

# The co-operative

# 2009

Social Responsibility  
Report

The Midcounties Co-operative

“As a co-operative business  
social responsibility is at the  
heart of what we do”



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## We aim to be a responsible retailer by:

- » Maintaining a high standard of ethical behaviour
- » Actively working on the reduction of our carbon and waste footprints
- » Providing responsible leadership
- » Developing sustainable programmes which positively impact on our communities
- » Raising awareness and understanding of social responsibility with our key stakeholders
- » Developing a more robust social responsibility performance management system
- » Embracing and supporting diversity, engaging with the diverse communities we serve
- » Being open and honest about our progress



# Our approach to social responsibility

Welcome to The Midcounties Co-operative's Social Responsibility Report 2009.

## About our Society

The Midcounties Co-operative is a consumer co-operative owned by our members. Our members have a say in the decisions we make and the actions we take, including our social responsibility agenda.

We operate six businesses in Food, Travel, Pharmacy, Funerals, Motors and Childcare. We also own a number of Post Offices, manage commercial and residential properties and run the .coop domain name. Our heartlands are in Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, Buckinghamshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, the West Midlands, Wiltshire and Worcestershire with a trading presence in the surrounding counties.

As a co-operative business social responsibility is at the heart of what we do. The co-operative values and principles which form the basis of our Society include solidarity, social responsibility, caring for others and concern for the community. To ensure we address these we have created our Steering Wheel, which ensures financial goals are always balanced against social, ethical and environmental aspirations.

We have over 7,800 colleagues working in our various businesses and we aim to engage as many colleagues as possible to achieve our social responsibility goals. We encourage colleagues to get involved in community fund-raising and volunteering events and to engage with our environmental campaigns.

Our Social Responsibility statement explains our commitment to social responsibility as a business. The full statement can be found on our website: [www.midcounties.coop](http://www.midcounties.coop) and the box on the facing page provides an outline of what we seek to do.

## About this report

This report follows on from last year's Sustainability Report and shows the progress we have made on the different environmental topics covered in the initial report. This year we are also reporting on our community initiatives, hence we have changed the name of this document to the broader heading of Social Responsibility Report.

In this report you'll not only find information about our environmental developments but also the difference our funding and volunteer work has made to our local communities and how we plan to facilitate change for good over the coming year in both areas.

The report covers the 52 week period ended 24 January 2009. It has been structured to explore the importance of each topic covered, what we have done to develop this area during the past year and what we plan to do in the next 12 months. In this way we can ensure that we are setting ourselves realistic goals and assess whether we are achieving these.



John Boot - President



Ben Reid - Chief Executive

## Award-winning commitment

We won a selection of national and local awards over the last year and gained recognition for our practices relating to social responsibility.

During 2008 the two national Big Tick Awards, which we were initially awarded in 2007, have been recredited. The awards, presented by Business in the Community, relate to our work supporting a Wolverhampton school and our Local Harvest and community-owned shop schemes.

At a local level we won two awards at the Annual Corporate Social Responsibility Celebration Event, organised by Walsall Endeavours CIC. We were extremely pleased to receive the overall award for outstanding CSR, which acknowledges the integral part social responsibility plays in our business. The charity-run youth centre Electric Palace in Bloxwich nominated us for another award to acknowledge the ongoing support we have provided them over the year.

Our supermarket in Grove received the Oxfordshire Investors in Education Award for its work with a school in Wantage for children with learning difficulties. The award was presented by Oxfordshire Education Business Partnership (OEBP).

We are in the process of applying for the CommunityMark standard, which is awarded by Business in the Community to organisations that demonstrate business excellence in community investment. During 2009 we will also be investigating gaining the Carbon Trust Accreditation. This is a significant accreditation awarded to organisations for their commitment to reducing carbon emissions.

To find out more about our Society please visit [www.midcounties.coop](http://www.midcounties.coop)

# Carbon emissions

## Why it matters

We believe that defending the environment is an important part of our role as a responsible retailer; therefore we are constantly striving to find ways to reduce our CO<sub>2</sub> consumption. It is also important for us to monitor our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions so we can assess what effect the work we are doing is having on our carbon output.

## What we said we would do

- » Introduce Smart Metering
- » Improve accuracy of data collection and analysis
- » Achieve a 20% reduction in energy consumption by 2010 from 2005 figures

## What we have done

During the year we have lowered our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to 2.9 tonnes per £1million turnover, compared with the 6 tonnes we reported last year. This figure includes business gas consumption, chilled distribution miles and colleague business miles. As mentioned in last year's Sustainability Report we source all of our electricity across the business from 100% green sources, therefore our electricity consumption is exempt from this reporting. As we acquire new trading sites we ensure that we switch the electricity supplied to the site to retain this 100% green electricity statistic.

