

# Mara's Housing Co-operative Ltd



## Business Plan 2025

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Mara's Housing Co-operative Ltd is a not-for-profit fully-mutual housing co-operative registered under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act (2014) as a Co-operative Society. Registration Number: 5321.

# Table of Contents

<b>1. Executive Summary.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2. Purpose and Aims.....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1. Purpose.....	8
2.2. Aims.....	9
<b>3. Governance, Management and Structure.....</b>	<b>10</b>
3.1. Legal Status.....	10
3.2. Membership and Roles.....	11
3.2.1. Shareholding Membership.....	11
3.2.2. Community Membership.....	11
3.2.3. Roles.....	12
3.3. Decision Making.....	13
3.3.1. Meetings.....	13
3.3.2. Process.....	13
3.3.3. Officer & Delegate Tasks.....	14
3.3.4. Action Points.....	14
3.3.5. Collaborative Action Points.....	14
3.4. Formal Associations.....	15
3.5. Current Operational Funding.....	15
<b>4. Strategy.....</b>	<b>16</b>
4.1. Key Success Factors.....	17
4.2. Funding.....	18
4.2.1. Loans.....	18
4.2.2. Grants.....	19
4.2.3. Donations.....	21
4.3. Other organisations.....	22
4.3.1. Co-operatives.....	22
4.3.2. Local charities and non-profits.....	23
4.4. Market appraisal.....	24
4.4.1. Community spaces in Aberdeen.....	24
4.4.2. Aberdeen's rental market.....	25
4.4.3. Aberdeen's property market.....	26
4.5. Marketing Strategy.....	27
4.5.1. Message.....	27
4.5.2. Brand.....	27
4.5.3. Audiences.....	28
<b>5. Financial Appraisal.....</b>	<b>29</b>
5.1. Assumptions.....	29
5.2. Expenses & Startup Capital.....	32
5.3. Ongoing Income.....	34

5.4. Ongoing Expenditure.....	35
5.5. Forecasting.....	36
5.6. Analysis.....	38
<b>6. Risk Register.....</b>	<b>39</b>
6.1. Upfront & Unexpected Costs.....	39
6.2. Changing Economic Conditions.....	40
6.3. Membership Turnover.....	40
<b>7. Monitoring Progress.....</b>	<b>41</b>
7.1. Milestones.....	41
7.2. Evaluation and Learning.....	42
7.2.1. Key Performance Indicators.....	43
7.2.2. Quarterly and Annual Reviews.....	43
<b>8. Appendices.....</b>	<b>44</b>
Appendix: Shareholding Members.....	44



# 1. Executive Summary

Mara Co-op is a not-for-profit, fully-mutual housing co-operative registered under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014. It is an organisation that can own, lease, buy, and sell property, while all surplus we generate that cannot be justified saving will be used to further our aims. The co-op is par value, and each member owns a share of Mara Co-op for a nominal price of £1.

Mara's Housing Co-operative (Mara Co-op) will provide a free to use space for community groups from day one and in the future support those groups with a financial surplus generated from the rent paid by the co-operative's resident members.

We began as an idea for a community gardening project. After researching options for community land ownership, we realised the potential for community-led spaces utilising a housing co-operative and community space model.

Our goal is to have a positive impact on Aberdonian communities by providing affordable, quality housing to members while using our surplus to provide a community space which can be used by local groups at no cost to themselves.

Mara Co-op is managed by its shareholding members via general meeting. Each shareholding member has an equal say in the direction and activity of the co-operative and we believe in consensus-building before vote-tallying. Shareholding membership is open to individuals who intend to live at the co-operative.

We believe that in order to engage Aberdonian communities with Mara Co-op, they must have a role in deciding how our community spaces operate. Community membership will be open to all residents of Aberdeen for participation in the development and operation of our community space.

We are raising the larger capital necessary to purchase a property via loan stock, grants, and a mortgage. Once we own or lease a property and can rent out its rooms, rental income will cover our running costs and loan repayments. As we pay off our debts, more surplus will accumulate, which we can use to further the aims of the co-op's community space.

Mara Co-op's aims were developed by reaching out to groups across Aberdeen and incorporating what they want to see in their community spaces, looking at similar successful projects, and bringing in our own experience. Our aims are focussed on collective care, promoting a better model for housing, learning & DIY, community

support, and communal living. Our aims will be achieved by this dual approach of co-housing and community spaces. We believe community support starts with infrastructure.

We want to engage positively with existing projects to foster trust and collaboration. We also engage with other co-operatives throughout the UK as a member of the Scottish Housing Co-operatives Network and a pending member of Radical Routes. Both organisations offer us the ability to network and mutually support other housing co-operatives in the UK.

This business plan goes into detail about how we will achieve these aims with a thorough market appraisal, financial strategy, risk register, and systems for monitoring and evaluating our progress. We have thought deeply about what is needed to make this project succeed and thrive, and we will continue to assess our plan as conditions change.

We anticipate that Mara Co-op will benefit the Aberdonian community significantly by being able to provide resources and support for free. To newly forming grassroots groups, any cost barrier can be too much: no one will be denied access to our community space due to a lack of funds. Anticipated outcomes from Mara Co-op includes increased community engagement, resource sharing, and the formation of new groups. Our long term goal is to reduce operational costs of the building through sustainable design and retrofitting.

We believe that Mara Co-op comes at an opportune time for Aberdeen with stagnant property value, increasing costs in the private rental market, and an ever-increasing appetite for community-led resource sharing.

This document outlines the current business plan for Mara's Housing Co-operative Ltd to detail its formation, structure, governance, funding strategies, and expected community impact in Aberdeen.

## **2. Purpose and Aims**

### **2.1. Purpose**

Mara Co-op's purpose is to purchase a multi-bedroom property in an accessible location within Aberdeen, and provide affordable and liberating housing to Aberdonians alongside free support to local community groups. Initially, we will provide a space for individuals and groups to meet, and basic facilities and resources for their activities. Over time, we will improve our facilities in order to provide better support. Our space will host small events, such as coffee mornings, book clubs, film clubs, educational sessions, and other events focused on wellbeing such as yoga, meditation, exercise, and gardening. Eventually, we will be able to provide financial support to groups, by way of donations, grants, or loan stocks.



## **2.2. Aims**

Mara Co-op's aims are built on a foundation of enthusiastic member consensus, and through consultation with community groups across Aberdeen about what they want to see in their community spaces. We have incorporated this feedback with our own experience and observations as community organisers to develop our aims, summarised below:

**Collective Care** – We insist on the importance of time freely spent with one another, and see the lack of it as the cause of many of society's ailments. We will encourage a culture of radical care by actively supporting movements and organisations that bring people together.

**A Better Model for Housing** – Homes are best cared for by the people who live in them. We seek to create a model for interdependent living, showing what can be achieved collectively – beyond landlordism and private property ownership.

**Learning & DIY** – Learning together makes a strong and resilient community. Knowledge is liberating, and we believe that the best way to learn is by doing. We aim to facilitate collective learning at no mandatory cost.

**Community Support** – Our basic running costs will be covered by rental income alone. As we pay off our liabilities, we will turn over a greater surplus. We will reinvest that surplus into the co-operative's facilities and local communities.

**Communal Living** – We are committed to developing healthy systems for communal living and organisation. We will continually improve our processes, encouraging open, honest, and empowering communication and mutual improvement.

For more details, please refer to our *Statement of Values and Aims* document.

## 3. Governance, Management and Structure

### 3.1. Legal Status

**Mara's Housing Co-operative Ltd is registered under Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 as a Co-operative Society.** We are a not-for-profit, Fully-Mutual Housing Co-operative. Any surplus we cannot justify saving will be used for furthering our aims. Our financial year ends on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December.

**We can own, lease, buy, and sell property, accept loans, loanstocks, & donations.** Mara Co-op is not liable to pay corporation tax on rental income or donations, however if we sell products or services we would be liable to pay corporation tax on that income. If Mara Co-op is not selling products or services, then we should also be exempt from filing each year. We are currently applying for that exemption. Mara Co-op does not plan to take in any income from selling goods or services, besides rent.

**Mara Co-op is fully-mutual: it has an independent legal status from its members.** The operations of Mara Co-op are decided at general meetings. Nothing owned by Mara Co-op may be transferred to members, beyond very specific circumstances, such as reimbursement. More details can be found in our primary rules.

