, local groups to hold meetings, and various sub-groups – including one that cares for woodland next to the pub
- In 2023, the Board launched a new member engagement strategy, emphasising more communication and introducing an open share offer at £25 a share – by the 2024 AGM, half of those who stood to become a director were from the open share offer cohort.





KEY MILESTONES

Original share offer

- Proposal accepted by the bank in November 2013 and a share offer issued to the community, raising £130,000 from 259 investors, with investments ranging from £100 to £15,000, opened on 22nd March 2014

Expanding the garden

- In 2020, the members decided to increase the size of the beer garden, install a shelter, and add heaters and lighting – created more spaces for different people and contributed to attracting a wider demographic

Management restructure

- Employed a Business Manager to work alongside the Pub Manager in early 2023, reducing the workload for both the Board Members and the Pub Manager and facilitating more operational focus and strategic direction

Open share offer

- In November 2023, launched the new open share offer as a means of widening participation and increasing the capacity and energy for running the co-op

BACKGROUND

ORIGINS: The Fox and Goose has always been a wet-led local pub – people meet there, have a drink, have a chat, play music. That was always its unique selling point and it had a fair bunch of loyal regulars. However, while it was popular, it was at risk of closure.

IDEA: A whole bunch of locals felt that it was worth saving. The owner wanted to sell to the community, but the group didn't know anything about buying a pub – so they sought advice locally and then from the Plunkett Foundation. Very quickly, the group learned a lot about community benefit societies, membership organisations, and community shares as well as visiting other community-owned pubs.

PROCESS: Despite no objections or major opposition, the whole process of buying the pub took two years, including registering it as an asset of community value and getting the business and property valued to avoid dispute. The community ended up buying the pub for £85k from the bank. The funds were raised from a community share offer with a minimum share of £100, which excluded some people but was felt reasonable, and supported by several key pledges for larger sums.

KEY FEATURES

Board of Directors – Elected members with standard Chair, Treasurer, Secretary roles

Pub Manager and Business Manager accountable to Board

Split some of the Secretary's responsibilities to create a Membership Secretary role to look after member engagement

Sub-groups established to cover key areas – membership, woodland management, etc.

One big AGM each year where members are updated as to the position of the business and elect new board members

Members can get involved with sub-groups as well as volunteer time to support the pub, from gardening to clearing glasses when the pub is busy

Own the whole building, including a flat above that's rented out, and a piece of woodland next to the pub

A full annual report is produced every year to ensure transparency, some members read it, others don't, but it's all there

Members receive a quarterly newsletter to ensure they are kept updated and engaged with what's going on at the pub

Living Wage employer, all wages go to local people, and also try to buy all beer from local independent breweries

Developed a small fund for investing in good causes and supporting other community and co-op initiatives

Work hard to ensure the pub is a safe, inclusive, creative, and open space for all

STRUCTURE

DECISION-MAKING

MEMBERSHIP

ASSETS

SOCIAL IMPACT



CHALLENGES



SUPPORT

- Plunkett Foundation – Setting-up and share offers
- Co-operatives UK – Guidance and training, particularly around governance
- Power to Change – Funding during COVID-19 pandemic

KEY MESSAGES / TAKEAWAYS

That they work! Why don't more people do it? It's just the right way to go. They are successful, it is community involvement, membership, and engagement. It's a great way to go. Yes, there are some complexities and there is plenty of learning to be done but ultimately that means you're upskilling the community, people can gain valuable skills and experience being involved with running a community pub – or other community asset.

Local councils seem to understand businesses and the third sector but don't understand community benefit societies. The big message is that this is a business, it operates as a business, it is not reliant on grants. Having community benefit societies, makes both community and the local economy stronger. They are more than a CIC, they aren't just an asset lock, they are a sustainable membership group committed to their asset and their community.

TO
COMMUNITIES

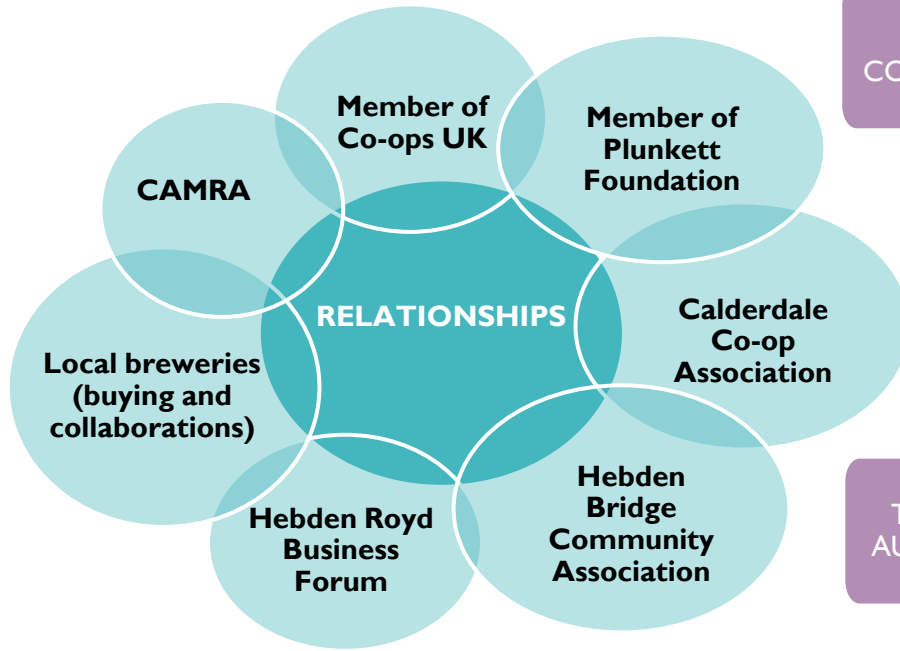
TO LOCAL
AUTHORITIES

GROWTH AND/OR REPLICATION

There's a big movement for saving village pubs, much more than urban pubs, and a lot of these are replicating or at least learning from examples like the Fox & Goose

There are lots of lessons to be learned and structures or processes that can be replicated but the unique selling point (USP) always varies a bit – What's the 'big thing' or things? It could be sport, or music, or real ale but that USP is key to determining success and sustainability

If it's not already been emphasised enough, the key lesson here has been nurturing the membership – it was a very conscious decision at a governance level to enhance focus on membership and that also led to the open share offer, which has resulted in 75 new members to date, with minimal objection or contention





LILAC HOUSING CO-OP

OVERVIEW

Registered Name	Lilac Mutual Home Ownership Society Limited
Date of Incorporation	05/05/2009

Legal Form / Structure	Society
Ownership class	Tenants (Leasehold)
Type	Housing co-op

Number of Members	33
Number of Employees	0
Number of Volunteers	0

Turnover (2021/22)	£56,924 (£2.4m shares)
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Location
Leeds, West Yorkshire, England



DESCRIPTION

- The name Lilac captures the key elements of the organisation – Low Impact Living Affordable Community
- It is a co-housing cooperative built from natural materials
- Uses:
 - ❖ A co-housing design strategy to develop the housing and community
 - ❖ A cooperative structure to ensure it is member-led
 - ❖ A financial structure called mutual home ownership society (MHOS) that builds financial equity between members
- ‘Low impact’
 - ❖ Constructed from natural materials including timber and lime so it's naturally sequestering
 - ❖ Also comes from behaviour change, with respect to the approach to living together, being a community, as well as an alternative approach to the conventional housing market





KEY MILESTONES

Financial model

- Locking-in Mutual Home Ownership model was a key moment, the real financial innovation behind the project that sparked interest and made it stand out from other eco-home initiatives

Critical mass

- More and more people joined until all 20 homes were filled, the enticing vision had worked!

Moving in!