During the year we have been working on improving the way we report on our emissions. As a business we have been working with Peak Energy Limited (a chartered energy management service) and following their guidelines to ensure that our figures are fully verifiable. Our calculations have been carried out using accredited conversion factors from DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs), The Carbon Trust and CRAG (Carbon Rationing Action Groups).

## Saving energy

In order to better monitor our electricity usage Smart Metering has been installed in all our food retail stores (excluding our smaller

Confectionary, Tobacco and News stores). These advanced meters measure electricity usage and communicate consumption remotely, meaning there is no need for meter readings and bills are consistently accurate. The advanced reporting options that Smart Metering provides can help us to use less energy and encourage energy efficiency.

We currently have five green stores across our trading area which house a range of energy-saving devices. For example our Madley Park food store in Witney, Oxfordshire uses heat reclamation technology, which recycles the heat emitted from the back of the refrigerators to heat the store, efficient chillers that operate on a timer and include night blinds to reduce energy loss, and an energy efficient air conditioning system. Movement sensing lights and Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems, which capture and use rain water, have also been employed at a number of these sites.

## Carbon offsetting

We work with The Carbon Neutral Company to offset business miles travelled by our fleet vehicles. Last year The Midcounties Co-operative supported two carbon offsetting projects: the construction of wind turbines in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu and a methane capture project at Rhine-Rhur Germany. This year we are supporting the Sichuan Province Hydro Power project in China. In addition, customers purchasing vehicles through our Motor dealership have the option to offset their mileage through the same company, and they can even choose which offsetting project their money will go to.

We also offer Travel customers the option to offset their flight's carbon emissions. This is arranged through Climate Care – an organisation dedicated to combating climate change. The optional charge to customers is passed to Climate Care which invests in projects to remove, reduce or prevent the creation of the equivalent amount of carbon dioxide used during the flight.

## What we plan to do

At the end of 2008 we had achieved a 13.5% reduction in energy consumption from 2005 figures. In order to reach our target of a 20% reduction by 2010 we will be focusing on using Smart Metering, improving energy-saving housekeeping and developing our Energy Champions programme during 2009 (see page 10).

Going forward we plan to further develop the consistency of our reporting and will look to include as much information as possible. We hope that this more thorough reporting will make it easier for us to prove that we conform to Government legislation, such as the proposed Carbon Reduction Commitment.

The Government's Carbon Reduction Commitment is scheduled to launch in 2010/11 and will be a mandatory scheme that aims to encourage carbon savings in large, non energy intensive organisations. Businesses will need to buy allowances to cover their annual carbon footprint in the hope that this will encourage them to introduce green measures. As a business we will be working to comply with this scheme by continuing to develop our green agenda, utilising Smart Metering information, investigating Carbon Trust Standard accreditation and continuing to adopt energy-saving practices throughout the business.

We are in the process of compiling the results provided by our Smart Meters into a league table to discover which sites have the best energy consumption and which have the worst. From these results we will work with our Energy Champions to reduce energy consumption throughout our sites.

When purchasing new appliances we opt for equipment that is on The Energy Technology List and complies with Government prescribed energy efficiency criteria



“ We will work with our Energy Champions to reduce energy consumption throughout our sites ”

LESS power MORE EFFICIENT



# Renewable energy

## Why it matters

In order to reduce our carbon emissions it is essential that we are at the forefront of developments in renewable energy. We are leading the way in creating a more sustainable Society for our colleagues, members and customers. To do this we are investing heavily in exploring new ways to power our sites that are better for the environment.

## What we said we would do

- » Install a wind test mast
- » Consider other potential sites for wind turbines
- » Install solar powered lighting in car parks

## What we have done

### Solar power

Last year we installed solar panels at our head office in Botley, Oxford. So far the panels have produced 5,700 kWh and saved 2,400 kg of CO<sub>2</sub> (2.4 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>). This energy generated helps to power our head office site.

We have also been investing in solar energy at our Cainscross food store. Solar panels have been fixed to the top of the streetlamps in the car park and these cells completely power the lamps so they do not draw power from any other source. We are currently investigating the CO<sub>2</sub> savings generated by this project with a view to implementing similar schemes across our trading area.

### Harnessing the wind

During the course of the year we erected a 60 metre wind test mast on land adjacent to our Oxford head office. The test mast is set to be in place for 12 to 18 months in order to measure accurate wind speed data in all seasons. If wind speeds are sufficient we hope to be able to put up a wind turbine at the site, planning permission allowing. The size of the turbine will be dependent on the wind speeds and could provide up

to 75% of power for our Oxford office, our neighbouring Motorworld garage and our food store in Botley.

