

WORKERS OF HUB



STRATEGY

2022 – 2026



Our organisation



Plunkett Foundation is a national charity with a vision for resilient, thriving and inclusive rural communities.

To achieve this, we support people in rural areas to set up and run a wide range of businesses which are genuinely owned by local communities, whereby members have equal and democratic control. Today, we represent over 800 'community businesses' in rural and urban areas throughout the UK, from shops and pubs through to woodlands, farms and fisheries.



Through our support for community businesses, we have a specific mission to create innovative, impactful and inclusive spaces. We achieve this by helping community businesses to:

- Provide a wider range of services and amenities that communities value and need
- Stimulate the local economy through localised supply chains
- Boost opportunities for employment, training and volunteering
- Benefit people who are most disadvantaged and excluded in today's society
- Offset climate change through delivery of environmentally sustainable initiatives
- Harness digital technologies to enhance business performance
- Promote equality, diversity and inclusion by creating safe and welcoming spaces for all.

In practical terms, Plunkett raises awareness of the community business model UK-wide and provides business support and training to help these businesses start-up and go on to thrive. As a membership organisation, we also seek to represent the interests of rural community businesses through research, policy and public affairs.

Our impact

Community businesses play a critical role in safeguarding essential services in rural communities on which people depend, such as access to food, cash, leisure, and health related services. Their existence particularly benefit those without access to private transport, those on low incomes, and those who suffer with physical mobility and poor health.

Community businesses involve significant proportions of people from a local community as shareholders, volunteers, staff and customers. Consequently, they become highly inclusive and participatory social hubs in rural areas, and as such, address a wide range of issues affecting today's society, including isolation, loneliness, mental health and wellbeing. As vital sources of employment in rural areas, they particularly seek to benefit people who would struggle to find mainstream employment such as those with caring responsibilities, people with health issues or disabilities, young parents, older people transitioning into retirement or younger people looking to gain experience and qualifications. Increasingly, community businesses demonstrate local action on global issues, such as proactive initiatives to tackle climate change, and co-ordinated responses to major weather events and the recent pandemic.

What is a community business?

Any type of business that trades for community benefit and which is democratically owned and controlled by the local community.

Where does Plunkett operate?

Our charitable aims direct our focus on rural areas throughout the UK. We accept there will be different interpretations of what defines a rural area, and as such, do not impose a single definition. From time to time, we work in urban areas where this is part of wider programmes, or where this intervention helps resource our support for rural areas.

Introducing our new strategy

Our new strategy covers the five-year period 2022 to 2026 and builds on our previous work. We start the period well placed to deliver against our vision and mission, having a skilled team of staff and trustees, an appropriate team structure, and strong relationships with a wide range of partners and stakeholders.

Our first three objectives commit to **growing the size, reach and impact of the rural community business sector throughout the UK**. This will require delivering a 'universal' service of business support and training to help more (and a wider range of) community businesses at all stages of setting up and running. It will involve greater engagement with partners and communities in geographic 'cold spots' where community businesses are currently less prevalent. It will also require a renewed emphasis of business support targeting the creation of social, economic and environmental impact. Alongside these objectives, we will embed membership at the heart of what we do in order to unite community businesses and those who support them creating a greater sense of a movement and solidarity.

Our fourth objective is to further our efforts to **represent and raise the profile of the rural community business sector through proactive communications, research and public affairs**. This will involve ongoing collaboration with key partners, undertaking policy campaigns and influencing and raising public awareness of the potential for community business to address societal issues.

Our final objective is to continue **strengthening Plunkett's own resilience and social and environmental responsibility through good governance, financial sustainability and investing in our people**.