- Great to move in and actually be 'doing it' – the sector needs several good examples where people can come, look under the bonnet, and get the sense they could also replicate it

What's next?

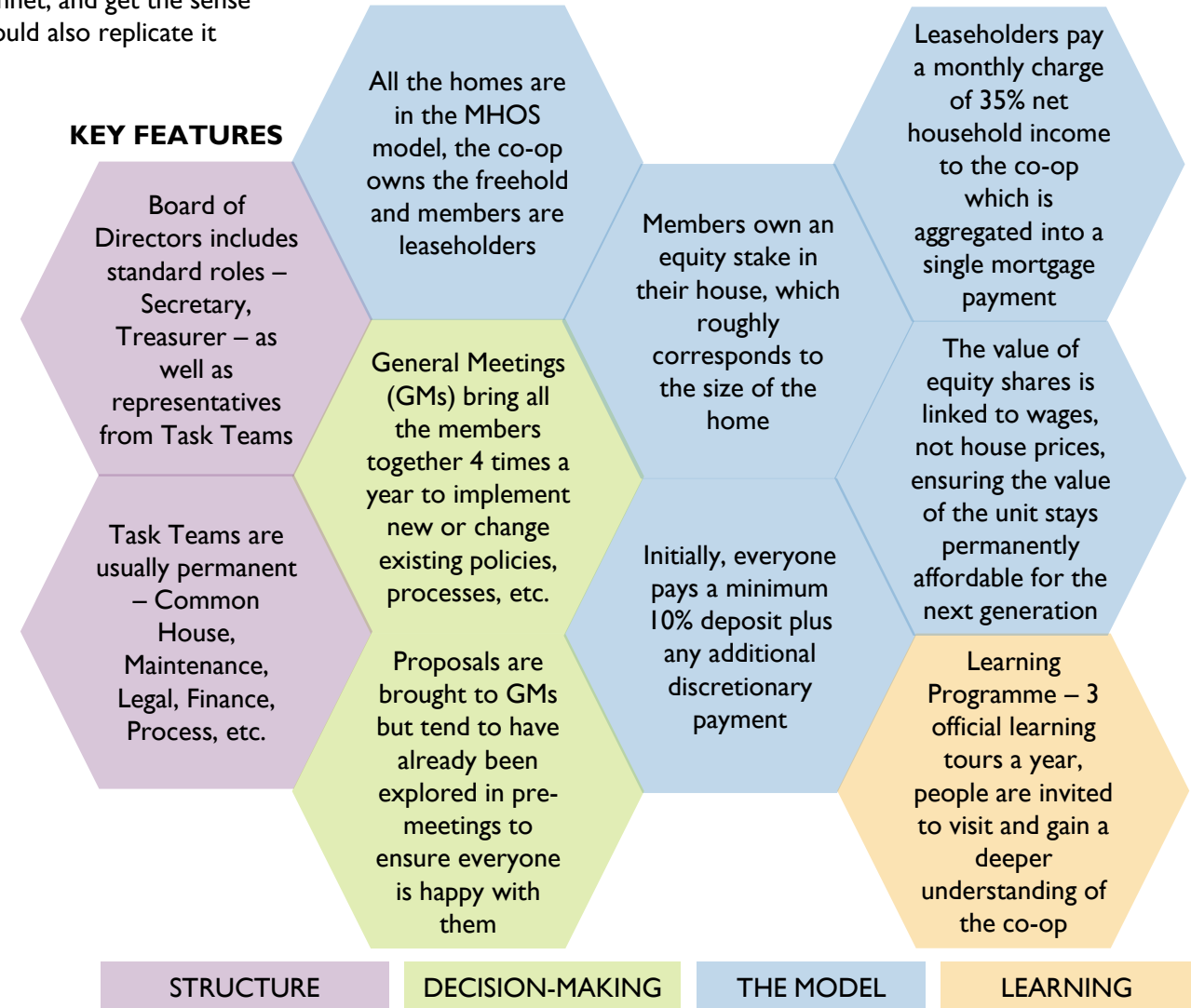
- Need to keep innovating and making progress, this includes getting off gas, bringing houses to Passivhaus standard, and figuring out how to push the model further to offer greater gains for lower income members

BACKGROUND

ORIGINS: Started as one of those classic bedroom conversations between friends. They wanted to do something a bit different in terms of thinking how they lived and where they lived in years to come. They looked at the kind of places on the market and felt that what was available wasn't quite right for people. "So, we just thought, well... what if we build our own homes?" It was kind of a big dream, a group of enthusiastic activists from different quarters but they decided to direct their enthusiasm toward housing. The vision started from there, it was really DIY, a group of friends with a vision they were determined to make a reality.

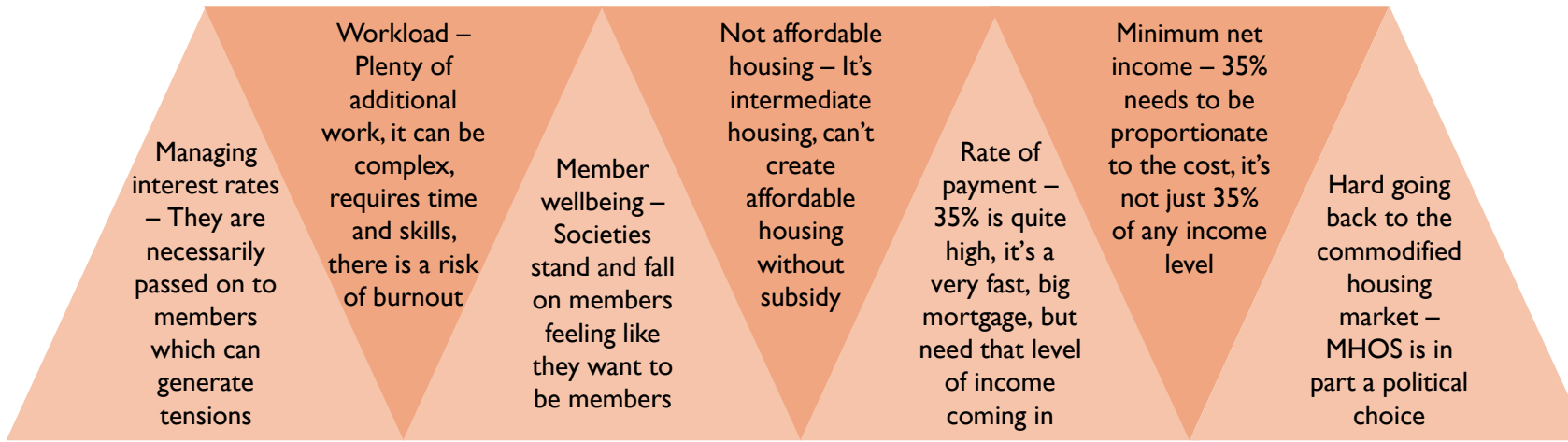
CRITICAL MASS: A couple of members moved to Leeds to begin forming the 'critical mass', they were called Leeds Eco Village. They held meetings every week and started to build up the membership as well as gain support for the project. Then they changed the name to Lilac, started looking for suitable land with Leeds City Council and talking to banks and lenders – Ecology Building Society and Triodos. Once there was a group of about eight members and they had been able to really nail down the idea between them, they started to open up membership and grow the group, they didn't want to have this situation, which a lot of co-ops and Co housing groups have, which is get too big too quickly and get pulled in too many different directions but never actually pull the idea off.

