



**A centre for the democratic economy,
climate emergency, and social change**

Open letter: On closing the New Economy Centre at Selgars Mill

Today we share the news that the New Economy Centre will be closing its doors at Selgars Mill on 14 November 2022. After three years, we would like to share our appreciation for all of you who have contributed your time, money, and affection into Selgars Mill.

So, how did we end up here?

Just over a month ago, we received the devastating news from the building's owner that – despite three years of financial and emotional investment into what we considered to be a life-long initiative at Selgars Mill in Devon, and five months of working together with the owner on Heads of Terms, Business Plan development, and engaging solicitors – that they were pulling out of the process with no possibility of further negotiations. Instead, the owner has decided to sell Selgars Mill on the private property market as soon as possible, and will use the proceeds of the sale for grants.

The donation or below market value sale of Selgars Mill to a new community-owned business was the basis for our involvement in this project from the start, and we based our tenancy and investment on the owner's original invitation to manage Selgars Mill and his intention of "bequeathing" it in the future, alongside many positive assurances that the transfer was the most likely option throughout our tenure.

Through an email, we learned of the owner's complete change of heart, and although recognising it as a "bolt from the blue", it prematurely ended the negotiation process, with only an offer to "talk this over at more length... but I'm afraid not with a view to changing my mind."

Given the business' financial situation (reflecting the economic consequences of running a hospitality and education enterprise during the pandemic), the only prospect of raising money to invest in business development and capital works (community shares and social investment) was conditional on ownership of the property. Even more so, anticipating the fragility of the business being compounded by the cost of living crisis, soaring energy bills, and reduced trading during the low season, our only option, unfortunately, was to make a quick decision to close the business.

What's happening to the Selgars Mill property?

It would be unfair if we omitted the owner's plans "to put the proceeds of the sale of the place into a ring-fenced trust of some sort, possibly with a time limit on when all the capital has to have been redistributed," which he believes "the potential for supporting radical social and ecological change would be greater" than our plans to establish a community asset and run a centre for democratic learning and action. While Stir to Action of course recognises the value of grants (and is a beneficiary), our dedication to democratic business over the last decade is based on the premise that a generative economy creates long-term security and resilience and we believe this is most likely through broad collective ownership (especially as the property market is such a significant determinate in economic and social outcomes).

Our plans for the future

Again, thank you to all who came to the New Economy Centre at Selgars Mill to learn, celebrate, reflect, rest, and build. For those who recognised the need for this space for the wider movement, and saw the centre as a beacon of hope in bleak times – yes, this is a huge set back. But we recognise the value that we created in a short space of time, and that there remains a need for this centre in some form.

Our vision and business plan for the New Economy Centre has been built around collective ownership of a community asset. We spent the last year working to create a model of community ownership – a multistakeholder co-operative – so that the centre would be owned and run by those who use it as a living, thriving example of a place of learning and experimentation. This work is not lost, nor is it restricted to the particular building and location of Selgars Mill. When the time and place are right, we hope to have another opportunity to build on all that we learned and develop a new place to create a unique and powerful institution for enacting the urgent changes towards a democratic, ecological, and just economy and society.

You can follow progress via [Stir to Action](#).

In solidarity,

The team at New Economy Centre workers co-operative