

## Family of Businesses Big Weekend!

*The Family of Co-operative Businesses enjoyed a full weekend of engaging with like-minded people in Cambridge!*



The weekend of 10-11 July saw the prestigious 'Big Weekend' festival take place in Cambridge. The Family of Businesses from the Cambridge area was out in force in the scorching summer sun. The Co-operative Food provided delightful summer fruit tastings including 'Grown by Us' raspberries and locally produced Cambridgeshire Strawberries! Co-operative Travel introduced their dice game 'Holiday' where festival goers threw dice to see if they could make up the word 'Holiday' to win a £10,000 holiday!

A colleague from CFS engaged with an active audience and provided a font of knowledge on CFS products as well as how explaining customers can benefit from being members. A range of other co-operatives were also present to provide the message 'There is an Alternative' way to do business.

The Co-operative Membership who sponsored and co-ordinated the event was present with The Co-operative Trailer and ran a quiz to win a holiday for four to Lake Garda on a guided tour train.

The highlight of the event for festival goers was Pif Paf's theatre production 'Honey' which was performed on the membership site. 'Honey' is a production that has been created to highlight The Co-operative's Plan Bee campaign. Find out more at

[www.co-operative.coop/membership](http://www.co-operative.coop/membership).

Co-operative and Membership Officer, Ranjit Singh commented, 'The presence of our Family of Businesses, Pif Paf, other co-operatives and our membership trailer is a proven recipe for success in getting our message across to the wider public about The Co-operative Values and Principles and mutual business ownership.'



## Annual Report 2009 – 2010

The year has proved to be both busy and successful and we have been extremely grateful for the funding support from The Co-operative Enterprise hub (CEH) and from Social Enterprise East of England (SEEE) and support from regional co-operative societies and other partners. The year has brought many changes with the change of Government and, like many other organisations, we wait to see how the dismantled regional structures will be replaced with new Local Enterprise Partnerships and the effect this will have on all our work.

**Management Committee:** The group has met five times and has continued to develop

its strategy towards meeting our business plan targets. We have been pleased to welcome Helen Underwood from the Foster Care Co-op to the group.

**Members/Networking Meetings:** We have held two this year:

- We launched the first of the Regional Co-operative Enterprise hub schemes and heard from co-ops doing business in our region.
- 'Brag & Brandish' on Social Enterprise Day enabled us to hear of the work of many co-op enterprises and practitioners.

These sessions have continued to strengthen our membership, enabled us to learn from each others' practice, to share information

and discuss relevant issues.

**Development Strategy:** the committee took a serious look at the way our work was being delivered and re-structured to streamline our effectiveness. As a result, we have moved some work away from the Secretariat function to a back office function via a company 'The Ethical Back Office'. We have set up a system for 'special contracts' and this enables to the Secretariat to focus on core work and take on special development work as necessary. The transition is still ongoing and proving successful with opportunities for further development in the future.

**Secretariat:** We renewed our Secretariat function with the Co-operative Assistance Network and the relationship continues to be

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of benefit as the volume of tasks increases.

**Promotion:** We have updated and replaced our two banner stands, sent out monthly email bulletins and produced folders for our literature. We have been represented at eighteen events across the region throughout the year promoting Co-operatives East and the co-operative ethos.

**Database:** Our database has been 'cleaned', edited, and transferred to the back office for maintenance and use for mailings.

**Website:** We have launched our web site [www.cooperatives-east.coop](http://www.cooperatives-east.coop) this year which links us in to Co-operatives UK, the national Regional Co-operative Council network and to various other relevant sites.

**SEEE:** As Chair, I have completed a term of three years on the SEEE Board, which has proved to be a hugely beneficial link for our organisation. Director Summer and Winter Schools have taken place along with a Board Skills audit and the Board now looks to steer SEEE successfully through the changing

economic and strategic times.

### **National Regional Co-operative Council**

**Network:** We have been represented at all of the national meetings including the 'awayday' looking at the future of the network. These gatherings of representatives of all the RCCs across the UK enables the sharing of information and expertise, skills and knowledge and we have learnt much from each other to bring back into our own regions.

