

# Community Harvest Whetstone Business Plan 2009-2012

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## 1. The Background to Community Harvest Whetstone

Community Harvest Whetstone (CWH) is the brainchild of a network of individuals and organisations with an interest in local food production. As the impacts of Climate Change hit home and commodity prices rise due the rising costs of fossil fuels, the need for affordable food, produced locally, will also rise. Currently, most families are dependent on food which is imported or transported over large distances, often requiring large energy inputs to ensure that food remains fresh and healthy to eat. Producing food locally allows fresh, healthy goods to be available with a reduction in energy cost and consequent carbon emissions. However, current capacity for local food production is minimal despite an increasing awareness of the potential benefits. The magnitude of the overall task of re-localising food production is beyond the scope or capability of any single project but every project which can be successfully established will act as a model for others.

The concept of a Community Supported Agriculture Scheme (CSA) is that individuals and households from a community pre-finance the costs connected with the local production of food for their own consumption. There are various legal formats for establishing a CSA and they vary in terms of the management structure, degree of participation and the growing methods used and products supplied.

The Transition Network is an international movement in which communities adopt a loose framework of principles aimed at reducing reliance on fossil fuels and increasing local resilience. In this context resilience means the ability of a community /ecosystem etc. to withstand shock (e.g. as a result of climatic change). Resilience also implies the ability to prosper and thrive through adaptation to changing circumstances. The Transition Movement embodies the principle that a lower energy future will be more vibrant, more creative, safer and healthier as communities will become more cohesive and mutually supportive due to the need to work, play and consume closer to home. Local food production is a key element of this kind of re-localisation strategy.

Transition Leicester (TL) is a local transition initiative, which has been linked to the Transition Network since March 2008. One of the aims of TL is supporting practical projects which further the general aims of reducing fossil fuel use and increasing local resilience. Many Transition groups are supporting CSAs in their areas. Transition Leicester was therefore keen to find a potential CSA site within Leicester or Leicestershire.

Leicestershire Food Links (LFL) is an organisation which promotes local food production and distribution. For example, via support for Farmers' Markets. As the aims of Transition Leicester and Leicestershire Food Links are similar with regard to the need for increased local food production, they have become natural partners in promoting Community Harvest Whetstone (CHW).

The Chair of LFL is Sandra Herbert, who, together with her husband, Anthony owns Whetstone Pastures Farm in the Parish of Whetstone, Blaby District. Sandra and Anthony attended a presentation about CSA schemes given by the Soil Association organised by Transition Leicester with the support of LFL. Subsequently, the Herberts approached Transition Leicester with the offer of land for rent for a CSA project. This started the ball rolling and allowed the formation of a working group to establish the vision for a CSA at Whetstone Pastures Farm.

## 2. Developing the Vision

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Following the Herberts' offer, Transition Leicester took on the initial role of engaging participation in the project by identifying key organisations and individuals who might have an existing interest in a CSA and also, by utilising the Transition contacts list, publicising the project amongst the wider membership of Transition Leicester. Publicity to the local community in Whetstone and surrounding areas was also undertaken via the media, attendance at events and through other relevant contact lists. Open meetings were held, which resulted in the formation of a core group working to establish the project and a wider group of people who are potential crop sharers and general supporters.

The decision of the working group was to establish Community Harvest Whetstone as an Industrial and Provident Society (IPS: a form of co-operative). CHW will be not-for-profit but will employ personnel to grow vegetables and manage the project on behalf of the membership.

**The overall aim of the project is to provide fresh, healthy, traceable vegetable produce to the local community in and around Whetstone therefore creating a resilient and sustainable model of food production in Leicestershire.**

Alongside this overall aim, the vision of the project includes:

- Recognising that the implications of Climate Change and rising fossil fuels costs creates a need for re-localisation of food production
- Recognising that Community Supported Agriculture is a tried and tested way of re-localising food production and strengthening local communities
- Providing a demonstration of a CSA in action
- Providing educational opportunities for people of all ages and groups (schools, colleges, clubs, home-educators and other community groups)
- Providing opportunities for volunteering and experiential training in natural food production methods
- Providing a space for events and celebrations
- Increasing awareness of the benefits of local, natural food production
- Increased awareness of health benefits from a healthier diet and lifestyle
- Increasing local biodiversity by eliminating use of petroleum based pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers in the growing area
- Reducing carbon emissions by using low intensity growing methods and decreasing food miles (distance from producer to consumer).

### **3. The Scope and Benefits of the Project**

The Community Harvest Whetstone IPS will be managed by a committee made up of 3-12 volunteers.

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The CSA will rent from Whetstone Pastures Farm (the Herberts) an area of land, as well as a large polytunnel and a Victorian glasshouse in need of refurbishment.

The land available in the Year 1 (1/8 acre), together with the polytunnel, will provide enough produce for 5 crop-shares but to increase participation, these are being offered as half-shares so that there will actually be 10 households benefiting.

In Years 2 and 3, the amount of land available will increase by another 2 acres and therefore we will be able to offer another 20 full shares in Year 2 and 40 in total in Year 3.

To receive a share of the crops, each member will pay a fixed sum, which is intended to cover the project's costs, including wages for the employees.

