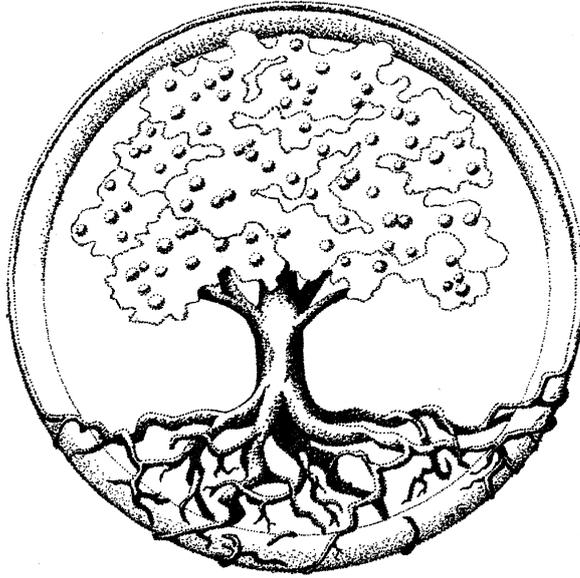


The Threshold Centre

Community Space, Affordable Cohousing, Sustainable Living



Annual Report 2007-2008

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Mission Statement

The Threshold Cohousing Centre Community Interest Company seeks to carry out activities which benefit the community and in particular to

- Operate The Threshold Centre at Cole Street Farm, Gillingham, Dorset as a demonstration of sustainable living, including sustainable building and energy systems, low levels of car use, and community market garden.
- Educate the public in relation to sustainable living and co housing
- Provide and promote affordable social housing

Company Information

Directors

Alan Heeks

Caroline Sharman

Jane Stott

Resident members

Peter Dunnett

Gay Ellis

Michael Giddings

Amanda Pearson

Nancy Winfield

Directors Report

Overview

It has been a momentous year for The Threshold Centre. Our main focus, as in previous years, has been gaining planning permission to realise our vision of turning the Cole Street Farm site into an education centre for sustainable living and cohousing.

In December 07 we submitted our revised application to the local authority which was duly reviewed by the Development Control Committee in March 08. Despite a case officers report that recommended refusal we were delighted that councillors unanimously voted to approve our proposal; subject to agreeing appropriate conditions.

It has taken longer than any of us envisaged to agree these conditions and as this report goes to print we are awaiting another Development Control Committee meeting at which these conditions will be finalised.

In the interim we have continued to develop our plans with East Dorset Housing Association, our architects and other partners, with the expectation that we will commence building in early 09. This will herald a whole new phase of life at Cole Street Farm.

Key to our revised application was ensuring 50% of our accommodation was for people on North Dorset Housing Register, and re-constituting ourselves as a community interest company to emphasise our not for profit status. We also leased an acre of land adjacent to Cole Street Farm to develop a community market garden and thereby address food production as part of our carbon reducing agenda.

Early tasks included the basic fencing off of the site, agreeing a planting plan, moving compost bins and developing some raised beds – not to mention the writing of another planning application to erect a polytunnel. We were successful with our first years crops and look forward to increased production in 08/09.

In September The Tree Council awarded us a grant that will enable us to plant an orchard of traditional apple and pear varieties with the help of pupils from Stower Provost Primary School towards the end of the year.

Despite all the challenges the year has brought we are pleased to report that our community has remained stable – and has expanded with the arrival of three temporary residents, who have come to learn about co-housing and community life with us. These extra hands have been a great help when dealing with the additional paperwork associated with grant applications and housework/catering associated with our education programme.

On a lighter note the community continues to find new ways to build and strengthen links. A particularly popular development this year has been the introduction of music sharing evenings and film viewings. Traditional events such as bonfire night, solstice, Christmas and New year have also been recognised and celebrated collectively. More than thirty people came to participate in a Dances of Universal Peace event on 21st December 2007.

We also continue to work closely with the wider community of Cole Street Lane and Gillingham. Our neighbours have joined us for coffee mornings and Sunday lunch; a number of local people have come along to our work weekends and we have hired out rooms in the main house for meetings of the Health Education Trust and to a local healer and therapist for private sessions with clients.

Economic benefits

During the last 12 months the Centre has attracted 150 visitors, and their associated spending power, to Gillingham and its surrounding area. It is not uncommon for visitors to incorporate a visit to us as part of a wider itinerary, exploring the locale.

We have developed a relationship with 2 local B&B providers who now provide “over spill” accommodation for visitors attending our courses. This has resulted in approximately £450 worth of business for Still Waters, Gillingham and The Crown Inn at East Stour.

Our policy of sourcing all materials and labour for the Centre as locally as possible continues and we are particularly pleased to be working with Jordan and Faber of Sturminster Newton as our preferred contractor for the planned building works.

Initial plans to use the Threshold Centre as a green tourism hub have been explored with the Blackmore Vale Tourism Development Company and are expected to be implemented once the centre is fully up to speed. In short this will mean the Centre using as many locally produced products as possible and promoting other likeminded businesses and attractions in the area with a view to generating growth in green tourism for venues across the local area

Education and training

During 07/08 we ran 4 co-housing courses with a total of 29 participants from a range of locations near and far. The feedback from these courses has been overwhelmingly positive (see Appendix 1); with many going away inspired.