KEY FEATURES





CHALLENGES



SUPPORT

- Received a small grant from Homes England early in the process, covered costs of engaging key professional services – namely a Project Manager and a Quantity Surveyor, both important for getting things right from the outset
- Financial modelling is another critical skill set to have in a housing project, Lilac had their own expert and it's increasingly common for other such groups to include a financial modeller
- Bought the land from the Council at market value but with a six-month options agreement to provide time to get finances in order as well the possibility of paying in two tranches, which wasn't needed in the end

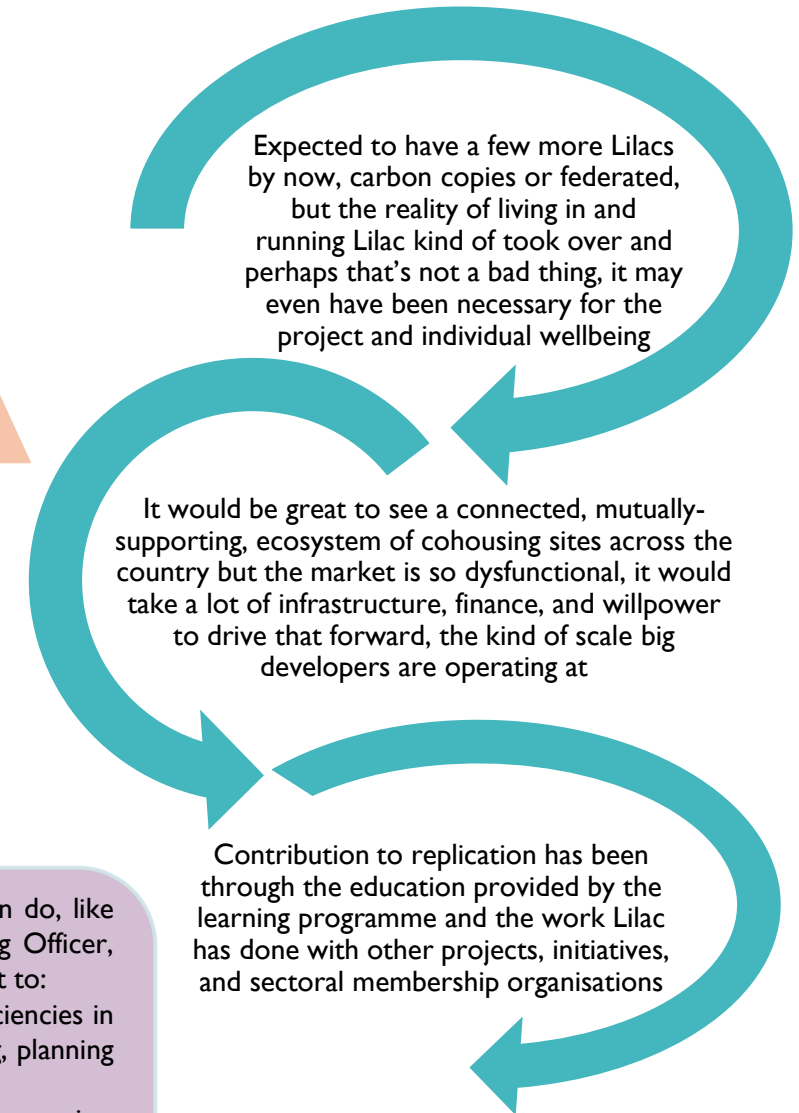
KEY MESSAGES / TAKEAWAYS

There are things Local Authorities can do, like have a dedicated Community Housing Officer, but the onus is on central Government to:

1. Address the inequalities and inefficiencies in the housing market – land banking, planning regulations, barriers to entry, etc.
2. Create opportunities for more community-led housing and provide the financial mechanisms to enable projects to be developed and delivered – early funding, government-backed loans, mandatory below-market value land sales.

TO
GOVERNMENT

GROWTH AND/OR REPLICATION



RELATIONSHIPS

UK Co-housing
Network

Community
Land Trust
Network

Confederation of
Co-operative
Housing

Wrigleys
Solicitors

Other housing co-ops,
community land trusts, and
other co-housing projects



GLENWYVIS DISTILLERY

OVERVIEW

Registered Name	Glenwyvis Distillery Limited
Date of Incorporation	05/04/2016

Legal Form / Structure	Society
Ownership class	Community Benefit Society
Type	Community co-op

Number of Members	~4,000
Number of Employees	4
Number of Volunteers	16

Turnover (2022/23)	£508,418 (£2.4m shares)
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Location
Upper Dochcarty, Dingwall, Scotland



DESCRIPTION

- The only community owned distillery in the country, producing single malt whiskey as well as gin
- Most of the Scottish whisky industry is owned by big multinational corporations or by very wealthy individuals and their families, GlenWyvis is owned by around 4,000 regular people, all with an equal share in the company
- GlenWyvis' is taking Scotland's national drink back into the people's hands but also distributing funds into the local area for social regeneration and other impactful projects
- Created high-value jobs for people in a remote region
- Presents a truly unique opportunity to own part of a distillery – two successful rounds of crowdfunding thus far, with another round on the way
- Primary revenue is from the whisky; small release every year, ~10-12k bottles, changing the vintage each year, need to hold oldest stock back to get older vintages
- Offer private cask sales which has proved a good source of revenue, people can store, sell, bottle their cask but it is often treated as a long-term investment
- Powered by 100% renewable energy via a Binder Biomass Boiler using locally-sourced wood chip





KEY MILESTONES

First gin

- In 2015 they launched a gin, this was ahead of any crowdfunding or direct production, the gin was produced in collaboration with another Scottish distillery, but it worked to get the name out into the world and start gaining some interest in the project

First crowdfunder / share offer

- In 2016 they launched their first fundraising campaign, raising about £3.6 million in 6 weeks to build the distillery – which was an incredible experience

The distillery opens

- On St Andrews Day 2017, construction of the distillery was completed, the opening was attended by many local people and the ribbon was cut by a regular local woman whose name was pulled out of a hat, as opposed to a celebrity or politician

Whisky production

- In 2018 the first casks were filled at the site, a huge milestone for the team and the first casks to be filled in Dingwall in 100 years
- In 2021, the inaugural 3-year-old whisky was launched, selling out very quickly