**We are a par-value co-operative.** Each member purchases a share of Mara Co-op upon joining at a nominal amount (£1), which represents the extent of their liability. A member can only have one share, it does not increase or decrease in value, and cannot be refunded, sold, or transferred. The ownership of one share gives you one vote when it comes to decision making at meetings. A member's share is revoked when they leave Mara Co-op.

## **3.2. Membership and Roles**

### **3.2.1. Shareholding Membership**

Anyone who meets the requirements laid out in our primary and secondary rules may become a member of Mara Co-op:

Members must be **over the age of 16**.

**Intend to take residence** in a property managed by Mara Co-op.

Must **not already own a property** which they are able to live in.

Must **support the management of Mara Co-op** as an organisation.

Must help **facilitate the use of community resources**.

As a result of our requirements, the voting membership of Mara Co-op will consist of members who have a vested interest in our success and are aligned with the principles, aims, and values of the Co-operative. This ensures that we can meet our aims without disagreement around the basic principles of this project.

Mara Co-op currently has 7 shareholding members. We are still accepting members but will shortly be at capacity due to the size of property we are looking at. While we don't intend to exclude anyone from expressing interest in becoming a member due to the capacity of a future property, we are conscious that there are many people interested in joining, so we're exercising patience about how and when we advertise.

Our current members have a variety of experience in relevant fields such as community organising, outreach and conservation. See Appendix: Shareholding Members for details about us.

### **3.2.2. Community Membership**

While becoming a shareholding member of Mara Co-op is open insofar that there are rooms for people to rent, representation from all parts of the Aberdonian community would be a challenge given this limitation. As a result, we are developing a structure for Aberdonians to become Community Members of Mara Co-op. Community membership is free of charge, and holds no obligation or requirements other than a person being a resident of our geographical area of interest (Aberdeen) and abiding by our safe spaces policies.

Community membership is designed as a way for people living in Aberdeen to connect with one another, and have a hand in the direction and organisation of Mara Co-op's community facilities. Community membership does not come with any shares,

or official decision making powers at our general meetings or special general meetings. While community members do not have the ability to unilaterally block decisions taken by shareholding members of Mara Co-op, it is essential for us to meet our aims that our communities have a sense of shared ownership of our project, and we will endeavour to ensure that our decisions meet their needs as much as is feasible.

Our ideal community membership structure would be one that allows community members to play a part in our long-term strategising and direction, and allow all members to feel like the community space is theirs to develop and change to support their needs as effectively as possible. While shareholding members would take part in the community membership structure, it would not be managed or operated by them. It is important to us that this structure is developed with the input of those who intend to be part of it, so we are already communicating with such individuals.

### 3.2.3. Roles

There are two officerships, Treasurer & Secretary. Officerships are reviewed at our annual general meeting. No one person can hold more than one officership at the same time, or for more than two consecutive years. These positions are detailed in our primary and secondary rules.

**Treasurer:** The treasurer shall manage our financial affairs and ensure adequate records are kept.

**Secretary:** The secretary shall ensure that the register of members and officers, documents, and meeting minutes are properly maintained.

Additionally, there are delegate positions to ensure that Mara Co-op's premises and facilities are well-maintained and our compliance obligations are met. These are reviewed at our annual general meeting.

## **3.3. Decision Making**

### **3.3.1. Meetings**

Mara Co-op has general meetings at least monthly. Occasionally, a special general meeting may be called to address urgent issues. Decisions about the organisation are formally made in these meetings.

At every meeting, one member will perform the role of chair, while another will perform the role of minute taker. Each member will have the opportunity to chair or take minutes on a rolling basis, as we believe that upskilling everyone is the best way to ensure that we have a well-rounded, capable membership.

While this description applies to the shareholding members' general meetings, similar principles will be applied to the community members' general meetings. Further details regarding the structure of the community member general meetings are in development.

### **3.3.2. Process**

Mara Co-op is committed to ensuring that every member has an impact on the direction of our organisation, and that decisions taken are collective ones which all members freely consent to. This ensures that everyone can put themselves behind decisions made, and we can collectively own our successes and failures.

To that end, we will adhere to consensus-building in our decision-making, and will only resort to vote-tallying when consensus cannot be reached.

Our process is as follows:

We begin with a discussion of the issue.

We develop early proposals.

Those proposals are critiqued, modified, and proposed again.

Repeat until we find a proposal which no member objects to.

This process can be used for big and small decisions alike, and can take as long as it needs to; critically, it ensures that every member owns the decision and can be motivated to further it.

There are times that we will make decisions by voting – we are obligated by our Primary Rules to make some decisions this way. Decisions may be brought to a vote on rare occasions when no consensus can be reached, due to time constraints or the

nature of the issue. However, in our experience of making decisions by consensus in other organisations, there has very rarely been a decision that could not be answered via consensus building.

### **3.3.3. Officer & Delegate Tasks**

We anticipate that as Mara Co-op grows, there will be many decisions which cannot wait for a general meeting in order to be addressed. Therefore, we will have Officers and Delegates who can make decisions about certain aspects of running the Co-op without bringing them to a general meeting.

As members with greater autonomy in decision-making, Officers and Delegates have more responsibilities to other members of Mara Co-op. They must keep other members informed about decisions they have made, their progress on specific tasks, and be open to scrutiny and collaboration with members who are interested in being involved, where feasible. Decisions which are judged to be significant enough to require input from the membership must be brought to a monthly meeting.

We have developed systems to ensure that all members are able to learn about, and participate in the different roles and procedures involved in running Mara Co-op. Our web server utilises separate text channels to keep track of areas of activity, which all members can access and update. Delegates and officers are expected to regularly update the membership on developments through these channels, and at monthly general meetings. This allows the rest of the membership to scrutinise decisions made through these channels, and negotiate a strategy which everyone believes is most appropriate for Mara Co-op.

### **3.3.4. Action Points**

Tasks which fall outside the remit of Officers and Delegates are assigned to members on a voluntary basis during general meetings. Once a member has taken responsibility for a task, they have autonomy to complete that task, with the same responsibilities as Delegates and Officers. More detailed updates and timelines for completion are presented at monthly general meetings.

### **3.3.5. Collaborative Action Points**

Some tasks require the involvement of several members. One member will typically become the 'bottom liner' of that project, and will be responsible for liaising between involved members to ensure the task's completion. Unlike Delegates and Officers, the 'bottom liner' does not have additional responsibilities, and does not have decision-making authority.

### **3.4. Formal Associations**

We are affiliated with Aberdeen Social Centre (ASC), a not-for-profit unincorporated association which provides meeting space and resources to community groups. Many Co-op members have years of experience on the organising committee for ASC,, and their struggles with funding and resourcing for community groups inspired Mara Co-op. As an affiliate group we abide by ASC's Safe Spaces policy, and their Principles and Aims; we have no other obligations to ASC.

### **3.5. Current Operational Funding**

Our current activities are funded entirely by member donations. Several members are offering regular donations to support our outreach activities, and to meet our current regulatory obligations. We are currently not restricted in our operations due to funding, and we are planning fundraising events.

## **4. Strategy**

Currently the sole objective of Mara Co-op is to obtain a property which meets our needs: one with enough space to house its members, and an accessible, public space for other groups to use. Our strategy is directed toward funding this objective in three ways: loans (including a mortgage), grants and donations. Additionally, we have identified other organisations that can support us.

Once we have achieved this objective our long-term strategy will concern running the community space. Our estimates suggest that the rents paid by members will exceed running costs (including paying off debts) after a certain point (see Financial Appraisal). We will be using this surplus to fund the groups who use the community space – for example buying equipment or paying for training. We will also support other co-operatives, donating or lending funds to help them get established.

We will cultivate a community of affiliated members who do not live in the co-operative but are invested in the community space. These community members will be involved in decision making for how the community space is run and how funds are distributed. This is an attractive offer for funders and investors: it ensures the outputs of our co-operative truly reflect community needs rather than being controlled by the small number of resident members of the co-operative.



## **4.1. Key Success Factors**

Our key success factors are summarised below:

**Fundraising:** Our fundraising strategy has been carefully considered so that it is affordable, feasible, and allows us meet our aims while remaining financially viable. Our funds will be closely monitored and forecasting revised regularly to ensure that we have a full picture of our situation and can adapt accordingly.

