

Surrey Docks Farm Development Plan 2020-21

Introduction

Surrey Docks Farm is a working community farm, situated on the Thames path in London. Here, we engage and educate the whole community to learn about farming and food provenance.

Challenges & Opportunities

As with many organisations Covid-19 has had a serious financial impact on the Farm. Having invested significant reserves in the new Riverfront Development and an essential electric upgrade we started the current financial year with free reserves covering just one months' running costs.

These investments meant we had the space to deliver new grant-funded community engagement projects and new income generating opportunities, including the return of an onsite cafe paying monthly rent. This planned income generation would have quickly rebuilt our free reserves back to three months running costs. However, with the Covid-19 lockdown and resulting Farm closure, came the loss of over £150k of forecasted income due to lack of activity at our busiest time.

Having such low reserves, the immediate focus for 2020-21 was to gain funding fast and reduce expenditure wherever possible in order to generate the cash flow to survive. Thanks to the generosity and incredible support from our community we raised £21,000 in just three weeks and this helped provide us the time to plan and apply for core grants to tide us through this difficult year.

We have continued to support our community throughout the Farm's closure, adapting services and finding new ways of working and we are confident about achieving our ambitious plans, detailed below.

Overview

Given this is an unusual time, we have revised our Development Plan to focus on what we aim to achieve this year, under the following areas:

1. Organisational & Financial Developments
2. Engagement & Education
3. Livestock
4. Food Growing & Greening
5. Feeding Our Community
6. Environment & Sustainability

Development Plan

1. Organisational & Financial Developments

Given the challenges listed our priority is to ensure tight control of finances and to build up our free reserves to at least two months running costs by the end of the financial year.

We'll also focus on new income streams to support future years. This includes starting the move from an 'exempt charity' under the Financial Conduct Authority to become a 'registered charity' reporting to the Charity Commission. This will enable us to access more grant opportunities and draw down income from wider sources.

Alongside this we will ensure new café tenants are engaged and both the café and forge have robust under leases in place.

2. Engagement & Education

Surrey Docks Farm is an education and community focused organisation that ensures our participants voices are heard, for example through our Youth Committee.

Examples of the engagement and education projects we aim to deliver include: providing a range of meaningful volunteer opportunities for local people; delivering a youth programme for those aged 2-18; developing partnership projects; linking with local schools; delivering training projects for adult students with learning disabilities; providing raised beds for local people to grow their own food; and more.

Where onsite delivery isn't possible due to Covid-19 we will adapt our services to ensure we support those most vulnerable in new ways.

This year we will also focus on the development of new projects. We will support our Youth Committee to apply for funding for a new youth project for 14-18 year olds and we will carry out a Volunteer Consultation to gain feedback to apply for a Volunteer Coordinator post.

3. Livestock

We encourage people to look, touch and learn about livestock. We care for a range of animals including goats, sheep, pigs, donkeys, poultry and small animals.

We are proud to be a proper working farm. We produce meat and eggs which are sold through our farm shop. We aim to connect people with where their food comes from and encourage them to choose high welfare farms and minimise food miles.

We also have an apiary in our orchard with several hives. We will engage participants to learn about honey bees and honey production, we'll then sell the honey to our local community.

After a successful pilot project delivering ton bags of rotted manure to community gardens, this year we will work on ways to speed up the rotting process to provide a better product. We'll also look for sponsorship to continue to deliver this natural fertiliser to a network of gardens, turning this waste into a resource.

4. Food Growing & Greening

We will maintain the food-growing spaces across our 2.2 acre site focusing on productivity. We will establish a weekly Gardening Shop to support the increased interest in growing food at home, selling all the resources needed to grow fruits and vegetables in small spaces. We'll plant and develop a new River Garden that will be open to visitors via the Thames path. We'll also install a grant-funded greenhouse to replace our polytunnel. The greenhouse will increase our accessible food growing space, enable visitors to see what's happening inside and reduce waste - as we were needing to replace the polytunnel plastic cover biannually.

We will recruit our first Horticulture Apprentice, who will gain a diploma in Work Based Horticulture and support the onsite garden maintenance and garden volunteer teams. We'll start developing a new network to connect and support community gardens, allotments, school gardens and home growers called 'Rotherhithe Community Gardening Network'. Through this we'll also outreach to local estates interested in greening and growing.

5. Feeding Our Community

We will continue to provide fresh, quality, seasonal produce for sale to our local community, by adapting to an online farm shop with collections from our gates.