We are currently spreading awareness about this project to our members and local residents to give them the chance to provide their views. One way that this has been achieved is by setting up an information and feedback page on our website. You can add your comments at [www.midcounties.coop/windmast](http://www.midcounties.coop/windmast). We will use this feedback to direct our future renewable energy projects.

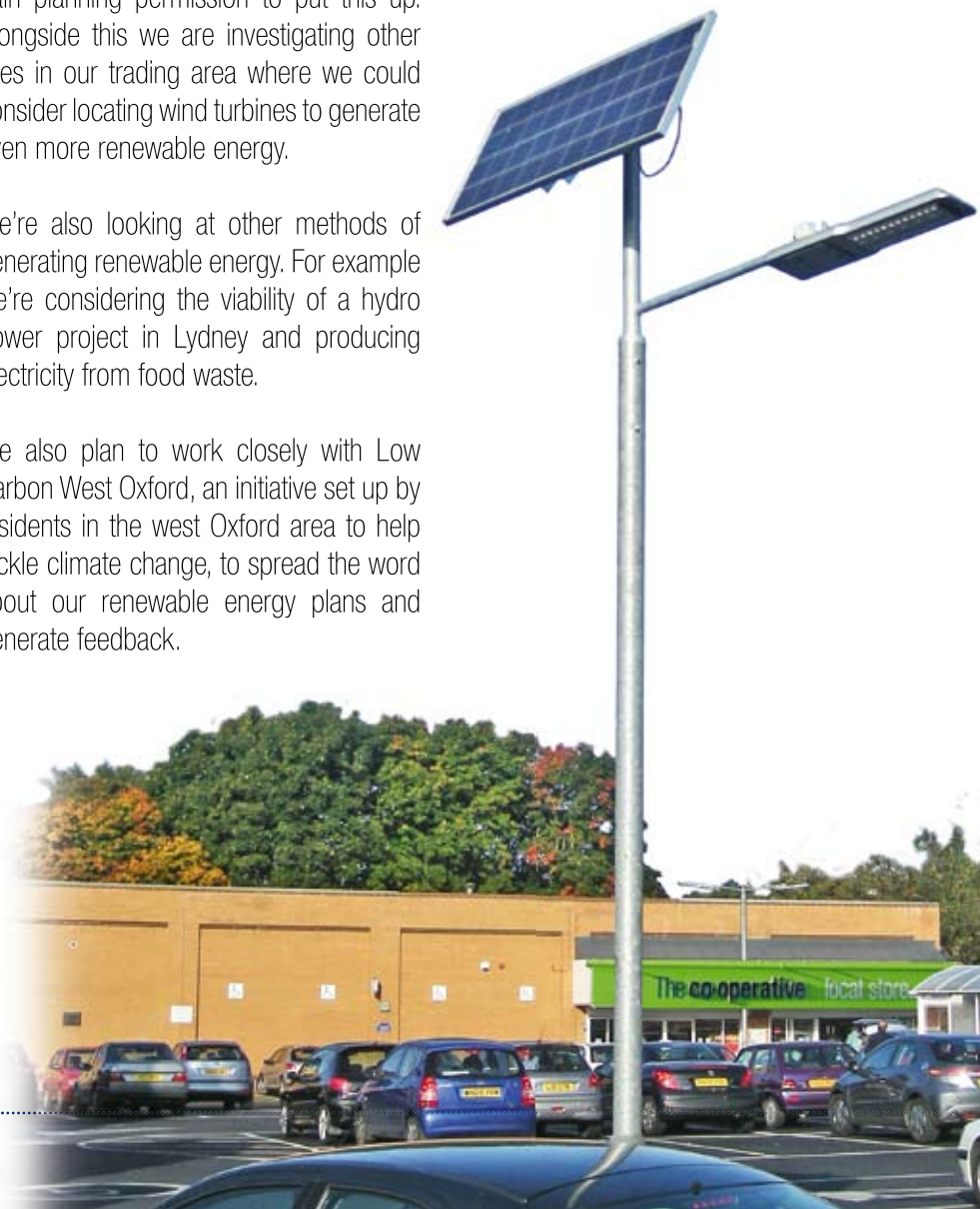
## What we are going to do this year

If wind speeds are adequate to warrant the erection of a wind turbine at our Oxford head office we will be looking to gain planning permission to put this up. Alongside this we are investigating other sites in our trading area where we could consider locating wind turbines to generate even more renewable energy.

We're also looking at other methods of generating renewable energy. For example we're considering the viability of a hydro power project in Lydney and producing electricity from food waste.

