

3 The Co-operative Retailing and financial services



Environmental impact	Medium
Employer/employee ranking	1/40
Staff numbers	75,004
Gas	3.5 MWh (+0.1%)
Electricity	15.5 MWh (-3.7%)
Water	27 m ³ (no change)

Just opposite its headquarters in Manchester, The Co-operative's new home is taking shape. When it opens next autumn, the 15-storey, glass-fronted, energy-efficient building will provide a powerful and visible statement about the organisation's commitment to sustainability. The building has achieved a Breeam (BRE Environmental Assessment Method) "outstanding" rating.

Part of the regeneration of a 20-acre site in the city, it marks the latest phase in the organisation's 167-year history — proof that its long-standing approach of doing the right thing is paying dividends for the 6m members, who own and run it, and for the environment.

The organisation, which has grown from a single shop in Lancashire to become the largest consumer co-operative in the world, providing everything from food, loans and insurance to funeral care, prescriptions and legal advice, wants to benefit everyone. It sells fairly traded and

sustainable products, protects endangered species on the 50,000 acres of land that it farms and has spent £4m on wind turbines, biomass boilers and other energy installations for schools to inspire children to learn about the environment and encourage them to live a greener life.

The Co-operative, which aims to be carbon neutral by 2012, ranks first for its environmental practices in our employer survey, which will come as no surprise to staff who consider it a leader in its approach to environmental management, giving a positive green score of 83% in our employee questionnaire. Friends and family think it's green, too (78%, only 11 firms scoring higher).

"We want to be a business that is really pushing this agenda forward," says sustainable development manager Chris Shearlock, who was drawn to the company because of its green credentials, as were his colleagues (55%). Staff say that the group always goes for the most environmentally-friendly option rather than the cheapest (76%) and it supports local suppliers and businesses (70%). It wins our best bigger company with medium environmental impact award.

Environmental stuff does not stop staff getting on with their job (86%) and they don't think the organisation's activities, such as giving away almost 1m packets of seed as part of its campaign to halt the decline of bees, butterflies and moths, or supporting more than 300 walking buses to cut congestion on the school run, are driven by a desire for publicity (59%, ranking 12th). Green initiatives are worth the money (90%), staff say.

A green travel website encourages people to cycle, use public transport or share cars to work (71%) and a green travel group is aimed at making it easier for staff to leave their cars at home when the new building opens with just 150 parking spaces for 3,000 staff and room for 100 bicycles.

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Can do: The Co-op hosts youngsters in its From Farm to Fork project