

# Ecology Building Society

## Statement on Corporate Responsibility Policy - 2007

We believe that as the world becomes more and more dominated by the actions of corporate bodies' policy on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is increasingly important. However unless the concept is thoroughly and holistically applied it will fail to deliver the protection to individuals and communities otherwise promised.

As a result the Ecology Building Society believes our CSR Statement should cover the nature and impact of our business, as well as the ways in which we go about undertaking our business.

### Our Business

The mission statement of the Society reads:

*A building society dedicated to improving the environment by supporting and promoting ecological building practices and sustainable communities.*

Our central business is the provision of finance to enable people to build or purchase homes. The right to shelter is a central human right and we are part of the mechanism by which people in the UK access that right.

Preservation of the environment for future generations is also central to our business. We believe that being socially responsible is inextricably linked to being environmentally responsible and promote this approach as a core principle in all that we do and the way that we do it..

We are a mutual organisation existing because of and working on behalf of our members. All decisions are taken on the basis of benefits delivered fairly to all our members, rather than to a smaller group of shareholders. The principle of fairness and equality are embedded within our decision-making; and we work to ensure access to membership is available to all who support our ethos..

This Statement is not intended as a policy document, but rather a summary of the key actions that we undertake to ensure our corporate behaviour conforms to the highest standards. Many of the issues covered by this statement are enacted through a number of our embedded policies and procedures. A list of these documents is below and we would be pleased to make them available on request.

- Treating Customers Fairly – Mission, Principles and Policy
- Equal Opportunities Statement
- Lending Policy
- Statement on Counterparty research
- Environment policy

### Our Stakeholders (Customers and Members)

All but a few of our customers are members of the society. Customers are not members only when legislation makes it impossible (eg for corporate deposit accounts.) We value the involvement of members in our business and encourage participation whenever that is possible. In our dealings with both members and our other customers we would always seek to apply the following principles:

- Treating stakeholders as we ourselves would want to be treated, with courtesy, honesty and integrity.

- Understanding, anticipating and responding to the individual needs of stakeholders, offering products and services appropriate to those needs.
- Seeking to be open and transparent in our dealings with stakeholders and respecting their confidentiality.
- Keeping our products and services easy to understand and simple to use.
- Balancing the needs of savers and borrowers
- Balancing the needs of new and existing stakeholders
- Responding quickly and fairly to complaints, acknowledging where we get things wrong and learning the lessons

## **Our Staff**

We have a dedicated and extremely competent staff many of whom have been with us for a long time. We value their experience and know that because of it they are able to offer customers and members a personal and professional service which understands and takes account of their needs.

- We strive to provide a workplace free from discrimination, and which meets or exceeds legislative employment standards.
- We expect to invest in the necessary training and support of staff to ensure job progression, and greater and increasing understanding of our ethical and environmental nature. wherever possible
- Our recruitment processes are non-discriminatory and fair.
- We endeavour to nurture a cooperative and constructive working environment.
- We commit to never paying any member of staff a salary that will exceed a maximum of five times the lowest full grade/scale point available.
- Wherever possible the Society will seek to support staff in taking part in community or environmental initiatives externally.
- We try to deal with disputes between staff, or complaints from staff, quickly, sensitively and fairly, and expect to keep staff involved in the process informed of the action we are taking.

## **Our Building**

We are guided by our Environment Policy in considering the source, need and supplier of every external input used and output generated by our building.

- Our building was designed to minimise the consumption of energy and resources in its construction and use. The design took into account resources such as building materials, energy, water and gas.
- We generate a proportion of the energy used in the building through solar panels installed on the outside of the building.
- We buy our electricity from a supplier using a sustainable source, and monitor developments of sustainable sources.
- We aim to reduce the amount of waste produced by the building, and recycle or compost as much of whatever waste is unavoidable.

## **Our Suppliers and Counter-parties**

- Where materials are purchased we choose recycled, re-usable or recyclable wherever possible.
- We aim to implement working practices that reduce the need for consumable resources.
- In our purchasing we try to consider local suppliers whenever possible
- For major service providers, such as our auditors, we take their environmental principles into account as part of our procurement process. We actively engage in discussion with such suppliers to ensure that they are aware of the importance of this area to us.
- As a provider of financial services we have cause to utilise the services of other financial institutions, primarily as counter-parties for the management of liquid funds. It is appropriate that such bodies be considered as a special case of supplier.

- We seek to work with counter-parties whose guiding principles and practices are not in contravention to our overall mission and ethical principles.
- Similarly for financial services counter-parties we try to make them aware of the reasons for our engagement or non-engagement, recognising that demonstrating a demand for ethical business practice is a key means for creating such practice in target institutions
- The nature of the finance industry means that it is challenging to guarantee that all counter-parties are engaged only in ethical business practice.
- We aim to engage with smaller institutions wherever possible.
- We aim to engage with institutions that have a robust and implemented environmental policy wherever possible.

## **Our Partners**

- We recognise our role in a wider movement promoting ecological principles in everyday life.
- We seek to work in partnership with other organisations and groups who share our beliefs and with whom there is a synergy of interests or activities.
- We believe such partnerships will assist us in promoting ecological principles in society, and assist us in promoting the mission and role of the Society in the wider movement.
- We provide clear and honest information about our activities and aims to all such partners.
- We aim to maintain the standards set within our 'Treating Customers Fairly' statement with all partners.
- We are rigorous when considering which partnerships to enter into in order to avoid compromising the values and mission of the Society.

## **Our Local Community**

We are a national organisation operating in a niche market and to a large extent our community is a far flung group of people who share our ethical position. However, all businesses impact in a variety of ways on the local community in which they are based. We are proud of the number of our employees who are local to the society. We expect to be seen as part of the community and a good neighbour, and to this end engage with the community in areas of concern which effect us all such as campaigning for better public transport links for the area

- We have tried to consider the needs of the local community in some aspects of the design of our building and grounds
- In so far as it is possible we would like to share our building with other local organisations. There is provision for the local community via the straw-bale meeting room within the building, which is available for use by local groups.
- We particularly welcome applications from local groups for our small annual grant programme and have in the past contributed towards play equipment in the local park.

## **Transport**

Transport is now seen as a key area in the climate change debate and we are very aware of the impact any travelling we do has on the environment.

- Staff and directors are encouraged to use public transport when travelling for the society
- We have only one company vehicle and this is a low emission hybrid.
- The office design incorporates secure cycle parking and showers to encourage staff to cycle to work.
- Flying as a means of travel for society business is discouraged.
- We are committed to reducing our carbon footprint as far as possible and in addition we have offset all the carbon emissions generated over the period the society has been in existence.