We also plan to work closely with Low Carbon West Oxford, an initiative set up by residents in the west Oxford area to help tackle climate change, to spread the word about our renewable energy plans and generate feedback.

Our solar panels saved enough CO<sub>2</sub> last year to fill two hot air balloons



# Managing our supply chain

## Why it matters

The distance food travels from field to fork is an important factor in assessing our carbon footprint. That is one reason why we set up our successful Local Harvest scheme. Another is because our members told us that they wanted to be able to buy locally and support their local farmers. Over the year we've been looking at ways to improve the logistics of this popular scheme.

## What we said we would do

- » Raise sales to £4 million
- » Introduce new suppliers

## What we have done Local Harvest

In our Sustainability Report last year we reported on our Local Harvest sourcing scheme. Over the course of the year the scheme has grown and we now support 40 local suppliers (last year the total was 33). Stock lines have almost doubled from 275 to 500 during the year and sales have increased from £2.9 million to £4 million – an increase of 37%. This growth is mainly due to the fact that all of our food stores now stock some Local Harvest products.

During the year we formed a new partnership with Heart of England Fine Foods (HEFF). Working with HEFF's Delivery Service means distribution costs for local suppliers have been considerably lowered. It is a service designed to increase efficiencies in distribution, both financially and environmentally, by consolidating delivery to one single drop, ultimately reducing the amount of vehicles on the roads. Since June 2008, seven of our existing local suppliers in our northern trading area have taken advantage of this new service. These suppliers account for around 10% of the total Local Harvest turnover.

We have also started a similar partnership with Oxford Wholefoods to allow suppliers in the southern part of our trading area to distribute more effectively and cheaply.

## Community shops

Again, throughout the year we have continued to support community owned village shops. We support these community owned stores from their creation through to providing reliable operational back up, thus protecting vulnerable rural services and communities. Our Big Tick Award for our work with these community stores and Local Harvest schemes was reaccredited for 2008, thanks to our ongoing commitment and development of these initiatives.

## What we are going to do this year

In the upcoming year we will continue to work with HEFF Distribution and Oxford Wholefoods to ensure we offer the best possible service to our Local Harvest suppliers and continue to improve our efficiency.

We have hit the £4 million sales target for Local Harvest products we set ourselves in last year's Sustainability Report



# Waste and recycling

## Why it matters

Reusing and recycling waste that is destined for landfill not only reduces the amount of methane released into the atmosphere but it means CO<sub>2</sub> is saved as new products do not have to be created to replace the discarded originals. This is why we put a strong focus on reducing waste and recycling what we can.

## What we said we would do

- » Conduct waste audits
- » Increase the amount of recycling at our office sites
- » Work with local waste authorities to develop recycling projects
- » Continue our initiatives to reduce the use of plastic bags

## What we've done

### Reduce, reuse, recycle

Through our packaging material recovery scheme, run in partnership with other members of the Co-operative Retail Trading Group (CRTG), the most recent figures show that we successfully recycled 601 tonnes of cardboard and 29 tonnes of plastic in 2007. This equates to 14% of our total waste output. Our target is to recycle 20% of our waste by 2010.

In 2008 we introduced our 'bin the bin' initiative where individual under-desk bins were replaced by centrally located recycling bins, encouraging increased recycling of all applicable waste. These recycling facilities have been tested at our office and Childcare sites and are gradually being rolled out to our other trading groups. The waste placed in these bins has been monitored since October 2008 and so far 1,864 kg (1.8 tonnes) of material has been successfully recycled.

To reduce the amount of waste that goes to landfill we ran a project in partnership with Gloucestershire County Council called Zero Waste Week. Our Cainscross regional office took part in the initiative, led by our regional Energy Champion, and

followed various guidelines to reduce the amount of waste they threw away. The office successfully developed composting exercises for its food waste and worked on recycling everything that could be recycled. From these findings we are now working with colleagues to improve recycling education.

## Carrier bags

Based on the amount of carrier bags handed out in May 2006, by the end of 2008 we had achieved a 29% reduction in carrier bag usage. Our ongoing target is to reduce carrier bag use by 70% by early 2010.

To achieve this target stores have introduced and promoted several initiatives including:

- » Removal of customer selection of carrier bags
- » Introduction of smaller bags for kiosk sales
- » New style produce bags
- » Promotion of alternative reusable bags

We worked closely with the communities of Church Stretton, Dorchester and Woodford Halse as they made the switch to go entirely carrier bag free. Our stores in these areas no longer provide carrier bags and at the launch we offered carrier recycling facilities and gave out free 'bags for life' to further support the switch.

