

DorsetCAN Case Study 1: 'Shaftesbury HomeGrown' – How to Build a Community Farm

Shaftesbury's community farm is a legacy of the 'Transition Town' movement. Thanks to landowners who let us lease land on the edge of the town, for more than 12 years Shaftesbury HomeGrown (SHG) has grown food seasonally as naturally and sustainably as we can. A changing group, all volunteers, have shared planning and carrying out farm tasks, benefitted from access to produce discounted in proportion to their hours worked, learned new skills, and enjoyed good company. We grow fruit, vegetables, flowers and herbs, keep bees mainly as pollinators rather than for honey, and free-range hens for wholesome eggs. Some things have adapted over the years: livestock used to play a greater part and we kept sheep and pigs. Throughout, the intention has been to provide opportunities for members of the community to join together to grow and have access to healthy local food.

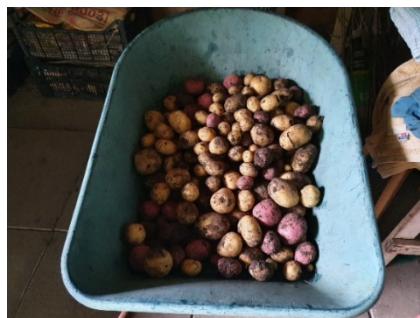


During the pandemic we needed to limit the number of people working at any one time. We introduced an additional work session to accommodate new members whilst keeping down the number on site at one time. We've all appreciated the outdoor activity and social side of collaboration. Summer 2020 gave us an abundant harvest of fruit, vegetables, and safe fun. Many of us have described our involvement as 'a life saver' and this is one of the things our chair, Helen English, spoke about when interviewed for 'This is Alfred', Shaftesbury's daily podcast. Hear her on the 27th August at minute 17:06: <http://bit.ly/Dcan301>



Encouraged by a good growing season, more volunteers and greater awareness of the climate emergency, in September 2020 the group decided to 'scale up' and play a larger part in the town's life. As well as increased food production, we're looking for land-based projects to run alongside the farm's core activities. Already we've gained:

- a tree nursery
- a new weekly family workday
- teenagers tackling a wide variety of tasks as part of their Duke of Edinburgh Award
- a connection to a dementia-friendly group
- understanding of what's needed (like a compost toilet) to make the site more family-friendly and suitable for therapeutic gardening
- poles cut from the hedge, used to make a wattle fence panel and supports for beans/squash
- permission for a polytunnel for which we're raising funds and support from the local community through Crowdfunder: <http://bit.ly/Dcan302>



What are the secrets of our success? We're largely self-sufficient; only occasionally needing supplementary funding to acquire say, a chicken house or now the polytunnel. Members must be comfortable with community growing and collective decision-making. It's not for everyone, but for us the enjoyment of working together is as important as the food we produce.



For information or to arrange a visit: contact Helen English: 07789 845498