**Outreach:** We have identified relevant stakeholders are fostering positive, collaborative relationships with them to gain the support we need to meet our aims. Outreach will be done in a targeted and efficient manner, so that those who are most likely to benefit from our project or support it are most likely to know about us.

**Community Engagement:** Engendering a sense of shared ownership of Mara Co-op is necessary for the space to effectively support our communities. Communities must feel like they are part of our project, and have a say in how they are supported by us. We will ensure democratic engagement in the management of community facilities.

**Membership Development:** Members must be well-equipped to deal with both communal living and the management of the co-operative, through training, development, and skill-sharing. No one member should become indispensable as a result of the knowledge and experience they have. We will identify areas where expertise is consolidated, and take action to ensure that there is sufficient transfer of that knowledge. Members who have a good understanding of and stake in Mara Co-op will be more likely to remain with the project long-term and contribute to it.

**Strategic Alignment:** We prioritise a culture of communication, debate, resolution, and consensus within the membership of Mara Co-op. We must ensure that all members have a full understanding of our purpose, aims, and have significant input into our strategies, along with a solid understanding of them. This will ensure that our organisation remains cohesive, and our overall aims are not undermined by misunderstandings or unaired disagreements.

## **4.2. Funding**

### **4.2.1. Loans**

We have identified three main sources of loans that will allow Mara Co-op to purchase a property.

#### **Loan for property deposit**

Radical Routes is a co-operative organisation consisting of over 30 member housing and worker's co-operatives and over 30 associate member co-operatives. We will be joining the Radical Routes network in order to make use of their knowledge, experience, support, and get access to the Radical Routes Loan Fund. They offer loans with affordable interest rates to new housing co-ops to pay for the deposit when purchasing a property. This loan is typically set at 10% of the value of the property. We expect to be a member and negotiating this loan in the first quarter of 2026.

#### **Mortgage**

Several banks and building societies provide mortgages for housing co-operatives. Ecology Building Society, Triodos Bank and the Co-operative Bank are providers whose values align with our own and have supported many community focused project. The Co-operative Bank also provides mortgage-style loans specifically for non-profit organisations. We are preparing literature to reach out to mortgage providers and receive more detail on this matter.

#### **Loanstock**

Loanstocks allow individuals and organisations to support our project while receiving a return. We expect that loanstocks will constitute a significant portion of the startup capital required in order to put a deposit down on a mortgage.

As of August 2025 we are open for loanstock applications. We have already been contacted by individuals interested in offering loanstock. The terms of every application will be discussed with the lenders, but typically these loans vary between 0-4% interest over a period of 5-10 years, the total amount being paid back at the end of the period. Loanstock will help us with the initial costs, with the benefit that we will not have to pay anything back until we are in a stable financial position after a number of years.

Our financial forecasting has incorporated the required savings in order to pay back a representative example of these loanstocks, and we have treated it as if it is a mandatory monthly expense. The benefit of loanstock is that it is not actually a mandatory monthly expense, so we have flexibility with our month-to-month expenses. If necessary we could spend a large sum to fund an essential repair for example, which would be more difficult if we were regularly paying off interest on loans. We are then able to appraise our finances and plan how we are able to meet the costs of the maturing loanstock.

Additionally, as the money is still in our accounts until the point in which the loanstock matures, we are able to offset some of the costs of the interest by putting that money into a savings account. For example, our current savings account with The Co-operative Bank has an interest rate of 1.75%, which would not completely pay for the interest accrued from our loanstock, but it would mitigate it. In the unlikely event (according to our forecasting) that we would find it difficult to pay off the entirety of our loanstock upon its maturity, we can open for further loanstocks to mitigate some of the immediate cost.

The challenges presented by loanstock is the relatively short timelines that are typically agreed upon for the loanstock to mature, compared to a mortgage for example. The shorter window to accrue the funds required to repay them means that a higher proportion of our monthly income must be set aside for loanstock repayment. We believe that the strengths of the loanstock model outweigh these weaknesses, and have multiple options for mitigating this challenge.

#### **4.2.2. Grants**

We have identified multiple grant funders which support co-operatives and community organisations. Funders will find our project appealing for the following reasons:

1. our co-op will be able to fund a community space and activities sustainably.
2. by obtaining an ex- guest house we will be regenerating an economically defunct asset.
3. the community that uses the space will have a say in how it is run and what activities our surplus funds.
4. our members' expertise in sustainability and conservation will ensure the environmental sustainability of the co-operative and efforts to improve the local environment.

Grants we have identified include:

**The National Lottery Scottish Land Fund:** "Supporting urban and rural communities to become more resilient and sustainable through the ownership and management of land and land assets." Grants of £5000 - £1,000,000 are available.

**The National Lottery Community Fund:** "We fund projects that support people and communities across the UK to thrive." Up to £20,000 for projects lasting a year or less are available, and over £20,000 for projects up to five years.

**Aberdeen Council of Voluntary Organisations (ACVO):** "ACVO can support on every step of the journey from finding sources of funding to completing applications as well as connecting you with local and national funders". ACVO distributes Scottish Government funds.

**North East Scotland Climate Action Network (NESCOAN):** "The Seed Fund is designed for small community projects. Any local not-for-profit community-led organisation, with an annual income under £50,000 that is based in Aberdeen City or Aberdeenshire can apply." Up to £500 for projects related to climate change mitigation, biodiversity or sustainability. This could be spent on energy efficiency improvements for the building.

**David and June Gordon Community Trust:** "Supporting music, the arts, youth groups and community centres". Grants of up to £2000 for organisations in North East Scotland.

**ABZ Propeller Fund:** "Aberdeen International Airport is on the lookout for charities, community groups and organisations to benefit from the ABZ Propeller Fund." Up to £3000 for groups related to sustainability, economic regeneration, and education.

**Sanctuary Scotland:** "Our key objective is to support the development of successful and sustainable communities in the areas where we operate." The organisation runs over 600 homes in Aberdeen.

**LUSH:** "Charity Pot grants provide targeted funding to small, grassroots groups... Charity Pot grants prioritise projects that aim to create long-term change". Environmental projects are supported by the grant.

**The Co-operative Bank:** "Grants of up to £1000 are available to Charity and Community Bank Account customers to deliver projects that will enhance their communities and environment."As a customer of The Co-operative Bank we can apply to their Customer Donation Fund. We will be applying for this grant to cover the costs of a fundraising event.

For the purposes of our business plan, we have chosen to exclude any estimates of grant funding from our projections. Although we are confident that we have a good chance of receiving grant funding, we must ensure that we can operate, even if we do not end up receiving a large grant. This is not to understate the impact that grants would have on our forecasting they would save us a significant amount of money. If we do receive grant funding, our forecasts will be revised.

#### **4.2.3. Donations**

To begin we need some cash-flow for advertising material, software and web services, and fundraising and outreach events. Members are currently funding these early stages through donating.

We have a payment gateway set up to accept donations from the public. However, we don't expect that periodic donations will constitute a large proportion of our income. From our experience with organising similar projects, such as the Aberdeen Social Centre, and from our communications with Glasgow's Autonomous Space (GAS), we understand that relying heavily on donations often leads to a precarious financial position.

We are currently planning a ceilidh fundraiser. As well as raising money, these kinds of events foster good-will and increase engagement with our project. It will be an opportunity to invest people in our work. We will have the community membership sign-up process finalised in time for this event, so that we can use the event to get people involved. We will run further events depending on the ceilidh's success.

## **4.3. Other organisations**

### **4.3.1. Co-operatives**

While Mara Co-op is a unique project in Aberdeen and Scotland as a whole, we believe it will be important to engage with other co-operatives throughout our development – learning from them and supporting each other.

Co-operatives often prioritise other co-operatives when deciding how to distribute their surplus funds, and we believe that we can obtain support from our fellow co-ops through loanstock or donations.

We will prioritise co-operatives with whom our members have existing relationships, and which share similar aims, values, and areas of activity to our own. We will prioritise local co-operatives wherever possible. Some of these include:

**Krakatoa (Black Cat Collective).** A workers co-operative in Aberdeen which is closely involved with community spaces in the city.

**Sumac Centre.** A social centre co-operative in England which also has flats it rents to individuals.

**Radical Routes Co-operative.** A co-operative that functions as a support network for housing co-operatives across the UK. They provide loans to help housing co-operatives purchase properties, which we will apply for.

**Catalyst Collective.** A collective which supports housing co-ops in the UK with legal advice, accounting, training about their regulatory obligations .etc.