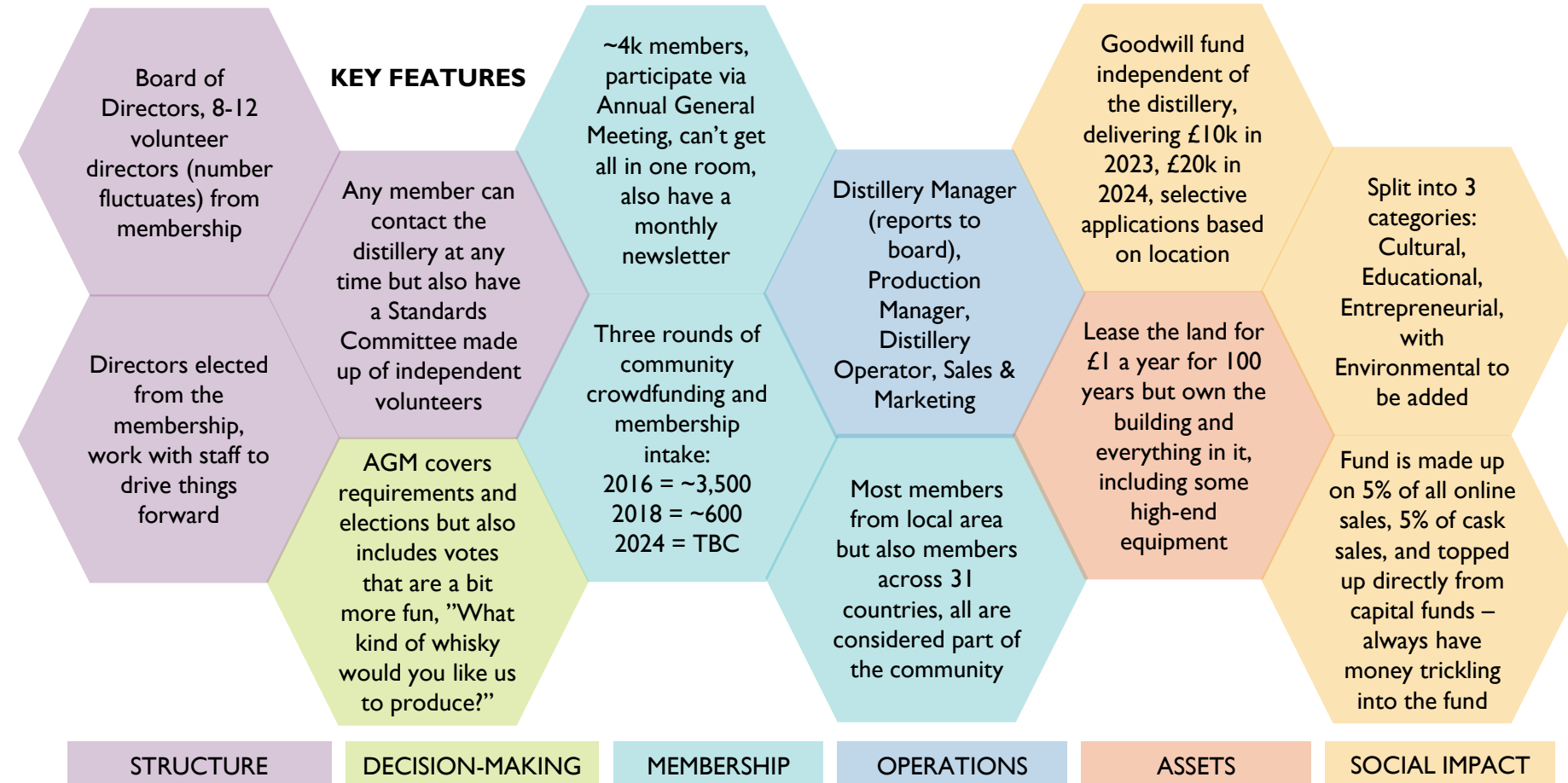
Goodwill community funding

- In 2023, the first tranche of funding was distributed to the community, around £30k in total to various organisations, regeneration projects, and things for local children and others

BACKGROUND

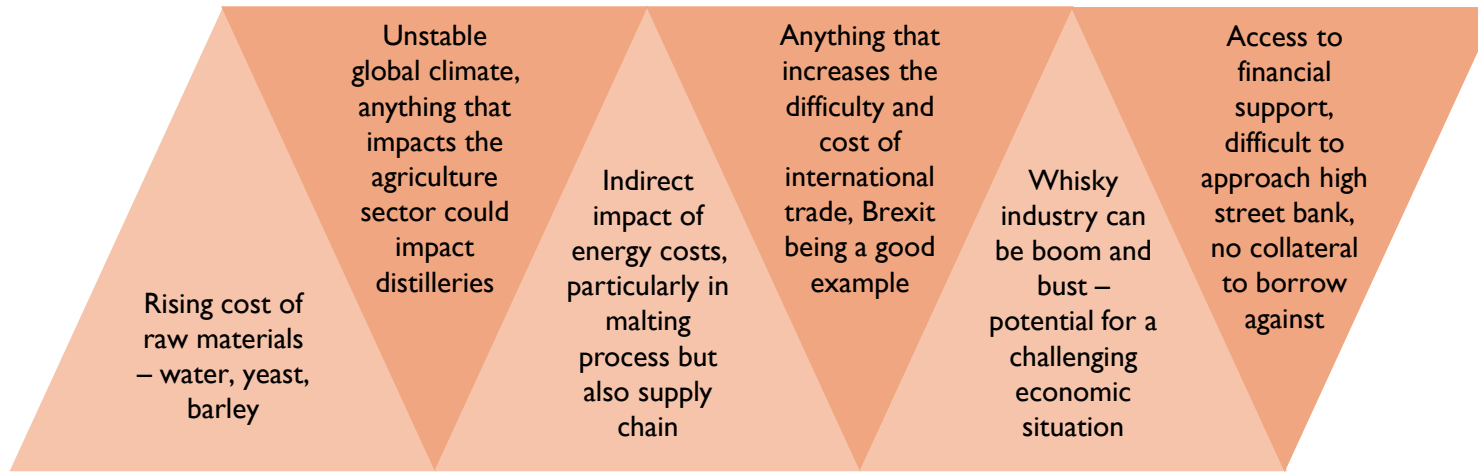
The business was the brainchild of a local farmer, a local to the Dingwall area. He recognised that Dingwall has lost a lot of services over the years, perhaps more so recently. While relatively close to Inverness, it is still some distance from the 'Highland capital' where many services and businesses choose to locate in the north of Scotland. He and others started thinking about what Dingwall could do to address this challenge and what industry might be suited to the area, something a bit unique that would both work as a business and create opportunities in the local area. A distillery started to make more and more sense. There had been whisky production in the area previously but the last distillery in Dingwall had closed almost 100 years ago. So, the idea came together to try and reinvigorate distilling in the town and at the same time use that regeneration of the local industry to benefit the local people to try and bring investment into Dingwall and the surrounding area.

KEY FEATURES





CHALLENGES



SUPPORT

- Co-operative Development Scotland – support throughout the process
- Highlands and Islands Enterprise – digital development grant funding
- Plunkett Foundation – model rules and associated guidance
- Lots of organisations with membership or subscription models offer some kind of charity discount, it's always worth enquiring!

KEY MESSAGES / TAKEAWAYS

What we are trying to do here is something completely unique within the country. Most of this industry is dominated by big corporations and most of the money made from Scottish whisky leaves the country. We have developed a model that challenges that status quo and opens a new chapter in the history of Scottish whisky, one where people can and should expect more from the industry and see more direct benefit to their communities.

TO THE
'PERSON ON
THE STREET'



GROWTH AND/OR REPLICATION

GlenWyvis is producing about 55,000 litres of pure alcohol a year and while that sounds like a lot, the nearest distillery to us produces 11.5 million litres so there's room for growth. The main thing holding us back right is the number of hours in the day with only four core staff. However, the future looks bright and the mechanisms for growth are there, it's just about finding the right moment

Would like to see more community-owned whisky distilleries, there seems to be a gap in the market for this kind of model and it has its roots in the history of whisky – community ownership and participation had a key part to play

It's a big industry with big numbers involved, replication would mean there are more people to work with, collaborate with, build purchasing power with, that would be a big benefit to the industry and to local communities across Scotland

Other community groups have approached GlenWyvis, wanting to understand what they have done and how they have done it with a view to replicating this success, we have always been very forthcoming with lending advice and support to them but it's important to recognise that every community is different, and it depends where a given community's priorities lie



NEWFIELD MEDICAL GROUP

OVERVIEW

Registered Name	Newfield Medical Group Limited
Date of Incorporation	31/01/2022

Legal Form / Structure	Company limited by guarantee
Ownership class	Workers
Type	Workers co-op

Number of Members	12 (GPs and Staff)
Number of Employees	16
Number of Volunteers	1

Turnover (2022/23)	£1.1m
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Location
Dundee, Scotland



DESCRIPTION

- A GP practice with a co-operative business model
- Members include clinical and non-clinical staff
- Contracted by the NHS via the local health board (NHS Tayside) to provide general medical services
- Core services include disease management, asthma, minor illness but this funding alone is insufficient
- Additional services: drugs and alcohol substance misuse, sexual health and family planning, contract with University of Dundee for undergraduate training (~36 a year), contracts with two local prisons to provide full GP support
- Emphasise access to GPs, removing barriers to access – GPs answer the phones and deal directly with patients from the first point of contact
- Important in a deprived area where patients are more vulnerable and often struggle to access healthcare due to barriers
- More doctor-heavy than admin-heavy – flipping the conventional model on its head to put patients' needs and access to GPs first
- Established and funded a charity to fund a social prescribing hub with a community cafe



