

Thornbury CSA

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Business Plan

1. Thornbury CSA

1.1. Thornbury

Thornbury is a small market town in South Gloucestershire 6 miles north of the Bristol conurbation. Thornbury is surrounded by farmland, mainly grassland but with some arable.

1.2. Community Supported Agriculture

A Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) scheme is defined by the Making Local Food Work project (www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk) as:-

“a social enterprise model that is based on an approach of mutual support through a producer-consumer partnership. CSA offers an innovative business approach where a food or farm enterprise has members who own ‘shares’ in the harvest and therefore also share in the risk. CSA enterprises range from allotments on farms and sponsoring apple trees, a community making an agreement in advance to purchase a particular crop from a producer, the community members making regular input of labour, to the purchase of land or related holdings or renting land and employing the producer. These enterprises engage and empower community members in the supply and/or production of their own food in a close relationship with a primary producer.”

Thornbury CSA has been started by Sustainable Thornbury (see section 2.1) and the Sheiling School Thornbury (see section 2.2).

1.3. Objectives of Thornbury CSA

The broad aims of Thornbury CSA are:-

- To grow more local food for Thornbury and surrounding villages;
- To make the Thornbury area more sustainable;
- To forge stronger links between local consumers and the source of their food.

In the constitution, the objectives are listed as:-

- (a) Growing and supplying vegetables, fruit and other fresh produce to the members.
- (b) Employing biodynamic, organic or similar farming methods to grow vegetables, fruit and other fresh produce.
- (c) Reducing the distance the food is transported as far as is reasonable.
- (d) Buying in food whenever necessary from sources that are as local and sustainable as possible.
- (e) Encouraging understanding of sustainable growing methods so members and others gain a deeper understanding of our relationship with food production and the earth.
- (f) Developing skills in food production and in organising Community Agriculture Schemes and to provide training, information and advice in these skills to other individuals and organisations interested in joining this CSA or in setting up their own CSA.
- (g) Treat suppliers fairly.
- (h) Generally doing such other things as are or may be considered by the CSA to further the foregoing objectives

2. Founding organisations

2.1. Sustainable Thornbury

Sustainable Thornbury (www.sustainablethornbury.org) is a community group in Thornbury and the surrounding area in South Gloucestershire. The group is concerned about global warming and peak oil, and tries to make Thornbury more sustainable. It is a Transition Initiative (www.transitionnetwork.org).

One of its key concerns is the lack of locally grown food available for local consumers. It is also mindful of the over-dependence of the bulk of its present food supplies on cheap oil for fertilisers, transport and packaging. Sustainable Thornbury sees CSAs as a way to start up a local food supply chain.

2.2. Sheiling School, Camphill Communities Thornbury

The Sheiling School Thornbury (www.sheilingschool.org.uk) is an independent school which provides both residential placements, termly and weekly, and day placements. The majority of its pupils are funded by Local Education Authorities, some jointly with Social Services or Health. The School provides for children and adolescents aged 6 to 19 with special educational needs, moderate to severe learning disability and complex needs. The school is a registered charity number 307104.

A farm attached to the school grows food biodynamically for the school, including vegetables, fruit, milk, eggs and meat. The farm is an integral part of the ethos of the school, involved in the school's educational work and provides food for the school. The farm is run by the Land Group.

The school and farm see the CSA as a way to reach out to the wider local community. The farm will produce the food biodynamically for the CSA and provide premises for distributing the food.

3. Start-up arrangements

Thornbury CSA is in the process of setting up start-up interim arrangements for growing and distributing vegetables as an unincorporated association. These arrangements may last for about one or two years until the membership determines the final shape of the organisation. An inaugural meeting has been held that agreed the proposed arrangements, agreed the interim constitution and formally appointed the officers and management committee.

Now these arrangements have been set up, the membership will determine the detailed structures and running of the organisation over the interim period. The membership will also decide what long term legal structures are needed to put the organisation on a more permanent footing.

3.1. The organisation

Thornbury CSA is currently a non-incorporated non-profit-making association.

There is a management committee whose objectives are:

- to run the association on a daily basis and
- to work towards setting up the permanent structures.

There is a temporary constitution already in place and a bank account will be opened.

The organisation will seek grants and loans to assist funding the set-up costs.

3.2. Funding

The intention is that Thornbury CSA will quickly become self-supporting financially.

Starting up the CSA requires additional investment and costs. Sustainable Thornbury has successfully applied for a grant from South Gloucestershire Council for £500 for CSA start-up expenses. Thornbury CSA will apply for grants from other funding organisations as appropriate. The initial farming costs of seeds, rent and grower are currently being funded by the Sheiling School; Thornbury CSA is expecting that this will be repaid when the income is sufficient. There will be further costs associated with setting up the permanent legal structures.

