



**Oakbrook Community Benefit Society AGM plus walkabout and talkabout with our tenants**

**Sunday 24 March 2024, 2-4pm**

**Oakbrook Barn, Oakbrook Farm, Painswick Old Road, Stroud GL6 7QN**

**MINUTES**

**1. Arrival and refreshments**

**2. Welcome and introductions**

Sarah Fotheringham welcomed all to the meeting

**3. Present and apologies**

a. In attendance: Leigh Coghill, Helen Cranston, Sandy Fotheringham, Sarah Fotheringham, Andy Freedman, Christian Greutzmacher, Craig Johnson, Richard Keating, David Lambert, Martin Large, Jessie Marcham, Rhys Moore, Sarah Peryer, Sally Pickering, Simon Pickering, Lucas Schoemaker, Patri Dominguez de Terry, Jason Warland, Elain ----

b. Apologies had been received from Gelda Perry

**4. Minutes of last meeting**

Agreed. Proposed by Simon Pickering, seconded by Lucas Schoemaker

**5. Annual Report update and future plans**

**a. Sarah Fotheringham report on the year 2023-24**

Sarah described the year against OCBS's four objectives: conservation, regenerative land management and the promotion of biodynamic principles; working with our farmers and growers; education; and community development. She was able to celebrate progress all round: an approving report from our BD assessor; grants from the Tree Council, SDC, FiPL and Countryside Stewardship, tree planting, soil and other habitat enhancement; increasing use of the farm by formal and informal educational groups and the development of the Haven as a community resource; the engagement of volunteers and of course the progress made by our wonderful tenants and their businesses.

**b David Lambert and Leigh Coghill outline of future plans**

David described progress on the Barn, aiming for completion in May: tenants provisionally lined up for all the remaining bays. The community room in which we are meeting is currently being

used by the Grove but once the rest of the barn is complete, it will be ready for lettings. Zero Dig have been in their double unit for nearly a year. Landscaping of the car park area and the garden at the east end also planned for this season. The medium-term aspiration is to have a shop for farm produce and even a modest café for farm users.

Leigh described plans to expand education and community activities via the new community room in which we are sitting, the forest-school activities being planned by our newly co-opted director Craig Johnson, the long-term commitment of the Grove home-ed group to Oakbrook, and the 21 educational tours this coming year funded by FiPL, of which 3 have already taken place with excellent feedback. In response to a comment from Sally Pickering it was agreed that OCBS and SCA should look for opportunities to cooperate over educational activities. Christian Greutzmacher drew attention to Friday Farmdays, the longest-established of all the parent and children home-ed groups at Oakbrook, run by Jessie Marcham.

## **6. Finance and annual accounts**

a. Lucas Schoemaker spoke to the accounts presented today. Clarification was requested over the nature of OCBS assets, other than the barn itself and it was agreed that next year the notes would be expanded to cover this. Proposed by David Lambert, seconded by Helen Cranston.

b. Meeting agreed to disapplication of the audit, as required by S84(2) Cooperative and Community Benefit. Proposed by Sally Pickering seconded by Lucas Schoemaker.

## **7. Presentation and election of new directors**

a. Sarah Fotheringham announced that due to pressure of work and increased family commitments she would not be standing for re-election. She remembered Martin Large referring to the work of Oakbrook being more than he had bargained for and she found herself in the same situation. She paid tribute to the amazing people working on the land at Oakbrook – growers, farmers, volunteers and would continue to join in as a volunteer. There was warm applause for all she has done over the past four years.

b. Sarah Jackson, who as a coopted member had done an enormous job of applying for Stewardship funding, stood down in November. We have benefited enormously from her expertise as a farmer in putting together our current Stewardship grant and the Board expressed its gratitude to her for all she has done.

c. Jason Warland has put himself forward to stand for election as a director. He described to the meeting his experience as a full-time tutor at Ruskin Mill and his commitment to biodynamic agriculture. He also referred to his familiarity with tech and social media – he has revamped the OCBS website and administers its Instagram pages for example. The meeting enthusiastically supported his election.

## **8. Presentation by Andy Freedman and Richard Keating: Growing Places**

Andy and Richard described the new Growing Places project put together by the long-established Walking the Land group. Focused on art, landscape and community wellbeing, GP has received FiPL funding for this coming year. Oakbrook is one of the key partners, along with Folly Wood Community Woodland, SCA and Hawkwood College. Over the year, the project will deliver a number of individual elements – a moveable ‘Gingerbread House’ structure for artists in residence to

run workshops, a composting project, a sculptural wall to hide the refrigerator unit at SCA, a family tree project combining planting, aftercare and commemorative art-prints, a festival and a directory. For more details see <https://walkingtheland.org.uk/growing-places/>

## **9. Farmers and growers**

Sarah introduced our growers and expressed our collective appreciation for what they are doing to deliver OCBS's objective of regenerative farming in support of local food systems and community education and wellbeing. Everything depends on them!

a. Nat Torsch described the challenges of the last year. In April Kees Fredericks resigned from all involvement and in June milk production was suspended while Nat and a new board focused on developing a sustainable Business Plan, the work being funded by members of the coop's ongoing subscriptions. That Plan has now been adopted and milk production will be starting in a couple of weeks: in future it will be seasonal, and the milk, yoghurt and kefir will be supplemented by haloumi, rose veal and sale of burgers and other meat products via festivals and other events. A new dairy manager is arriving in the next couple of weeks and they are also hiring a dairy worker. In addition the Dairy has been working with other tenants on a big tree-planting push this season to increase shelter and shade for the livestock.

b. Jessie Marcham reported on the development of Oakbrook Orchard, the agro-forestry scheme she has established. This year has seen 140 apple, pear and plum trees planted, of the 200 total. Funded in part by Stewardship. All grafted by her and propagated on site. Some 40 different varieties, and 4 different root stocks. Currently grazed by SMD cows between the rows as part of regeneration of the soil. Jessie has also led on Tree Council funded tree-planting around farm, carried out with volunteers and students, including coppice for ZD and tree-hay for SMD.

c. Christian Greutzmacher reported on the Bee Observatory and the Grove. He has formally transferred ownership of the Observatory to OCBS but remains its manager and developer. He is currently running a six-week course. He described the work of the Grove and their exciting plans for the Barn space, where they will process what they gather from the land –willow, wool, clay, wood – and for raised beds adjoining the Barn garden.

## **10. Walkabout and finish**

The AGM concluded its formal business and members divided into three groups for walks led by Nat, Jessie and Christian.