



## Annual report 2021-22

Reporting on the activities and community benefit of Canalside Community Food

### Canalside vision and mission statement

Canalside Community Food is a community supported agriculture (CSA) scheme. Canalside believes that communities should begin to take control of their own food production and to take responsibility for producing it in an environmentally beneficial way. We do this by providing our community with local, seasonal and organic food through our formally constituted Community Benefit Society (CBS – a type of community co-op) which is run by members for members. We hope that our members feel fully able to engage with the CBS to grow the food and enjoy the on-farm activities we organise and invite all our members to get involved. We also actively engage with other groups and communities who would like to produce food in a similar way.

### The View From the Field -----

It's been another transitional year on the farm. We were happy to welcome back Lena Sucker from maternity leave in January 2022, and waved farewell to Ali Jeffrey in Sept 2021 for a year of adoption leave. Nikki Cooper, one of our regular volunteers took on the admin role with very short notice and has done a great job of holding the fort until Ali re-joins us later this autumn.



Travelling back to last Autumn we did a lot of work behind the scenes planning, both in how we move forward as a team, as well as with the crop rotations and seed ordering. In the fields the work ticked on and we were grateful to weather Storm Arwen in late November with very little damage.



Some of our main crop harvests had a lower yield than previous years, such as potato, beetroot and celeriac, but this was expected due to such a difficult spring with consecutive frosts and lack of rain. Our squash harvest was similar to the previous year and onions considerably better. Despite some of the lower yields, with the correct calculations, it saw us through the winter and spring nicely until the new crops came in.



The new season got off to a great start. In comparison to last year this spring was ideal with good sunny spells in February and March which meant the new sowings propagated well. We also used a new potting compost which made a notable difference. It's been a bit of a blur since then, as the summer season took hold and the relentlessness of growing work consumed us.



The most notable challenge of the year came with the heat waves and droughts this summer - the driest July since 1935 and 6th hottest on record which meant working conditions were challenging. Harvesting at the crack of dawn to get the work done before we melted in poly-tunnels and a lot of time spent irrigating to keep the crops alive. It has really highlighted the need



to think about more sustainable water sources and also ways to improve our irrigation system. There may be some consequences to the drought - the crops have been very stressed in these conditions and may not grow as usual. Not to mention flea beetle that flourishes in dry conditions. That being said, we feel proud to have kept almost all the crops alive and hope we are through the worst.

The orchard has grown to a point where it largely manages itself and is a lovely part of the farm to spend time in. We prune and tend during the winter months and had our best apple harvest yet last autumn which supplemented the veg well. The soft fruits were abundant this summer, including our strawberries which also had a peak year. Our annual volunteer pickers did a great job getting them into the share throughout early summer and pick your own fruit also continues to be enjoyed by many members. It remains to be seen how the drought has affected the apples and pears this season.



As always, volunteer work mornings have been generally well attended in all seasons and weathers. It's a great chance to connect us to our members, and them to us and the land here. Every job is important whether its bringing in a crop harvest, hand weeding or ditch digging. A huge thank you to all the hands that helped in the fields this year, and also to everyone who volunteers in ways seen and unseen at Canalside.





Overall its been another challenging year but a lot has been learned. As our feet begin to hit the ground again after the summer season we generally feel on a good track.



As a team we are only getting stronger, getting more experience under our belts and clarity on how to work best together moving forwards. We've kept the produce share going to a high standard every week of the year; fresh, organic, local and seasonal that you can't find in shops or even national box-schemes. Even with the weather challenges faced the hungry gap didn't amount to much.

We love providing you with your weekly veg and being part of this community. Thank you to all our members who keep us in employment and enjoy the fruits of our labour.

The growing team,

Eleanor Brown, Lena Sucker and Stephen  
Hayward.

August 2022



## The Willows Project

Hi Canalside members,

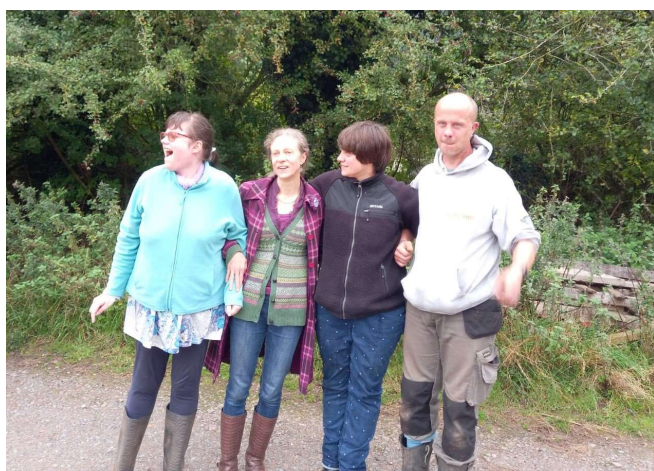
Another year has passed and all is going well for us at the Willows Project. We have a great team of 7 workers with wide ranging skills and attributes. For anyone who doesn't know, we are

located on the edge of the social field, to the left of the pole barn, just past the caravans and through the gap in the willow hedge. Feel free to have a look round anytime when we are not running sessions.