Our changing operating environment

The strategy is being launched at a time of change, when we look forward beyond the global pandemic that has impacted the lives of everyone. Whilst we cannot predict the future with certainty, we have considered the operating environment in which Plunkett and the community sector exists and identified the following issues and opportunities that will help shape the delivery of our strategy.

a. Social and economic change

- The **acceleration of commercial business closures** during the pandemic has heightened the interest in the community ownership model as a means for safeguarding local jobs and services. Pressure will remain on Plunkett to resource its business support service and meet growing demand.
- The pandemic has accelerated the use of **digital services and technology** by people of all ages. Whilst this presents a threat to local services, it also provides an opportunity for community businesses to harness technology to deliver improved services and introduce efficiencies.
- The **cost of living crisis** is likely to have a lasting impact on the lives of everyone for the foreseeable future. Community businesses will require our support to fulfil their potential to provide local services at an affordable price and provide fair-paid, meaningful employment opportunities.
- **Increasing operating costs** such as rises to minimum wages, employee contributions, energy costs, supply of goods and business rates, will put community businesses under considerable financial strain. Plunkett will be required to inspire community businesses to innovate their business operations in line with local needs.
- **Post-Brexit trading conditions** will add long-lasting pressures and costs on the traditional, globalised supply chain. Community businesses will need to innovate and consider alternative sourcing options, including localised supply chains, in order to maintain affordability of services.

- **Ongoing migration of young people** from the countryside continues to put at risk the diversity and vibrancy of rural areas. Community businesses are well placed to create new opportunities to enable young people to remain living and working in the countryside, and potentially, contribute to the inward migration of a more diverse range of people.
- The pandemic has shone a light on **health inequalities** for those living in rural areas, with further distances to travel to access health care and inadequate public transport serving local needs. Community businesses can be supported to address this through hosting services, or helping to connect residents via transport or digital solutions.

b. Political landscape

- The UK Government's Levelling Up agenda intends to turbo charge the economy and living standards for all areas of UK, and encourage decentralised decision making. This provides an ideal opportunity to champion the community ownership model as a means for levelling up 'left behind' rural areas.
- There will be a General Election within the strategy period, which could impact on current policy agendas which are largely supportive of community ownership. Plunkett will advocate for greater levels of support to facilitate community-ownership, across all four nations to all political parties.
- There is an inconsistency in legislation in all four UK nations in respect of promoting and supporting the creation of community-owned assets. Plunkett will continue to campaign for new and more consistent community rights and a legislative framework in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland that put community interests and needs at the heart of the policy landscape.

c. Climate and net zero carbon ambitions

- The climate crisis will become a primary focus beyond the pandemic, with policy linked to facilitating net zero carbon ambitions across the UK. Community businesses can positively contribute to this through reduction and recycling of waste, reducing consumption of energy, producing and using green energy, reducing travel for customers and shortening supply chains. However, this agenda may bring challenges for groups that are prevented from easily transitioning to greener operating models due to their location, or the age or make-up of the asset they trade from.



d. Funding and financial support

- The UK Community Ownership Fund, which was launched in 2021 with £150m to support community owned assets, will be a major opportunity for the sector. Plunkett will continue to advocate on behalf of our members to ensure the fund reaches rural communities requiring support.
- The UK Shared Prosperity Fund, launched to replace EU funding post-Brexit, presents an opportunity for Plunkett to help community businesses access investments to support job growth, productivity and contribute to net zero carbon ambitions.
- Community shares generated over £18m for Plunkett supported businesses during the last strategy period, and will remain an important fundraising mechanism in the future. Plunkett will continue to advocate for community shares to be recognised by government and policy makers, and seek opportunities for match funding.
- The social investment sector will continue to have an important role in resourcing community businesses through blended loan and grant finance. Plunkett will continue to work in partnership to influence new funding streams such as the dormant assets bill to ensure the needs of rural community businesses are represented.
- Resourcing Plunkett's service from trusts and foundations through traditional 'project' activity will become more difficult as funders move towards 'place-based' strategies targeted at urban-deprived neighbourhoods. However, Plunkett will continue to champion the role of rural community businesses and their impact.
- As traditional 'project' funding becomes harder to secure, Plunkett will be required to continue to diversify its income streams to include corporate partnerships and community fundraising as well as other forms of 'earned income' including membership, training and consultancy.

