

Minutes for Sims Hill Shared Harvest open member's meeting 26 June, 2012

We had a quorum of members attending plus several guests, including our speakers Joy Carey and Ciaran Mundy.

Sims Hill Shared Harvest member Simone Osborn chaired the meeting.

The first item on the agenda was Joy Carey speaking about local food provision in Bristol. Joy is the author of the Who Feeds Bristol report, which is a baseline report about how Bristol's food supply was provisioned in Bristol in 2010. Joy's recommendations about encouraging local food provision were:

- Encouraging cooking from scratch
- Trying to source as many staples from the city-region as possible
- Engaging Bristol's citizens around the importance of local and seasonal food
- Encouraging closed loop systems, such as permaculture
- Maintaining and supporting diverse retail outlets

Ciaran Mundy then presented on the Bristol Pound in the context of Sims Hill signing up to the Bristol Pound.

Here are the key facts about the Bristol Pound, which launches on 19 September, 2012:

- Bristol Pounds are purchased for sterling and can then be spent with business members in the region.
- 5% bonus on deposits into Bristol Pound accounts. That's an extra 5% purchasing power for free! (offer limited to first £100,000 deposited into the scheme)
- Bristol Pounds are spent just like pounds sterling with £B1 equal in value to £1 sterling.
- Each Bristol Pound is backed pound for pound by sterling deposits, so taking part incurs no financial risk.
- The Bristol Pound is a complementary currency, designed to work alongside sterling, not replace it.
- Business accounts are available to traders that are independently owned and based in or around Bristol.
- Anyone will be able to pay with or accept printed Bristol Pounds as they will be in free circulation.
- Whilst there are some rules for taking part in the scheme, local currency is not legal tender and so accepting Bristol Pounds is voluntary.
- Printed Bristol Pounds are highly secure, printed by specialist printers, incorporating a host of security features.
- Bristol Pound accounts are very secure. Money can only be taken out of the system by registered account holders.

Sims Hill grower Tim Lawrence then presented on the challenges and opportunities inherent in working for a community food growing business such as Sims Hill.

Sims Hill is situated on the urban fringe of Bristol where all of the market gardens growing food for Bristol used to be. The supermarkets have driven all or nearly all of these operations out of business.

Sims Hill is a community-supported agriculture project that is cooperatively owned and run by its members. It fits somewhere in between supplying produce to supermarkets which require perfect vegetables and allotment holders who don't want to waste any of their hard-grown produce. Sims Hill has to produce veg boxes for members who don't want to waste food but at the same time have been conditioned to see perfect vegetables at the supermarket, so we have to manage these competing expectations.

Local food is expected to be seasonal also, which means much less variety than we are used to seeing in the supermarkets, and because we are producing small volumes the production is much more labour-intensive than in larger commercial food-growing operations.

The members must be able to share in the harvest and also the risks of the whole production cycle. They are paying for the growing of the veg, not just the veg itself. CSA's cannot externalise the costs of production as supermarkets can. Sims Hill also helps educate its members about where their food comes from and how it is grown.

Tim ended his presentation by asking two questions: How can we start up local food-growing projects? And how can we shift from a capital-based to a community-based model?

It was then proposed that Sims Hill would in principle sign up to the Bristol Pound and leave the Board to determine how that might be carried out in practice. Several members wanted clarification around whether all members would have to pay their membership fees in Bristol Pounds. They were assured that payment in Bristol Pounds would be completely voluntary. Standing orders could be set up through the Bristol Credit Union and would work just as they do now from other banks and financial institutions. A lively discussion followed on how well local currencies can help to transform local economies and help drive the creation of a more local food economy in particular. It was concluded that local currencies are simply one tool among many others which are needed to make this happen.

The decision was taken for Sims Hill to join the Bristol Pound in principle and leave the Board to look into the detail.

The next members' meeting will be 25 September at 7:30 pm at Horfield Meeting House.