**The Co-operative Bank.** We have our bank account through the Co-operative Bank, and there is the potential to receive our mortgage agreement from them.

**Scottish Housing Co-operatives Network.** An unofficial collective of housing co-operatives and aspiring housing co-ops across Scotland who support one another with resources and feedback.

We have positive relationships with the Scottish Housing Co-operatives Network, The Co-operative Bank, Catalyst, and Radical Routes. We will be joining Radical Routes, and have had legal support and guidance from Catalyst.

### 4.3.2. Local charities and non-profits

There are several non-profit organisations operating in Aberdeen who we can learn from: we can learn from their experience of running non-profits, their governance structures and how they meet the needs of their communities. They also have members and users who we can target for outreach.

**Aberdeen Council for Voluntary Organisations (ACVO):** Supports voluntary and non-profit third-sector organisations in areas such as governance, process, funding, and outreach.

**Community Food Initiative North East (CFINE):** Supports communities by providing access to fresh, healthy food, as well as financial advice and support to individuals in crisis. Can advise on facilities like community kitchens and pantries.

**Aberdeen Social Centre (ASC):** Space for community and activists groups to network and utilise shared resources. They already engage in a similar project to what we aim to achieve, and their values align very closely with ours.

**Aberdeen Trade Union Council (ATUC):** Large membership of trade unionists, many of whom will align with our values.

**Station House Media Unit (SHMU):** SHMU Community Radio can assist with outreach.

**Grampian Regional Equality Council (GREC):** Can provide support regarding accessibility, safety, equality, diversity and inclusion.

**North East Scotland Climate Action Network (Nescan):** Can support sustainability initiatives, for example providing grants to improve a property's energy efficiency.

**Living Rent:** Scotland's tenants union, can advise on issues relating to tenant rights and needs.

**Shelter:** Housing charity, can advise on the housing needs of people in Aberdeen and factors that lead people to housing insecurity.

## **4.4. Market appraisal**

Three different areas influence the viability of Mara Co-op. Firstly, as we will be requesting loans, grants and donations we need to show that we will benefit the city of Aberdeen. Secondly, the rental market influences Mara Co-op because its members will be tenants of the co-operative – without a demand for affordable rented accommodation, we would not be able to rely on a supply of members. Lastly, property prices will affect us because paying off the loans used to buy the property will be our main cost; fortunately conditions in Aberdeen are currently favourable.

### **4.4.1. Community spaces in Aberdeen**

An important part of our offer is a public space for free use by community groups; it is this that makes it worth individuals and organisations donating, lending, and granting funds to the co-operative. There is clear desire among Aberdeen's grass roots community for more support. Responses to the question **'What kind of support do you believe Aberdeen's community and activist groups are most in need of?'** in a survey we are running include:

"Bigger spaces for community activities, money."

"Housing, community space, green space."

"I think Aberdeen's community and activist groups need a place to meet, organise and do activities and organise workshops."

"Access to physical spaces. A local space (Snug) has just closed and ASC has become more and more popular!.. ASC alone is not enough to facilitate access for all groups and events who need a space."

"Improved quality of meeting spaces, both in terms of size, number and accessibility... the lack of facilities in Aberdeen was compounded by the closure of several libraries and Belmont Cinema."

"Funding, access to resources like kitchens."

"Financial support for tools / equipment, or access to those tools / equipment."



Spaces that community groups can access in Aberdeen are often costly, with prices ranging from £10 to over £50 per hour<sup>1</sup>. In our experience, even cheap options are prohibitively expensive. Community groups, often organising around issues related to poverty in one way or another, or whose members have little spare income, can rarely afford hiring a space for a couple of hours for even a monthly meeting. Offering a space free of charge allows these groups to use their financial resources more effectively, meet more frequently and do more activities.

Currently the most similar project to Mara Co-op operating in Aberdeen is the Aberdeen Social Centre (ASC) which charges a yearly affiliation fee of £50 (or £100 for national organisations). In return, affiliates gain access to the space for meetings and storage, and can use equipment such as tables, printers, and speakers. ASC is the cheapest space in Aberdeen available and has over twenty groups affiliated with it.

However, ASC's key weakness is that it does not possess a property and relies on income from affiliations and donations to pay its rent and running costs. As such, ASC is unable to grow beyond its current capacity, and will face scheduling issues from multiple groups requesting the space at the same time. Additionally its narrow financial margin puts it at risk, for example from a change in the conditions set by its landlord. Rather than having a community space that relies on income to pay the rent, the rent paid by Mara Co-op's residents would pay for a community space. This is a much more sustainable model which has the opportunity to grow as debts are paid off and more surplus from the rents is available to fund more activities and offer more services.

#### **4.4.2. Aberdeen's rental market**

The average cost of renting in Aberdeen/Aberdeenshire has risen by 4.3% in the year to June 2025, similar to Scotland as a whole; the average cost of renting one bedroom flats (being most of the cheapest properties) has risen the most, by 4.9% to £589 per month. This is following a trend of rising rents since 2021<sup>2</sup>. While the annual increase in rent has slowed since 2023, rents show no sign of decreasing, with one head of a letting agency saying in June 2025 that there's "never been a better time" to invest in buy-to-let properties in Aberdeen, with a lack of supply driving rents up<sup>3</sup>.

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1 *Community spaces*, Aberdeen Council of Voluntary Organisations (ACVO), accessed 19/07/2025.  
<https://acvo.org.uk/opportunities/community-spaces/>

2 *Housing prices in Aberdeen*, Office for National Statistics (ONS), accessed 19/07/2025.  
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/housingpriceslocal/S12000033>

3 *Aberdeen expert claims 'there's never been better time to invest' in buy-to-let properties*, Press and Journal (P&J), 2025, accessed 19/07/2025.  
<https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/business/local/6782498/aberdeen-property-expert-backs-aberdeens-buy-to-let/>

Housing quality is a concern in Aberdeen, with poorly insulated, damp and mouldy properties being common: local members of the tenant's union Living Rent have reported frequent experience of such issues first-hand and from talking to tenants in public outreach.

Our fully-mutual structure means rent paid to the co-operative is only used for the co-operative, rather than going to an individual landlord; members can be sure that their rent will be used responsibly to address maintenance issues and improve the quality of their home. Additionally, Mara Co-op will provide accommodation for its members for cheaper rent than what is on offer in the private rental market.

Altogether this makes the co-operative an attractive option for people seeking accommodation in Aberdeen, so we are confident that we will have a consistent income from rents and that rooms will not be left vacant for long.

#### **4.4.3. Aberdeen's property market**

The average house price in Aberdeen remained stable in the year to May 2025, in contrast to the rest of Scotland which saw a 6.4% rise. Prices for detached properties in Aberdeen rose by a similar amount as the Scottish average, but we are seeking to establish the co-operative in the city centre where most properties are terraced. Terraced houses in Aberdeen saw a 2% rise in price in the year to May 2025 (Office for National Statistics, 2025). A report using different measures showed a decrease in average house price of 1.7% from the first quarter of 2024 to 2025<sup>4</sup>.

However, the specific property type we have been looking at are guest houses. There are currently a number of former guest houses for sale in central Aberdeen, which are usually terraced properties costing around £300,000. Many meet our requirements for a large number of bedrooms with a large open ground floor space. These properties, being large and set up for multiple private occupancies, are generally undesirable to buyers and hence have stayed on the market (without an increase in price) for many months. We have already seen the price of one property we viewed drop by 3.3%, indicating that the price of these properties is likely to remain stable or drop in the period we are looking to purchase a property.

Average house prices in Aberdeen are currently around 75% that of the average price for Scotland and just about 54% that of the average price for the UK. Aberdeen is a relatively viable location to establish a housing co-operative with a public space, because the much lower costs resulting from the property price allow a surplus to be generated from the residents' rents.

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4 *Aberdeen Housing Market Report first quarter 2025*, John MacRae & Rainer Schulz, accessed 20/07/2025. <https://www.aspc.co.uk/media/ssyee5af/first-quarter-2025.pdf>

## **4.5. Marketing Strategy**

Our marketing strategy is directed at organisations and individuals who can help us achieve our goal of obtaining a property by providing funds. It is not currently aimed at potential users of the community space; because the space will be offered free of charge, its users are not sources of income. We are confident that a user base exists (see Market Appraisal) and will market to them once we have a space. Nor is our current marketing strategy aimed at potential members; we have enough members already, and we are confident that rental conditions in Aberdeen ensure a supply of members should we need to replace any (Market Appraisal).

