

Focused Meeting Minutes from 27th August 2026

Rather than a process record, we are attempting an issue based approach to the notes from the meeting .

1.Present: Dave Amos,Alan Dobie ,Sally Bee,David Bee,Gail Chapman,Raymond Simpson,Dave Roberts,Linda Simpson (minutes)

Apologies:Elspeth Baillie,Jane Bremner

2.Background: The spring planting period had been a time of great pressure and stress on volunteers.As we didn't want to repeat this scenario ,we decided to discuss,seek solutions ,adaptations and improvements.

We acknowledged that our production of fruit flowers and vegetables was now progressing very well despite this and that morale was boosted by this.

All Trustees and regular volunteers were invited to email in their thoughts ,observations and suggestions .Eleven people wrote in. There was general consensus about the challenges and some solutions with a variety of other suggestions made.The volunteer experience was highlighted as important.RS supplied an analysis of all the contributions with suggestions.

3.Aims of the meeting:To address the challenges identified.

4. Individual hopes:Individuals expressed their own their personal hopes for the next growing year.

5. Reminders:We reminded ourselves of our **Charitable Aims** finding there was room to improve on community links and the educational aspect of our aims.

The **Constitution:** no issues there.

The **Lease:** Reminders to keep pernicious weeds down.The possibility of using over wintering sheep without needing to consult our landlord.

The possible **rotation** of crops for next year: No problems were identified.

6. The challenges identified

Too much work for too few people in a short window of planting time was the general consensus.

Reasons :

Tractor late to plough and harrow plots pushing back the amount of time available to get the plots ready .

*Remedies :*have our own tractor; plough in autumn; different cultivating approaches

Wet weather: this prevented good access to preparing the plots; extra labour created by one day of work creating compaction on a very rainy day.

Remedies: learn the lesson of not working on very wet soil;keep up good soil care by using compost and organic matter.Succession plant leafy crops to ease pressure to plant out quickly.

***Couch grass:** A major problem making ground prep very laborious and time consuming.Because of the delay,couch also had the chance to flourish on plots where membrane with planting holes had been laid. Couch also restricted the size of the plots.

Remedies: Cover couch infested areas over with best quality tarp for up to a year.,create trenches round plots to stop incursion of couch,

***Define our cultivating area more clearly** so that we know how much space there is for crops,lay solid membrane down before sowing and planting to kill off weed seeds,

Too many plants?

Remedy: Agree to anticipate the amount needed depending on space, cut back on less popular varieties, sell or give extra plants,

Some volunteers unwell:

Remedy: Keep good contact and remember to deliver produce.

Regular helpers on holiday:

Remedy: Doesn't mean the remaining folk need to work harder! Look forward to their stories when they get back!

Not enough working hours: Thursday and Saturday 10 to 12 is not enough time at important times of the year.

Remedy: either /and : more people, less planting, better machinery, more hours, additional days, specific big planting days

Sharing the work out better: A skill shortage especially in sowing and watering and in using powered tools

Remedy: more time taken to show what to do, a rota to share simpler routines, specific teams for specific jobs research lighter or more manageable tools.

Machinery out of action: This further slowed down cultivating progress.

Remedy: Service lawn tractor done; repair two lawn mowers done, Adjustments to strimmer done. Use personal tools done,

Scythe training done

Climate Issues and white onion rot

Challenges : Irrigation .taking time and effort outwith working hours. Prolonged warmth can give storage difficulties:

Remedies: improvements made to irrigation and need further monitoring; Focus on crops which store well in the ground; improve ventilation in the insulated shed. harvest earlier, sell earlier. Use garlic powder .Can alliums be separated as this year.?

Harvest rain water

7. The margins: these also need managed Timing and tools required need more discussion and research. Scything and brush cutting ongoing.