## What we are going to do this year

In order to develop our recycling further we are looking to provide more recycling facilities for customers and we're hoping to introduce branded recycling units to promote our commitment to the environment.

We will also be tying in our recycling with fundraising for Help the Hospices, our Charity Partner for 2009. We will be

looking at possible revenue streams that can be created through recycling to help support the charity financially.

We are currently investigating the possibilities of linking in with a food bank project which will allow us to pass on re-usable food waste to various local community projects. Such projects could include elderly lunch clubs, homeless shelters and children's groups. This could potentially help us redeploy food destined for landfill and help to feed groups that need this support. We are also investigating the use of anaerobic digestion for our food waste. This is a waste disposal unit designed to turn food waste into electricity and fertiliser.



We have been working on a carrier bag reduction programme with other members of the Co-operative Movement

“In 2008 we introduced our ‘bin the bin’ initiative where individual under-desk bins were replaced by centrally located recycling bins”



The Midcounties Co-operative Properties 

eco  
depo

...thinking  
of the  
future...



# Colleague engagement

## Why it matters

With over 7,800 colleagues working for the Society and a culture of openness, honesty and co-operation, it makes perfect sense for us to engage everyone in our initiatives. By communicating our messages to our colleagues they can become the voice of our Society, spreading the word to the customers and members they come into contact with. And, by engaging our colleagues in events and campaigns we've achieved some tangible energy-saving results.

## What we said we would do

- » Appoint Energy Champions

## What we have done

### Colleague teams

We now have 64 Energy Champions across our different businesses who have been taking a lead on initiatives such as Green Travel Week and Zero Waste Week, ensuring good recycling practices are happening at site and identifying energy-saving ideas. These colleagues occupy various positions in the Society to ensure that our green agenda is being implemented and is effective at grass roots level.

The Energy & Environment Steering Group, which is comprised of senior management and a Board representative, as well as colleagues from across our trading and support groups, continues to develop key initiatives, aims and objectives for the Society's green agenda.

During the year the group has been working on:

- » setting out our business recycling aims and considering ways to reduce materials used
- » evaluating our Peter Penguin educational project and helping to shape its framework (see page 18)
- » developing methods, aims and

- objectives to reduce energy consumption
- » finding effective ways to educate colleagues and members about our green agenda
- » developing ways to reduce colleague business miles

The theme for our 2008 Colleague Forum, which hosted 250 colleagues from across the business, was Defending the Environment and featured an interactive session and talk by Oxford ClimateXChange. The session highlighted what individuals can do to reduce their carbon footprint, provided feedback opportunities and increased awareness of current practices.

### Initiatives

In order to reduce energy consumption and generate good housekeeping standards we ran a Switch Off campaign, in association with the Carbon Trust. To promote the campaign Energy Champions across the business placed Carbon Trust 'Switch Off' stickers on light switches, computer monitors and other equipment to remind colleagues to switch them off. Email and plasma screen communications also helped spread this message. This was a simple campaign regarding energy consumption, but one that was vitally important and easy to implement.

Working in partnership with Walsall Borough Council, we ran a Green Travel Week in September where colleagues were encouraged to try a greener form of business travel for a week. Emails, plasma screen promotions and Energy Champions were all utilised to maximise colleague engagement. The colleague with the best green travel idea won a bike, with runners up picking up Co-operative vouchers. The week successfully reduced business travel emissions by 828kg CO<sub>2</sub> (0.83 tonnes).

The Society is part of The Prince's May Day Network, the UK's largest group of businesses committed to taking action on climate change. We report back to the network regularly, providing updates on internal developments and ideas on how businesses can further reduce carbon emissions. Our successful colleague engagement has been recognised by the network and as a result we have been invited to present at this year's Prince's May Day summit to share best practice on involving colleagues in our environmental initiatives.

## What we are going to do this year

We'll be looking to improve the education about CO<sub>2</sub> that we provide to colleagues. We'll be explaining what CO<sub>2</sub> is, what this means in real terms (by providing physical representations of a tonne of CO<sub>2</sub>), how CO<sub>2</sub> harms the environment, how CO<sub>2</sub> emissions can be reduced and how we as a business are reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

In order to reduce colleague business miles we will be running a campaign to educate colleagues on the benefits of using video conferencing and monitoring how many business miles are saved by increasing the use of this communication method. Colleagues will be educated on everything from how to use the equipment through to the facility's more technical aspects, with a focus on the environmental benefits of using the video conference facility.