We'll donate food from our youth plots to the participants' families and we will record how much we give away through Capital Growth's 'Community Harvest' project.

We will apply for grant funding to install a new Community Kitchen in our Tower building which will provide a dedicated space for community cooking workshops using food harvested from the Farm, provide new jobs and support work targeting food insecurity. We are members of Southwark Food Action Alliance and will engage with other members and our existing participants to ensure this new kitchen space meets the needs of our community.

6. Environment & Sustainability

We are proud to be a demonstration site for sustainable energy practices; we harvest rainwater, use energy from our solar panels and boil the kettle with gas from our biodigester. We will promote and develop this use across the Farm, including installing signage to educate visitors.

As a working farm in central London we're not the usual place you'd associate with wildlife. Here we 'garden for wildlife' and work to organic methods. We grow wildflowers for pollinators, leave nettle patches and log piles for invertebrates. We install bee, bat and bird boxes and have a dedicated Wildlife Garden and pond that hosts over 50 frogs each Spring. We work with organisations in the Southwark Biodiversity Partnership to deliver the Southwark Nature Action Plan 2020 by increasing biodiversity at the Farm; with a particular focus on improving habitats for amphibians, house sparrows and bees. This year we will increase the amount of hedging on site to provide more habitats and nesting sites. We'll renovate our wildlife garden through a crowdfunding campaign led by our Youth Committee to improve the space for wildlife and people. We will also continue to educate and engage people to learn about wildlife both on and off site.

Areas	Aims	Examples of Outputs Monitored
Organisational & Financial Developments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finances managed in line with 2020-21 budget. - Build reserves back up to a minimum three months running costs. - Establish new income streams for the future. - Cafe tenants engaged. - Forge under lease in place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of people signed up as Friends of the Farm giving monthly donations - Number of people who donated to the 'Save Surrey Docks Farm' Campaign launched in April - Total free cash reserves in place
Engagement & Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide a range of meaningful volunteer opportunities for local people. Carry out a volunteer consultation to inform funding bids to engage a new Volunteer Coordinator post - Deliver a participant-led Youth Programme - Deliver Partnership Projects that increase diversity of users - Offer a tailored Schools Programme - Deliver training projects for adult students with learning disabilities - Provide raised beds for local families to grow on throughout the year. - Engage local people with the Farm, remotely via social media in Q1 and aiming for phased visits returning in Q2 (risk assessments permitting) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of volunteer roles - Number of regular volunteers and adhoc volunteers - Number of volunteer hours - Number of volunteers engaged in consultation - Number of 8-14s engaged in youth clubs - Number of work experience students - Number of Youth Committee Members and meetings held - Number of Southwark Youth Offending Service Carpentry Sessions - Number of School Visits - Number of training spaces filled by adults with learning disabilities - Number of plots tended by local people and access slots offered - Number of followers on social media sites - Number of visitors
Livestock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Livestock cared for to high animal welfare standards - Educate and engage local people to learn about food production from livestock - Educate local people about honey bees - Manage muck heaps to turn waste into a resource 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of animals reared and number taken to market - Number of bee workshops delivered - Number of manure bags sold - Number of community gardens who received manure deliveries

Food Growing & Greening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintain the site to be productive - Sell plants and resources through a Garden Shop - Develop a 'Rotherhithe Community Gardening Network' (RCGN) - Outreach to local estates to support growing - Recruit a Horticulture Apprentice - Plant and tend a new River Garden - Install a new greenhouse to increase space for food growing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of households using gardening shop and number of collection slots offered - Number of plants sold - Number of compost bags sold - Number of members engaged in the new RCGN - Number of people engaged in growing projects at local estates
Feeding Our Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Online farm shop offering food collections four days a week - Free fruit and veg boxes for Youth Programme families - Funding bids submitted to install Community Kitchen in Tower 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of households accessing the farm shop and number of collections offered - Number of free food packages given out and number of families that benefitted
Environment & Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Install signage to explain about our sustainable energy projects - Raise awareness of wildlife on the Farm via website, social media and signage - Contribute to delivery of the Southwark Nature Action Plan 2020 - Renovate the Wildlife Garden to benefit nature and people - Increase hedging and habitats for wildlife across the site - Support young people to engage in the 'Keeping It Wild' Project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of posts on new webpage listing wildlife spotted - Number of backers for the wildlife garden crowdfunding campaign - Length of additional hedging planted - Number of young people engaged in 'Keeping it Wild' project and number of meetings held