### **The Co-operative Gateway East of England:**

The Gateway is driving forward offering business support to potential and developing co-ops and our close partnership has enabled us to make a cohesive co-op 'offer' in the region. Through the funding support of the CEH, the Gateway is able to offer free advice and develop co-operative enterprise in the six counties.

**The Co-operative Enterprise hub:** We are extremely grateful for the funding support from the hub which enables us to develop our network and to support and promote

co-operative enterprise to our members and a wider, interested client base.

### **Future plans:**

- We aim to update and re-print our regional Flyer.
- We will be undertaking a survey of our members to ascertain how we can best serve them in the future.
- I have stood down from the SEEE Board due to my change in employment and I am delighted to say that Jo Gluza from our Management Committee has been elected to the SEEE Board to continue to represent Co-operatives East.

We are in the midst of changing times and we hope the survey will help us to structure our services in the new 'geographic' map to address what it is that co-ops want from us as together we tackle our pathways in the new social and economic 'world'.

In line with Co-operatives UK, we continue to promote the co-operative option in a climate that is not only receptive but also ready. Exciting times!

Pam Walker, Chair (September 2010)

## Social Enterprise – Every Village Must Have One?

By Peter Smith

We are constantly bombarded with news and stories about Social Enterprise, we hear from politicians of all parties that 'The Social Enterprise Model' is the way forward.

What is a social enterprise? This question will frequently elicit many different answers and some are very far from the mark, especially those that feel that this is a model that can deliver service or a product at a cheap price. When my frequently worn cynical hat is on show, I often sense that some public sector bodies encourage this as an opportunity for cost saving whilst private sector sneer at it as a model run by 'do gooders'

Those that fall within either of these camps will be in for a rude awakening. A social enterprise should be an efficient business idea, designed to be long term sustainable and not reliant on grants. They should be designed to be profitable and the more lucrative, the better, because the funds raised are reinvested into the business or into the social purpose that the business was set up to support.

I then hear the bleat that social enterprises are basically cheap labour and my retort is check your facts. Many social enterprises choose to support people through employment who are

disadvantaged in one way or another. Whilst this is massively beneficial from a social perspective, on the business side the extra support required impacts on productivity increasing real costs. One thing for sure is that successful enterprises have to be more organised in their business model and structure and run very tight structures.

Many of these businesses are run as co-operatives, under the numerous headings that fall within this sector (Building, Retailers, Utility, Worker, Social, Consumer, Agricultural, Banking – the list is endless). It may even surprise some that in their village a social enterprise or co-operative exists and has been there for near a century or more. They may be better classified as a community enterprise or better known as the Village Hall. The reality is that the Village Hall is in the business of selling space, it provides a vital social purpose in the community and the profits are reinvested in that social purpose.

At Norfolk RCC, we have the support structure to help groups or individuals that believe they have the idea that can become a business to fulfil a social purpose. This has recently been seen in our work to help

communities look at opening a community owned shop. It may not be appropriate for all groups, but it is a model that is proven and results in wonderful strengthening of local communities. (Followers of the BBC Archers programme will be well aware of the trials & tribulations.) It may be that there is a desire to take on the local pub, set up a local food co-operative, community farm or sports association. Whatever, do not assume that in the current economic climate it cannot be done. I would argue that this is the ideal climate to launch a new venture on the basis of survive this, then you have a strong idea.

The Government is trumpeting The Big Society; perhaps a glance at some of Norfolk's rural communities is required, for there exists wonderful examples of the basic idea of 'TBS' in action and working in projects run by local people.

The support we are able to give is made possible through the Seamless Support Programme, from which it is possible to source small bursaries to help strengthen current projects or investigate potential new ideas.

If you or your community needs help in getting an idea off of the ground, give Peter Smith at Norfolk RCC a call on 01362 698216 or email [peter@norfolkcc.org.uk](mailto:peter@norfolkcc.org.uk)

## Awards and New Premises for 1st Question East

*Andrea Coptcoat and Bill Knowles receive the Social Enterprise Mark award from Michelle Rigby, CEO of Social Enterprise East of England*



1st Question East Co-operative are proud to announce that they have been awarded the Young Suffolk Quality Standards Award, in recognition that they are a well run and safe provider of services for children and young people. This follows their gaining the Social Enterprise Mark earlier in the year - the first social enterprise in the East of England to do so. As if that were not enough, they have just moved to smart new premises at the Brightspace Social Enterprise Park in Ipswich.