Our Green Travel Week saved the CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent of 2,300 car miles, or one flight from London to Houston Texas

“ We ran a Green Travel Week in September where colleagues were encouraged to try a greener form of business travel for a week ”



# Environmental community links

## Why it matters

At The Midcounties Co-operative we pride ourselves on being a community retailer with strong links to the communities where we trade. We are now using these connections to share best practice and support local groups that are working towards the same environmental goals as us. We also have 344,000 members living and working across our trading area who tell us that they want to get involved in our green practices in active ways.

## What we said we would do

- » Finance community based projects that address the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub>

## What we have done

### Local initiatives

In order to develop our environmental goals further, we have joined forces with the Low Carbon West Oxford Community Group to exchange green ideas and business practices. The 90-strong group consists of local residents eager to help tackle climate change and raise awareness about the necessity of changing our attitudes to the environment. Some of our colleagues have been spending their community volunteering hours working with the group and we are running a pilot with the group investigating ways of allowing members to support local environmental projects.

We have been working with a number of local authorities to support their environmental campaigns. One such initiative was Oxford Civic Society's OxClean activity, designed to increase awareness of the importance of keeping our local area tidy. Colleagues and members got involved by joining organised spring cleaning events and litter picking activities.

We are supporting Wantage Area Climate Action's (WACA) drive to educate people on how they can reduce their domestic energy consumption and reduce their household bills. We worked with Oxford City Council to provide similar information

to local people via the 'Oxford is my World lite' project, following on from last year's main activities as mentioned in our Sustainability Report.

### Education

We worked closely with Oxford University to produce an educational booklet for students, advising them of ways to reduce their carbon footprint and informing them of the Society's current renewable energy projects.

Walsall College ran 'One World Week' where we held a seminar workshop on the different ways businesses can be greener and what is currently being done, using The Midcounties as a case study.

We believe early education is essential in creating good, life-long green habits. That's why our community team and the Energy & Environment Steering Group have worked together to create a new teaching tool for schools. A colleague dressed as Peter Penguin has begun visiting primary schools to teach the importance of the three 'R's - Reduce, Reuse, Recycle - to the children.

## What we are going to do this year

This year we will be working with UKCIP (UK Climate Impacts Programme) to identify climate risks and actions that need to be taken. This will involve identifying key risks to our co-operative posed by current and projected climate change and identifying action plans that the Society can adopt to help us adapt to these changes.

The Society is a member of the Black Country Chamber of Commerce Energy and Environment Committee, a committee of local businesses working together to develop environmental ideas and become greener together. Working with the committee we will be lobbying to gain increased support for renewable energy,

encourage businesses to reduce energy consumption and involve local communities in reducing energy consumption.

We plan to work with Oxfordshire Community Action Group (CAG) to identify recycling streams that are not currently available and look at the possibility of adding recycling facilities at our stores.

For example, in Bicester residents identified the need for clothing and electrical goods recycling. Working with Cherwell District Council we ran a recycling day where residents could visit our Bicester convenience store to recycle these items. Working with groups like Oxfordshire CAG we will look to develop this type of activity further.

We are investigating ways in which we can link in more closely with Transition Towns. These are communities that have said they are committed to actively combating climate change. Initially we are investigating links with Transition Swindon to look at how we can help respond to the challenges of peak oil and climate change.

We will also be increasing the level of involvement our members take in making key decisions about our green agenda by linking the Steering Group in with our membership base. Currently we have a member of the Board of Directors on the Steering Group who provides excellent feedback to the group about the thoughts of the Board. The next step is to think of new methods to feed key environmental information back to members. To achieve this we are looking to appoint a member of our Membership Strategy Committee to our Steering Group during 2009.

Our Cainscross office got behind Gloucestershire County Council's Zero Waste Week initiative and significantly reduced its waste output

“ We have been working with a number of local authorities to support their environmental campaigns ”



# Community investment

## Why it matters

Concern for the community is one of the co-operative principles that guides the Society, and as a co-operative business we are committed to supporting the sustainable development of our communities.

Dynamic communities are those with citizens who get involved. They form effective partnerships which involve strong community groups, public services and businesses that work together to support people and to meet local needs. When businesses work with communities they can make a real difference to the economic and social well-being of that community.

With the backing of our stakeholders we work to support communities through the investment of money, time and skills to provide support in a co-operative way.

## What we have done

We return a percentage of our profits back to the community to support organisations that are committed to making a difference locally through an investment of time, money and resource.

We have developed a community investment programme which encompasses these areas and is shown under the headings of:

- » Co-operative Community Funding
- » Co-operative Community Volunteering
- » Community Projects

Through this provision of funding, volunteering and project work we have supported local communities across the whole of our trading area.

## What we are going to do this year

We have made significant changes to the strategic direction of our community investment to ensure that our work is

aligned with our business goals and with the social challenges faced by the communities where we trade.