### **4.5.1. Message**

At this stage we are seeking resources. Our proposal to those who can offer resources is simple: **“Mara Co-op will provide a free to use space for community groups from day one and in the future support those groups with a financial surplus generated from the rent paid by the co-operative’s resident members.”** What we are offering to the audience we are currently marketing to is the opportunity to benefit Aberdeen by investing in a sustainable model of running a community space which will enable the city’s grass roots to grow and be more effective in their diverse goals.

### **4.5.2. Brand**

We have established a colourful brand that communicates themes of collaboration and friendliness. Our logo of grasping hands suggests our ideal of helpfulness and echoes the designs of historical social endeavours. Illustrations have a playful style to show that we are approachable.

### 4.5.3. Audiences

We have identified three audiences for outreach and different styles to communicate with them effectively, as well as a variety of outputs. Our website is aimed at all audiences.

**Funding organisations.** These are grant funders and lenders. Our reason for outreach to this audience is for resources – funds, knowledge, support. Our style and tone when reaching out will be competent and concise so that we show we are worth investing in. Outputs aimed at this audience include official documents, a presence on LinkedIn and media explaining the project in depth.

**Other organisations.** Other co-operatives, charities, unions and so on who share our values. Our reason for reaching out to these organisations is to obtain feedback and endorsements and to promote the project to their members. Our style and tone will represent us as an effective and open organisation that inspires confidence and will listen to feedback. Outputs aimed at this audience include a presence on Facebook, a letter requesting organisations to endorse us, posters and flyers.

**Individuals.** Potential shareholding and community members, other interested individuals. Our reason for reaching out to this audience is to recruit members, obtain donations and loanstocks, and receive feedback and endorsements. Our style and tone will be inclusive and attractive when reaching out to this audience, attempting to engage the audience as a project they would want to be personally invested in. Outputs aimed at this audience include presences on Instagram and Facebook, posters, flyers, and leaflets giving an overview of the project.

## 5. Financial Appraisal

We have considered what we need to meet our aims as Mara Co-op. This has involved identifying what costs we will incur, regulatory and legal requirements, income streams, feasibility, sustainability, risks to our project, and several other aspects. We have a clear picture of the costs that we will likely incur throughout each stage of this project, and we have developed a model which is sustainable and allows for sufficient surplus in order for us to continue meeting our aims into the future.

### 5.1. Assumptions

Throughout this appraisal, we have encountered a number of instances where we do not have sufficient data in order to offer a concrete value. This is natural, given the fluidity of several aspects of our project. Our assumptions are as follows:

**Model Property.** We are not yet in the position to put an offer in on a property, and as such we do not have details on specific aspects of the property that we will eventually purchase. So we chose a model property for the purposes of this appraisal. We chose a property that we determined was suitable for meeting the aims of Mara Co-op, that is within our budget, is around the average cost of a suitable property, and one that we would be willing to proceed with purchasing if we were in the position to do so today. We also wanted to choose a property that we had sufficient information about, to minimise unnecessary assumptions which could impact the clarity of this appraisal. The model property we chose is the Skala Guest House, 2 Springbank Place, AB11 6LW as it meets all of the above criteria. It was listed at time of developing this appraisal for £305,000 – however at time of writing the property has dropped to an asking price of £290,000. The prices of guest houses in Aberdeen appear to be consistently dropping from our experience, so we are confident that maintaining the assumption that we will spend £305,000 on purchasing a property will allow us flexibility in finding a property which meets our needs and allows us to meet Mara Co-op's aims as effectively and affordably as possible. We have viewed this property, and had detailed discussions with the owner regarding cost of upkeep, utility costs, council tax, among other considerations. As a result, we feel that this is an ideal model property to base this appraisal on.

**Grant Funding.** Despite our intention to apply for relevant grant funding, we have developed this appraisal with the assumption that we receive a small amount of grant funding, if any. We have done this for a number of reasons, but one of the main reasons is that we want to be confident in our feasibility as a project. Grant funding would be a massive benefit to this project and would allow us to significantly increase the support we provide to our communities. However, we do not want to be in the position where we are uncertain of our feasibility in the instance that grant funding doesn't manifest. Despite this caution, we are very confident in the fact that Mara Co-op is an excellent candidate to receive grant funding.

**Debt Makeup.** We are open for loanstock applications as of the 1<sup>st</sup> of August, 2025, and have already been approached by several individuals interested in submitting a loanstock application. However, until we have received enough loanstock applications, and have a concrete idea of their exact timescales & interest rates, we have went with the assumption that all of our loanstock will be provided at an average of 2% interest for an average of 10 years. At this moment in time we believe that estimate to be realistic, as we are aware of multiple people intending to agree to loanstock over a longer timeline at a lower interest rate – which we expect to offset any loanstock that has slightly shorter timelines or higher interest rates.

**Ongoing Costs.** We have included costs of consumables and non-consumables that we expect to have to purchase and replace in order to maintain a functioning property and community space. As part of this costing, we included estimated costs for replacing these items regularly. Many items do not have a specific, predictable, due date for replacement (such as furniture, computers, ongoing maintenance .etc). As such, we provided cautious estimates in order to ensure that, if anything, our business plan overestimates these ongoing costs rather than underestimates them. These estimates were made by researching each specific cost, and determining what the low-end time frame would be for replacement / recurring the cost. For maintenance costs, we added an annual cost of 1% of the value of the model property (£3,050) annually as a baseline, alongside an extra cost every 10 years for 10% of the value of the property (£30,500), to account for extraordinary maintenance that we cannot predict.

**Utility Costs.** Until we have purchased a property and begin to receive bills for our energy usage, we will not have a specific, known, cost for utilities such as electricity and gas. So in order to determine how much we expect to pay, we researched the average cost of electricity and gas in our area, looked at data regarding average energy costs and usage in properties with similar characteristics to our properties of interest, and spoke to owners of properties we are interested in purchasing to find out how much they pay for their utilities. We believe that this has given us a relatively accurate idea of how much we should expect to pay for utilities, and have once again been cautious with our estimates – estimating high to avoid a situation where we end up with less money than we need in order to continue operating.

**Inflation & Market Conditions.** For our forecasts, we have assumed that inflation at the time in which we purchase a property will be 3.5%, around what it is at the time of writing. We have also assumed that the asking price for our properties of interest will be around what they are today. This is because we do not expect inflation or property values in Aberdeen to spike significantly over the next year. However, we have included increases in interest rate and inflation in our yearly forecasting – once again in order to provide us with a cautious forecast for our security as an organisation. We have also made cautious assumptions on interest rates on loans from Radical Routes and mortgage providers, which were based on information provided by those organisations and our own independent research.

## 5.2. Expenses & Startup Capital

Initial Costs (all priorities)	
Annual Costs	Amount
Compliance	£3,859.76
Office	£1,649,87
Utilities	£382.17
Inventory	£3,133.90
Building	£1,118.88
Property & Finance	£320,826.91
<b>Total</b>	<b>£330,971.49</b>

Table 1: Summary of startup costs, including priorities (1 - 5), for Mara Co-op to purchase a property and prepare it in accordance with our aims. See our [forecasting spreadsheet](#) for more details.

Our forecasting shows that we expect to spend approximately £330,971.49 on day one to begin operating in accordance with our aims. This includes the purchase of a property and all other costs that we expect to incur along the way. For more details see our forecasting spreadsheet.

Day 1 Income	
Incomes	Amount
New mortgage type loans	£244,000
New loan stock	£50,000
Cash	£35,000
Other (e.g. fundraising)	£5000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£334,000</b>

Table 2: Summary of assumed startup capital.

For the purposes of this forecast, we assumed that this startup capital would arrive from multiple sources. These are:

**£50,000 from loanstock** (10yrs @ 2% on average).

**£40,000 from member contributions, grants, and donations.**

**£213,500 from a mortgage agreement** (25yrs @ 8.5-11.5%).

**£30,500 from loan agreement with Radical Routes** (25yrs @ 6.0-7.5%).



As these are estimates, we expect that the exact makeup of our startup capital will be different. We are committed to ensuring that we do not receive loanstock, loans, mortgages, or take on any other form of debt until we believe that we are able to operate sustainably while repaying them.