So we had to take our poly tunnel down after a request from the gas board as it was situated over an underground gas pipe and we pulled the old Canalside office caravan onto our patch to provide much needed extra indoor space. We have since been successful in bidding for funds to build a more permanent shelter in our garden which we hope to get finished before winter.



In February we were sad to hear that Ella one of our regular Friday participants had passed away. We will be erecting some raised beds in her memory.

Ali left on maternity leave. Congratulations Ali. Ness had an ankle operation in January and is only just returning to work. Magali stepped in to work with the team. Our Friday volunteer Deb has left and Gill has joined us. Thanks Nikki too for covering the odd session. Hayley, Dave, Paul, Celia and Mord continue to work hard.



Our enterprise products in the veg collection space, in Gaia, Lighthorne Pavillion Café and Core Wholefoods continue to help us keep sustainable, and our herbs outside the pole barn have sold well again. Thanks everyone. The participants have been busy making various bird boxes which sell quickly. We are also growing mushrooms in our woodchip paths and other areas where mushroom spores have been spread. We're growing plants for dying material various colours as well as our usual pollinating insect attracting flowers near the polytunnels.







Thank you to Canalside for access to the wider farm, to the Ingalls for the visits to their amazing pond full of wildlife and to the rest of you for your continued support.

Ness, Dave, Hayley, Celia, Paul, Mord, and Gill our new Friday volunteer

August 2022

[thewillowsproject@gmail.com](mailto:thewillowsproject@gmail.com)

## Socials

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With Covid restrictions easing over the past year we have been able to have more social events at Canalside.



In October we combined our **Apple Pressing Day with a Fete and Open Day** including farm tours. We were very lucky to have a lovely sunny day and as well as the ever popular apple pressing, we had stalls offering t-shirt printing, cyanotype (art printing process), guess the weight of the cake, and pumpkin, as well as other crafty activities, willow heart making and of course a cake stall.

**Chacma** has continued to run their pop-up restaurant throughout the year on Saturdays once or twice a month. It's been great to finish a work morning with some delicious South Indian food.



Our big **annual harvest and planting days** have continued to be a success with members helping out on our extended Saturday volunteer work mornings. In September we had the potato harvest to bring in our main crop spuds. Early November was the beetroot harvest (see photo above) and then in April we had lots of helpers to plant all the onions.

**Open Farm Sunday** returned in June, when we opened our gates to members and non-members to have a look around the farm and find out more about what we do.

**EcoFest** was in early September and Canalside had a stand there along with The Willows. We had lots of interest in the farm and it was great to chat to people about CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) schemes and to see the continued interest in local, sustainable, farming models.



We finally saw the return of our **Summer Party** in July this year! With the heatwave and a guarantee of no rain, the whole event was held outside in the social area. Chacma and Jasmin had food stalls selling South Indian thali and falafel platters and we had the Aardvark Ceilidh Band drawing people in to dance. With nearly 250 people attending this year there was a real festival vibe with a marquee up for the ceilidh, hay bales for seating around the fire, bunting and generally a buzz and excitement for members and non-members to be able to celebrate altogether.



Our **AGM** will once again be combined with harvest celebrations to acknowledge the successes and hard work of the season. It will be on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> September at 5pm and we hope you can join us at the farm for it. Full details are in recent members' emails.

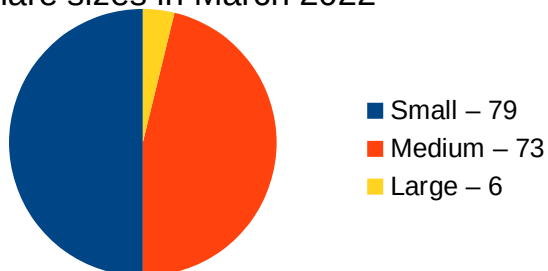
Thanks to everyone who got involved and helped at all of these events.

Nikki Cooper, September 2022

## Membership – April 2021-March 2022

Demand for our produce continues to be high, with a waiting list consistently at around 50 households or more for most of the year. There is still much demand for local, organic produce as people think more about where their food comes from.

Share sizes in March 2022



Over the year we had 22 new households take up a veg share at Canalside, mainly from trials started over the summer when the vegetables are most abundant.

The year was also another busy one for new social members, with 34 new households joining to engage with work mornings and social events.

We ended the year with 158 produce share subscriptions feeding the members of approximately 175 households.