1st Question East run training programmes based on co-operative values and principles, delivering to students, teachers, businesses and community groups.

Co-operatives East wish them well as they continue to lead the way for co-operative social enterprises in the region.

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### Links:

[www.1stquestion.coop](http://www.1stquestion.coop)  
[www.onesuffolk.co.uk/  
youngsuffolk/qualitystandards](http://www.onesuffolk.co.uk/youngsuffolk/qualitystandards)  
[www.socialenterprisemark.org.uk](http://www.socialenterprisemark.org.uk)  
[www.brightspace.org](http://www.brightspace.org)

**Essex Savers** **Essex Savers**  
launch 21st **net Credit Union**  
**Access Point** **Fair Finance for All**

Douglas Carswell, MP opened Essex Savers net Credit Union's 22nd access point at the Tendring branch of Clacton Library on 10 September. Their 23rd access point will be opening soon at Bishops Park, Jaywick, and plans are under way to open more face to face access points in libraries, community centres and churches across Essex in the coming months. They also recently opened in Harwich library.

Essex Savers net Credit Union has 1,756 members and loaned a total of £865,000 to members in the last 3 years. They are currently recruiting volunteers to help out at their contact points, so do make contact if you think you may be able to help – or if you are considering joining as a member.

For more information, please visit the website [www.essexsavers.co.uk](http://www.essexsavers.co.uk) or contact Alison Davies, Essex Savers, 53 New Street, Chelmsford CM1 1AT. T. 01245 496314 [info@essexsavers.co.uk](mailto:info@essexsavers.co.uk)

## Community Ownership brings financial benefits

Speaking in response to the announcement on 9 August by Chris Huhne, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, that from next week local authorities will be able to sell renewable energy to the National Grid, Ed Mayo, Secretary General of Co-operatives UK, who co-authored a discussion paper – A new energy infrastructure – in November 2009, which called for this step as part of a wider move towards community level energy, said:

“Co-operatives UK welcomes the news

that local authorities will be able to sell renewable energy to the National Grid because it opens up opportunities for working in partnership with local communities.

“In other European countries local authorities have grasped the benefits of co-operatives and encouraged their development in various ways.

“In France for instance, co-operatives such as Bois Bocage Energie have been developed to allow local authorities, consumers and producers to produce

energy from biomass. In Denmark, local authorities have supported the growth of district heating co-operatives through acting as loan guarantors and enabling planning conditions, working alongside housing associations, local business and householders.

“Renewable energy is an area where Big Society action could flourish, with the appetite for community ownership and control mobilised to take projects forward. Local authorities will be key in seeing these partnerships develop.”

## Earth, Wind and Fire

On 23 September, Co-ops East held its most successful event to date: Earth, Wind and Fire – exploring food, energy and co-operative passion.

30 people made it to the SmartLIFE Centre in Cambridge, from a wide variety of co-operatives and social enterprises, many of whom are new to Co-operatives East, so this has really helped to raise our profile.

We learned of the work of the SmartLIFE Centre, at Cambridge Regional College, where they research and

demonstrate ecological and sustainable building technologies. On the Earth theme, we enjoyed a presentation from Barley to Beer, and learned the story of the East Anglian Brewers Co-operative. Coldham Wind Farm was there to give us an insight into the wind energy industry in the region. Did you know that energy co-operatives are springing up all over the place?

Our keynote speaker was Ed Mayo, Secretary General of Co-operatives UK. Ed ran an interactive presentation and shared with us his vision of a co-operative future in the context of the Big Society. The

co-operative movement is on an upswing at the moment, with all the political parties vying to be more supportive of co-operatives than the others.

We then held our AGM, at which the Management Committee grew to its maximum size of nine. Finally, we were all presented with a large bag of fresh, mixed vegetables harvested the day before from Co-operative Farms.

The management committee would like to thank all the people who contributed and attended to make this event such a success.

## Co-operative Development in the East of England

[www.cgee.coop](http://www.cgee.coop)

The Co-operative Gateway East of England (CGEE) is a consortium of Co-operative Development Bodies operating in the East of England. The mission of CGEE is to co-ordinate and ensure the provision of co-operative development services across the whole of the region.