Our Vision, Mission and Values

We have reviewed and re-articulated Plunkett's vision, mission and values as follows:

Our Vision is for resilient, thriving and inclusive rural communities throughout the UK

In our experience, rural communities have demonstrated resilience most strongly when they work together to take control of assets and services they value and need. With extraordinary long survival rates, we have seen first-hand how these highly inclusive and participatory community businesses stimulate community activity and generate deep and long lasting social, economic and environmental impact.

Our Mission is to work with community owned businesses to create innovative, impactful and inclusive spaces

Working with people setting up or already running community businesses, we will take a proactive approach to create spaces in which people want to live, visit and participate.

- Being 'innovative' requires Plunkett to inspire communities to reimagine how traditional businesses operate and to adapt and diversify according to their community's needs.
- To be 'impactful' requires prioritising Plunkett's resources to help those seeking to generate the greatest social, economic, or environmental impact.
- Becoming 'inclusive' means taking greater efforts to ensure our members take proactive measures to reach, work with and benefit a greater diversity of people.

Our Values are to be Inspiring, Accessible, Dedicated, Inclusive and Collaborative

Our values reflect the activities of our organisation and the culture of our people. This includes our trustees, staff, advisers and our members. In practice, we seek to be:

Inspiring: we raise awareness of the power of community businesses to drive positive change.

Accessible: we are approachable to all, and tailor our support and services to individual's needs.

Dedicated: we are focused, putting the interests of communities first.

Inclusive: we value equity and diversity and treat everyone with respect, honesty and integrity.

Collaborative: we achieve more when working closely with others.



Our strategic objectives

Five strategic objectives will govern our work from 2022-2026 to enable us to achieve our mission.

1. Growing the rural sector: Helping more community businesses to open and ensuring those already trading have the support they need to thrive.

As of December 2021, there were 627 community businesses trading in rural areas across the UK.

We have identified a need to help establish more community businesses (of all types) and to help those that already exist to survive and thrive. 'Growing the sector' also means uniting the network of rural community businesses to work together and be recognised as a cohesive movement.

We aim to support at least a 20% increase in the number of rural community businesses trading by the end of 2026 (to 752 in total). Additionally, we aim to convert 150 additional existing community businesses already trading into Plunkett membership by the end of the strategy period.

2. Extending our reach: Ensuring the community business model is known and there is relevant and accessible support available to rural communities throughout the UK.

Community businesses are currently spread unevenly across rural areas in the UK and the model is heavily weighted towards shops followed by pubs.

We want the model to become more widely recognised as a realistic option for addressing rural community needs. Our research has identified Scotland, the Northeast of England and parts of the Midlands as areas where there is greatest opportunity to grow the awareness of the community business model.

Whilst we cannot dictate where community businesses operate, we can at least take a more proactive approach in areas such as these to ensure rural communities are: a) aware of the model, and b) able to access Plunkett's services (and those of our partners) in order to establish community businesses.

By the close of 2022, Plunkett's annual business planning will incorporate significant awareness raising and partnership activity in the above areas where community businesses are currently most under-represented.



3. Deepening the sector's impact: Realising the potential for all community businesses to extend their social, economic and environmental responsibility.

Driven by local people and their needs, community businesses have long gone beyond their primary trading purpose to create a powerful “ripple” of positive social, economic, and environmental impacts.

We want to help community businesses to recognise and measure the impacts they already have, and provide the encouragement and practical support to achieve the following target areas:

- Provide a **wider range of services** and amenities that communities need and value
- Stimulate the local economy through **localised supply chains**
- Boost opportunities for **employment, training and volunteering**, particularly for younger people at risk of exclusion, older people at risk of loneliness, and others with health or educational needs
- Benefit people who are most **disadvantaged and excluded** in today's society
- Offset **climate change** through environmentally-friendly practices
- Harness **digital technologies** to enhance business performance
- Promote **diversity and inclusion** by creating a safe and welcoming space for all.

Throughout the strategy period, we will publish annual reports against these six impact areas and support 30% of our community business members to complete annual appraisals identifying impact opportunities. Alongside this, we will publish our commitment to driving positive change to equality, diversity and inclusion both internally and externally through our membership.