NEWFIELD MEDICAL
GROUP LTD.
EST. 2022



KEY MILESTONES

Like-minded people

- In 2019, the GPs were working under one roof, providing services, and sharing ideas as well as their frustrations with the constraints and conditions

Discussions with Health Board

- In 2020 the journey started through conversations with the health board around how the GPs might gain more independence and autonomy to make decisions on the direction of the practice that would best meet patients' needs

An independent practice

- In 2022, the co-op was established and took over the contract for running the practice from the health board

GP training centre

- By 2023, a GP training centre was established – this had required negotiating with the Scottish Government for funding and opening on a very tight timescale with limited funding in time for the new academic year

Growth

- As of 2024, the practice has seen its list size increase by 1,000+ patients every year, growing from ~1,800 patients to >6,400
- Recent recruitment drive to increase number of GPs extremely successful with many GPs interested in this new approach to running a GP practice

BACKGROUND

Most GP practices operate under a partnership model where profits primarily stay within the partnership, occasionally benefiting the practice through salary increases, bonuses, or building improvements. The practice was previously run by the Health Board after the former partnership dissolved, leaving GPs frustrated as salaried employees with no autonomy or decision-making power. Seeking change, the GPs went through a 12-month procurement process to set up their own business. Without business experience, they outlined core values like good recruitment, shared responsibility, patient focus, and accessibility. After exploring options, they discovered the cooperative model, which aligned with their goals. They thought, "Well, this fits! What we're wanting to do isn't new! Co-ops have been around for quite a long time, and there's all these resources available" And that's how it started...

KEY FEATURES

12 members, including clinical and non-clinical staff (doctors, nurses, and administrative staff)

Director roles include GP-lead, Admin-lead, Business Secretary, and Practice Manager

AGM – all directors step down, directors (re)elected, set strategic priorities for the business

Directors have regular business meetings, weekly or fortnightly, responsible for general management of the business

Core services include disease management, asthma, minor illness, etc.

Additional services include drugs and alcohol substance misuse and sexual health and family planning

Contract with University of Dundee for undergraduate training, taking ~36 students a year via the bespoke on-site training centre

Trainee medical students observe GPs in surgery as well as participate in GP-led clinic for minor / more common ailments

Contracts with prison service to provide full GP cover – HMP Castle Huntly and The Bella Centre

Established and funded charity to run on-site social prescribing hub and community café

Biggest social impact has been direct access to GPs on the phone – they come to know their patients and their families

STRUCTURE

DECISION-MAKING

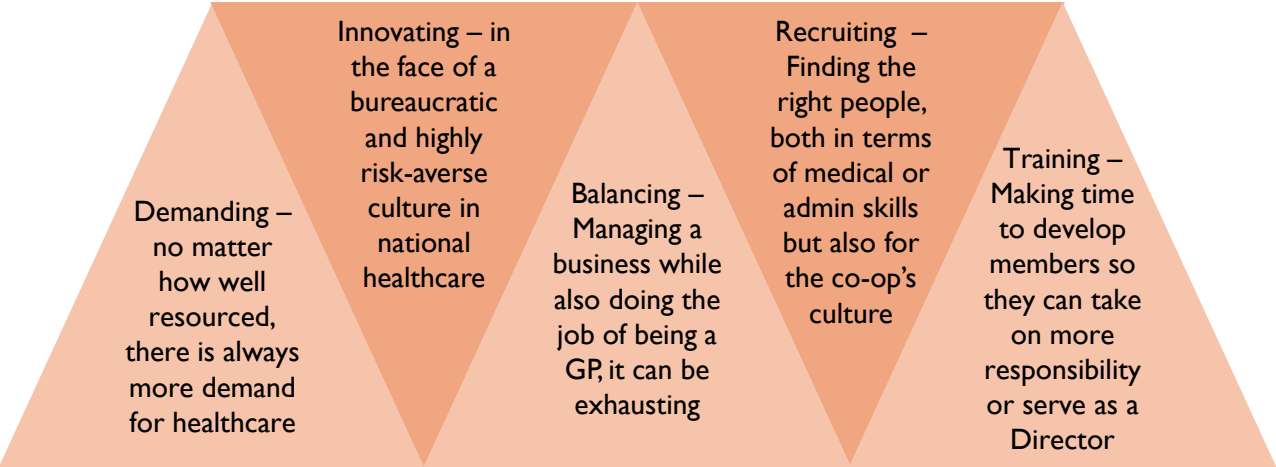
MEMBERSHIP

OPERATIONS

SOCIAL IMPACT

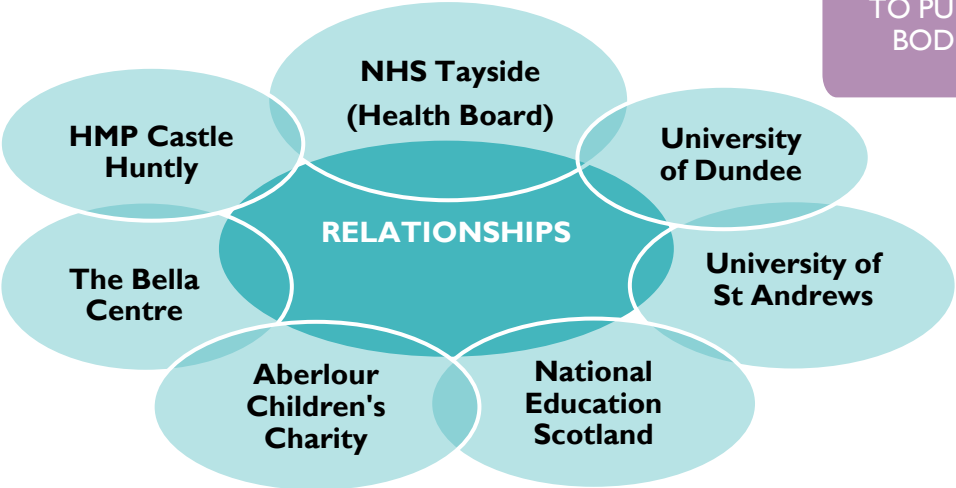


CHALLENGES



SUPPORT

- Co-ops UK and The Hive – received £1k funding to cover advice and guidance for setting up the practice
- Strong support from the local MSP, Shona Robison
- CONDIES Accountants & Advisors provided early support and deferred payment until the business was up and running
- Government department for primary care

