

Our five-year strategy

2026



2031

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Who we are and what we do

Plunkett is the UK’s leading organisation supporting community ownership and represents the largest membership of community-owned businesses in the country.

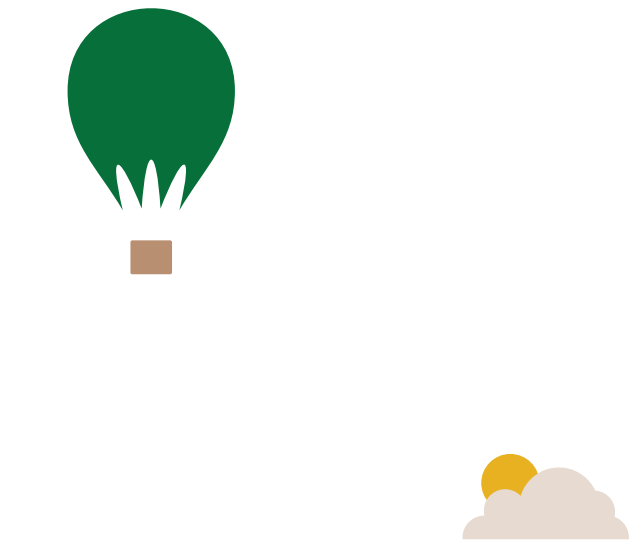
Community businesses are owned and controlled by community members, with membership open to anyone at accessible prices, and all members have equal and democratic say in how the business is run.

As the only organisation providing **dedicated UK-wide support for rural community businesses**, Plunkett is proud to support and represent a movement of almost 900 community-owned businesses across the UK. These businesses range from village shops and pubs to community farms and woodlands.

- Our work spans the entire community ownership journey.
- We raise awareness of the community ownership business model and inspire communities to take action.
 - We provide practical business support to help community businesses establish, grow and thrive.
 - We strengthen the wider environment in which community businesses operate through membership, networking, policy, and research.

Our vision, mission and values

For over a century, Plunkett has seen the power of community ownership create thriving, inclusive and resilient rural communities. Our vision, mission and values guide how we make that happen today and into the future.



Our vision

Our vision is for **thriving, inclusive and resilient** rural communities throughout the UK.

A thriving rural community

A community with a strong local economy, sustainable businesses, meaningful opportunities for employment, volunteering and skills development, and a vibrant community life that encourages and enables everyone to participate and contribute.

An inclusive rural community

A community where everyone feels welcome, can access opportunities, participate in community life and play a meaningful role in shaping its future. It ensures that everyone can benefit from, and contribute to, the social and economic opportunities their community provides.

A resilient rural community

A community that successfully adapts and thrives in the face of long and short-term economic and environmental shifts, enabling people to continue living and working locally. They also have strong social networks and leadership capacity to respond and cope with sudden or unexpected emergencies.



Our mission

To help rural communities **create and sustain** community-owned businesses and to connect them through **a stronger community business movement** that delivers...

Better business for people

Businesses that improve quality of life by providing access to essential services, strengthening social connections, supporting health and wellbeing, creating openings for employment, volunteering and skills development, and enabling people to play an active role in their community.

Better business for the economy

Businesses that strengthen local economies by creating employment, supporting local supply chains, retaining spending within communities and helping rural places become more economically resilient.

Better business for the environment

Businesses that support more sustainable rural communities by reducing travel, shortening supply chains, encouraging responsible use of resources and contributing to environmental improvement and net zero ambitions.

Together, these impacts demonstrate why community ownership matters. It is not simply a way of running businesses; it is a way of creating thriving, inclusive and resilient rural communities.

Our values

These values sit at **the very heart of our organisation**, driving our operations and decision making.

Fair

We believe rural communities deserve the same opportunities, investment and recognition as any other place. We champion equity, diversity and inclusion to ensure everyone can access, benefit from, and participate in, community ownership.

Accountable

We listen first and act second, seeking to understand the needs of our members and use their insight and evidence to shape our work.

Collaborative

We achieve more together. We build trusted relationships with partners who share our values; we share knowledge openly and bring people, organisations and communities together around a shared purpose.



The challenges this strategy seeks to address

Our new strategy builds on our former strategy to grow the size, reach and impact of the rural community business sector, and responds to the new challenges facing both rural communities and rural community businesses.

The challenges

Rural communities across the UK face growing social and economic pressures. Like communities everywhere, they are experiencing rising living costs, housing affordability challenges, increasing unemployment and pressure on public services. However, these challenges are often amplified by greater distances, fewer local services and limited transport options. While every rural community is different, many share common concerns including hidden poverty, declining opportunities, increasing isolation and loneliness, and the loss of essential local services. Together, these pressures create a cycle of decline that weakens local economies, reduces community resilience and limits opportunities for future generations.