4. Strengthen the legal, policy and support environment for community businesses:

Plunkett has worked diligently, both independently and with a range of partners, to create a supportive environment for community businesses to establish and then thrive.

The commitment from UK and devolved governments, funders and partners has never been stronger for community businesses. However, there is still a lack of understanding of rural issues, a gap in financial resource being made available, and a tendency to fund ‘something new’ over existing models of community ownership, which have a track record for meeting community needs.

Our ability to strengthen the community business ecosystem requires further evidence of impact, clearer and more direct campaigns and greater collaboration with partners across the UK.

Our commitment throughout the strategy period is to work more closely with our members to understand the issues they are facing, and to inform our communications and public affairs. We will strive to improve our evidence base and, working with partners, we will ensure that Plunkett is the voice of rural community business and their ‘asks’ are heard loud and clear. As part of this, we will execute a major campaign relating to core policy ‘asks’ including ‘UK-wide community rights’ and a call for a fair share of funding for rural communities.



5. Secure Plunkett's financial sustainability: Ensuring our ongoing ability to continue supporting the wider rural community business movement.

Plunkett made great strides to grow and diversify our income sources during the last strategy period, but we remain heavily dependent on the goodwill of a relatively small number of grant-making bodies.

Our ultimate goal is to safeguard a core advisory service for community businesses for the longer term, and secure sufficient income to resource other key areas of our work including communications, policy and influencing. Traditional project funding supported by grants will remain a critical means for resourcing our service, but we will need to secure some longer term and larger scale projects which effectively resource a 'universal' core service throughout the UK. We will also need to continue diversifying our income sources to include corporate partnerships, community fundraising and 'earned income' such as membership, training and consultancy.

Our target is to achieve a 'break-even' position across the five year period and to maintain financial reserves at or beyond the reserve level. Any financial surplus generated above our reserve requirements will be reinvested in the delivery of our mission.



Activities essential to achieving our five objectives

Four areas of our business are the **engine rooms** for achieving our vision, mission and objectives:

1. Delivering a 'universal' community business service:

The Ambition: Over the next 5 years, we will provide a first-class 'universal' service for community businesses throughout the UK – by which we mean having sufficient resources to meet the support needs of community businesses of all types as demand grows, at all stages of their journey from setting up to running and across all areas of the UK. As well as the important work of saving assets under threat, our service will focus resources on the creation or enhancement of innovative, impactful and inclusive spaces.

Steps to achieving this:

a) Increase the accessibility and relevance of the service, including:

- Ensure our definition and description of 'community business' is easier to understand
- Refresh our marketing and imagery to incorporate a wider range of business models, and more diverse imagery of people and places UK-wide
- Publish bilingual materials and films wherever possible
- Safeguard a free and personable helpline which co-ordinates the right level of support at the right time throughout all stages of setting up and running and community business
- Extend the means for delivering support and training virtually via our staff and advisers.

b) Relaunch the service offer to fulfil the ambition of a 'universal' service, including:

- A 'core' support offer which is available to all community business models at all stages of setting up and trading, in all parts of the UK
- A more in-depth support offer which can be resourced via funded projects and consultancy.

c) Innovate and enhance the range of services we offer, including:

- Continually review and extend the range of training and business support offered
- Strengthen our consultancy offer to bridge any gaps in funded support
- Regularly review and update the model rules service, including digitising the registration process
- Develop financial support for members, including bespoke grant and loan programmes.

d) Re-position our business support to target new and existing community businesses seeking to:

- Provide a wider range of services and amenities that communities value and need
- Stimulate the local economy through localised supply chains
- Boost opportunities for employment, training and volunteering
- Benefit people who are most disadvantaged and excluded in today's society
- Offset climate change through delivery of environmentally-friendly practices
- Harness digital technologies to enhance business performance
- Promote equality, diversity and inclusion by creating safe and welcoming spaces for all.

e) Work collaboratively with partners across all nations of the UK including:

- Greater engagement with communities and partners in geographic 'cold spots'
- Identify new partners with whom we can cross refer business support
- Work with new and existing partners to design new packages of support
- Provide on-going support and training for our internal and external business advisers to enable them to help community businesses realise their potential.