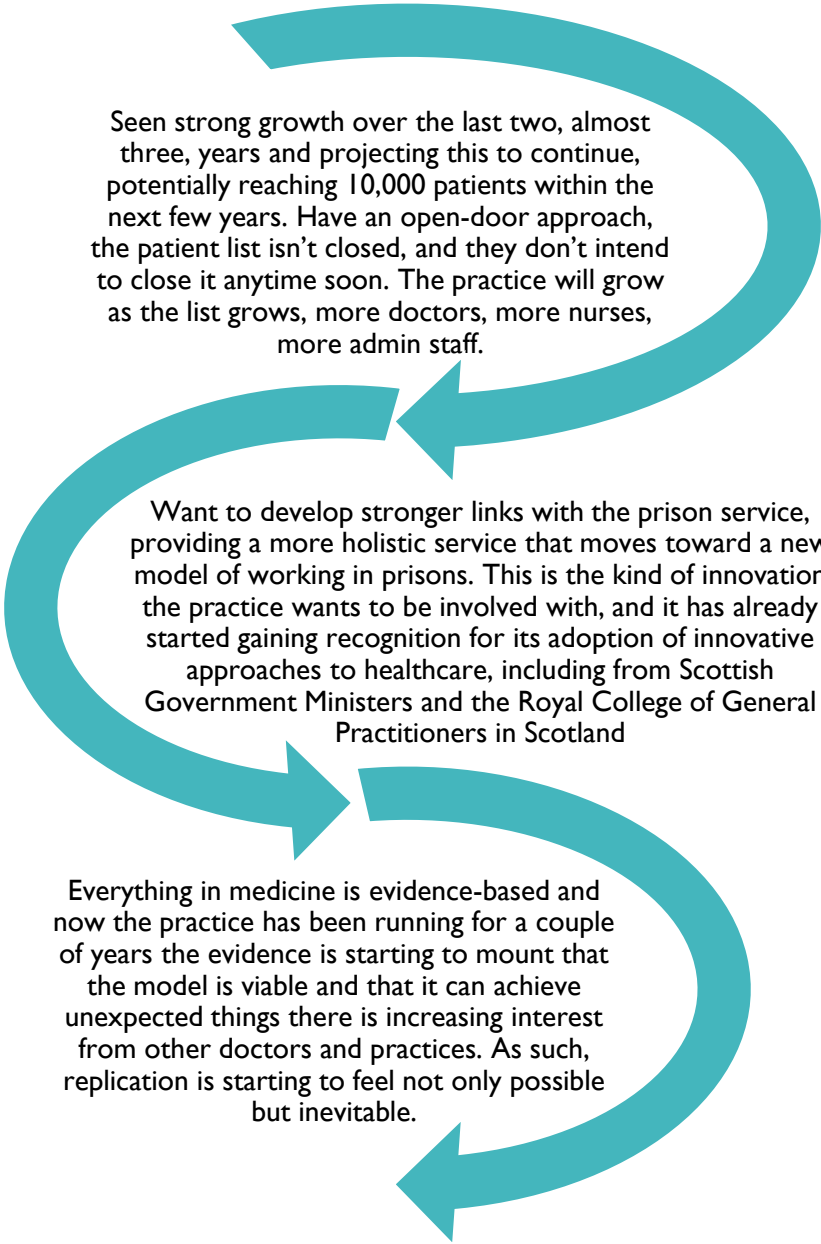


TO PUBLIC BODIES

KEY MESSAGES / TAKEAWAYS

The key message is that barriers to innovation must be removed or simplified, as they consume valuable energy that could be better spent. Growth and improvement require space for innovation, and this demands bravery—people willing to make bold decisions. The healthcare system has become rigid, with bureaucracy preventing communication, stifling change, and ignoring new ideas. Change shouldn't rely on especially persistent individuals to break through these barriers, but that's the reality. Health boards, local authorities, and public bodies must be bold to drive meaningful improvements in community health and wellbeing.

GROWTH AND/OR REPLICATION



LAMBETH GP FOOD CO-OP

OVERVIEW

Registered Name	Lambeth GP Food Network Limited
Date of Incorporation	29/07/2013

Legal Form / Structure	Society
Ownership class	Community Benefit Society
Type	Multi-stakeholder co-op

Number of Members	14
Number of Employees	4 (part-time)
Number of Volunteers	28
Turnover (2022/23)	<£50k

Location
Lambeth, London, England



DESCRIPTION

- Lambeth GP Food Co-op (LGPFC) is a community-led multistakeholder health cooperative working in and for the NHS, members include patients, doctors, nurses, and local residents
- Work with NHS partners including two major hospitals (Guy's and St Thomas' and King's College Hospital) and two GP practices and have built 19 vegetable gardens since 2013
- Local community of ~325,000 people, high density, inner city, with all the challenges that you would expect
- Focused on engaging with patients with long-term health conditions in Lambeth, including diabetes, arthritis, stroke
“In short... we save people's lives”
- Unable to support people with complex mental health issues because not trained or skilled in doing so but many of the patients have depression
- The spaces being used belong primarily to the NHS, LGPFC is a small-scale approach to transforming a tiny bit of the NHS estate into cooperative gardens, it's non-threatening, it adds value to the organisation, and since the pandemic, access to green space has shot up the national agenda



KEY MILESTONES

Award-winning concept

- In Summer 2013, before anything had been grown, the co-op won the accolade for Best Sustainable Food Initiative in the NHS
- Later awarded Excellence in Patient Engagement in Health by NHS England

Royal membership

- In 2019, visited by the now-Queen, who became an honorary member of the co-op

Growing together

- A learning community in which patients, NHS, and local government staff are engaged in understanding the deep relationships between growing food together and improvements in health and wellbeing. Members contribute to Lambeth Food Partnership and Lambeth Biodiversity Forum

Covid-19

- Worked closely with Lambeth Council to deliver a gardening at home project for people who were self-isolating and vulnerable – providing seeds and linking them with a 'gardening buddy'

BACKGROUND

LGPFC has its roots in the New Labour government and work by Patricia Hewitt, then Secretary of State for Health, regarding the role of social enterprises, mutuals, and cooperatives in the NHS. In 2012, the idea was presented to Lambeth Council to form a borough-wide co-op, engaging with some of the ~45 GP practices across Lambeth. They chose GPs because they are the boundary between our communities and accessing the NHS. Likewise, GPs were where systemic pressure and tensions were manifesting most acutely for patients. LGPFC was founded by a nurse, a GP, and an academic, with three GP surgeries participating in the first wave. The aim was to engage patients in gardening and food-growing activities with an economic dimension. If enough vegetables could be grown, they could provide for catering. However, engaging with patients with long term health conditions also tends to involve patients who are slightly older and potentially quite isolated. These patients tend to rely on their GP practice more than others. It dawned on the team that if most of their members and volunteers were elderly people who were ill, there was no way they could be asked to come in 8am-5pm to grow vegetables, it simply wasn't going to work. The compromise is that, with the support of MediRest, who hold the catering contract, LGPFC runs a vegetable stall once a month and sells produce to staff and visitors.

KEY FEATURES

LGPFC is a distributed network organisation, not located in one place but rather across GPs and hospitals

Steering Group – Linked with Lambeth Council, advises and guides the co-op,

4 part-time employees, 2 lead the garden groups

Parties (AGMs) involve some business but also celebration with talks from external speakers from community farms etc.

Members include GPs, nurses, and patients

Own very little other than tools, and planters, and boxes are often built by hospital carpenters

Experience tensions like any organisation but there is generally a very high level of trust and cooperation

In the health sector, not in the care sector – includes the activity itself, the socialising, and the natural food

Impact at national level through encouraging colleagues to think more imaginatively about using the estate to empower patients

Provide a safe, secure, and known space to bring people out of isolation and into activity

Working with Lambeth NHS Stroke Network at the Pulross Centre Brixton to deliver gardening for health to stroke patients

