

ESG Impact Report

Supporting Community Businesses
to Strengthen Rural Britain





Chair Foreword:

A Movement for Sustainable Rural Communities

Rural communities across the UK are showing that when people come together with a shared purpose, they can build thriving, inclusive and resilient communities through businesses that are not only commercially resilient, but environmentally responsible, socially inclusive and democratically governed.

At Plunkett, we have the privilege of supporting and strengthening that movement.

For more than 25 years, we have helped nearly 900 community-owned businesses open their doors – safeguarding vital services and creating spaces that hold communities together. **Today, those businesses are doing more than surviving. They are leading.**



They are reducing energy use and investing in renewables.



They are creating employment, volunteering and skills opportunities, including for people often excluded from the labour market.



They are strengthening local economies through shorter supply chains.



They are proving that business can deliver better outcomes for people, the economy and the environment.

This report begins with the impact created by the community businesses we support – because that is where our greatest contribution lies. It then looks at our own impact and how we operate as an organisation.

Leadership also requires integrity and accountability. We therefore hold ourselves to the same standards we promote.

Over the past year, we have strengthened our own environmental measurement, deepened our commitment to equity and inclusion, and maintained robust governance aligned with the Charity Governance Code.

Rural communities that are thriving, inclusive and resilient do not happen by accident. They are built intentionally through good governance, shared ownership and long-term thinking.

Plunkett exists to ensure that rural communities not only survive – but thrive.

Alison Jeffers

Chair of Plunkett UK



ABOUT PLUNKETT UK

Plunkett supports rural community-owned businesses across the UK and is the only organisation dedicated solely to this mission.

Community businesses – from shops and pubs to farms, woodlands and community hubs – are incredibly resilient, with survival rates far exceeding the private sector.

Our vision is for thriving, inclusive and resilient rural communities. Our mission is to help people create and run businesses that are genuinely owned by local communities, based on democratic, one member one vote principles.

We champion this movement by providing specialist advice, practical tools, training, governance support and funding guidance.

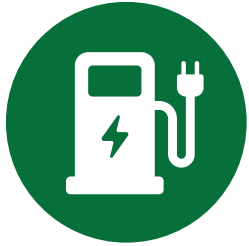


Environmental Impact (E):

Community Businesses: Driving Climate Action in Rural Areas

Rural communities are on the frontline of climate change. Community-owned businesses are responding with action.

Our 2025 Impact Report shows:



96%
of community
businesses took
climate action last year



85%
have installed or are
considering energy-
saving measures



58%
plan to invest in
energy efficiency if
funding allows

Across the sector, community businesses are:

- Retrofitting buildings for better energy performance
- Installing renewable energy systems
- Hosting refill stations, repair cafés and car sharing initiatives
- Adopting regenerative and organic land-based practices
- Shortening supply chains by sourcing locally

See the next page for some examples.

Plunkett's Role

These outcomes do not happen by chance. Plunkett supports community businesses through:

- Specialist business advice integrating environmental sustainability from the outset
- Climate-focused Special Interest Groups for members
- Communications and campaigns that highlight best practice and inspire peer learning
- Guidance on funding applications for energy efficiency and renewable projects

By amplifying success stories and equipping communities with practical tools, we help **normalise climate leadership in rural areas.**

Plunkett's own Environmental Commitment

We are equally committed to reducing our own footprint. In 2025, we:

- Measured our Scope 1 and 2 emissions, establishing a baseline of 1,590kg CO₂e
- Began planning for Scope 3 measurement to capture full organisational impact
- Transitioned to renewable energy supply
- Implemented energy-efficient lighting
- Reduced print publications and prioritised sustainable procurement
- Formalised a Sustainable Travel Policy
- Maintained flexible working to reduce commuting emissions

Our next step is to set **measurable reduction targets** aligned to our baseline year and publish progress annually.

Environmental responsibility is not an add-on to our mission – it is fundamental to protecting the rural communities we exist to serve.

Environmental Impact (E):



Woodgreen Community Shop & Post Office, Hampshire

It has taken a practical, community-led approach to reducing its environmental impact. Key initiatives include installing a solar PV and battery storage system, upgrading to LED lighting and energy-efficient refrigeration, and implementing a data-driven approach to reducing food waste. Since the solar installation became operational, electricity consumption has fallen significantly, with the system expected to generate around 30% of the shop's annual electricity needs and save approximately £4,000 per year. Food wastage has also been halved over three years through improved stock management and local redistribution of unavoidable food waste as animal feed. The project demonstrates how community-owned businesses can combine environmental sustainability with long-term financial resilience.



Smarden Community Store, Kent

It has embedded sustainability throughout its operations, combining renewable energy generation with practical circular economy initiatives. Its solar installation has generated more than 60,000 kWh of renewable electricity and avoided over 34 tonnes of CO₂ emissions. The store has further strengthened its environmental performance through battery storage technology, EV charging points, recycling schemes for batteries and vapes, bottle return programmes, reuse of packaging materials, and composting initiatives using spent coffee grounds. By integrating sustainable practices into everyday shopping habits, the store has made environmental action accessible to the whole community while reducing waste and supporting greener transport.

