

Dunkeld & Birnam Community Growing Project

Annual General Meeting Friday 6th November 2020

Chairman's Report 2020

The Place ...The Produce...The People ...The Pandemic ...The Process

We live in uncertain times that question where we are now and our future direction. The present is challenging and complex but has emphasised the importance of soil, season and social food growing. We are fortunate to live in and around Dunkeld with the space and natural potential of the Field.

The Place

The Field's soil has steadily improved during its first decade. The soil is so important to what we do, how we grow and the legacy we pass on to future generations. Minimal interference, copious compost and careful control of weeds and a focus on biodiversity have been key factors.

In 2020 we have built three new storage sheds behind the main shed area. Built of local larch, we are grateful to Raymond Simpson for his design & practical skill in completing these. They provide much needed space for nets and produce.

The watering system and cleaning has been improved with new hoses and a reel to give better ability to water selected areas and clean tools and containers. We are constantly aware of the need to minimise water use and reduce waste. Some crops grow under membrane (leeks, brassica & onions) and we have invested in higher quality materials that we hope can be reused for multiple growing seasons-reducing the use of single use plastic.

Labels and signs have been updated and the seeds, herbs and plots numbers are hopefully clearly marked. Compost is a key component in organic growing so we try to make as much as practicable as well as getting high-grade compost from Binn Farm locally. Horse manure from local horses helps the fertility -but we are still learning how and when to best use the "dung".

Sadly, Hamish Carlton died this year. A bench is in the main seating area to recall and recognise the practical grass cutting, gazebo lifting and legal advice he gave The Field for many years.

Hazel and willow trees have been successfully planted on the peripheral areas of the Field area and seem to be thriving.

During the Covid 19 lockdown, the A9 traffic noise disappeared to be replaced by the sound of native birds with clear crisper clarity. We encourage hedgehogs that are effective slug eaters but live in balance with our resident pheasants who share the bounty of food on their doorstep. Oystercatchers again successfully nested in the middle of the plots this summer.

2020 has seen the arrival of disinfectant for tool handles and touch surfaces and hand sanitiser bottles in 3 areas could remain a feature in 2021.

The Produce.

On this day of writing I have eaten onions, leeks, spinach and autumn raspberries all from our own produce! I have learned so much during my initial 4 years and am aware that sharing the learning is so important. I am grateful for the wisdom of those who continue to guide us in our monthly planning and activities. The importance of seasons, sowing and harvesting at optimum times gives us an impressive array of vegetables and fruit that is organic and local.

Traditional staples have thrived and new innovations of aubergines, sweetcorn, pumpkins, autumn raspberries add to interest and variety. Some disappointments this season have been onion rot in the garlic bed, some blight on certain early potatoes and rodent damage to our carrots. The success with beetroot, basil, brassicas, parsnips, shallots and early onions have delighted us...and fed us in Corona constricted times!

The flowers have been amazing with such a variety of shape, colour and size from early spring to late autumn.

Seed planning, sowing and planting has been good with ever increasing skills and knowledge enhancing success.

The People

We are increasingly aware of our interdependence on the land and natural world not just for our food but for our physical and emotional wellbeing.

The growing project would not be active and thriving without the initial innovators (Raymond, Linda, Dave R and Dave A) and 20-30 regular volunteers who have given so much time & energy since the early lockdown times in March. Working in household groups within a rota system has been difficult. I would like to thank the many regular volunteers that have shown flexibility and consideration during this growing and yet challenging season.

Our stall holders, Ginny, Lorna, June and Dave A have been such an asset to keep the Field produce being available to the community of Birnam and Dunkeld during sunshine and some torrential rain. The markets have an important social connecting role during times of limited travel and restricted family meetings.

The 89 members are all appreciated for their ongoing support.

The community of Birnam and Dunkeld has been practically supportive buying our produce and giving useful feedback.

I am privileged to be in a group of trustees who have shared decision-making and workload having regular 2 weekly zoom meetings to ensure the horticultural work can continue and volunteers can be as safe as possible. Although we had an open reflection evening in March, we have not been able to choose all initiatives and plan this year as we had hoped. I apologise for this.

Dave Roberts (secretary) is constantly alongside to discuss and disseminate new plans and initiatives. His help has been much appreciated this year.

Alas 2020 has not allowed visitors to our project. In recent weeks however we have been able to contribute to one of the Dunkeld Cathedral online services focusing on harvest time and the importance of local food growing to our community.

The Pandemic

Covid 19 is no longer a pandemic but a significant virus that is endemic in our country. Even after 6 months of spread there are more questions than answers.

We have had to creatively think how we can proceed with safety and yet continue to sow, plant ,grow and sell our produce.We now can accept credit cards, contactless payments but still recognise that cash is still convenient for many.

The threat of personal spread obviously impacts on the numbers we can allow at the Field. Scottish Government and local authorities have written guidelines and we now have a refined version of our online rota. John Small and Elspeth Baillie have been instrumental in the development of the rota. Thank you. The rota ensures better safety and allows any potential contacts to be traced -which is good governance.

The virus has had practical and emotional effects on our volunteers. During the period of lockdown the Field has provided structure, social connection and meaningful activity to many spring and summer days.

We are now more able to work at other times although we hope the Thursday and Saturday mornings will resume with social spacing and limited numbers.

Despite the restrictions, sanitisers and limited numbers we have grown quality produce for our community and ourselves and rekindled our values, our community and kept us grounded to the natural environment and appreciate the Field as a special asset for now and hopefully many years ahead.

The Process

Business requires focusing on profits and expenses ,but the horticultural process is more important than even the profit or produce. We are aware more than ever of the issues around climate change, biodiversity and reducing use of fossil fuels and their derivatives at every opportunity. Sharing workload, produce, decisions, learning & new ideas are important but the essential ingredient of a community-growing project is sharing “stories”.

Elif Shafak “ Stories bring us together, untold stories keep us apart”

Thank you

David E Bee

Chairman.

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November 2020



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