We continue to offer informal support and guidance to enquirers from up and running cohousing groups and have made the Centre available for use by a group from Bridport who meet here regularly to discuss their plans.

Several residents are also working with the UK cohousing network to promote co housing around Britain.

Four gardening/work weekends and 4 open afternoons attracted a further 35 people: A significant proportion of these individuals came from the local area and helped us with a range of tasks, from investigating the whereabouts of an additional septic tank to creating raised beds to planting and harvesting crops in the new field.

New for 2008 has been open lunch on a Sunday where we welcome anyone from near or far on the basis that they bring some food to contribute. Friends, family, colleagues, neighbours and interested parties unable to attend at other times have been able to visit and get a flavour of what we offer here.

Yoga classes continue on a Monday afternoon with four regular attendees coming to the Centre a total of 17 times during the year.

Meditation on first Thursday of the month continues to attract several people most months.

Given that this programme of activity has been delivered whilst we are still in skeleton form we are proud of our achievements and the quality of the experience our guests have had. We look forward to an expanded schedule post development.

Environmental Impact/Sustainability

We were delighted to be awarded with the “Bronze” level of South West Tourism “Green Tourism Business Scheme” this year. It recognised our good standards in a variety of areas as well as providing us with valuable guidance for the future. We will be re-assessed in two years time and hope that with the environmental improvements we have planned we will be achieving silver, if not gold.

Key factors that contributed to our bronze rating included our policy of encouraging visitors to use public transport/ride share through cost reductions (approximately 30% of our guests take this up), producing our own food, using “green” products that were sourced locally and our approach to recycling.

During the year we have supported the development of the Local Exchange Trading System by hosting 2 trade afternoons at the centre and have started to explore the possibility of widening our food growing through a community supported agriculture project with another local farmer.

Conclusions

The Centre has clearly demonstrated its educational aims and focus over the last 12 months, despite operating in an uncertain context and with a huge amount of time being spent on planning related business. It is now on the cusp of a period of huge expansion which will enable it to deliver its full vision.

Treasurers Report

The day to day running of the Centre is on a stable financial footing, with income of £29,607 covering outgoings of £24,811 adequately. For the majority of the year two rooms and a cottage have been rented out on a medium term basis to individuals interested in learning more about co housing and community living. This income has been further augmented by service re-charges to existing residents together with revenue gained from running co housing courses (fees include B&B and provision of meals).

An on going dispute with Ecotricity around accurate measuring of our electricity consumption means we estimate we now owe them £4000.00 and expect to reconcile this difference with them shortly.

The legal, consultancy, and ancillary overdraft charges relating to the submission of our planning application amounted to £26,460 and took our total overdraft to £57,701.

We anticipate that this overdraft will be cleared in 09/10 when we receive funding from East Dorset Housing Association to develop 7 units for individuals on the housing register.

Plan for 08-09

Economic Benefits

- Commence conversion work in March 09 to turn Timber Barn and Sette Brook Barn into 7 new residential units
- Identify 7 new householders from North Dorset Housing Register by June 09
- Install new fire safe stairwell in house by September 09
- Secure grant funding for educational work and installation of clean energy systems

Education/Training

- Identify opportunities for Princes Trust to engage with build process by March 09
- Conduct follow up survey with 10% of previous course attendees and adapt/develop training on basis of findings
- Double yoga class take up by September 09
- Offer 5 co-housing workshops
- Offer 5 gardening/work weekends
- Develop co housing training for professionals in housing sector
- Develop a 6 session personal development workshop

Sustainability/Environmental Impact

- Install biomass boiler, PV and biodisc system – link services to all residential properties by October 09
- Erect polytunnel by Spring 09
- Plant orchard with support from local community during National Tree Week 08
- Create structured walkways/paths through market garden
- Create a further 6 raised beds for food production
- Increase recycling of waste by 5%.

Appendix 1 – Comments from The Threshold Centre visitors book 07/08

An inspiring experiment. Good Luck!
Susan Gunnsell, Kidderminster

Great people, wonderful food, highly informative and inspiring –
also lots of fun!
Irena Kruszona and John Crum, Pembroke

A great encouragement. A treat to see a cohousing project with
sound principles, good support for each other and good
connections with the local community. We have learned a lot.
David Helpin, Tamworth

Good step by step account of what to expect. Instructive and
educational weekend. Fun too! I feel more realistic and certain
about the way forward.
Carla Wight, Wilts

Thank you for making the difficult dream dream become clearer an
showing us how.
Anne Ling, Uxbridge

Appendix 2 – Summary of accounts 1 Oct 2007 – 30 Sept 2008

General running expenses

Income		Expenditure	
B&B	2093	B&B	700
Courses	2168		
Meals	480	Meals	588
Residents payments	13,500		
Rental income	11366	Rental exp(admin)	700
		Ctax	6000
		Water	724
		Sewage	700
		Ecotricity	8,400
		Gas	2,000
		Phone	700
		Insurance	2038
		Marketing	120
		Stationery	360
		Postage	60
		Admin	260
		Sundries	110
		Accounts	1351
Total	£29,607		24,811

Note: estimate of £4000 owed to Ecotricity for this period

Development Budget, for new development

Battens solicitors	4,500
Bank charges	660
Bank interest	3400
Land use consultants	3000
Energy consultants	2700
Drain investigations	350
Architect	8,470
Field	3,380
Total	26,460

