



Co-operative

FUTURES

Annual Review

April 06 - March 07



This was another hectic year of both delivery and development for Co-operative Futures. By the end of the year our membership comprised 34 independent social enterprises and provided our corporate board.

With a view to the future, the board approved the appointment of Jim Pettipher as Deputy Director in November 2006. Previously Jim has worked in the sustainable development sector, helping organisations to define, develop and deliver sustainable projects.

One of Jim's first tasks in his new role involved representing Co-operative Futures on the Wiltshire Strategic Economic Partnership (WSEP) social enterprise sub-group. Co-operative Futures, on behalf of WSEP, drafted a successful application to the Rural Renaissance Partnership to part fund specialist business advice for local social enterprises. Wiltshire County Council provided matched funding, allowing the tendering of Wiltshire's first countywide social enterprise support contract.

Co-operative Futures provided Wiltshire support throughout the year, funded in part by a contract with Business Link Berkshire & Wiltshire and in part from its own resources. The creation of Mere Footprints as a social enterprise (Industrial & Provident Society) was just one of many organisations that Co-operative

Futures helped. Jane Ryall, our Wiltshire Advisor, also completed a social enterprise feasibility study for Westlea Housing Association.

Meanwhile in Oxfordshire the work of Tessa Hennessy - one of our two county Social Enterprise Advisors - contributed significantly to the registration and creation of the Radley Village Shop Association. Tessa was also largely responsible for the delivery of our Oxfordshire Business Link Solutions contract, ensuring that social enterprises won rightful recognition as valued members of the county's economic community.

Our other Oxfordshire advisor, Richard Snow, came to an end of his time on the Snakes & Ladders partnership project, which worked with people who had suffered from mental health problems and encouraged them into self-employment. Richard immediately began work on another partnership project - Enterprise Support - that aims to support and stimulate social enterprise in communities across Oxfordshire that experience multiple deprivation.

In Swindon Julie Allen continued her work with the credit unions to try and ensure financial inclusion for all, particularly with a weather eye to the potential closure of rural post offices. Julie completed the expansion of the credit unions' common bonds to include the outlying rural areas of the borough.

At the same time Julie became a leading advocate, appearing on national television no less, on behalf of the credit unions and their efforts to look after people experiencing hardship due to the collapse of

Farepak, Swindon's erstwhile Christmas Hamper company.

In Gloucestershire, Helen McComb had a busy year working with the four Gloucestershire credit unions, the Credit Union Forum and the City's Westgate project.

Helen also worked with a number of independent social enterprises and helped to register the Gloucestershire Contracting Partnership and Gloucestershire Wood Fuels as marketing co-operatives.

Meanwhile Jo White, Director of Co-operative Futures, oversaw all of the above and represented Co-operative Futures on the boards of the Gloucestershire Infrastructure Group, RISE, South East Co-operatives (Chair) and Co-operative & Community Finance.

As if that wasn't enough Jo also co-ordinated, researched, wrote and submitted the national social enterprise sectoral response to the Highways Agency's motorway service areas consultation.



Gloucestershire

Tourism is the biggest industry in the Cotswold village of Bourton-on-the-Water, so when Cotswold District Council announced its plans to close the Visitor Information Centre in the village, a few members of the local Chamber of Commerce acted to save it.

Three local businessmen - including the Chamber's Chairman Norman Jones - set up a limited company, signed up as directors, and negotiated the transfer of services to it.

In a culture of declining grants for these non-statutory services, the directors wrote an enterprising business plan for the Centre which outlined ways it could generate income, such as renting display space to local businesses. The business plan is on target. The future supply of the Visitor Information Centre's marketing and support services to Bourton seem secure.



The directors, however, worry about the future of the service for Bourton. They want to make sure it is safe in the longer term and remains focused on helping Bourton, rather than simply making a profit.

And so they contacted Co-operative Futures. Helen McComb from the Co-operative Futures' Gloucester office worked with them as they considered the choices available, their suitability, and what steps the directors would need to take to make a change.

Model rules have now been adapted to suit the group. The directors are working with Helen to offer membership to local residents.

The directors hope this will encourage wider local participation and provide a more secure future for these important services.

This work is funded by Gloucestershire County Council and the Midcounties Co-operative Society.

Oxfordshire

Cycling is enjoying a boom in the UK - both participation and sales of new bikes are up. This is in marked contrast with the cycle manufacturing industry, which in the face of competition from the Far East has all but ceased to exist. Bicycles have become, to many people, so cheap that they are a disposable commodity.

This is not true however at the Oxford Cycle Workshop, which describes itself as having two main purposes: to recycle as many of Oxfordshire's abandoned bikes as possible, and to do everything it can to promote cycling in Oxford - and beyond - as a safe, easy and fun activity.



The founders and team at the Oxford Cycle Workshop believe that the natural next step for their ethical business is to convert from a limited company to an Industrial & Provident Society and workers' co-operative.

Tessa and Richard from Co-operative Futures' Oxford office have been helping the business to navigate the tricky legal and consensual path to co-operative status.

This work is funded by the Midcounties Co-operative Society.

Swindon

This was a very busy year for the Swindon credit unions. The Financial Services Authority approved the expansion of the Clivey Credit Union's common bond (trading area) and this means that, working with the Steam Ahead Credit Union, the entire borough of Swindon now has access to credit union services.