This model suggests that we will have an extra £5,000 available to us after all expenses are accounted for on day one. We believe this is a rather slim margin. However, as we get closer to the stage that we are able to purchase a property we will have a more concrete understanding of the costs involved in operating the specific property we decide to purchase, and will create a new forecast with those numbers in mind – ensuring that we have adequate excess in case of unexpected costs. Table 1 includes everything that we would like to pay for on day one, including things that aren't essential.

<b>Initial Costs (Priority 1)</b>	
<b>Annual Costs</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Compliance	£1,265.56
Office	£1068.35
Utilities	£382.17
Inventory	£1058.50
Building	£1118.88
Property & Finance	£320,826.91
<b>Total</b>	<b>£325,720.37</b>

*Table 3: Summary of startup costs for Mara Co-op to purchase a property and prepare it in accordance with our aims. This only includes priority 1 expenses – those that are essential to the functioning of the property upon purchase.*

Table 3 above shows our expected costs when we only include expenses that we believe are essential to the functioning of Mara Co-op in accordance with our aims. It excludes purchases that we believe would be nice to have, but not essential, such as instant water boilers, community space resources such as a television, and gardening supplies that aren't essential for basic maintenance. As can be seen when comparing it to table 1, we can save approximately £5,000 when removing startup costs that we do not deem to be essential. While we believe this would have an impact on the benefit that Mara co-op can provide to its members and the community, we are strategically prioritising our expenses in order to ensure that in situations where we can't afford everything we would like to offer, we are still able to function in accordance with our aims in a sustainable way.

### 5.3. Ongoing Income

Rental Income				
Income	Quantity (no. of payments)	Frequency (per year)	Cost	Annual Income
Room 1	1	12	£473.72	£5684.64
Room 2	1	12	£473.72	£5684.64
Room 3	1	12	£473.72	£5684.64
Room 4	1	12	£473.72	£5684.64
Room 5	1	12	£473.72	£5684.64
Room 6	1	12	£473.72	£5684.64
Room 7	1	12	£473.72	£5684.64
Room 8	1	12	£473.72	£5684.64
Room 9	1	12	£473.72	£5684.64
<b>Subtotal</b>				<b>£51,161.76</b>

*Table 4: Expected rental income from leased rooms within Mara Co-op premises. All rooms average £109.32 per week / £473.72 per calendar month.*

The rental income that Mara Co-op expects to take in is based on 9 bedrooms being permanently occupied. Given the properties we are of interest to us, at this price range, we believe that this number of rooms being leased at any given time is feasible and realistic. Note that our forecasting going forward includes an extra 5% void to account for any periods in which all rooms are not being leased.

As mentioned previously, the monthly rent that each member pays may look different to this table in reality. We agreed to tie the average rent to the Local Housing Allowance rate for a one-bedroom rental for Aberdeen, for the purposes of this forecast. This is because we intend to offer rental agreements to recipients of local housing allowance at a price that they can afford. Rent will not be any lower than that rate, and for some members will be higher insofar as they can afford it and are willing to pay. Therefore, we expect that our actual income will be slightly higher.

## **5.4. Ongoing Expenditure**

<b>Annual Costs (all priorities)</b>	
<b>Annual Costs</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Compliance	£717.13
Office	£499.22
Utilities	£7745.44
Inventory	£704.43
Building	£3195.87
Property & Finance	£33,175.82
<b>Total</b>	<b>£46,037.91</b>

*Table 5: Expected annual ongoing costs.*

Table 5 includes all of our expected ongoing costs for managing and maintaining Mara Co-op. This includes consumables and non-consumables that will need to be replaced periodically – such as computers, furnishings, office supplies, etc. It also includes regular bills, such as utilities, insurance, and council tax. This table also includes an added cost for saving money in order to repay our loanstock on time.

## 5.5. Forecasting

Year Balance			
Month cost total:	£3836.49	Year cost total:	£46,037.91
Month income total:	£4263.48	Year income total:	£51,161.76
Month balance:	£426.99	Year balance:	£5123.85
<b>Surplus margin: £46,037.91</b>			
<b>Income-to-cost ratio: 89.99%</b>			

Table 6: Simplified balance forecast by end of year 1. See [forecasting spreadsheet](#) for details.

By the end of year one we expect to be left with a surplus of around £5,123.85. This represents a surplus margin of 10.01%, and therefore an income-to-cost ratio of 89.99%. We believe that this is a sufficient margin which suggests that Mara Co-op has the capacity to deal with some unexpected costs without resorting to increased debt. This model suggests that once we have purchased our property and begin leasing rooms to members, our first year will be relatively stable.

Our yearly forecast (Table 7) shows that, once established, Mara Co-op can be financially stable and be able to repay its debts in full over the years. We will also continue to accrue capital over time, which can be allocated to repaying our loanstocks upon maturity, to improvements to the property and community spaces, and eventually to funding and supporting other community groups directly. Although we included loanstock repayments in our annual costs tally (Table 5), the fact that we do not need to repay those until their maturity means that in the short-term we have increased flexibility.

Our yearly forecast includes inflation at an estimated 3.5% and our costs increasing annually reflect that. Our rent increases annually by 2% in order to account for the same while remaining cautious. Our forecast includes a spend of 10% of the value of the property (plus inflation) in order to account for major works on the property. This can be seen on Table 7 every 10 years.

Year 10 on Table 7 shows a significant deficit of £80,383. This is because that is the year where loanstock matures and is repaid in this model. It is also the same year that the cost of major works comes out. Importantly, despite those costs, year 10 still leaves Mara Co-op with a balance of £31,000. In reality, loanstock will mature at different stages depending on the duration agreed upon between Mara Co-op and each specific funder. Overall, our model suggests that Mara Co-op is feasible and sustainable as a project, even when given relatively conservative assumptions.

Yearly forecast (simplified)				
Year	Total In	Total Out	Cash surplus	Bank Balance
1	£385,358.54	£367,636.33	£17,722.20	£17,722.20
2	£52,474.32	£40,706.06	£11,768.26	£29,490.47
3	£53,580.87	£41,981.87	£11,599.00	£41,089.47
4	£54,707.54	£43,099.25	£11,608.29	£52,697.76
5	£55,855.62	£44,225.51	£11,630.11	£64,327.86
6	£57,025.61	£45,310.49	£11,715.12	£76,042.99
7	£58,218.27	£46,405.31	£11,812.95	£87,855.94
8	£59,434.09	£47,509.81	£11,924.29	£99,780.23
9	£60,673.61	£48,623.76	£12,049.86	£111,830.08
10	£61,937.36	£142,320.54	-£80,383.18	£31,446.90
11	£62,763.00	£50,462.46	£12,300.54	£43,747.44
12	£64,076.62	£51,202.15	£12,874.47	£56,621.92
13	£65,418.15	£51,966.78	£13,451.37	£70,073.29
14	£66,788.11	£52,757.22	£14,030.89	£84,104.18
15	£68,187.02	£53,574.35	£14,612.67	£98,716.85
16	£69,615.31	£54,419.08	£15,196.33	£113,913.18
17	£71,073.83	£55,292.36	£15,781.47	£129,694.66
18	£72,562.82	£56,195.16	£16,367.66	£146,062.32
19	£74,082.95	£57,128.51	£16,954.44	£163,016.76
20	£75,634.77	£102,702.10	-27,067.32	£135,949.43
21	£76,995.83	£59,091.05	£17,904.78	£153,854.21
22	£78,611.68	£60,122.46	£18,489.22	£172,343.42
23	£80,260.97	£61,188.81	£19,072.16	£191,415.58
24	£81,944.32	£62,291.33	£19,652.99	£211,068.57
25	£83,662.33	£63,431.23	£20,231.09	£231,299.66

Table 7: Simplified yearly forecast. Total Out row does not include the savings for loanstock repayment. Costs increase by 3.5% and rent increases by 2% annually in order to account for inflation. For more details, see our [forecasting spreadsheet](#).

## **5.6. Analysis**

When considering every aspect of our model, we believe it shows that Mara Co-op has the potential to be a sustainable, financially responsible co-operative with the capacity to meet our stated aims. At start-up we have high initial costs in order to make the property liveable and useable as a community space. These costs will be covered primarily by loans which we have demonstrated can be affordable for us. Once established, Mara Co-Op will be able to generate a surplus sufficient for maintaining our property, repaying our debts, and improving our facilities over time. This model is conservative in terms of predicted income and tends high on estimated costs. This is appropriate to ensure the success of our model, despite the challenges we may face.