Community-owned businesses have long helped rural communities tackle these challenges by safeguarding services, creating jobs, and bringing people together. Today, however, they face significant pressures from rising costs, reduced consumer spending, volunteer fatigue, and increased taxation arising from changes to National Insurance, the National Living Wage and business rates. Reflecting this, our latest sector survey found that 34% of community businesses were only just surviving and a further 2% believed they were at risk of closure – the lowest levels of business confidence Plunkett has recorded.

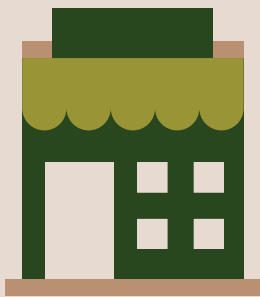
At the same time, many rural communities continue to feel overlooked within national policy and funding decisions, where measures of concentrated deprivation and persistent misconceptions about rural affluence can mean that investment and support fail to reflect the realities of rural disadvantage.

The challenge for Plunkett is therefore not simply to help communities establish community-owned businesses, but to ensure they remain resilient, relevant and recognised as part of the solution to the challenges facing rural Britain.



Our strategic priorities and expected results

Everything we do over the next five years will contribute towards these three strategic priorities:



1. Stronger Community Business



2. Stronger Movement



3. Stronger Plunkett

Our strategic priorities

1. Stronger community business

We will balance growth with long-term sustainability to create a stronger and more resilient rural community business sector.

We will achieve this in three ways:



1. Grow

We will continue to invest in and enhance our Community Business Service, ensuring communities across the UK have access to high-quality advice, training and specialist support to establish and run successful community-owned businesses. Alongside supporting new start-ups, we will place equal emphasis on helping established community businesses thrive. Through more proactive engagement, stronger relationships and timely advice, partnerships and practical support, we will help businesses become more resilient and sustainable.



2. Strengthen

Alongside more proactive relationship management and tailored business support, we will strengthen our membership offer so that community businesses receive greater value from being part of Plunkett's network. We will develop a stronger portfolio of trusted suppliers, member benefits and strategic partnerships that help businesses save time, reduce costs, increase resilience and focus more of their resources on serving their communities.



3. Maximise impact

Members told us that their ambition is increasingly not simply to save assets, but to create opportunities, strengthen communities and address local challenges. We will therefore place greater emphasis on helping community businesses maximise their impact for people, the economy and the environment, recognising that businesses delivering greater community benefit are also more likely to be resilient. Through enhanced training, partnerships and practical support, we will encourage community businesses to create opportunities for employment, volunteering, skills development and participation that strengthen both local economies and community life.

Expected results

The rural community business sector continues to grow, with more than 1,000 community-owned businesses operating across the UK by 2031, whilst maintaining one of the highest business survival rates of any business model.

Community businesses are more resilient, financially sustainable and better equipped to respond to changing community needs. They are creating greater opportunities for employment, volunteering and skills development, measuring the difference they make and continually adapting to maximise their impact.

Measure	2026 Baseline	2031 Ambition
Grow: Rural community business trading	875	1,000
Strengthen: 5-Year Survival Rate	97.5%	Maintain at 95% or above
Maximise Impact: Annual impact reporting	Annual report published	Annual Impact Report published, evidencing the social, economic and environmental contribution of the rural community business sector.
Maximise Impact: Employment partnerships	Emerging activity	National and regional partnerships in place that expand access to employment, skills development and volunteering opportunities through rural community business.

Our strategic priorities

2. Stronger movement

We will continue to build a more visible, united and influential movement of community businesses and their supporters, connected by a shared vision for thriving, inclusive and resilient rural communities and a belief in community ownership as a powerful way to achieve it.

We will achieve this in three ways:



1. Connect

Guided by our principle of listen first, act second, we will strengthen relationships with community businesses through proactive engagement and a more compelling membership offer.

We want membership of Plunkett to become an essential part of running successful community businesses; providing valuable business support, procurement benefits, and regular opportunities to connect, collaborate and learn from one another.



2. Champion

We will increase the visibility of community ownership through confident communications, storytelling and the introduction of a shared national identity that enables community businesses to demonstrate they are part of something bigger than their individual enterprise.



3. Represent

We will strengthen our policy, advocacy and research, ensuring the experiences of rural community businesses shape national conversations and that the movement speaks with a stronger, more influential voice to government, funders and other decision-makers.

It is also driven by a commitment to fairness and a determination to ensure rural communities receive the recognition, investment and support they deserve.

Expected results

Community businesses increasingly see themselves as part of a wider movement rather than individual organisations working in isolation.

Membership of Plunkett has grown significantly and reflects the diversity of the sector, with established trading businesses, emerging groups, supporters, volunteers, community shareholders, corporate partners and policymakers all feeling connected to a shared purpose. The movement is recognised nationally through a stronger collective identity, increased collaboration, greater peer learning and a more influential voice in public policy.