2. Embedding membership at the heart of all we do:

The Ambition: Over the next 5 years, we will embed Plunkett membership at the heart of the organisation, creating a culture both internally and externally in which membership becomes a ‘must have’ for all community businesses and those who support them. Ultimately, we want to grow the Plunkett membership, and ensure all members feel aligned to a wider movement and have the opportunity to shape it.

Steps to achieving this:

a) Develop a membership engagement strategy in which we commit to:

- Engage and listen to the needs of community businesses and those who support them
- Make greater use of the Community Business Membership Panel to inform the development of our services and membership
- Regularly review and improve the way we communicate with members
- Undertake dedicated member recruitment campaigns
- Develop and implement a community business recognition scheme.

b) All areas of our work are informed by the membership from policy and research to project design.

c) Regularly review and enhance the range of membership benefits to ensure its relevance.



3. Delivering a service of information, policy and communications:

The Ambition: Over the next 5 years, we will grow our information, policy and communications output in order to inform the development of our services; better evidence and demonstrate the impact of rural community businesses; and reinforce our role as the voice for rural community businesses. In particular, our ambition is to raise the profile of rural community businesses generally, and reinforce wider activities taking place that builds a movement and unites those that the movement represents.

Steps to achieving this:

a) Strengthen the capacity to produce and publish high quality information:

- Continually improve data collection, processes and storage
- Target data collection on impact measurement (social, economic and environmental) and areas relating to equity, diversity and inclusion
- Publish our own data for benchmarking purposes and make available data for third party research
- Attract resources to carry out our own research, commissioning partners to do so where necessary.

b) Represent our members with governments and policy makers in all four nations of the UK:

- Regularly consult members to shape our views and opinions on matters that affect them
- Attend, network, and raise rural community business profile at policy events and related fora
- Build relationships and supply information to government departments and think-tanks
- React and respond to relevant policy consultations as they emerge
- Proactively feed into long term policy agendas such as Levelling Up; including the delivery of the Community Ownership Fund, UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Dormant Assets review
- Make the case for stronger and more consistent 'community rights' throughout the UK
- Work with partners to undertake high-profile policy campaigns which make the case for fairer access to funding for community businesses.

c) Refresh our brand and deliver high quality PR:

- Champion the inclusive, innovative and impactful role of community-owned businesses
- Target geographic 'cold spot' areas
- Continue to engage and build relationships with the media
- Refresh our branding to reflect our values and the community businesses we represent
- Demonstrate the role of rural community businesses as part of a movement.



4. Ensuring the effective and efficient operations of the charity:

Ambition: Over the next five years, we will strive to enhance our existing approach to our regulatory, statutory and legislative responsibilities, strengthen our internal financial systems and controls, and invest in our people. Ultimately, we want to achieve greater resilience and sustainability so that we continue to attract talented and committed people who help ensure we support and represent a thriving rural community business network.

Steps to achieving this:

a) Continue with improvements to our policies, compliance, finance and culture

- Continue to review and improve all internal policy development and implementation
- Benchmark our performance against sector standards and share our approach in our annual report
- Undertake regular risk-based assurance reviews
- Harness digital technologies to achieve efficiencies.

b) Continuing to invest in the development of our staff and Trustees

- Work more explicitly with our staff and Trustees to ensure our values are embedded throughout our activities and actions including recruitment
- Invest in learning and development opportunities: annually plan, review and measure the success of training opportunities for staff and Trustees
- Appraisal cycle: measure and manage performance by impact and how staff and Trustees go about their role, living our values and behaviours
- Annual staff survey: encourage staff to share feedback about their experiences of Plunkett to ensure we continually improve as an employer
- Skilled and diverse leadership: ensure Board recruitment is inclusive and responsive to gaps in skills
- Effectiveness review: annually assess the effectiveness and impact of our Board to ensure our corporate governance continually improves.



c) Evolve and deliver our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy

- Launch and deliver a five-year strategy to develop our internal and external approach to EDI
- Work with partners to support community businesses implement their own approach to EDI
- Seek funding to provide specific initiatives within our support offered to our sector
- Ensure strength, diversity and accountability in our own leadership and workplace culture.