The Co-operative Enterprise hub funds CGEE to provide advice, training and registration services to co-ops that are starting up or planning change. Applications are made online at the hub website (below). CGEE will then appoint one of its member CDBs to carry out an assessment of the applicant group to determine if the project is likely to result in a robust and sustainable co-operative. If it is, up to four days of appropriate service is delivered to the group, free of charge, to help them realise their objectives.

These are some of the co-ops that CGEE have helped or is helping through The Co-operative Enterprise hub programme:

### Cambridge Wood Works CIC

CWW is now a well established co-operative, collecting waste wood and timber from all around Cambridge, ensuring that it



is all reused one way or another and kept out of landfill sites, and in doing so, they provide valuable training, volunteering and employment opportunities. CGEE helped with company registration and evaluation of the business plan.

[www.cambridgewoodworks.org.uk](http://www.cambridgewoodworks.org.uk)

### Driveaway School of Motoring

A group of driving instructors in Cambridge who have been working together for years and are now ready to incorporate as a co-operative enterprise. CGEE will be helping with company registration, business planning and governance training.

<http://driveawayschoolofmotoring.com>

### Elbow Grease

People with and without learning difficulties providing gardening, cleaning, dog-walking, befriending and lunch making services. CGEE helped them register and launch as a multi-stakeholder co-operative in Harlow.

### Harlowsave Credit Union

CGEE helped with the development of a complex and detailed business plan to help this credit union take advantage of expansion opportunities.

[www.harlowsave.coop](http://www.harlowsave.coop)

## LEAPS – Learning and Enterprise Access Points

An original collaboration between University Campus Suffolk and Suffolk County Council is now ready for community ownership. CGEE is working with them to establish a co-operative structure that will enable members of the community to 'join' LEAPS and to possibly receive a dividend in the form of discounts on courses and learning. [www.ucs.ac.uk/about/partnerships/LEAPs.aspx](http://www.ucs.ac.uk/about/partnerships/LEAPs.aspx)

### Norwich Community Agriculture

A project arising from Transition Norwich. CGEE is working with the group to establish a structure and governance procedures that fit the ethos of the Transition Movement and deliver sustainable, quality, locally grown foodstuffs. [www.eafl.org.uk/csa.asp](http://www.eafl.org.uk/csa.asp)

### Red Room

A group of like-minded socialists are hoping to set up their own community pub with community learning activities and social facilities on site. CGEE is working with them to devise the appropriate co-operative structure and to support the business planning activity.

### Willow Housing Co-operative

Established in 1984, Willow is one of the oldest surviving housing co-operatives in the country. Despite this, Willow is still having problems with the local authority. CGEE is working with them on business planning and assisting them to devise co-operative management procedures that comply with the LA's needs.

<http://willowhousing.wordpress.com>

### The Co-operative Enterprise hub scheme

For more information about The Co-operative Enterprise hub scheme, or to apply for free advice and training, please visit the website:

[www.co-operative.coop/enterprisehub](http://www.co-operative.coop/enterprisehub)

The **co-operative** enterprise hub

### Contact us

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### Visit our website

[www.cooperatives-east.coop](http://www.cooperatives-east.coop)

## About Co-operatives East

The mission of Co-operatives East is to be the voice of the co-operative movement in the East of England region – that is, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk.

Co-operatives East aims to:

- Bring together consumer and worker co-operatives, credit unions, housing co-ops, co-operative development bodies and other organisations sharing co-operative values and principles
- Represent and promote co-operative values and principles
- Raise the profile of the co-operative sector in the region
- Represent the co-operative movement and promote the co-operative difference to regional strategic development bodies and opinion formers. By working together, we can make our voice heard and ensure that decision makers consider the role that co-operative, mutual and social enterprises have in contributing to the economy and culture of the region
- Represent the co-operative sector within regional media and regional forums (including regional groupings and sub-regional networks)
- Involve members and potential members in the wider co-operative movement and in particular in active membership of Co-operatives UK
- Build partnership structures and arrangements with organisations with similar objectives
- Support the work of co-operative development bodies at regional level.