

Windmill Hill City Farm Strategy 2020-2023 and beyond

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This strategy has been created by the staff and board of the organisation with input from members, volunteers and service users. It aims to strike a balance between continuing work that is underway and instigating new areas for the organisation to explore. Whether new or established, we aim to ensure our work makes a vital contribution to our local community.

At the time of publication there is a major global pandemic unfolding that will most likely change quite fundamentally the underlying assumptions of this strategy. It may require an early and significant revision, probably in the autumn of 2020.

Thank you for your interest in and input to Windmill Hill City Farm.

Introduction

Windmill Hill City Farm was founded in 1976 as the first city farm outside London. In the years since, it has grown to offer a range of activities that involve people from across the city and has become a key provider of services and facilities to its local community.

This strategy sets out ambitions and targets for the organisation on a 3-year time frame based in the context of a 10-year view. It aims to outline both the 'why & what' of its aims as well as some of the 'how', the detail of which will be dealt with in the operational plans for each year. The strategy addresses three audiences:

- ◆ Staff and board of trustees
 - To give a guiding document against which new decisions can be tested to ensure a consistent direction is maintained and that everyone has a shared notion of what that direction is. This does not preclude changes in direction, but makes them conscious ones rather than drift.
- ◆ Service users, members, volunteers and friends
 - To share the direction of the organisation and to provide a vehicle by which their voice can be heard in setting that direction.
- ◆ Funders
 - To give assurance that the organisation has articulated its ambitions and knows how to go about achieving them.

Current context

From its origin, Windmill Hill City Farm was built through volunteer action and the organisation will continue to put volunteer activity and community involvement at the heart of what it does. It is in essence a local organisation, however it aims not to be parochial tackling global issues through local action and personal development of the people engaged here. It was founded with a high regard for improving the environment, both in terms of making the neighbourhood a good place to live (eg sustainable transport, good housing, community buildings), and in addressing global environmental challenges (eg biodiversity, climate change). The emergence of the 'climate emergency' as a mechanism for change invites a response that must run through the fabric of the organisation – both in its own practices and in its influence on others.

To achieve financial sustainability it will give priority to generating income and improving operational efficiency rather than reducing costs by cutting activity. The vast majority of its income is through earned sources (childcare, café, room hire, contracts) with a small amount derived through grants and donations. Constraining the demanding activity required for income generation so that it does not negatively impact on advancing its mission is an ongoing challenge. Access to the site is free and the organisation is committed to that remaining so.

The external context in which we are developing this strategy is one that has economic and social challenges. The age of 'austerity' has taken a toll on local authority funding where there are greater demands on social services at a time when there are less resources available to meet them. There is a potential role for the organisation to act as an agent of social change, leading the way for our community to increase its resilience and self-reliance in such a climate. Improving its own financial resilience through a review of its business model is an essential first step in this aim.

Locally there are also new opportunities and challenges. For example, major infrastructure developments (Bedminster Green, University of Bristol's Temple Campus) are likely to change the profile of the local population. This in turn raises questions about who 'our community' actually is and how we go about serving them. In an inner-city area with pockets of disadvantage sitting side-by-side with relative affluence – the city farm aims to offer something to all local people.

The financial context in which we operate continues to make it harder to win grant funding from the local authority or charitable sources. Many social services are being put out to tender, often within structures that make it difficult for smaller or local organisations to bid for. Grants are fewer, smaller and have higher competition than they previously did. The organisation faces continuing pressure to 'earn' its income through direct trade with individuals or businesses, raising challenges about how to continue services to those who cannot afford them.

Mission and values

Our mission is to improve the lives of local people by providing a city farm: a place where people grow.

The difference we want to make is derived from the charitable objects (see appendix) that underpin the company. We aim to

- ◆ Educate
 - People will have greater knowledge, opportunities, skills and experience through their engagement with us increasing their capacity to lead a fulfilled life.
- ◆ Develop wellbeing
 - People will be able to live happier, healthier lives, to make the most of their abilities, and better manage conditions that limit their lives.
- ◆ Provide a community facility
 - More people will make better use of our improved site and services gaining a greater sense of belonging and pride, making our neighbourhood a better place to live for all.
- ◆ Undertake community development
 - Local people will have greater engagement and power in their community improving investment, regeneration and recognition of the area.
- ◆ Be a strong organisation
 - As a well run organisation with a strong staff team and shared vision we'll be more resilient, better able to achieve our goals and a greater contributor to a wider agenda for change.

