

Minutes of the Sims Hill Shared Harvest AGM on 26th February, 2013

A quorum of the members were present.

Chris Sunderland chaired the meeting.

Elections to the Board

The first item was to elect new Board members. Tim Lawrence and Kristin Sponsler stood again after fulfilling the requirement of two Board members needing to stand down every two years. Sim Osborn and Kate Whittle were both standing for the first time. Sim introduced herself and explained that she wanted to bring some of her project management skills to the team. Kate Whittle is an expert on working with cooperatives. All were elected to the Board with no dissenting votes.

Presenting of the Accounts

Robert Sunderland presented the accounts that had just been audited. She explained that we made an operating year loss in 2012 of £3000, however due to a surplus from 2011 we are carrying approximately a deficit of approx £1000. We do have plans to try to cover the shortfall. Bobbie explained that we need to keep recruiting members so we can make our goal by July.

Growers' update from Tim and James

The field is still struggling to dry out. The growers have had to buy in quite a bit to keep the shares going. They have a timber frame shelter from East Side Roots which will become the packing shed and growers centre. Tim and James have also been renovating the big glasshouse at Feed Bristol which Sims Hill has the use of temporarily for a few more months. This has been a critical piece of infrastructure for us so we can do high-value and early growing there.

Tim and James outlined the plans for 2013. Gardener's adrenalin is getting going. Seeds will be purchased next week. Early carrots have been planted. They keep checking the ground for dryness! Sims Hill will be able to use some of the ground at Feed Bristol for early vegetables in exchange for some work. We are still waiting to hear whether our drainage and apprenticeship scheme will be funded. The prospective funder is very behind schedule. We probably won't know this for several more weeks.

James and Tim have started meeting with Sim about project management. Tim is taking a permaculture course and will be doing some redesign to help involve apprentices and the wider community in the project.

Kate asked what Plan B is in case we don't get the funding.

Plan B is to do a much simpler earthworks which would include one big ditch across the field and help reduce the amount of water draining out of the field. The rest of the works will be added incrementally as time and resources allow. There are various small pots that might help fund the apprenticeships.

Mark Gale, a Somerset farmer, had a question about whether swales are actually the way to go as he thinks that they could potentially add to the water retention in the field. Mark will meet up with Tim and James on the site and help to give a second opinion in addition to what Jay plans for drainage.

There was another question about Feed Bristol and how well the partnership is working. Feed Bristol is more of a large educational awareness-raising scheme and they struggle to have the capacity to use all the land so the partnership is working out really well.

We have put in our application to be a Permaculture LAND centre.

How cooperatives work

Kate Whittle led a session on showing how cooperatives work. There is no legal definition of a cooperative; it is only defined by the seven co-operative principles. A key criterion for governing cooperatives is one person, one vote, and it is democratic. Co-operatives are a *business*. They are a different form of business.

She then led an exercise where people had to cooperate in doing an activity where they were not allowed to speak.

The message of the exercise was to stress the importance of communication for co-operators. A co-operative is like a big conversation. All members need to be talking to each other as well as hearing from the “centre.” We need to know what our skills are and what we can contribute.

Members' handbook

Ali introduced the members' handbook. The handbook includes the early history, a picture, a map, FAQs, etc and should be a useful resource for telling people about the project. Once it is updated to include the new Board members it will be emailed out to the members and will be up on the website as a living digital version. Thanks to Kate Whittle for drafting the handbook.

Member recruitment

Jack Phillips has become a workshare who will be helping coordinate member outreach activities. He plans to do this through promotional stalls, existing networks groups, and outreach through our workplaces.

Future events where Sims Hill will have a presence are:

Big Dig activities 16th March at Feed Bristol, Sims Hill and the Walled Garden

Anarchists Book Fair 20th April at the Trinity Centre

Farmers Market at UWE 26th of March

Stall at St. Nicks (TBD)

Informational stall at the Gloucester Road on the 9th of March.

Outreach through local groups, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, and Transition.

We need to try to recruit people through their workplaces. We are going to put an email out around in places like Sustrans. Jack and Kristin will put an email together for this.

We need about five or six people to create another drop-off point.

There will be a follow up with the AVAG people who received the one-off veg share drop to see if there is any interest.

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