Measure	2026 Baseline	2031 Ambition
Connect: Established trading businesses in Plunkett membership	40%	60%
Champion: Visible community business identity	No shared identity	Rural community business identity established and adopted across the movement
Represent: Progress against priority policy ambitions	Policy programme established	Demonstrable progress on a Rural Community Ownership Fund, and improved fiscal support for community-owned businesses

Our strategic priorities

3. Stronger Plunkett

We will strengthen Plunkett, building a financially sustainable, resilient and capable organisation that can lead the rural community business movement for the long term.

We will achieve this in three ways:



1. Diversify

We will strengthen Plunkett’s financial resilience through a more diversified income model, continuing to build long-term relationships with trusts and foundations while expanding the number and range of corporate partnerships and carefully considered commercial activity that aligns with our charitable mission.

As part of this, we will expand our placemaking work, partnering with developers, land promoters, housing associations and others to embed community-owned businesses into the planning and development of new places. Working both as a retained strategic partner and through consultancy commissions, we will ensure community ownership is considered from the earliest stages of placemaking while generating sustainable income that strengthens Plunkett’s long-term impact and financial resilience.



2. Modernise

We will undertake a programme of digital transformation, investing in our systems, data and technology to improve member engagement, strengthen service delivery and generate richer insight into the rural community business sector. Better information will enable us to provide more personalised support, improve organisational efficiency and strengthen our evidence base for policy and advocacy.



3. Strengthen

We will continue to invest in our people, culture, governance and leadership, ensuring Plunkett remains a trusted, collaborative and high-performing organisation. We will also continue to develop the partnerships, skills and organisational capacity needed to lead an increasingly influential rural community business movement.

Expected results

Plunkett is recognised as the UK’s leading organisation for community ownership and the trusted voice of the rural community business movement.

We are financially sustainable, generating consistent operating surpluses that enable us to invest in our people, services and future growth, while maintaining strong reserves that safeguard our long-term resilience. Our services are proactive, digitally enabled and responsive to member needs. Through stronger partnerships, a more diversified income model and a nationally recognised placemaking programme, we have expanded both our impact and our influence, ensuring Plunkett remains equipped to support the rural community business movement for generations to come.

Measure	2026 Baseline	2031 Ambition
Operating margin	-4%	Sustain an operating surplus of at least 0% to +2%.
Balance sheet resilience	Within board approved policy	Maintain free reserves within the Board approved reserves policy throughout the strategy period.
Strategic placemaking partnerships	Emerging placemaking programme	A nationally recognised placemaking programme, with a growing portfolio of strategic partnerships and consultancy commissions generating sustainable income and embedding community ownership within new developments.
Digital transformation	Legacy systems	A successful digital transformation delivering cloud-based infrastructure, enhanced CRM and data capability, sector-leading research and benchmarking, and the safe, proportionate use of AI to improve organisational efficiency and member experience.
People and culture	Annual staff survey established	A high-performing, engaged and values-led team, evidenced through consistently strong staff engagement and performance.

Theory of change



Our belief

Community ownership is one of the most powerful ways to make our vision for thriving, inclusive and resilient rural communities a reality.

Our role

We help rural communities create and sustain community-owned businesses. And we work to unite them as a movement.

The challenge

Rural communities face growing social and economic pressures, including:

- loss of local services
- rising costs
- hidden poverty
- isolation and loneliness
- pressure on community business

Our strategic priorities

Stronger community business

Help more rural communities create community-owned businesses and strengthen those already trading.

- Grow the sector
- Strengthen resilience
- Maximise impact

Stronger movement

Build a more connected, visible and influential rural community business movement.

- Connect the movement
- Champion community ownership
- Represent the movement

Stronger Plunkett

Build a financially sustainable, modern and capable organisation that can lead the movement for the long term.

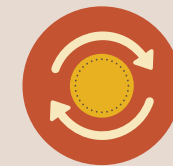
- Diversify income
- Modernise systems
- Strengthen capability

What changes

Community ownership creates: **better businesses and communities** for:



People



Economy



Environment

And we achieve **our vision** for...
thriving, inclusive and resilient rural communities.

Closing statement

Rural communities have always demonstrated remarkable resilience, determination and ingenuity. Yet resilience should never mean being expected to cope alone.

Over the next five years, **Plunkett will work alongside communities across the UK to ensure that community ownership continues to provide practical solutions to the challenges facing rural places.**

By strengthening community businesses, building a stronger movement and continuing to evolve as an organisation, **we believe rural communities are most likely to thrive, be more inclusive and resilient.**

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Above all, this strategy
reflects a simple belief:

We believe that when local people
are given the opportunity to take
ownership of the issues that
matter to them, they can shape
stronger futures for themselves
and for generations to come.

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