The scheme is designed to expand over time. In the first year the crop sharers will be mostly people with an existing interest in local food production and sustainability. Over the next two years, it is planned that there will be an uptake of crop-shares by the wider local community.

In addition to those buying crop-shares, the project will receive some finance from a wider number of members, who will pay an annual subscription and will benefit from family-friendly access to the farm, healthy exercise, opportunities to join in work days and participation in social events and open meetings.

The project will employ three part-time growers, who will benefit from jobs, training, working in a healthy environment and the acquisition of a wide range of horticultural and management skills.

A number of volunteers will also benefit from being able to do outdoor work and exercise, acquiring new skills and socialising. It is hoped that by Year 3, we will be able to offer up to 5 work-shares whereby people on low income can get all or part of their vegetable shares in exchange for work on the project.

Whetstone Pastures Farm have an existing educational programme for schools and other community groups, Community Harvest Whetstone will be able to link with this and provide our own educational activities.

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## 4. SWOT analysis

### Strengths

- Mailing list of 60+ people and access to Transition Leicester/Leicestershire Food Links mailing lists with members numbering 500+.
- Actual membership of 13 supporting members and 9 crop-sharers.
- Affordable land available with supportive landlord.
- Support, training and mentoring via the Soil Association.

### Weaknesses

- Lack of understanding among the general public of the benefits of local food
- Reliance of the project on volunteer time – with subsequent possibility of volunteer burn out.

### Opportunities

- Potential for further expansion within the farm
- Subsequent expansion of provision of food to the community
- Likely increase in general awareness of local food issues as effects of Climate Change start to become obvious.
- Training opportunities through Soil Association

### Threats

- Climatic changes – unpredictability of weather and changes to pest and disease levels
- Lack of skilled employees and volunteers.
- Having to compete with large agribusiness and the existing unsustainable system of food subsidies, production and distribution.
- Current economic situation might make potential investors cautious about investing in an innovative project.

## 5. Development Strategy for CHW

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## Marketing

- Media advertising e.g. local and Parish magazines, local press and radio
- Word of mouth and networking
- Participation at local events and festivals (including Farmers' Markets, stalls at Environmental and Food Events)
- Mailing lists (Transition Leicester, Leicestershire Food Links, Home-educators around Leicestershire)
- Website and social networking sites (e.g. Facebook) and Youtube
- Newsletters

## Human Resources

- Management Committee (Voluntary) including Chair, Vice-Chair and Secretary.
- Treasurer/book-keeper
- Three part-time growers
- Other Volunteers and supporters
- External advisers e.g. from Transition Network, Soil Association, Mercia Organic Growers Group.

## Customers

- Crop-sharers
- People attending educational visits and events

## Operations

- Land preparation
- Repairs to polytunnel and glasshouse
- Fencing
- General maintenance of land and tools
- Planting
- Cultivation
- Harvesting

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- Packaging
- Distribution
- Accounts and Finance
- Marketing and sales
- Managing employees and volunteers
- Management of educational visits, events and other social activities

## Technology

- Generally low tech – mainly using hand-tools
- Rotavator
- ITC

## **6. SMART Objectives**

Within the first three years of the project:

- Production of 40 large and 10 small weekly vegetable boxes to local scheme members by the end of Year 3.
- To provide 3 part-time jobs for the growers.
- To provide visits for local schools, colleges, clubs and other community groups (programme and specific targets still to be developed)
- To provide training for volunteers and future employees via the Soil Association Make Local Food Work programme (to date, four people have already attended training workshops)
- To disseminate acquired skills to local volunteers (numbers and timescale to be determined at a later date)
- Develop a system of allowing up to 5 work-shares whereby people on low incomes can get all or part of their vegetable shares in exchange for work on the project.

## **7. Financial Plan**

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Initial plans have been developed for the first three years of the project. However, it is expected that the project will continue to expand beyond this time-frame. The Budget Plan exists as a separate document. Below is a brief financial summary of Years 1-3.

Summary of Projected Income and Expenditure in Each of Years 1-3:

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Income	£13,680.00	£11,400.00	£24,440.00
Expenditure	£5,963.00	£18,610.00	£22,850.00
TOTAL	£7,717.00	-£7,210.00	£1,590.00

The income will be provided by the sale of vegetable shares (£630/yr) and by yearly membership subscriptions (£24 or 12, if on low income), also we will be raising £10,000 by a share offer.

In Year 1 we will be offering 10 half-shares at £320 per annum each and are expecting £480 in membership subscription (approx 20 supporting members). Some other income should be generated by events donations

In Year 2 we will be offering 10 half-shares at £320 per annum each, as well as 20 full shares at £630 per annum each, with quarterly payments starting in Jan 2011. Membership subscriptions should raise a further £180 (approx 10-15 members).

In Year 3 we will be offering 10 half-shares at £320 per annum each, as well as 40 full shares at £630 per annum each, with quarterly payments starting in Jan 2012. Membership subscriptions should raise a further £180 (approx 10-15 members).

It is expected that by the end of Year 3 (Aug 2012) the project will be fully self financing.

The loss in Year 2 is explained by the costs sustained in setting up the project and expanding onto a larger field: tools, materials, equipment, fencing and extra labour. They are expected to be covered by the share offer in Year 1.