

Sims Hill Shared Harvest Members' Meeting 25 September

A quorum of members attended. Chris Sunderland chaired the meeting.

Report from the field by Tim Lawrence

The first item on the agenda was the growing conditions this year in the field. This has been one of the wettest summers in 100 years. The field also has particular issues with drainage as well. There seems to be more water draining into the field than just what has been coming from the weather. This could be coming from the car park at the top of the hill. Due to these conditions, there will be very few staple field crops harvested this autumn.

However, Sims Hill has been working with Feed Bristol for our protected growing. We have been able to use the big glasshouse on the Feed Bristol site to grow salad crops and to start off crops to plant in the field such as leeks. We have signed an agreement with Feed Bristol to provide services such as mowing and cultivation in exchange for using the glasshouse for another year.

The workshares for 2012 have been extremely helpful and enthusiastic, especially since there have been fewer opportunities to work this year because of the weather.

Financial report by Bobbie Sunderland

We have had 10 people join in the last year. Several people have also left. We also have 9 workshare members who are exchanging their labour for a weekly veg share.

Our plan for the year was to have the equivalent of 15 full shares to join by July and for the field to be producing. We have not grown to the level we had hoped. Because of this, the growers have not been able to increase their hours up to the expected level. We are growing for approximately 60 households at the moment.

We do have some grant funding that will go toward capital projects such as polytunnels, water, etc.

The decision on how to deal with the potential financial shortfall was left for the next members' meeting.

Drainage situation on Sims Hill by James Adamson

Even with the previous drainage work that has been done on site (i.e. the installation of the pond earlier in the year), that has not been sufficient to keep the site well-drained between all the rain that we have received and the amount of water that is draining down in to the site on a regular basis.

While there are more conventional options that we could pursue, they are very expensive. What we would like to do is work with Jay Abrahams, who did the previous water work and is an expert in wastewater disposal, to redesign the site using swales which will be connected with pipes and help to disperse water throughout the site. (Definition from Wikipedia: Swales as used in permaculture are designed to slow and capture runoff by spreading it horizontally across the landscape (along an

[elevation contour line](#)), facilitating runoff infiltration into the soil.) This would require moving some hedgerows (although some fruit trees could be planted next to the swales themselves), and fitting the plantings in between the swales. We would no longer be using the grid system. The right-of-way would be unaffected but we are hoping that most people will use the alternate right-of-way route that will be set up to go around the growing areas.

This would result in a more resilient and permaculture-oriented growing system with more biodiversity than we have at present but with some possible loss of veg growing space. We would have to fundraise for this project. James thinks it would take about 5 or 6 days to complete the project.

Becoming a permaculture LAND centre proposal with apprenticeship scheme by Tim Lawrence

We have been faced with several challenges this year which have forced the Board to go back and look at the original aims of the co-op. The original plan was to focus on setting up the veg growing business before developing the other aspects of the co-operative. Now we realise that we need to develop all aspects of the co-operative in concert.

The proposal for this would include an apprenticeship scheme based upon our workshare and previous apprenticeship training programme. Doing this will allow us to establish and deliver the community development and educational aspects of the project's original aims.

The apprenticeship scheme will be part of a broader proposal which includes becoming a certified [Permaculture LAND centre](#). Sims Hill would then become part of the Permaculture Associations' national scheme and would be supported as part of this initiative. Local permaculture expert Patrick Whitefield has offered to mentor us through this process. The focus of the project would then shift to include a more formal educational side of the project where some revenue could be realised through offering workshops, etc., on site. The apprentices could then help to build capacity to help develop the more commercial side of the project as well.

Q&A session facilitated by Ali Crowther

Will any apprentices receive a formal qualification? James said that this would definitely help anyone who is studying to receive a permaculture design certification.

Would it be possible to share learnings and experience with Feed Bristol? We are already working with Feed Bristol and further future partnerships are planned and ongoing.

How can members participate and help with the project? Members can participate in the classes and workshops that will be offered if we become an accredited LAND centre. Members and volunteers are also welcome to come and help on Tuesday and Thursdays (you will need to text the growers.) Several suggestions for help with capacity were Growing Communities, Green Volunteers, the Princes' Trust, and possible corporate work days.

Suggestion: On an email make sure people know that the growers' phone numbers are at the pick up points and that they can be used:

To cancel veg when they are holidays

To check where they are so that they can help.

Request: Could growers' details be put on the members blog/email so that members can contact them

Request: Workshares have noticed that they aren't on lists. Please could their emails be put on the SHSH membership email list.

Can we use this new direction for Sims Hill to get more media attention? Yes, we would like to do that.

Suggestion: Sims Hill may be something we could crowd fund for – or certain elements anyway.

Observation: Good that the website will be updated – and it will be good, once that is done to get the TV, media, radio more involved. Eg write a column or link our blog to others.

Several members offered to help with press releases and flyering/marketing.

How long do we have the site for? Our lease is for 10 years with a break clause. We expect that we could renew the lease.

In principle, there was a unanimous decision to go ahead with the drainage work with Jay Abrahams as contractor and the application to become a Permaculture LAND centre provided sufficient funding can be found and due diligence is provided by the Board.

Discussion about how to deal with veg share shortfall

Due to the situation with very little staple field crops being forthcoming for the autumn and winter months, several options were put forward about how to deal with this. Members were asked if they would prefer to have veg bought-in, no bought-in veg, or if we should ask new members to become supporter members rather than veg share members. The growers said that we can buy staple vegetables in bulk which would help to keep the expenditure down for this. It was decided to keep buying in veg. The options for new members can be discussed again at the next members' meeting on 27 November when the budget for the next year will be adopted.

The next members' meeting will be 27 November at 7:30 pm at Horfield Meeting House.