The Burrow Community Hub, Devon

It has delivered a community-funded decarbonisation project focused on renewable energy generation. Following extensive fundraising to repair a roof and enable installation, the community successfully introduced a solar PV system that is helping reduce both energy costs and carbon emissions. Since installation, the project has reportedly avoided over 2 tonnes of CO₂ emissions while reducing reliance on fossil fuels. What makes the initiative particularly noteworthy is the strong community engagement behind it, with residents supporting the project through fundraising events including open gardens, community meals, quizzes and craft activities. The project demonstrates how collective community action can successfully deliver meaningful environmental improvements.

Social Impact (S):



Community Businesses: Inclusive, Democratic and Life-Changing

Each business operates on a one-member-one-vote model. Decisions are made democratically, ensuring benefits flow to the wider community rather than external shareholders. The social impact is tangible:



33%

provide first paid employment opportunities



14%

employ people with disabilities or long-term health conditions



One-third

partner with charities to create supported volunteering opportunities

These businesses tackle rural isolation, hidden poverty and limited employment access. They provide safe, welcoming spaces open to everyone - not tied to faith, status or membership.

Examples include:

- Supported work placements for neurodiverse individuals
- Volunteer roles helping refugees build language skills and gain UK work experience
- Community spaces reducing loneliness and improving mental wellbeing

Plunkett's Role in Strengthening Inclusion

We support inclusive practice by:

- Embedding Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) guidance into business support
- Running EDI-focused Special Interest Group training
- Developing practical resources available through the Member Hub
- Promoting inclusive case studies to inspire replication
- Supporting communities to consult widely and engage underrepresented voices

Our communications strategy actively highlights inclusive practice, helping community businesses see what is possible - and giving them the confidence to follow suit. **When community ownership works well, it becomes a platform for belonging.**

Plunkett as an Employer

Strong, inclusive rural communities depend on strong, inclusive organisations. We therefore work to ensure our own workplace reflects the values we promote externally. Plunkett is a Real Living Wage Employer and offers a benefits package designed to support long-term wellbeing, including contributory pension and life assurance.

We've strengthened our internal culture through commitments such as the Menopause Workplace Pledge, carer-supportive policies, stress-management guidance and regular employee voice mechanisms. In 2026, we will introduce an Employee Assistance Programme to provide confidential wellbeing support, alongside a full staff survey to deepen our understanding of what helps our team thrive.

By supporting our staff well, we strengthen our ability to support communities well.

Governance (G):



Community Businesses: Democratic and Accountable

Governance is one of the defining strengths of the community business model.

Each enterprise is:



Democratically owned



Accountable to local members



Operated for community benefit



Transparent in financial and strategic decision-making

This structure embeds accountability at the heart of rural enterprise.

Plunkett ensures communities understand and implement strong governance frameworks from the outset - supporting them with model rules, board training, and regulatory guidance.

Plunkett's Governance Framework

As a national charity, we hold ourselves to the highest standards of governance so that communities can have confidence in the integrity of the support we provide.

We have adopted the **Charity Governance Code**, ensuring transparency, integrity and effective leadership.

Our governance structure includes:

- A skilled and diverse Board of Trustees with lived rural experience
- A Governance and Nominations Committee overseeing board effectiveness and succession
- An Audit and Risk Committee providing financial and risk oversight
- Regular internal board effectiveness reviews
- Independent external governance reviews every three years

As a membership organisation, we remain **accountable to our members** through Annual General Meetings and open reporting of finances and performance.

We are currently retendering our investment portfolio to ensure ESG principles are embedded within investment decision-making.

Good governance builds trust. Trust builds resilience.

Looking Ahead: 2027 and Beyond

The climate crisis, rural inequality and economic fragility demand long-term commitment.

Our priorities reflect our commitment to strengthening rural community businesses and the movement they represent. Key areas of focus include:

- Expanding climate and EDI resources for members
- Relaunching the Community Business Membership Panel
- Embedding ESG metrics into organisational KPIs to strengthen the support we offer
- Strengthening strategic communications to amplify member impact
- Measuring and reducing Scope 3 emissions
- Introducing an Employee Assistance Programme and conducting a full staff survey to ensure our team is equipped to deliver high-quality support

We believe rural communities are not passive recipients of change - they are active leaders in shaping a fairer, greener economy. Plunkett exists to ensure they have the tools, confidence and support to succeed.

ESG Performance Dashboard 2026



Environmental

Indicator	Performance
Community businesses taking climate action	96%
Energy-saving measures installed/considered	85%
Planning further energy investment	58%
Plunkett Scope 1 & 2 emissions baseline	1,590kg CO ₂ e
Renewable electricity supply	100%
Scope 3 measurement	Planned 2026

Social

Indicator	Performance
First paid job opportunities created	33% of businesses
Employment for disabled/long-term health conditions	14%
Businesses partnering with charities	~33%
Real Living Wage Employer	Yes
EDI Special Interest Groups launched	Yes
Full staff survey	Planned 2026

Governance

Indicator	Performance
Charity Governance Code adopted	Yes
Annual board effectiveness review	Yes
External governance review	Every three years
Audit & Risk Committee in place	Yes
Governance & Nominations Committee	Yes
ESG investment retender underway	Yes

Plunkett UK, The Quadrangle, Woodstock, Oxfordshire OX20 1LH
+44 (0)1993 630022 | info@plunkett.co.uk | plunkett.co.uk



Plunkett UK is the operational name of Plunkett Foundation, a registered charity, numbers CC 313743 (England and Wales) and SC 045932 (Scotland). It is a company limited by guarantee, registered number 00213235 (England and Wales).