STRUCTURE

DECISION-MAKING

MEMBERSHIP

OPERATIONS

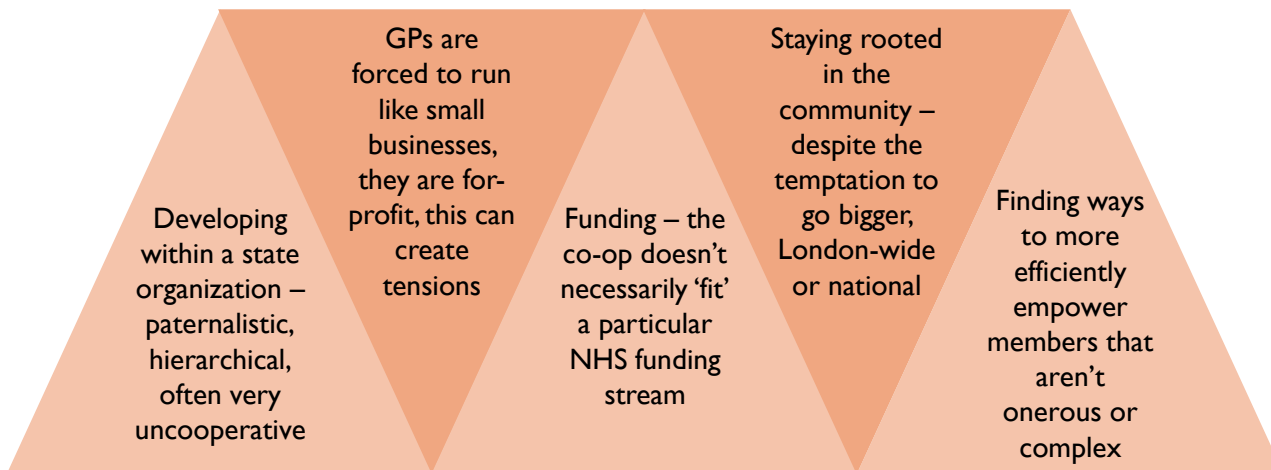
ASSETS

SOCIAL IMPACT





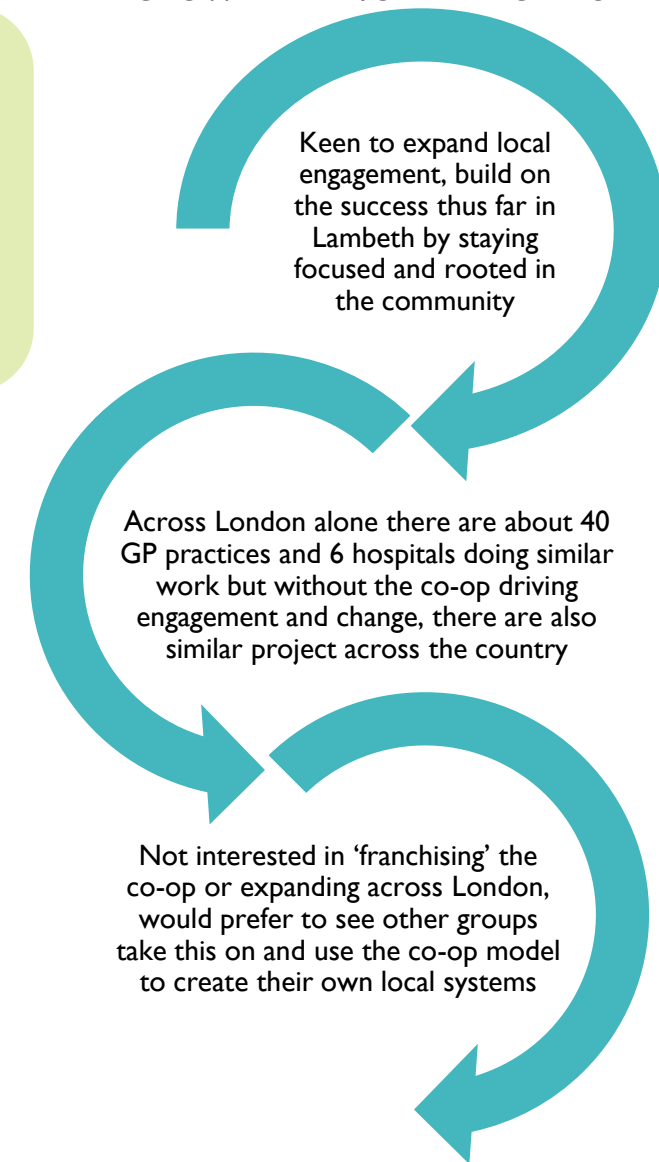
CHALLENGES



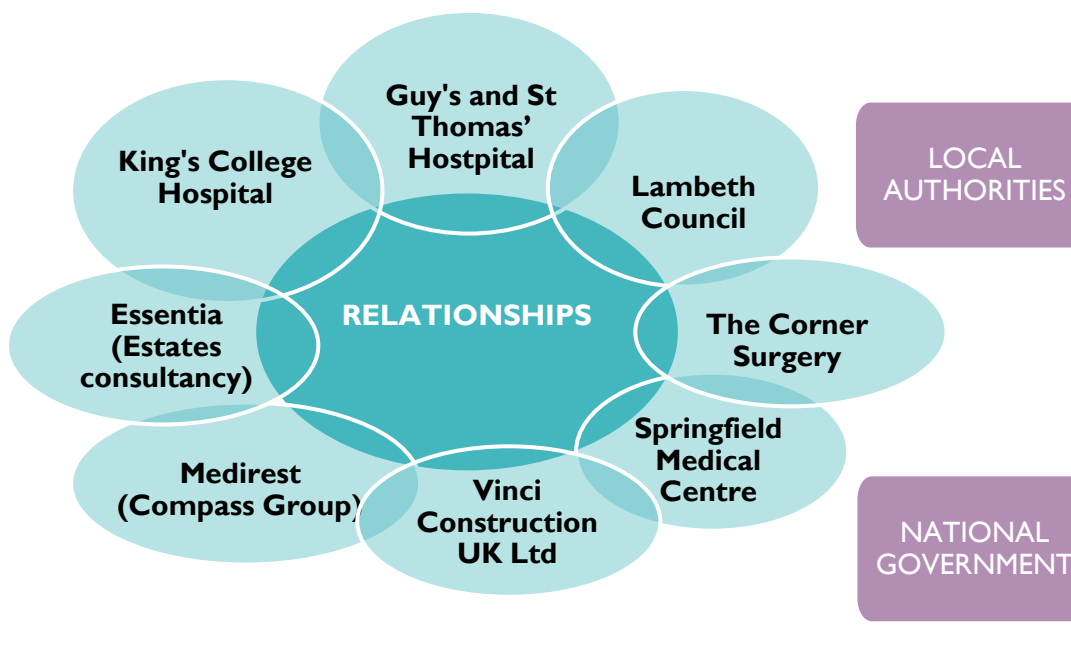
SUPPORT

- Early support from Co-ops UK and Nathan Brown (co-op consultant) was vital to getting the organisation and its operations set up correctly from the outset
- Ongoing support from Lambeth Council
- Political support NHS trusts and NHS England, albeit not necessarily tied to stable funding

GROWTH AND/OR REPLICATION



KEY MESSAGES / TAKEAWAYS



Local authorities have a vital leadership role in creating new community-led health co-operatives. They have a statutory responsibility for public health, they also chair the health and wellbeing boards, so local authorities are already in the health business. Investing in co-ops that engage hard to reach patients in communities, people who are very ill, people managing long COVID, is a practical way in which to invest modest amounts of money in empowering and enabling citizens with long-term health conditions to become more integrated into the social life of their communities. This can have real value to the lives of people who are really struggling, they are unseen and unheard.

If they don't invest in a major enhancement of the cooperative movement across care, housing, and experimental models like LGPFC, they will have missed a critical – perhaps even the last – historic opportunity to do so.



SHAREENERGY CO-OP

OVERVIEW

Registered Name	Sharenergy Co-operative Ltd
Date of Incorporation	15/04/2011

Legal Form / Structure	Society
Ownership class	Community Benefit Society
Type	Community co-op

Number of Members	5
Number of Employees	20 (full and part-time)
Number of Volunteers	0

Turnover (2022/23)	£553,968
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Location
Shrewsbury, Shropshire, England



DESCRIPTION

- Exists to help grow the community energy sector in the UK through working with existing resources, building up local capabilities, and filling in the gaps without "running the show"
- Services and support include site finding and initial assessment, business planning and consultancy, society setup, share offers, administration, operational support, landowner engagement, technical, regulatory and installation, outreach, and troubleshooting
- As indicated by the list above, the range of services offered reflects an emphasis on governance, operations and technical assessments; but it also demonstrates some of the complexity Sharenergy can help communities navigate effectively
- While Sharenergy itself is a co-op, the organisations it helps may or may not be 'bona fide co-operative societies' but are usually established as community benefit societies or occasionally as community interest companies
- Primarily operates in England, although not exclusively, but cooperates and collaborates with similar organisations and associated projects in Scotland and Wales



KEY MILESTONES

First ever project!