Our activities are described in this document under each of these headings, however most of them advance more than one of our aims.

Values

The organisation operates with the following principles.

- ◆ Our activities put volunteer activity and **community involvement** at the heart of what we do.
- ◆ We engage in **diverse activities** with each area feeding into and drawing on the others.
- ◆ We take positive steps to include and **involve all** members of society.
- ◆ We work in **partnership** with other organisations to achieve greater outcomes.
- ◆ We set high standards for the **sustainability** of our activities.
- ◆ We aim to properly **reward our staff**, provide them with development, involve them in setting direction, stimulate and engage them.
- ◆ We are clear, focused, open and **transparent** about our aims and objectives.
- ◆ We are led and **managed well** to deliver our work effectively.

Windmill Hill City Farm is...

- ◆ A farm for the local community to share.
- ◆ A place that inspires, informs and educates people, that is busy with visitors who have a wide range of backgrounds and experience, and that reaches out to all people in our community.
- ◆ A beacon for sustainable living, where people can experience, see, understand and learn about animals and plants, their environment, and food production.
- ◆ A space for people to visit, enjoy, play, relax and to meet people.
- ◆ A sanctuary for people and nature.
- ◆ An organisation that is both responsive to and a leader within our community.

Realising our aims

The following section outlines the specific aims and activities we wish to advance. Sections are set out with separate headings, however many aspects of activity overlap across sections and are dependent on each other for success.

Engaging with and educating people

Our current activities towards this goal have a focus on food, farming and the environment. They include on-site interpretation, information services, courses, training, educational visits and childcare.

The difference we'll make

People will have greater knowledge, opportunities, skills and experience through their engagement with us increasing their capacity to lead a fulfilled life.

How we will achieve it

- ◆ Use our farm and garden environment to engage people in outdoor learning, connect them to their environment and to help them find their role in addressing the climate emergency.
- ◆ Provide a childcare environment that gives a high-quality experience to pre-school children.
- ◆ Provide an outstanding educational resource to a broad spectrum of learners that includes both informal learning and courses.

Development of existing work

- ◆ Deliver a strong programme for schools, optimising the resources available to them.
- ◆ Increase the level of work with nurture groups for children.
- ◆ Provide high quality of care to children, services to young people and activities for families, using the unique environment effectively and imaginatively
- ◆ Support families in need through activities that educate, advise and empower parents
- ◆ Improve levels of interpretation around the animals, gardens and heritage of the site.
- ◆ Develop challenging educational messages in the café and shop around positive food choices.
- ◆ Expand the range of adult courses on offer.

New areas to explore

- ◆ Develop better family support and outreach work to improve families' wellbeing through early years provision.
- ◆ Develop a programme of workshops for all ages in traditional land-based skills.
- ◆ Expand provision for young people (11 to 20 years) including work experience placements.
- ◆ Review the environmental impact of our farm production and develop a coherent narrative around our role in the future of farming.

Developing Wellbeing

Our current activities towards this goal have a focus on activities based in health and social care work for people with mild to moderate needs (mental health, learning difficulties, older people).

The difference we'll make

People will be able to live happier, healthier lives, to make the most of their abilities, and better manage conditions that limit them in achieving their ambitions.

How we'll achieve it

- ◆ Use our facilities and outdoor environment to deliver services that aid therapy or recovery for people in need.
- ◆ Improve our understanding of local needs and create services that responds to them.
- ◆ Provide a place with universal appeal and benefit for the wellbeing of local people.

Development of existing work

- ◆ Ensure financial sustainability of the H&SC programme to deliver therapeutic programmes of activity.
- ◆ Ensure supported volunteering opportunities are available in all areas of our activity.
- ◆ Engage with the local community to better understand their needs and aspirations.
- ◆ Strengthening the bonds between Bristol's three city farms for greater collaborative work.
- ◆ Encourage other organisations to deliver services from the farm.

New areas to explore

- ◆ Increase the variety of activities on offer across all facilities on site (eg sports).
- ◆ Increase the interchange between departments to address wellbeing across all our communities
- ◆ Development of the offer we make to older people including intergenerational activities.
- ◆ Engage with social prescribing in a profitable manner.

Community Facility

Our current activities towards this goal have a focus on running a city farm and gardens (attract general visitors, produce food, maintain public gardens, provide a café, provide opportunities to take part and get involved through volunteering).