## **6. Risk Register**

We are aware of a number of risks to our model that we are considering and preparing appropriately for.

### **6.1. Upfront & Unexpected Costs**

The costs associated with starting up Mara Co-op are significant, estimated at around £330,000. We have a large amount of capital to obtain in the first instance. Throughout this Business Plan we have explained the ways in which we intend to gather those funds; however, we are aware that early upfront costs can vary and we must acknowledge the possibility of unexpected upfront costs arising that could increase our early costs. Hidden maintenance and compliance issues and delays to moving in (resulting in lost rent) are examples of unexpected upfront costs.

We are facing this challenge by working to ensure that we have a cash buffer above what we expect to require in order to become fully operational, as evidenced by our forecasting. In the worst case that a significant upfront cost arises early on, we intend to either have sufficient insurance (insurance has been costed in our forecast) to cover those costs if it is property related, or borrow money in the form of loanstock or traditional loans in order to meet it.

We will minimise the risk of unexpected costs arising from problems with the property by getting a home report, EPC report, and a full inspection of the property and its condition; this will allow us to take any additional costs into account.

Although not incorporated into the forecasts within this business plan, we will apply for grants (see section 4.2), which have the potential to significantly strengthen Mara Co-op's financial situation.

## **6.2. Changing Economic Conditions**

Given the significant impacts experienced by businesses and organisations across the world this century, from COVID-19 to the financial crash in 2008, we believe it is reasonable to consider what the impact of changing economic conditions would have on Mara Co-op, and prepare appropriately where possible.

While we have very little control over the economic conditions we find ourselves in, we are aware of the current economic conditions faced by the UK and Aberdeen. And while there are challenges in many respects, the condition of the property market is currently quite suitable for us. Summarised, property prices in Aberdeen are low and not predicted to increase significantly in the near future and inflation has stabilised since the pandemic. Because we forecast that we will generate a surplus, we should be able to absorb some of these costs arising from global or national economic changes.

## **6.3. Membership Turnover**

We anticipate some turnover of membership over the lifetime of Mara Co-op. When members leave the Co-op, they take their knowledge and experience with them; without adequate preparation, this loss could impair our ability to meet our obligations and aims.

As part of our annual review, we will assess the distribution of knowledge and skills within Mara Co-op, and identify areas in which knowledge needs to be further democratised. We also intend to provide members with the opportunity for continued skills development, such as training courses and workshops relevant to the management of Mara Co-Op.

We are not concerned about lost income from vacant rooms. We are confident that there will be no shortage of potential tenants, and the cost of vacant rooms has been incorporated into our forecast.



# 1. Monitoring Progress

## 7.1. Milestones

We will monitor our progress and impact through regular internal reviews, community feedback, and milestone tracking. The milestones in our first eighteen months are outlined in table 8.

In our first year, we will work toward a series of key milestones that will allow us to secure a long-term, member led housing and community space. By quarter 3 of 2025, we aim to finalise our governance documents, complete outreach materials and begin engaging with local organisations for support. We will also gather community feedback and organise our first major fundraiser event.

Between quarter 4 of 2025 and quarter 2 2026, we will focus on loan stock outreach, approaching funders and strengthening our financial position. This includes securing a mortgage agreement in principle, confirming tax exemption, joining Radical Routes, and applying for larger grants.

By Q3 2026 we aim to be in a position to purchase a suitable property.

2025												2026								
Quarter 1			Quarter 2			Quarter 3			Quarter 4			Quarter 1			Quarter 2			Quarter 3		
Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
		Complete core governance and process documents																		
				Complete outreach materials, business plan																
				Collect and analyse quantitative and qualitative feedback																
				Engage with local community organisations to build support and endorsements																
									Fundr aiser											
									Approach potential funders											
									Outreach for loanstock: host meetings, pitch, negotiate											
															Secure mortgage agreement in principle					
															Confirm corporation tax exemption					
															Join Radical Routes, negotiate loan					
															Apply for larger grants					
																		Be in a position to purchase a property		

Table 8: Milestones timeline for Mara Co-op.

## 7.2. Evaluation and Learning

We are implementing mechanisms for feedback and learning at every stage: reviewing progress on milestones at fortnightly meetings, quarterly and annual reviews, and using surveys to gather input from the community that we hope to benefit.

A number of quantitative and qualitative metrics will be used to assess different areas of activity while we are in the fundraising stage and property acquisition phase (see our [Internal Performance Review](#) document for relevant metrics after this phase).

Area of Activity	Quantitative Metrics	Qualitative Metrics
<b>Properties</b> What are we doing to find properties? Are we finding enough properties that are within our budget and have what we need?	Property prices (including change in price over time) No. of properties viewed No. of viable properties found	Relationships with potential sellers Suitability of properties
<b>Community Engagement</b> Are people invested in the project? Are we building a community that will work with us long-term?	No. of organisations we have specific support arrangements with No. of meetings with other organisations and individuals No. of community members	Relationships with organisations and individuals Feedback
<b>Reach</b> Are people hearing about us? Are we reaching the audiences we want to reach?	Social media statistics (no. of posts, followers, engagement rate etc.) Website statistics (no. of visitors, which pages are most visited etc.), no. of survey responses No. of printed materials No. of places advertised in	Feedback from individuals (e.g. 'where did you hear about us?') Feedback from organisations we are asking to distribute our outreach content and materials to their members
<b>Fundraising</b> Are we raising the funds we need to succeed? Where are our funds coming from and what are our most effective ways of acquiring funds?	Amount of money raised No. of grants applications, successful and unsuccessful No. of loanstock agreements No. of fundraising events and other activities Comparative effectiveness of different fundraising activities	Feedback from fundraising event attendees Feedback from grant funders and lenders we have applied to
<b>Viability</b> What do people think about us – are they confident we can succeed? Are our finances healthy? Is our financial forecast accurate?	No. of endorsements received from individuals and organisations Financial statistics (expenditure, income, whether costs of anything we've budgeted for is changing significantly etc.)	Feedback from organisations and individuals General economic conditions which may affect us
<b>Organisation</b> Are we making progress? Are milestones being met effectively and on time? Are we organising the project effectively?	No. of deadlines met or failed No. of meetings Meeting attendance	Feedback from shareholding members

### **7.2.1. Key Performance Indicators**

Currently our KPIs are the number of endorsements received from individuals and organisations, and amount of money raised. These reflect our priorities of building a community of supporters who are confident in our ability to benefit Aberdeen, and our fundamental requirement of raising enough funds to achieve our aims.

As we are only now starting to apply for grants and loans, we do not yet know what is a good number of endorsements. We will seek feedback from funders and our community to ascertain a number to aim for.

The amount of money we are aiming to raise is £334,000 (see section 5).

### **7.2.2. Quarterly and Annual Reviews**

The outcomes of quarterly reviews will be recorded in a Review Log, while outcomes of annual reviews will be published as an Annual Performance Review Report available on our website.

Each review will look closely at how realistic our goals, business plan, and timelines have been. If we have missed a milestone, we can look at relevant metrics to understand where the problem was. We then decide whether our internal processes need updating to better support our work.

Our Internal Performance Review processes allow us to examine the challenges we face, whether organisational, financial or political. Our reviews ask how we respond to those challenges, and what they reveal about our current capacity, strengths, or blind spots. These reflections and lessons learned help us plan more sustainably for the future.

In our reviews we will also evaluate whether we are genuinely living our aims and values as described in our Statement of Values and Aims: that housing should be secure and democratic; that our space should be accessible, welcoming, and inclusive; and that we are contributing to local organising efforts.

Recognising that additional experience can give us deeper insights, we may seek external support from advisors or peer networks such as Radical Routes, particularly when evaluating legal and financial areas of activity.

## 8. Appendices

### Appendix: Shareholding Members

#### **David Parkes (they/them)**

David is a resident of Aberdeen and has been for around 10 years now, having arrived from a small fishing town on the north-east coast of Scotland. They attended Moray UHI, gaining a HNC in Computer Science, before going to the University of Aberdeen to earn a BSc(hons) in Conservation Biology. While at university, they were closely involved with the Conversation Society acting as treasurer. They have years of experience working in laboratory environments, with a focus on pollution monitoring while working for Marine Scotland, and now work as a full-time Legionella Risk Assessor across Scotland. As a result they are experienced in developing & adhering to strict methods, scientific writing, environmental issues, and health & safety compliance. They are also first aid trained.