We have identified four key social issues which will direct our work:

- » Education
- » Social Inclusion
- » Health
- » Environment

It is important that our work not only benefits the community but provides a business benefit too. We have also taken steps to improve the reporting and measurement of our community investment programmes.

Our Big Tick Award from Business in the Community for our support of a Wolverhampton school has been reaccredited



# Co-operative Community Funding

## Why it matters

As a co-operative we are committed to giving something back to our members and our communities. Through an application process we give a percentage of our profits back to areas where we feel help is needed. This commitment helps us make a real difference to community projects by providing much needed funding to support their vision. We see this as a way to react positively to community need.

## What we have done

We created our Co-operative Community Funding programme to provide community groups, schools and organisations with quick and easy access to low level funding. This money is mainly used for the purchase of small items of equipment.

In order to gain funding these organisations complete an application form. These forms are then assessed by our Membership Strategy Committee. This committee consists of a range of Midcounties Co-operative stakeholders including members of our Board of Directors, colleagues and other members elected from our general membership. Judging takes place five times a year to ensure allocation of funds is as timely as possible and grants can consist of any amount up to a maximum of £500.

During 2008 we provided £131,000 in Co-operative Community Funding and supported over 260 individual organisations. On top of this we've also provided over £7,000 to community projects supported by our colleagues as part of our Colleague Co-operative Community Funding system. Another £20,000 has been handed out through our chequebook initiative, which allows branch managers to allocate cheques which can then be used to purchase goods for a community group or to buy raffle prizes.

Here are a few examples of groups and organisations that have benefitted from funding during the year:

- » We provided Chipping Norton Lido with a £300 grant to purchase new equipment for the free swim sessions it holds for teenagers
- » We awarded a £500 grant to the Fairview Allotments Association to allow them to hire equipment to clear overgrown plots, install a water supply and improve access to the site near Headington, Oxford
- » Heart Care (Walsall Cardiac Rehabilitation Trust) was awarded a £500 grant to buy an overhead laptop projector which staff will use for educational talks and patient information events.

## What we are going to do this year

For the coming year we have reassessed the way in which we will be giving financial support to our community. In order to engage with as many groups as possible we have decided to cap individual grants at £250. We feel that giving low level funding acts as a touch point with these groups and allows an initial connection to be established. The hope is that we can then provide more sustainable support through the provision of colleague volunteer hours which creates a longer lasting relationship with groups.

During 2008 we returned over £158,000 of our profits to community projects



# Co-operative Community Volunteering

## Why it matters

We believe we can provide meaningful support to our communities by offering volunteering opportunities to local groups.

Our Colleague Volunteer Programme encourages all of our colleagues to participate in volunteer activity. This may take the form of supporting community leaders by getting involved in local community events and projects, participating in challenge activities or providing support for schools. Our colleagues provide a mix of skills, resource and time so that communities are then better equipped to create strong and prosperous communities for themselves.

## What we have done

Our Society investment has made a measured difference to our local communities. Last year we recorded 22,365 volunteer hours, which all took place during work time. If this work had been paid for it would have cost the beneficiaries £324,000.

Below are a few examples of the projects undertaken over the year:

- » Volunteers from our Property Service Group transformed the outdoor space at the James Hopkins Trust's centre in Gloucester. The charity provides nursing respite care for severely disabled, life limited and life threatened young children across Gloucestershire. The team levelled ground, laid decking and erected storage sheds to keep the children's trikes in, freeing up storage space in the main building
- » Volunteers from our Membership Team pulled on their wellies and waded in to help carry out repairs on the Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal after it was damaged by flooding
- » Retail colleagues took a break from their usual jobs to become decorators for a day in order to brighten up a Walsall community venue. The team volunteered their services at the Blakenall Community Centre to paint its main meeting room.

## What we are going to do this year

This year we will continue to work with local communities to identify issues or areas of need, targeting disadvantage and developing sustainable programmes that will make a lasting impact. Using these findings as a basis we will strive for continual improvement.

In order to do this we will:

- » identify social issues that are most relevant to our business and most pressing to the communities where we trade
- » improve our communication to inspire and engage our colleagues, members, customers and suppliers to support our community programmes
- » improve the measurement of our community investment programmes by implementing a new database.



29.3% of all Midcounties colleagues have now participated in volunteer activity

## Charity Partnerships

Each year colleague representatives choose a charity to become our charity partner for the year ahead. From the end of 2007 into 2008 we supported Dogs for the Disabled, a Banbury based charity which trains dogs to provide people with disabilities with greater freedom. Our colleagues provided volunteer hours and organised a wide array of fundraising events raising a total of £150,000 for the charity. This money allowed them to buy and train 15 new puppies.