The difference we'll make

More local people will make better use of, and have greater input to, our improving site and services gaining a greater sense of belonging and pride, making our neighbourhood a better place to live for all.

How we'll achieve it

- ◆ Engage local people in developing our offer and aim for a wide spectrum of people participating in accessible activities.
- ◆ Provide a café and farm shop that lives by and promotes our values and makes a profit.
- ◆ Balance green space vs built environment as we develop the site to create a great experience for people, good animal welfare and good environment for wildlife.
- ◆ Enhance our capacity as a 'community anchor' offering a range of services and facilities that complement local authority and commercial provision.

Development of existing work

- ◆ Retain free entry to the farm and gardens and good accessibility to all facilities
- ◆ Enhance the café menu and optimise use of its space (eg shop development).
- ◆ Provide greater opportunity for volunteering and training placements in the café.
- ◆ Make the gardens even more beautiful, productive, sustainable, inclusive and educational.
- ◆ Keep a good variety and number of animals with high levels of animal welfare.
- ◆ Improve the signage and interpretation on site to enhance an accessible and welcoming environment.

New areas to explore

- ◆ Explore the feasibility of a new community space off site – in particular in the Bedminster Green development
- ◆ Redevelop the farm yard area to make it more useful and attractive
- ◆ Build a strategy for long-term renewal of the fabric of the estate to ensure the sustainability and attractiveness to the community it supports.
- ◆ Explore how to integrate the site with the new developments in Bedminster Green to engage its residents

Community Development

Our current activities towards this goal have a focus on connecting to local people increasing their capacity to participate in society, volunteering, running events, building community cohesion, and developing our relationship with our members and supporters.

The difference we'll make

Local people will have greater engagement and power in their community improving investment, regeneration and recognition of the area.

How we'll achieve it

- ◆ Provide opportunities for volunteering to people of all abilities.
- ◆ Play a role in leading local and city-wide initiatives to the benefit of our community.
- ◆ Help to enhance the identity and cohesion of our local community, provide a space for local voices to be heard, and be a leader in creating shared visions of new developments.
- ◆ Support activities that make our neighbourhood a great place to live and work.

Development of existing work

- ◆ Enable volunteers to participate in an exciting programme of activities with exemplary volunteering procedures and practice
- ◆ Build a profitable relationship with businesses eg corporate volunteer groups and sponsorship
- ◆ Provide a programme of events that attract, reflect and involve local people and make a positive financial contribution to the organisation
- ◆ Increase the number and level of engagement of members and encourage their participation in setting the direction of the organisation.
- ◆ Increase the diversity of people involved in our activities taking positive steps to engage minority communities.
- ◆ Further engagement with the city council's community development team working in the area.

New areas to explore

- ◆ Respond to the arrival of large numbers of students into the neighbourhood positively engaging them in the community.
- ◆ Increase our capacity to undertake community engagement work to understand the needs of local people.
- ◆ Improve provision for 14-24-year olds including work experience opportunities
- ◆ Explore potential to act outside the site boundaries (eg as a social landlord or provider of outreach services)

Stronger, more sustainable, organisation

These are the activities that underpin our existence: having sufficient, diverse and robust income streams, managing internal and external communications, staff development, environmental credentials, use of technology.

The difference we'll make

As a well run organisation with a stronger staff and volunteer team we'll be more resilient, better able to achieve our goals and a greater contributor to a wider agenda for change.

How we'll achieve it

- ◆ Work to be an environmentally positive and carbon-neutral operation by 2030 by investing in reduced consumption, renewable technology and offsetting.
- ◆ Develop a financially robust model that reliably turns a surplus.
- ◆ Invest in the development and welfare of our personnel and become a 'living wage' employer.
- ◆ Develop our organisational agility to respond to challenging circumstances with partnerships that enable us to better fulfil our mission.

Development of existing work

- ◆ Develop a plan to carbon neutrality – adopt a means of measuring our carbon footprint.
- ◆ Ensure that sustainability is built in across all activities - economic, social and environmental
- ◆ Become an 'employer of choice' through an integrated system of staff management
- ◆ Support board development to build diversity, capacity and activity of trustees

New areas to explore

- ◆ Community initiatives on climate action.
- ◆ Improving measures of our own impact.
- ◆ Developing a narrative that relates our work to the global strategic development goals.
- ◆ Improve staff accommodation (eg loft conversion for volunteers building) and maintain the balance of green space to buildings.