d) Manage our organisational activities and supply chain to reduce our contribution to climate change

- Put into practice a set of commitments to ensure our own contribution to climate change
- Establish an environmental framework for community businesses to work towards

Appendix 1: Key Performance Indicators

Public Facing Targets:

1. Commit to strengthening Plunkett's own resilience and social and environmental responsibility through good governance, financial sustainability and investing in our people
2. Commit to achieving at least a 20% increase in net growth in the number of rural community businesses trading
 - a. At least 30% of this net growth to be based in devolved nations
3. Commit to assessing our annual Impact Report for Plunkett and the community businesses we represent (including a focus on our 6 main areas of impact) to generate positive change

KPIs against the 5 Strategic Objectives (to be reported to the Board quarterly)

1. Growing the Sector:
 - a. Support a total growth in the number of rural community businesses trading over the strategy period – by at least 20%
 - b. Convert 150 additional existing community businesses already trading into Plunkett membership by the end of the strategy period
2. Extend our Reach:
 - a. Establish and monitor the performance of accessibility plans for four cold spot areas (primarily Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and Northeast England)
3. Deepen the Sector's Impact:
 - a. Assess our operational impact annually
 - b. Support at least 30% of community business members to complete annual appraisals identifying impact opportunities
4. Strengthen the legal, policy and support environment for community businesses:
 - a. Launch / execute a major campaign relating to core policy asks including:
 - i. UK-wide community rights
 - ii. Fair share of funding for rural communities
5. Secure Plunkett's financial stability
 - a. Meet quarterly budgets
 - b. Maintain financial reserves at or above reserve level.

Appendix 2: Resourcing the Strategy

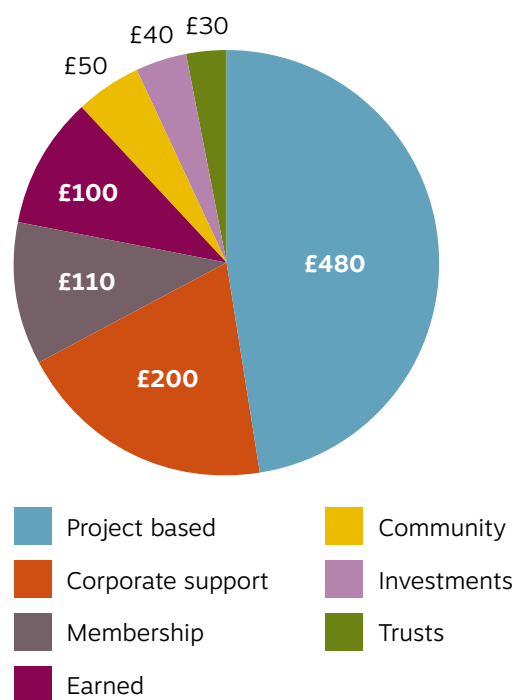
Our aim is to be able to fund, as a minimum, a 'stable core' of operations over the strategy period, costing around £1,000,000 annually (in 2022 prices).

This would enable us to resource:

- A universal community business offer which offers a consistent service across all parts of the UK for all types of business model at all stages in their journey
- A strong Research and Information Hub consisting data collection, research, policy and advocacy
- Engagement activities which grow relationships with community businesses, partners, funders and policy makers and as a means for securing alternative types of income
- Communications activities which reinforce all our operations
- Other functions which ensure good governance, legislative compliance, financial control and the smooth operations of running a charity.

We are looking to continue developing a diverse range of income sources as shown below (averaged over the strategy period based on current prices and indicative only).

Expected sources of Plunkett income 2022 to 2026 £000, pa



Our aim is, at the very least, to be able resource this 'stable core' of operations, but our aspiration is to build on this with additional thematic and geographically focused work which will turbo-charge specific elements of the strategy, sub-sectors or geographic areas. This additional work has the potential to not just grow our impact, but bring in additional income and enhance our financial sustainability.



**Plunkett
Foundation**

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