

Members' meeting 28th September

We had a quorum of members attending the meeting.

The Farm Manager, Miriam Schoen, started off by giving us her growing report.

Growing Report

It has been a very busy year, and Miriam thinks that we have been doing as well we could do under the present constraints. There have been lots of weeds and slugs and birds! We have been growing on one-half to two-thirds of the site. The Sims Hill field has more of the root and winter veg, and we can also use it to grow salads, etc.

The Feed Bristol greenhouse is still proving very useful. We have late salad leaf and late lettuce coming still. It has been difficult at times, especially as the offsite tractor arrangement causes delays. Miriam wants to grow more veg and is looking forward to starting to prepare for next season's work this winter and is very excited about it. She is planning on doing some fall ploughing which will help with weed control. She is also hoping to buy in more locally this winter than we have been able to do up until now to fill the gaps in the share.

Miriam would really like to get a tractor and tools to go with it as there aren't enough people available to do the amount of weeding, hoeing etc. that is needed by hand. We hope to do this with a crowdfunder.

Miriam would also like to get more volunteers to help with the fieldwork and has written a poster that can be put up in the pickup points. She also mentioned that Sims Hill has a woodland and pond which need to be maintained and worked on, and because of this she will keep the volunteer work days going through the winter. Miriam will have a forester looking at the woodland as well, and will see what needs doing with the apple trees.

Miriam is working on 3 year plans and wants input from members via a questionnaire that she has come up with. This will also be sent out to all the members by email.

From next week we will have all our own veg, at least for a few weeks, which is very heartening.

Chris added that the financial update on the project will happen at the November Members Meeting. He did however say that things are tight. Because of this we have had to cut the growers' hours. From October 1st, Miriam will go down to 3 days a week and Martin and Bruce will go down to 1 day a week. The growers have all agreed to this.

Questions from members:

Is David's tractor (the tractor we are currently borrowing from nearby David Bavistock) onsite yet?

Miriam's answer: We don't have the tractor onsite yet because we haven't had time to clear out the container, and we have only needed it for ploughing and harrowing so far. We cannot use the tractor for other work as we need the other implements associated with it as well. Miriam thinks we can do this over the winter, but in the long term she would prefer to have our own tractor.

Damien Phillips emphasised that we really need that crowdfunder for the tractor!

Question: How many more members do we need to keep the project viable.

Answer: We think we need 10 to 15 more full share equivalents.

We really need to recruit more members – so help from members with this is really needed!

We will have new flyers ready shortly.

New Social Projects

Chris Sunderland mentioned that we have always had *Working to include and support people who are socially or economically marginalised* as a core aim of the Sims Hill project. We now have grant funding from Tudor Trust for two new projects, including an education project and a community project.

The Education Project

Kirsty Philbrook has just started as the education worker, and has met with Miriam to scope out what it will mean to engage schools from disadvantaged areas, such as Barton Hill, and so we will probably not engage so much with schools in the south of the city. We are hoping to have a combination of ongoing visits and one-off visits.

Kirsty went on to describe some of the activities that the children will be doing on a typical day such as weeding, learning about what food can be produced from the veg growing at Sims Hill, etc. There will not be so much emphasis on wildlife as that is more Avon Wildlife Trust's focus. The project will be working mostly with Stages 1,2, and 3 of the National Curriculum. Anyone who has links with schools, please let Kirsty know.

Community Project (Land-based Community Food Centre)

Laurie King has been appointed as the Community worker. On Thursdays, people in crisis will be referred from various agencies to come to the site. There they will be invited to take part in some work, take part in creating the communal meal, and then they will be invited to take away some Sims Hill veg and some Real Economy food as well. This will be known as the Sims Hill Community Food Centre. The subsidy for the food will decrease over time, and some of the participants may be invited to become workshares. Chris calls this a community of health and well-being. The project will be contributing to the participants' food security, giving them life skills, and helping to connect them with where their food comes from and with the natural world. This is going to be a pilot for a larger city-wide project.

The project's aims are: food education, training in life skills, and personal empowerment. Ultimately the project will include a network of community food centres. This might start up some spin-off projects as well. The goal would be to have a central community food centre, which will also be a food processing centre with an industrial kitchen which would provide training, and also food to sell to the public at free or subsidised prices. Chris already has the Citizen's Advice Bureau on board!

The subsidy for the food will go down in the second year of the project. We are hoping that next year we will attract more public donations to make up for this.

Crowdfunding

We are going to have a brilliant crowdfunder! Freya Widdicombe and Miriam have met with Holly Black who has previously helped with the Street Goat crowdfunder. We are planning to launch a £10K crowdfunder and are looking for help. We need some photos and some infographics. Steph Wetherill suggested a website where we could create our own.

We need some testimonies about Sims Hill from our members that we can use for the crowdfunder. We need 4 weeks of preparation before the launch. We also need networks from everyone where

we can advertise, and a few rewards for people who are contributing, such as bags, hoodies, mugs, etc.

We would like to launch in November, and we will probably run it for a month. We hope to have the money by late January, so we can purchase the equipment for the spring.

We are planning on have a small launch party, but it would be good to target some specific people or organisations beforehand to prime the pump. We are also thinking of having a volunteer day in the middle of the crowdfunder.

Another task will be to help to tell the story of Sims Hill in an engaging way for the crowdfunder, and also to highlight the fact that we need new members.

Freya will start an email list for all those who want to be involved in the project.

Thanks to everyone who brought cake and goodies.