- In 2011, Sharenergy supported the delivery of Leominster Community Solar, with 94 members. The £150,000 required was oversubscribed by 40%

A growing team...

- By 2015, Sharenergy was growing and was able to start employing people. In 2024 there are now nearly 20 employees working a mixture of full or part time

Launch of the Big Solar Co-op

- In 2022, with over a decade of experience, Sharenergy founded the Big Solar Co-operative. The aim was to jumpstart community solar at commercial scale, with a volunteer led ethical model that operates across the UK. It is aiming to install 100 MW of solar by 2030

Bringing the energy!

- When Sharenergy started its first project was 50kW. It's now working on projects at MW scale and assisting other groups to achieve similar outputs. They are currently working to deliver the UK's first ever solar farm with reused solar panels!

BACKGROUND

Sharenergy started in around 2011: the founders were Jon Halle and ETTY George. It came off the back of an organisation called Energy 4 All which had developed a wind farm using a European co-operative model. Jon wanted to carry on this work but with more of a UK flavour and approach to developing community energy projects. He started off by helping local groups start their own cooperatives. The first ever project they brought forward was a solar system owned by the community on a sports hall in Herefordshire. It was the second ever community-owned solar system in the UK. Jon is still working as the CEO and along with a small board of two other directors: Joe Bentley and Adam Kennerley. From the outset, the motivation was to bring people together and deliver renewable energy projects that wouldn't happen otherwise. Commercial developers are routinely interested in making the most money they possibly can.

Sharenergy is about bringing people together in a local community – whether it's a wind turbine or a solar farm, it's really about getting people to act together in a way that benefits themselves and the communities they live in.

KEY FEATURES

Structured and run like a business - the employees don't usually get involved in decision making

Three main strands of Sharenergy are Development Team, Operational Team, and Big Solar Co-op Team

The Big Solar Co-op is a project of Sharenergy, with its staff employed by Sharenergy

The structure is open and flexible, with staff sometimes increasing / decreasing hours to suit their needs

Most of the team aren't involved in AGMs or regular monthly meetings but the structure is also quite open and flexible

The scale and complexity of the projects demands a high level of expertise, but Sharenergy work to develop community capacity too

The Big Solar Co-op is quite unusual – it's like a super co-op that is expanding all the time rather than operating in a single area

Sharenergy also run a Small Wind co-op that is set up like Big Solar Co-Op, but focused on wind

STRUCTURE

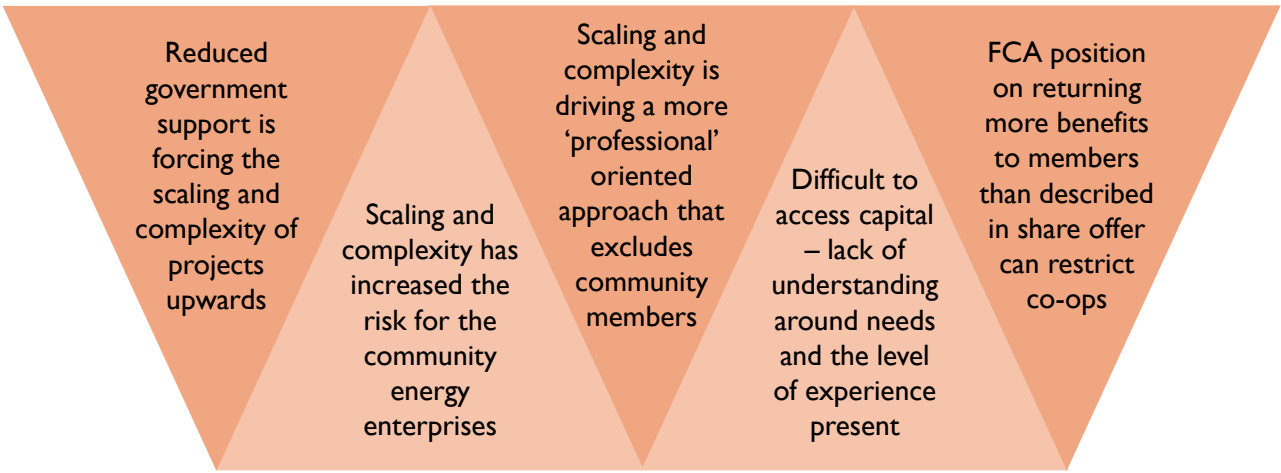
DECISION-MAKING

OPERATIONS

MEMBERSHIP



CHALLENGES



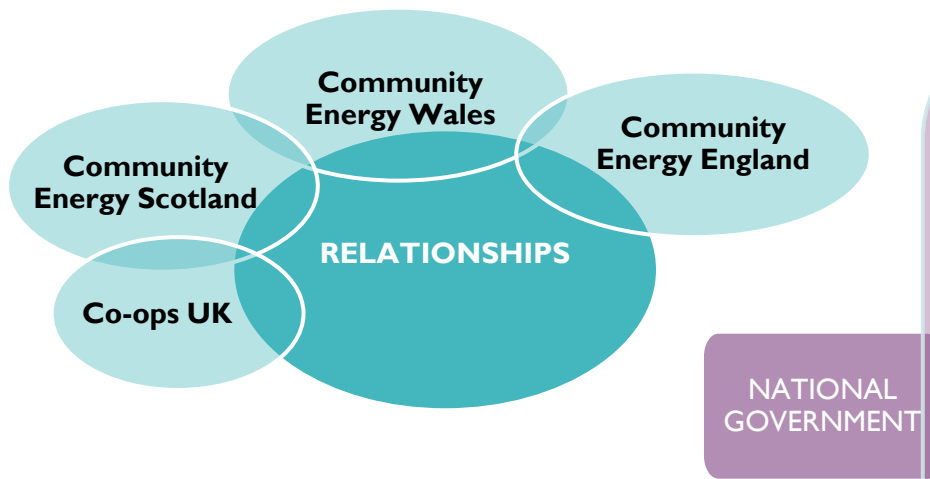
GROWTH AND/OR REPLICATION

Have been helping communities replicate effective and successful business models for nearly 15 years, it's pretty much what Sharenergy does... but it wouldn't make sense to replicate Sharenergy itself because its purpose is to provide support and integration...

Growth will primarily be via the Big Solar Co-op and that will likely lead to some growth of Sharenergy in terms of the shared functions and services – there's another similar project on the horizon called the Community Heat Development Unit which will focus on community heat networks, that will likely also be a source of significant growth...

As for wind energy, the Small Wind Co-op could grow but it's much less likely because of a) planning restrictions, b) localised resistance, c) the cost of installation and long-term maintenance...

KEY MESSAGES / TAKEAWAYS



SUPPORT

- Not particularly, there hasn't been the need, Sharenergy has always stood on its own two-feet by being paid for doing work for other co-ops...

Community Energy is worth supporting because people on the ground understand what will work in their community, whether or not it's the best or most attractive proposition from the perspective of a commercial developer. Commercial developers will always take the low hanging fruit. Community energy projects don't try and do that. They try to bring forward projects which they feel have got most value to the local community.

This idea of democratising energy generation and bringing the benefits of natural resources into the local community is incredibly important. It is money that then stays inside the UK and brings benefits back to people in the places where those assets are being put in - it is much more valuable than multinational corporations coming in and extracting value from our natural resources and local economies.