

Springhead's Productive Gardens Project Project outline November 2019

Summary of project

Through the productive gardens project, we hope to give more children and local people the chance to get involved in growing and eating organic produce. There will be four main strands to the project:

- Growing and harvesting produce including vegetables from the kitchen gardens, fruit from the orchards, and wild food, to prepare in Springhead's kitchen for the benefit of visitors including catered school groups
- An educational programme to provide opportunities for involvement of local schools, and develop activities and resources for residential groups
- Opportunities for involvement of the local community, for example through provision of a community growing area, closer links with the local school, volunteering and events
- Developing Springhead's role in showcasing sustainable living, for example by organic food production, the promotion of biodiversity, and the use of renewable energy

Staffing and management

The project will be run by a dedicated project co-ordinator. The post-holder will report to Springhead's Director, and work closely with other part-time staff, and the board of trustees. She/he will supervise volunteers as appropriate.

Project duration

While we are initially seeking funding to employ the co-ordinator to set up and run the project for the first year, we plan to seek further funding to extend the programme once the co-ordinator is in place.

Springhead's tradition of organic produce production

Springhead has a tradition of growing organic produce. The land, which has been managed organically since the 1930s, is subject to an organic covenant. Its former owner, Rolf Gardiner, had a keen interest in sustainable food production, and was one of the founding members of the Soil Association. Up to the 1970s, Springhead was largely self-supporting in vegetable production. It was also part of a network of organic farms that supplied produce to a London's first health shop, the Baker Street Health Food Store, and to London's first chain of vegetarian restaurants, Cranks. During the 1980s, Neal's Yard Remedies, the organic skin and body care specialists, managed Springhead's former kitchen gardens as a herb garden from which it manufactured tinctures. More recently, Springhead has constructed some raised beds in the kitchen garden and employed a sessional gardener in order to provide (a limited amount of) vegetables and salad for use in the kitchen.

Capacity for growing produce

Among Springhead's 15 acres of grounds, the following areas are already used to a small extent for food production and have potential for expansion:

- A kitchen garden of approximately half an acre, with a number of raised beds and a plastic polytunnel
- Two historic orchard areas of approximately three acres in total which are in urgent need of restoration
- Extensive hedgerows, which border much of the site and in some cases produce berries

In addition, there is scope for developing food production elsewhere on Springhead's land; in particular:

- Millcreates, a four acre field, which is easily accessed via a public footpath, so has potential for for growing and/or community uses
- Land to the side of the track from the road to Springhead which has been identified as suitable for planting a native hedgerow

Springhead has a constant supply of natural spring water (permission would have to be sought to extract water from the spring itself but spring water is also available on tap).

Proposed activities

The project will help us to meet Springhead's general aims of advancing environmental education, giving the public opportunities to enjoy and learn from the countryside, and promoting the protection of the natural environment.

We have identified four main areas of activity:

1. We will serve more meals using produce grown on site

With up to around 3,000 meals being produced for school and community groups in 2019, there is scope for using a significant amount of produce grown on-site in Springhead's kitchens. Current menus and recipes are well-suited for use of home produce. While main harvests don't necessarily coincide with current peaks in visitor numbers (April to July), we are looking to extend the 'shoulder months' and to increase winter usage (for example by hosting A level geography field trips in the Autumn). There is also scope for preserving food, for example through bottling, freezing and pickling, for use out of season or at times when we do have more guests. To scale up the amount of produce available for cooking on-site we will need to increase the amount of land in production, construct more greenhouses/polytunnels and raised beds, and restore our orchard areas. We will have to build on the systems we have put in place to grow the right food at the right time to maximise opportunities for using produce in our kitchen. We will also need to review and improve our kitchen equipment, and are likely to need, for example, new freezers and preserving equipment. Importantly, once the Project Co-ordinator is in post, we will review our capacity for cooking and are likely to need to employ a part-time cook to help take the project forward.

2. We will involve more children in growing and cooking

Springhead already welcomes around 500 children and young people a year on day and residential visits, and outdoor activities in Springhead's gardens are very popular. Children have also shown a keen interest in gardening and food preparation, both of which can teach them important skills and give them new experiences. Even simple activities like helping to make lunches and laying the table are new experiences for many children (10 out of 33 children from a Weymouth school who visited recently said it was the first time they'd done this). There is also considerable scope for carrying out activities in small groups, which is particularly suitable for children with special needs and disabilities. In a recent survey of schools currently using Springhead, 85% of the schools said they would be interested in juice making and apple tasting activities for example. Other activities could include children making simple meals such as pizza, with fresh tomatoes, onions and other produce from the garden. Additional services we intend to develop include helping local schools to build and manage their own raised beds which they can regularly look after (St Andrews school in Fontmell Magna, for example, has already expressed interest in this), and offering special sessions for excluded children and children with special needs. To support our educational work, capital items we are likely to need include an outdoor field studies room.

3. We will involve a greater number and wider range of people from the local community

There are many ways in which the project could provide opportunities for strengthening Springhead's links with the local community and involving a more representative range of people. Potential activities and opportunities include setting up community allotments (there is currently no provision in Fontmell Magna itself), partnership projects with community groups such as older peoples groups, opportunities for employee volunteering through local businesses, and for local people to volunteer with activities like gardening, watering, looking after school plots during holidays, preserving and bottling. Other activities which could be explored include a horticultural training scheme, a pop-up restaurant, and cut flower and herb production.

4. We will build on our work to showcase sustainability

More community and school involvement will give more people the opportunity to see Springhead's existing work to protect and improve the environment. Next to the kitchen gardens for example, we have an array of PV panels, which generate electricity, and we also produce renewable energy from a micro hydro power scheme, using the year-round flow of water at Springhead. We already manage areas of our grounds for wildlife, and practice organic gardening, and will ensure that nature conservation and promotion of biodiversity are central to the productive gardens project. For example we plan to restore the old orchards, which will include sensitive management of the

veteran fruit trees which provide vital habitat for invertebrates and other wildlife. Other potential work could include crop and technique trials within the organic movement, and partnerships with organisations such as WWOOF (World Wide Opportunities On Organic Farms).

Anticipated outcomes

These are likely to include:

- More children having a greater awareness of where food comes from, and the importance of soil
- Children having more opportunities to enjoy the countryside and have new experiences
- Increased health and wellbeing of visitors and volunteers
- A reduction in Springhead's carbon footprint
- Greater involvement from a more representative range of people in Springhead's activities
- Biodiversity being better supported through sensitive, organic growing and land management
- Restored and well-managed orchards, kitchen gardens and hedgerows
- Springhead having a more sustainable future through increased visitor numbers

The Productive Gardens Co-ordinator will be responsible for developing activities in partnership with Springhead's trustees and staff. Appropriate outcomes and target indicators will be identified, along with ways of monitoring activities and measuring their success.