For 2009 our charity partner is Help the Hospices, created to support its 182 member hospices across the UK and co-ordinate national campaigns. We are working closely with 11 hospices across our heartlands to provide support in many different forms. Colleagues are volunteering in hospice shops, helping out at their local hospice and organising events to raise money. We're also working with Help the Hospices by linking in with their own awareness events, such as Love Your Local Hospice in February and their Go Yellow Month in June.

“ Last year we recorded 22,365 volunteer hours, which all took place during work time ”



# Community projects

## Why it matters

As a local employer and community retailer it is essential for us to engage with the communities where our colleagues and members live and work. In order to provide ongoing support we are undertaking a number of projects. These projects have been identified by assessing social risks to the business and considering the business benefits of these partnerships.

## What we have done

While we were restructuring our community investment strategy we began to recognise that often our project work was reactive rather than proactive. While this has led to some rewarding partnerships we have decided that going forward we need to be proactive and choose the right projects to allow us to address our broader social goals.

## What we are going to do this year

To address our four key social issues of education, social inclusion, health and environment we are going to be engaging with projects that encompass these themes. Below is an outline of the four main projects we will be supporting throughout the year. We will provide not only significant financial investment but also volunteering support for these projects.

### Education

Through education we can help to improve the prospects of young people in our trading area. By supporting schools we can spread our message of co-operation and mutual respect and help to build a more co-operative society from the ground up. We already work closely with local schools through our funding and volunteering opportunities; however we are looking to create some longer lasting links with selected schools in the future.

This vision was first implemented last year when we provided Sutherland School in Telford with the £40,000 it needed to prepare for its bid to become a

co-operative business and enterprise college. The school now has its new status and during 2009 we plan to engage with the college to ensure that co-operative values and principles form a basis for the pupils and members of staff.

Our ongoing education plan is to increase the number of co-operative colleges. We have set ourselves a goal of helping to support the creation of another two by the end of the year.

### Social inclusion

True to our co-operative values of equality, solidarity and social responsibility one of our key social issues relates to social inclusion. We aim to tackle this in a number of ways, including working with a theatre group to engage vulnerable young people.

During 2009 we will be working with the Fairgame theatre group in Gloucestershire. Its Knifepoint project will engage young people identified as at risk of offending in an attempt to discourage the carrying of knives. The young people will be able to create their own dramatic piece to deglamourise carrying knives. Their ultimate aim will be to produce a film which can be shown to schools in Gloucestershire, outlining the real dangers of knives.

Social inclusion is also being addressed through our ongoing community owned stores initiative (see page 7). By supporting community stores we can allow everyone to enjoy this essential amenity and ensure the stores are financially viable.

### Health

For the past two years our pharmacy business has run the Healthy Hound programme to address childhood obesity. One of our pharmacy colleagues has been getting dressed up as a cuddly seven foot dog and touring schools in our trading area to promote the benefits of an active lifestyle and healthy eating. During the reporting period Healthy Hound delivered

his message to eight schools and all together the Society gave 362 volunteer hours to the scheme. We are now in the process of looking for an exciting new health-based project which will take over where Healthy Hound left off. We will report on our progress in this area in next year's report.

### Environment

As a co-operative we recognise the importance of defending the environment – so much so that it forms an element of our Steering Wheel. As explored in previous sections of this report we are working on reducing our carbon emissions, developing our renewable energy sources and recycling waste across the business. We also have a social responsibility to encourage our members, colleagues and customers to look at their own personal environmental impact.

In order to involve the people who will influence the survival of the planet in the future we decided to engage with primary school children using a conceptual character. The community team has been instrumental in the creation and implementation of our new environmental teaching tool – Peter Penguin. Peter Penguin (pictured on the front page of this document) is a cuddly character who visits schools, along with members of our community team, to promote the importance of the 3 'R's - Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. Throughout 2009 Peter will be visiting schools, encouraging children to design their own reusable bags and explaining the actions children can take to help save the planet.

Throughout the year we will be asking for feedback from the schools Peter visits to see whether the children's awareness of environmental issues has changed and whether it has affected their behaviour long term. By measuring the success of these visits we hope to show the tangible impact these lessons have had.

Total staff turnover for the year was 31.29% and in colleagues that have participated in volunteering these figures drop dramatically to 3.4%, showing a direct link between the retention of colleagues and participation in community activity



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# The **co-operative**

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234 Botley Road  
Oxford  
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[www.midcounties.coop](http://www.midcounties.coop)

Printed on: Alleo 100% Recycled stock  
Printed by: Hickling & Squires  
Designed by: Midcounties Design Studio