

# 60 SECONDS WITH AN ENTREPRENEUR...

## SEAN KERR

**Role:** Director

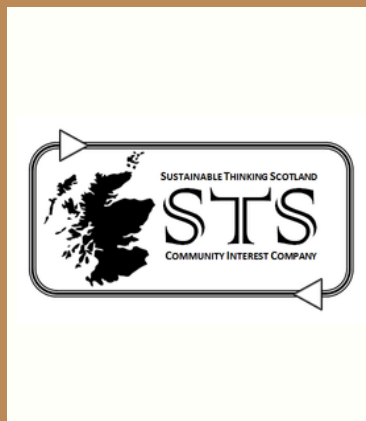
**Company Name:** Sustainable Thinking Scotland CIC

**Sector:** Food production, Carbon management, Recycling, Education, Community Wellbeing

**Founded:** 2016

**Base:** Bo'Ness, Falkirk

**Purpose:** To provide social, ecological and environmental improvements via our range of food growing, recycling, and community wellbeing projects.



**Tell us a bit about your business?** We responsibly dispose of green waste, using it to create biochar - which not only captures carbon but can be modified and used to help tackle nutrient pollution and blue green algae issues by recollecting nutrients from waterways. We then use those nutrients to grow more food in our Foodbank Farm, whilst using our solar powered community hub and the education events we offer to encourage others to do the same, helping to improve community wellbeing.

**How did you come up with your business idea?** It all really started because we wanted to help local food poverty services, increasing the amount of produce and improving the quality of fresh food which was available to those requiring support. The rest of our projects were developed to help support that initial social aim.

**What's been your biggest challenge to date?** Developing the biochar project, because unfortunately the regulation and guidance is distinctly lacking in Scotland. We hope our continued research and academic partnerships will be the key to overcoming that challenge, unlocking the many potential benefits biochar can provide.

**How has SE (or any other support organisation in the Scottish ecosystem) helped you on your journey?** I'm a proud alumnus of SE's Unlocking Ambition Programme 2021, which provided in depth business support to help us achieve our ambitions, and we continue to benefit from our relationship with the SE team. We also accessed the associated development fund which allowed us to conduct a collaborative biochar research project with the University of the Highlands and Islands and the University of Strathclyde.

**What's been the highlight of the last year for you?** It has to be receiving our Catalyst Fund investment from Firstport - it really signifies a massive step up for our social enterprise, allowing us to focus on the development of our projects, particularly the biochar potential, for the next few years.

**Is there anything on your business bucket list?** I'd like to see social enterprises at the forefront of most markets, essentially 'nationalising' a lot of the social support sector within the social enterprise model and the communities they work with. With a profit and asset lock, and a people-centred approach, I feel social enterprises can not only increase the quality and standards of the support given, but the revenue generate can be exclusively used to expand and develop the range of services and increase the volume of people you can engage with.

**How did you come up with your business name?** Oh unfortunately that one is a secret, though there are a few clues in the logo...

**What's your favourite thing about being an entrepreneur?** The freedom to make your own choices, be principled, and do what you feel is right.

**What's the best thing about being an entrepreneur in Scotland?** Mostly that you are in Scotland, I love this country. We have a history as a nation of socially minded creatives, statesmen, inventors, and engineers who have the talent and ambition to make a real difference to our society. We are fortunate enough to be at a time where the support for such ventures is available nationally, and this will hopefully help Scotland reach its green aspirations.

**What's the best piece of advice you ever received?** “You'll be nowhere in 5 years time.” – though not a positive example, after hearing that one it really lit a fire and made us work twice as hard to prove people wrong.

**What advice do you wish you hadn't listened to?** “What you need is a timeshare!”...only joking ...but really all advice is useful, good and bad. I'd rather listen to it all and have multiple perspectives, but that doesn't mean you have to act on any of it. It's up to you to decide what fits the bill.

**What has been your proudest achievement since starting your business?** Delivering food growing workshops to my niece's primary school class. It's not the biggest achievement, but seeing her little smiling face as we went through the activities was certainly my proudest.

**Who's been your biggest supporter?** I'd say Firstport in terms of support for our ideas and overall business development, they have been there to help us every step of the way, but personally I'm thankful for the support of the two hardest working volunteers in Bo'ness, Jim Rose and Christine Simm.

**How do you care for each other's wellbeing at work?** We are lucky enough... or unlucky enough... to have been friends with each other for over 15 years, so we usually know when something is up.

**How do you start your day?** Usually bleary-eyed and in search of coffee...

**What do you do for fun after a busy week?** Usually play chess, watch sports, hang out with friends, or spend some quality time with my family.

**What's the best business book you've read?** I don't really read many business books, I think the closest would be Sun Tzu's The Art of War (!?)

**Any office pets?** No but my co-founder Steve regularly has his pets, Billie (dog) and Ted (cat), on site to keep us company through this excellent adventure...

**What's your best tip for achieving a good life/work balance?** When I figure that one out I'll let you know... but running a purpose driven business, especially during the start-up, is really a life-style choice so you have to be ok with it consuming everything to a certain degree.

**What would you say is the secret to success?** An indomitable spirit – the journey will be rough at times but you have to be willing to back your own ideas, even when other don't.

**What's your big dream?** To scale our model nationally, putting a farm behind every foodbank, which is financed by solving ecological and environmental problems at a national scale. Those funds will allow our communities to invest in themselves, building a stronger society, and a more Sustainable Scotland.

**How would you like to be remembered?** To paraphrase Willie Mason - “proud of a life where to give means more than to take...I wanna look beyond the modern mentality, where paper is all that you're really taught to create.”

**Where can we find out more about your business?** [Facebook.com/SustainableThinkingScotlandCIC](https://www.facebook.com/SustainableThinkingScotlandCIC/) / [@STS\\_CIC](https://www.instagram.com/STS_CIC)