Organisation

Business model

The current business model for the organisation is under stress. We face increasing pressure to move towards earning our income through paid services rather than grants. While we already earn the vast majority of our income our expenditure exceeds what we earn. The argument for 'core' funding of community spaces is out of favour and projects are increasingly unlikely to pay for overheads not directly linked to activity. There is an increasing narrative among funders that the perceived 'reliance' of organisations on charitable donations must be reduced, with social enterprise models championed as their replacement.

We will undertake a review of the business model in 2020 with external support to ensure that our approach is one that meets our aims for social impact and financial sustainability. Our emphasis is to increase income and efficiency to achieve sustainability rather than to reduce costs by cutting activities and capacity. Fundraising activity will continue to focus on major grants for projects.

Governance and structure

Windmill Hill City Farm is a company limited by guarantee and registered charity. Nothing in this strategy requires a change to that status. WHCF owns a trading company through which some activity is currently directed. The board of trustees is the legally responsible body for the organisation. It should be maintained with between 6 and 12 members in order to offer sufficient expertise and challenge to the executive team. The staff of the organisation are headed by a Chief Executive Officer who is directly responsible to the board.

Volunteers will continue to play a central role in the activities of the organisation. They are both the subject of its charitable mission and the means of achieving it. Members have an important role in developing the organisation as they are both the source of board members and hold the board to account. We aim to improve engagement levels of members. Membership will continue to be a requirement for access to some of the services of the organisation.

Measures of success

The measures by which we and others judge our success are a key driver in determining the direction of the organisation. The organisation must strike a balance between input, output and impact measures, which all have different benefits, and the measures chosen must not cost more to measure than the benefit derived from measuring them.

Key Indicators and targets

Detailed indicators and targets will form part of the operational plans for each year. The following indicates the areas and types of measure we will be monitoring.

- ◆ Overall
 - A portfolio of measures of overall social impact.
 - Brand, reputation – be considered a flagship city farm.
 - Quality and quantity of projects undertaken and their delivery.
- ◆ Engaging with and educating people
 - Number of visitors and the quality of their experience (based on feedback)
 - Quantity and quality of school visits
 - Quality of on-site informal learning opportunities
 - Quality of care in the nursery
- ◆ Developing Wellbeing

- Quality of services offered – progress of individuals engaged
- Number and diversity of people supported
- Wellbeing indicators (eg Community Life survey, Thriving Places index)
- ◆ Provide community facilities
 - Accessibility of the facilities and services
 - Animal welfare measures
 - Quality and quantity of food produced
 - Quality and profitability of events
 - Café – profitability, customer satisfaction, volunteering opportunities
 - Impact as a place-maker
- ◆ Community development
 - Number and type of volunteers (eg individual, corporate groups, supported), quality of experience they have
 - Events – variety, viability, community involvement
 - Membership – level of engagement
- ◆ Become a stronger organisation
 - Financial performance
 - Staff retention, remuneration and professional development levels
 - Measures of environmental impact
 - Fabric of the estate improved

Charity objects

The objects for which the organisation is established were updated in 2016.

Extract from the Articles of Association.

1) To advance for the public benefit the education of all people in the neighbourhoods in and around Windmill Hill Bristol, particularly, but not exclusively, in subjects related to food, farming and the environment through provision of information, courses, activities and facilities for learning; to provide education and nursery care for young children; and training for people in any trade, occupation or service, thereby advancing them in life and enabling them to earn their own livelihood.

2) To assist in the treatment and care of persons suffering from mental or physical illness of any description or in need of rehabilitation as a result of such illness, by the provision of services and facilities for work, therapy, education and recreation.

3) To provide for the benefit of the public in the neighbourhoods in and around Windmill Hill Bristol facilities including, but not limited to a farm and gardens, and services in the interests of social welfare for recreation, volunteering or other leisure time occupation of individuals who have need of such facilities by reason of their youth, age or disability, financial hardship or social circumstances with the object of improving their conditions of life and wellbeing.

4) To develop the capacity and skills of people disadvantaged in any manner in the neighbourhoods in and around Windmill Hill Bristol in such a way that they are better able to identify, and help meet, their needs and to participate more fully in society.

Steve Sayers, Chief Executive, March 2020