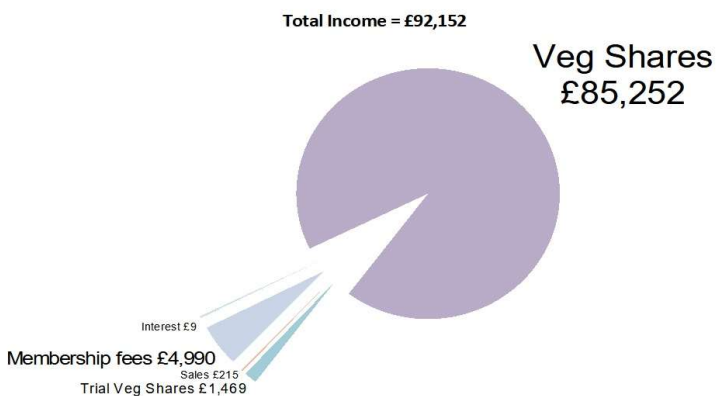
During the year, 27 subscribing households moved on from Canalside for a wide range of reasons, the most common being a house move to another area or growing more veg at home.

Nikki Cooper, August 2022



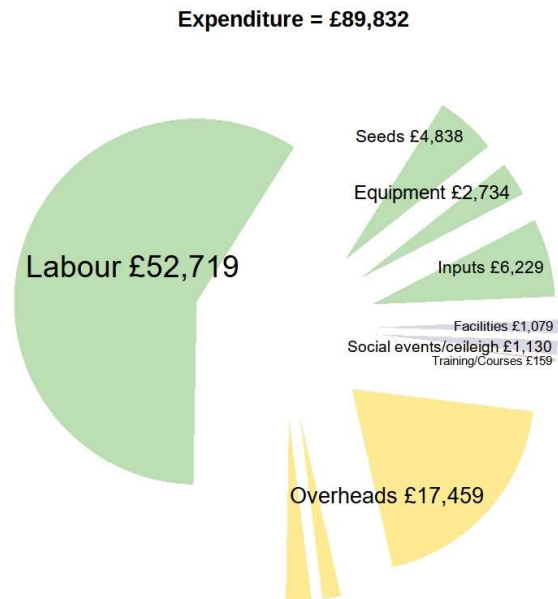
## Finances – April 2021-March 2022

We continued to see a healthy provision of 150+ veg and fruit shares in the past year with our regular team of four growers, supported by a group of regular casual labourers, and importantly, a team of regular and *ad hoc* volunteers from the community who turn up to our regular work mornings on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Our turnover on shares and memberships, which constitutes 90% of our income, was £92,152 this year, slightly up on last year. We also accumulated a pot of donations to the tune of £3,266 which we added to our pot of donations of £8,125 last year, which in turn was used to purchase an additional two acres of land to add to our holding of ten acres. The purchase was successfully completed using £14,324 from our reserves (at a total cost of £25,623) and we are currently engaged in putting together an investment programme to increase the environmental, financial and community sustainability of the farm into the future. See the pie chart for a breakdown of our income.



Against our income we had expenses of £89,832 of which our main costs were wages for the growing and admin team (70% or £64,562). Our high wage costs reflect our desire to pay a fair wage to our workers and to communicate with our members and run a financially responsible enterprise through an effective admin team that removes the burden of financial administration from the growing team. We have to balance this with charging our members a competitive rate for our veg and fruit shares and we believe we have got the balance right as we regularly deliver a fresh, organic and seasonal share of 5- 10 items at

the same time as keeping our costs for growing the produce as low as possible (currently around 20% of our costs). See the pie chart for a breakdown of our costs.



All in all, in the financial year we posted a very modest £2,322 surplus which in fact represents a very small fraction of our turnover (less than one months running costs). But we did pay interest on our shares (£2,130, some of which was donated to the Willows) which effectively covered the surplus bringing us into a break-even situation. For those interested in our legal FCA cooperative returns these are presented on the website.

To set against this, the steering committee recognises upcoming challenges to our enterprise which we need to factor in. The primary challenge at the moment is to continue paying a fair wage in the current economic climate where some projections of annual inflation are coming in at 13- 18% and we need to factor this into our likely wage bill! We also recognise that all our input costs (seed, compost etc.) are rising (we estimate of the order +/- 20%) which will further raise our costs. Finally, the current climate crisis means that we have to future proof our production by investing in our land and growing practices. This means we are considering ways we can improve our system by for instance reducing mains water use for irrigation both by storing rainwater and

using technologies such as drip tape to reduce water use. We are also looking to changes to our rotations and cropping that will improve our soil biology that will in return make them more resilient to excess rain and drought, and we are looking at ways we can incorporate perennial elements such as (fruit) trees and shrubs onto the farm that will benefit our ecological resilience. At the same time we would like to make the farm more inviting to the community and make it more available for their enjoyment over and above the current volunteering possibilities and use of the social area.

Finally, for those interested in playing a part in these exciting developments please consider joining the steering group or offering your skills in any capacity that you feel able through volunteering. Let us know through the admin person or by contacting the steering group email.

Gareth Davies, August 2022

The Steering Group



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**Photo credits:** the Canalside staff team and The Willows team

For more photos of Canalside's activities go to <https://www.flickr.com/photos/126538300@N02/albums>