

SIMS HILL MEMBERS MEETING 29 JUNE 2017

Welcome and introductions

Grower update

Going well – a lot better than last year. Tractor is a real help. Still needs some tools for it to make us more efficient, but really good to be able to harrow and cultivate. Have planted a lot. Have been using a little planting machine. Carrots, beetroot, swedes, cabbage, leeks, over 1000 squash plants, onions, chard, peas, sweetcorn. Want to add dwarf French beans. In the tunnels and greenhouse, first cucumbers, aubergines, toms, peppers, salad leaves, beans. Early potatoes in Feed field. A lot of weeding and hoeing to do.

Socially – have a placement for a month of someone who is studying at RAU in Cirencester. Full up with workshares. Feels a lot more vibrant than last year with volunteers and Laurie's group.

Woodland – we sold some firewood in the winter – that has now been taken – so the woodland has been thinned – good to manage it.

Glasshouse – we feel that it won't last another year. Looking for grants to replace it with polytunnels. We have permission from AWT to remove it and replace with a multispan polytunnel. Would like to do this in November if we can secure the funds.

Chloe has joined as assistant grower. Enjoying it. Good start. Getting to know the site and all its challenges.

News from education project – by Chris Sunderland as Kirsty Philbrick couldn't come.

Aimed at young people, targeting deprived areas. Want ideally to work regularly with the same children. Proved quite hard to recruit schools. Shifted the focus to community groups with a particular social concern. That has been much more successful. Have had 270 children through via this and a few schools. Good diversity of group including deaf and blind children, a Somali group, young carers. Some of the schools have been paying for their access. Very positive feedback from teachers and young people.

Community Food Center Update from Laurie King

Started running Community Food Centre in November. Open to anyone, but aim to get referrals from agencies for people experiencing financial difficulties with food. Looking for better access to food and more community. Successful so far. Today hoeing lettuces and then made courgetti fritters on the open fire Great with meals for people to connect with each other. Also people inspired that they are helping on a working farm. About 11 or 12 projects so far, mostly from Talking Money. 4 regular attendees. Laurie getting advice on working through issues of getting people to come – has 1 more day a week now to spend on this part of the project.

Laurie has a Facebook page specifically for this aimed for referral agencies. Also brought a newsletter that she sent to referral agencies this week.

Also have monthly talks attached to the lunch to broaden out discussions about food issues. The next one is 13th July with Steph Wetherell – 13th July at 12.30-2.00.

The best thing about it is the community aspect – there's such a great atmosphere on a Thursday when we're there.

Cora asked what the max number of manageable referrals would be – Laurie thinks a group of 12.

Chris thinks one real positive is that it is an inclusive community, it doesn't have staff and clients and so on, the people really feel they are coming to help and do something meaningful and useful. We're still learning, but it feels like it is something important. This is also helping us meet the core aims that we had from the beginning to benefit the community.

Update on the budget

We set a budget in November and through the year we monitor how we are doing against it. We are now at approx. 6 months. Chris passed round a spreadsheet to show where we are.

Headlines:

Spent a lot more on bought in veg than anticipated (prices have risen and we didn't have as much veg as we wanted due to challenging growing situation)

Spent a bit less on wages than budgeted.

Interproject transfer – Laurie's project gives some money to the project based on giving veg shares to participants. Got fewer than expected so have drawn down less than expected. Have now given Laurie an extra day a week to recruit – will use that fund. Hope this will grow the number using that project.

Variance of approx. -£1000

Cora asked how long the funding for 2 projects runs for? Chris – education for 1 year, food centre for 2. Idea was that education one would start paying for itself? Might decide to raise more funding for these based on the use of them.

Peter – any potential upsides on the variance? Miriam – hoping not to have to buy in anything for the rest of the year – except maybe potatoes. More members would also improve it.

We need to be aware that at this stage we have very little money in reserve having drawn it down last year. Might therefore want to be cautious. We have also received a donation which will help us, but we would like to budget for a small surplus to be a sustainable business.

Chris circulated a second spreadsheet with some possible models.

The current budget (agreed in November) had a price increase in it. Chris puts to the meeting that he thinks we should increase the share price slightly more than in the budget – suggests £48 for FS and £28

for HS. At current shares would give approx. £550 extra. If we went up to 65 shares it would give us £1500 over budget.

Asked members for views on this.

Damian thinks it might be a good time to do it because people will be getting bigger bags at this time.

Concern about people reviewing whether they want to continue their standing order.

Increase seems fair in principle.

Is there an option for people if they really can't afford the increase?

If we are going to ask people to change standing order might as well go for the higher amount.

Comms important – good to give the whys.

Important to frame the news well – part of a much more cohesive idea of Sims Hill – veg looking fresh, good projects – show how the price looks weekly. SH is expanding message. Make people proud to belong.

Need to clarify that we're not subsidising the community projects. They are self supporting.

For only a small monetary increase a week, we can secure the future of SH and its expansion...etc...

Make sure people feel they are/were involved in the decision.

Build message of buying in food into our messaging – how we support other projects by doing it, don't have cold storage infrastructure, want to ensure that we have veg all year round. We are however impacted by food inflation.

Kristin, Miriam to work with Cora and Ali on the message.

From ASAP – change payments from August.

The share price increase of £48 for a full share and £28 for a half share was approved unanimously.

Carole asked that we survey members ahead of the budget meeting on how we operate as a financially sustainable business. Can feed that into the budget meeting.

Outreach – Ali

Engagement with the membership. Ali has been trying different ways to engage – not easy to get connection? Any thoughts here?

Steve feels that this is typical for charities that there is a small active membership and a lot of people who are passive members.

Lots of people involved in the work days.

A lot of people said that the SH emails are going to their spam or promotions email which they don't tend to check.

Cora suggested leaving more messages at drop off stations. Miriam can add things to the list in the share.

Lots of people who regularly come to volunteer days don't ever come to Members Meetings.

Our community is bigger than the membership and growing.

We're having a party on 15th July at the Pickle Factory! There is a flyer that can be sent electronically too. If you would like a flyer please email Ali on aliceleith@gmail.com. More information can be found on Facebook here: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1899315806983502/>.