

Sims Hill Annual General Meeting

February 28 2019

Attendees

A quorum of members was present.

Park and Ride update

Corra (Chair of Sims Hill) gave an update on the park-and-ride issue. We are very pleased with the support we have received during the consultation and we feel we are in a good place. However, until the four unitary authorities confirm the next stages of the plan we will not know for sure that the proposed P&R has been moved elsewhere. All the responses are being collated by the councils and should be reported in around May. Bristol City Council said during the consultation that they don't want it to be built on our land, and two local MPs are supporting us. Transport experts are suggesting that it needs to be further up the motorway. We are in a strong position, but we need to wait and see what happens next.

Grower's update

James (Farm manager) spoke about the land and crops. Despite the summer drought, we managed to have a good growing year in 2018. We are building fertility in the land and will be growing on more land than we ever have in 2019, so we should have more of our veg by this time next year. Right now, we are coming to the end of crops grown outdoors on the field but the polytunnels will help feed us until the new field crops come through. Chard, spring onion, and salad will be coming through in March.

We are around 76.5 full share equivalents at the moment – that means about 120 households receive our veg each week which is great. We are on target for our plans, and would like this number to be slightly higher by the end of 2019.

Our tractor is currently waiting to be repaired, so we are very grateful to David (a local farmer and supporter of Sims Hill) for continuing to lend us his tractor in the meantime.

Election

Freya (Board member) led the election for new Board members. Steve Hobbs and Kirsty Philbrick have stepped down, and were thanked for their hard work. Remaining Board members (Damien Phillips, James Miller, Freya Widdicombe, Kristin Sponsler, Simone Osborn and Corra Boushel) introduced themselves.

Two people were standing as candidates to join the Board – Julian Harrison and Julia Nichols. Julian introduced himself as a member of 3 years' standing, goes to volunteer days and hopes to bring business skills to the project. Julia has been a member for 2 years, has been volunteering regularly, and is helping to coordinate Sunday volunteer days, and wants to help organise events. Julian and Julia were both successfully elected to the Board.

Finance

Sim (Board member) presented the accounts for 2018. Our total turnover was around £47,000 and total profit from everything (vegetables sales and grant income) was £1520, meaning we finished the year "in the black". We have reserves of over £10,000 which is a good position for Sims Hill.

Community Food Centre

The Community Food Centre is coordinated every Thursday by a community worker, Sian, at the Feed Bristol part of the site. The Food Centre is a chance for people who might be in food poverty, and/or who experience social isolation or health issues, and who would benefit from being in a small group where they can be in nature, learn cooking skills, enjoy being in a positive group of people. We have a positive evaluation of the impact it has had on people's lives.

We need funding to cover the project running costs for the project worker, rent to Feed Bristol, cost of providing shares, cooking staples for the lunch. Some time for our growers has also been paid, as they also put time into the project.

The funding that supported the Centre from 2016-2018 has finished. We are writing applications for large grants (£20,000-60,000) to continue the project. In the meantime, for Q1 (Jan-March 2019) we have had a private donor and Sims Hill reserves to cover the costs. For Q2 (April- June) we currently have a smaller amount of donations to cover the expenses. As a consequence, the Board proposed to the members that we spend £2007 for Q2 from the Sims Hill reserves.

Members discussed the funding idea. Suggestions included having more communication with members so they knew earlier what was happening, investigating corporate responsibility funding, setting up a donate button on the project website, thinking of any way to make the project more sustainable or self-sustaining, and possibly crowdfunding.

Crowdfunding will be used for something else this year (see below). Corra is amassing funding sources, so we are happy to get more ideas and connections from people. Members can email us, talk to us, or use Facebook or Twitter. We will keep looking for funding even if we have to stop for a while. We could help become a service provider for other organisations who would refer to clients to us. If anyone is willing to help with fund raising to please let us know by emailing corra.boushel@hotmail.co.uk or simshillsharedharvest@gmail.com

The proposal was carried by the members. We will subsidise the CFC for Q2 for a maximum of £2007 from our reserves, but look for more private donors to help reduce this burden on the Sims Hill reserves as well as continuing to bid for grants in the longer term.

Traineeship

Chloe (Assistant grower) explained that need to expand our growing team capacity to be able to increase our crop outputs. We want to have a 2-day a week role over the summer for someone who wants to increase their commercial growing skills and experience.

We haven't got enough money this year to pay someone from our income, but the growing team feel confident that they could increase capacity this year enough to fund the post through our income next year. We can't run an apprenticeship model because of timing and scale – apprentices have to be employed for a minimum of 12 months and we are not ready for that yet.

For this year, we have applied for a few grants but not been successful. We require around £3k as a minimum to be able to make it a paid position. We will launch a crowdfunder in the next few weeks to collect this money. The person who made a film for us for our previous crowdfunder will be making one again. Chloe is asking anyone who wants to help with social media, graphic design, or prizes.

It might be possible to partner with UWE with one of their placement or grant programmes through their Student Experience grants, etc. which will be investigated by the Board.

Chloe suggested getting interested people to meet up quickly afterwards to organise a meeting. People can also email corra.boushel@hotmail.co.uk, and Simshillgrowers@mail.com and Chloe.r.Russell@gmail.com with ideas or to find out more.

Veg share pricing structures

At the last meeting, members agreed that the Board can raise the price of shares in 2019 if it is necessary to cover costs. If we do increase the share price, could we offer any concessionary share prices to make sure people aren't priced out? In response to this suggestion, the Board and Julian have done a scoping project.

Julian presented on his project to think about two-tiered pricing structure. To do this, we would need other people to be subsidising these cheaper shares and be confident in our margins so that we were not losing money through this process. We are not currently in a position to reduce the price of any shares to a concessionary rate as we are not making a significant profit on the price.

A different way to fund concessions and build up the project more generally is to have more "supporter" members (who don't receive vegetables, they just donate to the project). We would like to make a push for more supporter members and Board members plan to focus more on that in the summer once the traineeship crowdfunder is over.

Plastics

We have had a few requests and questions from members about going entirely plastic-free. We have already stopped buying any new plastic bags for shares – all are now recycled wholesale nets or material bags.

We still use single-use plastic bags for our salad, etc. If we didn't use plastic bags for green leaves (e.g. using paper bags or leaving them loose in crates), they would go off too quickly and then are wasted, which is also bad for the environment. We can't reuse the "normal" plastic bags we use at the moment because of health and safety regulations.

The "normal" plastic bags we currently use can be recycled e.g. at supermarket recycling points but it is difficult to know where this plastic ends up. There are different plastic options such as degradable or compostable, but they are more expensive and have their own issues. "Degradable" plastic is currently not actually composted by local councils as their facilities cannot manage it. They would take a very long time to compost in a home composting system as the conditions are not right for them. "Compostable" bags are sometimes made from sources that are themselves unsustainable or compete for land use.

We would like to find a good source of compostable plastic bags that come from forestry by-products (so they are recycling a waste product, not competing for land). We will try to transition to degradable single-use plastic for the salads when we find a source that is affordable and meets these sustainability criteria. We know other organisations locally and nationally are facing similar quandaries, so hopefully it is something that the sector can solve soon.

AOB

Next volunteer day is Sunday 17th of March. We have had really good turnout the last couple of months and there's lots to do – potatoes might be planted on 17th.

There is a Green Week in June and someone from Sims Hill may present to an architecture firm that are focusing on biodiversity this year. Street Goat has some goat meat for sale.