The benefits of this coverage soon became clear when Swindon-based Farepak ceased trading in the run up to Christmas, leaving many of its savers in the town with no Christmas hampers and no idea where to go for help.

Julie Allen from Co-operative Futures' Swindon office worked with the credit unions, Swindon's MPs and the



local and national media to try and help local people caught in the Farepak collapse.

With the Farepak firefighting more or less over, Julie is now working to recruit rural credit union champions and members in Swindon's outlying areas.

This work is funded by the Community Foundation for Wiltshire & Swindon and by the Midcounties Co-operative Society.

Wiltshire

Salisbury's Sarum Solar is a workers' co-operative with seven members and a member of Co-operative Futures.

The company installs and maintains solar domestic water heating systems and shares a common desire with its customers to minimise carbon emissions. Solar water heating installations can also provide longer-term cost savings but this is a secondary driver in Sarum Solar's market.

Since the company was established in 2004, it has continued to expand and achieved an impressive growth of 25% in 2007.

The company's ambitious ongoing target is to complete a new solar heating installation each week, while also building up its accompanying maintenance business.



Although the co-operative has been trading since 2004, the members have been so busy that they could only manage to make time for an official opening of their offices by Robert Key, their local MP, in March 2007.

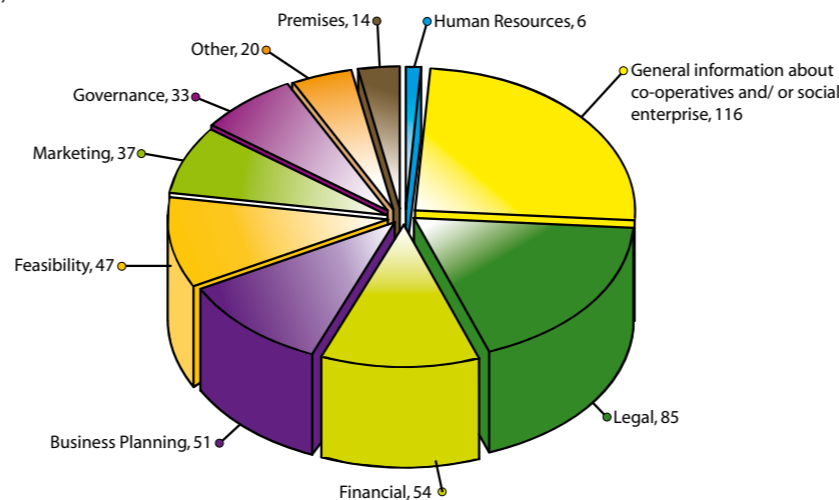
Co-operative Futures helped the co-operative with its registration in 2004 and its initial business plan. It now provides Sarum Solar with ongoing support which has included advice on marketing, pensions and other human resource related issues.

This work was funded by Midcounties Co-operative and Business Link Berkshire & Wiltshire.

Picture of Robert Key MP (right) at the opening of Sarum Solar supplied courtesy of Salisbury Newspapers, www.journalphotos.co.uk

How we helped groups

Types of enquiries, 2006-07



Spreading the message

As well as working directly with and for co-operatives and social enterprises in Gloucestershire, Swindon, Wiltshire and Oxfordshire, Co-operative Futures also works hard to represent their interests at policy-making level.

Co-operative Futures co-ordinated and delivered the national social enterprise response to the Highways Agency's consultation on policy for service areas and other roadside facilities on motorways and all-purpose trunk roads in England.

In Gloucestershire Helen McComb was secretary to the Gloucestershire

Credit Unions Forum. Jo White, Director of Co-operative Futures, was an active board member of the Gloucestershire Infrastructure Group.

In Wiltshire Jane Ryall, Co-operative Futures' County Advisor, and Jim Pettipher, now Development Director, drafted a successful Rural Renaissance funding bid on behalf of the Wiltshire Social Enterprise Partnership.

In Oxfordshire Richard Snow, one of the two Co-operative Futures' County Advisors is a board member of the Oxfordshire Social Enterprise Forum.

In Swindon Julie Allen, the Co-operative Futures' Advisor was a member of the Swindon Enterprise Group, the Community Development Network and the Voluntary & Community Sector Forum.

Julie is part of the Swindon Co-operative and Credit Union Forum and came up with the idea for a local fund to help victims of Farepak's collapse. The fund raised £7,000 locally and the national Farepak Fighting Fund - which raised £7,000,000 - replicated the idea.

Members of the board

Jo White (Executive Director)
Co-operative Futures (Director)

Brian Tittley (Finance Director)
Co-option

John Down
Co-option

Stephen Yeo
Co-option

Mark Gale (Chair)
GNPN, Gloucestershire

Malcolm Smyth
Midcounties Co-operative, Oxfordshire

Brian Tyler
Phoenix Enterprises, Swindon

Ken Brown
Refurbiz, Wiltshire

Steve Allsopp
Steam Ahead Credit Union, Swindon

Phil Reade
Waste Not Want Not, Wiltshire

Kat Luddecke
Westmill Wind Farm Co-operative, Oxfordshire

Thank you

Co-operative Futures is grateful for the support of the following organisations:

Business Link

DTI Phoenix Fund

European Social Fund

Gloucester City Council

Gloucestershire County Council

Learning Curve

Midcounties Co-operative Society

North Wiltshire District Council

Oxfordshire County Council

SEEDA

Swindon Borough Council

SWRDA

Westlea Housing Association

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