They have become well-integrated into community organising spaces within Aberdeen, with groups such as Living Rent, Fossil Free Pride Aberdeen, Radical Film Club, SCALP, and a number of others. They have had a particular focus on paying attention to the collective momentum within communities and supporting people in harnessing that energy into productive organising. David also played a significant role in the Organising of 2024's Climate Camp Scotland, which took place in Aberdeen, by putting together a number of 'community caucus' events so that representatives of communities across the North East of Scotland could have their voices heard on how they'd like to see Climate Camp Scotland support them.

David was accepted as a member of Aberdeen Social Centre's organising committee in 2023, and has been focusing on outreach for the centre. A particular focus of theirs was updating and developing the Aberdeen Social Centre's safe spaces policies.

David is one of the founding members of Mara Co-op, and the current treasurer. Their focus has been on developing a business plan, forecasting, and grant writing. The experience and knowledge they have gained throughout their personal, interpersonal, and professional work life means that they are well suited to this role, and can advise on a number of matters related to Mara Co-op's outreach strategies and risk assessments, along with our compliance and health & safety obligations.

### **Fiona Napier (she/they)**

Fiona moved to Aberdeen in 2008 and has been involved in organising in the city since then. She is one of the founding members of the Aberdeen branch of Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign (2010) and Aberdeen Social Centre (2018), and is on the organising committee of both organisations.

In her day job, she is a scientist with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) with a focus on water quality/ protection. She is also a workplace steward for UNISON (and comms officer for her branch), a workplace first aider and trained mental health first aider.

As a life-long renter she strongly believes that secure, good quality housing is a basic right and is a fundamental building block of strong communities. She joined Mara Co-op to help show there is a better way to do housing.

### **Izzy Okaya (she/they)**

Izzy is from Massachusetts and came to the UK to study Conservation of Cultural Heritage, achieving a BA and MA in the subject, and has completed placements as a conservator in various museums and heritage services. She's worked as an archive assistant and currently works with the University of Aberdeen's museum department, where she contributes to the organisation and preservation of the nationally significant collections. Izzy also has some experience in organic farming.

Izzy is a key organiser for Aberdeen Food Not Bombs, which gives out free food in the city centre and supports events organised by other grass roots organisations. She revived the group after a long hiatus and has regularly co-ordinated the group's operations for almost two years. She has co-ordinated volunteers, logistics and cooking and serving food for multiple large events including Aberdeen Social Centre's alternative fresher's fair, demonstrations by Aberdeen Trades Union Council and Alternative Pride. Izzy has also campaigned with Scotland's tenants union Living Rent.

Izzy was one of the founders of Mara Co-op and has been involved since it started as a gardening project. She has contributed to the creation of the co-operative's secondary rules.

### **Jo Mackintosh (they/them)**

Jo is a hippy with a book hoarding addiction from Forfar, Angus. Jo is an experienced organiser and researcher: they are a member of Aberdeen Social Centre's organising committee, Living Rent, Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC), and a Legal Observer for the Scottish Community Activist and Legal Aid Project (SCALP). They are also a member of the Black Cat Co-operative, a workers' co-operative which runs the Krakatoa bar in Aberdeen.

They joined Mara Co-op because they wanted to help build both an alternative model of housing to oppressive and negligent private landlordism, and a radical community space that can be open to everyone.

### **Mario Santana Santos (he/him)**

Mario Santana is an environmental professional originally from Mexico, now based in the UK. Before moving to the UK, Mario dedicated time to volunteering as a community teacher in remote areas of Mexico, helping bring education to small communities. He moved to Scotland to complete a MSc in Environmental Pollution and Remediation at the University of Aberdeen. He also holds a BSc in Environmental Engineering. Mario has built a strong foundation of practical experience in the environmental sector. He worked at Port of Aberdeen, where he supported Net Zero and energy efficiency projects, helped develop and present carbon dashboards, carried out water quality monitoring and contributed to ISO 14001 compliance efforts. He now works as an Environmental Advisor, supporting sustainability and compliance initiatives across different departments and regions. He enjoys making environmental data clear and engaging, and brings a collaborative approach to his work, whether it's leading internal campaigns, supporting audits, or helping others understand carbon and energy performance. Outside of work, Mario is a founding member of Mara Co-op, a grassroots housing cooperative in Aberdeen focused on community and sustainability. Passionate about the environment, Mario combines technical knowledge with a genuine drive to create positive change.

### **Marlow Bushman (they/them)**

Marlow arrived in Scotland in January 2019, hailing from West Virginia in the United States of America. They came to Scotland with a Bsc(hons) in Geology from West Virginia University, before earning an Msc in Environmental Science at the University of Aberdeen. While in Scotland, Marlow has gained highly relevant professional

experience, such as working as a Community Coordinator for the Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels project managed by the Scottish Wildlife Trust. They now work full-time as a Research Assistant at the James Hutton Institute, working with fellow experts, different organisations, and members of the public on a number of projects – such as environmental monitoring of wildlife in remote parts of Scotland. They are particularly knowledgeable about plant diversity, sustainability, and bioremediation techniques. Marlow has developed skills in communication, public outreach and education, public engagement, and conflict resolution. They are also first aid trained.

Before moving to Aberdeen, Marlow spent some time in Edinburgh where they co-founded and directed Rhyze Mushrooms. Rhyze Mushrooms is a worker's co-operative that focused on using bioremediation techniques in order to create a sustainable way to grow food communally, utilising non-profit principles. Since moving to Aberdeen, they have been active with groups such as Living Rent Aberdeen, Food Not Bombs Aberdeen, Fossil Free Pride Aberdeen, SCALP, and a number of environmental and queer community organising spaces. Marlow has since become a member of the organising committee at the Aberdeen Social Centre, and has a particular focus on development of the community spaces, organisation of the community storage, and development of the ASC's funding strategies.

Marlow is one of the founding members of Mara Co-op, and has a particular focus on outreach, social media engagement, policy, and developing relationships with other community organisations.

### **Salem Newman (any)**

Salem has lived in Aberdeen for much of their life, and has spent years connecting and integrating with community groups supporting vulnerable people within the city. Salem has worked closely with a variety of organisations which support vulnerable people, such as CFINE – where they prepared and delivered food parcels to those in need, and helped those who need it with their food shopping and other daily tasks. Salem has also spent years as a brownie leader, which involved them mentoring and supporting young girls in gaining confidence and developing their own skills. This included organising events, planning and running meetings, and acting as a role model for young children. Salem has developed a range of skills through their voluntary work, in particular de-escalation, interacting with and managing conflict between different – often vulnerable - groups, community engagement and support while being an inspirational positive influence for those they work for and alongside. They have also developed skills in maintenance of public buildings, administrative skills, and secretarial skills which they utilise regularly through their voluntary work.

Salem's experience with disability and community support means that they are intimately familiar with the struggles that some people face in their day-to-day lives, and how to ensure they are best supported. Salem is also digital illustrator and crafter, having developed an excellent eye for artwork and design.

Salem is one of the founding members of Mara co-op, and in particular plays a significant role in Mara Co-op's artwork and outreach. Their skills mean they are an excellent mediator and advocate for accessibility and support for disabled people, which will prove invaluable for Mara Co-op as we progress.

### **Sam Revell (he/him)**

Sam is originally from England where he worked in the libraries of the V&A Museum and the Wellcome Trust, and trained in Conservation of Cultural Heritage attaining a BA and MA in the subject. He came to Aberdeen in 2021 to work for the University of Aberdeen's museum department and is now responsible for producing exhibitions in the University's public gallery in the Sir Duncan Rice Library. Sam specialises in public engagement with heritage and research, and is a skilled writer, editor and graphic communicator.

Outside of work Sam is an organiser for Aberdeen Food Not Bombs, which gives out free food in the city centre and supports events organised by other grass roots organisations. Sam is the group's treasurer, handling donations and reimbursing members for expenses, and has established the group as an unincorporated association. He has co-ordinated volunteers and handled logistics for cooking and serving food at large events. Sam has also campaigned with Living Rent (Scotland's tenants union) and done public engagement with Vegan Outreach Scotland.

As one of Mara Co-op's founders Sam is secretary and has led the organisation's branding and the creation of its website, and contributed to the production of outreach materials.