8. Ground Management plan

Specifically Couch grass * * define our cultivating area more clearly

On the basis that the main manageable irritant is couch grass, a proposal was made to clearly define the cultivating area from the previously cultivated area. ie **the rest** A scale map of the field was presented by RS with the main couch intrusion marked.

a. This was to divide plots 1 to 5 horizontally at c 25 m from the north from the rest.

b. The rest to be cultivated differently to keep it in good heart. First steps are to mow it with a view to ploughing and harrowing and levelling (safer underfoot and easy for our lawn tractor to cut) it prior to using . This could be for green manure , grass or a mixture of these, (for compost) or a wild flower area(for biodiversity) or other use to be decided later.

c. Dig a trench between the two areas. to inhibit the intrusion of couch grass.

Possible Growing areas.

The main growing Plots to be selected from the 25m lengths.

Treat couch grass , specifically plot 3 , by covering in silage tarp for a year,

Possibly plough up paths;

Use cover crops eg mustard seed asap where possible where crops have been lifted

Remove any pernicious weeds such as docken.

Couch on southern margins bordering the rest to be covered to exclude light.

Use membrane to plant through to further suppress weeds eg plot 1 the new brassica plot

Lift potatoes extending into the rest area first to allow the tractor to mow and level

Lift the leeks protruding into the rest area first to allow the tractor on.

Cut down Phacelia on plot 5 before it seeds and allow to lie on the ground.

Plots 8 and 9

Both plots useable .The south end of plot 8 needs attention because of couch and weeds. Stones and weed on a strip of plot 9 need attention also.

Plot 9 is allocated for courgettes ,squash ,spinach .It could also be used for leeks if space needed.

Plot 7: An area of 12 beds in a 3x4 pattern with grass paths separating each.

This suffered from the reduction in working time and tool breakdown this year .a. Paths widened encroaching on beds,b. too many beds to be managed well.c.grass edges not cuttable by mowers ,creating more grass seed and untidy edges.

Remedy: Discuss removing the transverse beds to simplify mowing. Agree a strategy for cutting edges and for mowing.

In general,

It was agreed to work towards using all the beds available with those most full of couch to be covered.

Adjustments to this to be made as deemed necessary as each plot becomes crop free and checked for couch etc

AOCB:

The Big Polytunnel:

*Challenge :*to have later and earlier crops.Rats ate the best corn,Cucumbers not thriving Pheasants in dust baths

Remedy☐: Sow in trays on August for autumn and then winter.When crops are removed ,plant these out ,

Rats : keep monitoring level of pest control needed.avoid tempting crops, cucumbers: check the variety used ,check feeding is appropriate,arrange feeding rota,make sure good quality of compost used and topped up as necessary.Better door barriers.

The raised beds..

Challenge. Underused

Remedy : plan better for seed purchase,allocate a team to these.

Actions:

Ask Dave Muirhead to top/ mow the grass in the rest RS

Ask Craig to advise on hiring a small digger for a trench along the boundary of the cultivated plots and the rest SB

Discuss removal of transverse paths on plot 7 to ease mowing requirements.

Consider how to edge all grass edges.eg edging trimmer,bladed tool , simply cut by spade etc

Costs involved : Explore grants 1.Windfarm AD 2. Community Fund : LS

Type and costs of a small tractor with implements to ease the physical load on helpers : RS and DR

Silage Tarp: Pros and cons ,costs amount.DB and LS

Green Manure and grass options for the rest: LS

Shed ventilation : Solar fan to be installed .LS / AC

Explore cordless tools eg Stihl .Match to machinery gaps and ease of use .

How to engage more people? Evening sessions ,invitations to local groups, discuss and action.

Different cultivating approaches: GCh,SB and LS attending new training

Grants and expenses monitoring: Gail Chapman volunteered to take on the treasurer role (hurrah)DR to contact JC for further advice for GC.

Take our basic plan to **a meeting with regular volunteers** on September 10th c 11.30 to share thoughts .Use this discussion to think about improvements to communication and how we work eg using teams , training ,new tools ,sharing opinions more freely.

Meet members for a field tour with tea and cake on September 9th at 2 pm . DB SB LS GC etc