Income will come mostly from membership fees and the sale of produce to members and the Sheiling School. If necessary, fund-raising events will be held to supplement these items. For a standard share of vegetables, members can pay either £10 weekly or an equivalent amount monthly. Some members may opt for a smaller or larger share and

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will pay pro rata. We expect there to be about 50 members each taking shares for 35 weeks in 2010-11, but we have budgeted for 40 members.

The initial expectation is that the Sheiling School will take approximately half the produce and will pay a corresponding proportion of the costs, through the contribution it already employs to fund the farm and vegetable production. The Sheiling School will contribute additional labour, materials, premises and equipment, for which Thornbury CSA will pay.

The budget for 2010-11 with 40 members is as below. With 50 members the income increases to £30000. After 2010-11 we would expect the running costs and income to increase modestly as we extend the food season beyond 35 weeks and add more foodstuffs such as fruit.

Running costs

Item	Cost pa
Seeds	£1300
Rent	£600
Certification	£500
Wages	£20,000
Other expenses	£1600
Total running costs	£24,000

Income

Item	Income pa
Sheiling School	£12000
Membership fees	£400
40 members' shares 35 weeks @£10	£14000
Total income (40 members)	£26400

Start-up costs

Item	Cost
Equipment	£400
Tools	£200
Setting up collection shed	£300
Start-up wages	*£3000
Total	£3900

*The start-up wages are for the labour costs of growing the crops until produce shares become available and revenue starts to flow into Thornbury CSA.

Any surplus income will be used to repay start-up costs, to build a modest contingency fund and to invest in the farm equipment, food storage facilities, polythene growing tunnels and so on.

3.3. Membership

Thornbury CSA has a membership of local people who are either food consumers, food growers or supporters of the scheme. There is a membership subscription of £10 per year. There are 15 paid up members on 23 April, and about a further 30 people interested in becoming members.

Most members will have a weekly share of vegetables, for which they can pay weekly, monthly or annually.

We expect there will be other opportunities for members to be involved in the CSA, such as working parties, helping with the growing, social events and investing in the CSA. There is significant goodwill towards the scheme amongst the members and those expressing interest.

There will be membership meetings as needed to discuss the options and agree proposals by the Management Committee.

3.4. The food

Vegetables will be grown by a grower (to be appointed), with the help of the Land Group at the Sheiling School on land adjoining the Sheiling School, currently rented by them.

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There will be a choice of quantities of vegetables, namely a standard share, a small share or more than one standard share. Vegetable shares will be collected at a set time and weighed out by buying members. This will be in a building in the Sheiling School according to a list put up on a board. In the first year the vegetables are likely to be potatoes, carrots, parsnips, cabbages, onions, Brussels sprouts, beans, peas, courgettes and squashes.

There will be an opportunity to exchange unwanted vegetables for spare vegetables. All vegetables will be seasonal, mostly locally grown and mostly biodynamic or organic.

The first vegetables are likely to be available in July 2010. In the first year there is likely to be a gap after February, so the members will get vegetables for about 8 months, or 35 weeks.

3.5. The grower

A grower will be appointed to work with the Land Group at the Sheiling School to grow the produce for Thornbury CSA. One willing and able candidate for the position has been identified. The Land Group has started growing the crops for 2010-11, and will continue to do so until the new grower is appointed.

While Thornbury CSA is an unincorporated association, it cannot employ anyone. The grower, when appointed, will either be self-employed or will be remunerated by the Sheiling School. The details of this arrangement will be negotiated with the grower and the Sheiling School as part of the appointment process.

If Thornbury CSA becomes an incorporated body then the relationship with the grower will be renegotiated.

3.6. The land

For 2010-11, the produce will be grown in a rented field adjoining the Sheiling School land. The owner of the land has given notice that the lease will not be renewed in 2011. Thornbury CSA and the Sheiling School will seek to rent alternative land in the Thornbury area. It is expected that plenty of suitable land will be available.

3.7. Risks and mitigation

The food crops will vary from year to year depending on the weather and other factors. Normal minor fluctuations will be passed on to the members by reducing or increasing the shares. The members will decide whether or not major shortages will be made good by buying in produce, and how this will be paid for. When funds permit, investment in polythene growing tunnels and food storage facilities will reduce dependence on the weather.

At this stage, there is some uncertainty in the amount of food the members will want. Individual members can decide how much food to take, and some of those who indicated interest may decide not to join. Thornbury CSA has not yet advertised itself beyond the members of Sustainable Thornbury, so a simple publicity campaign in the local press and through local websites and posters should be sufficient to increase the membership.

The appointment of a grower may take longer than anticipated. In that case, the Sheiling School Land Group will be able to continue growing the food for a short period, aided by volunteers from the Thornbury CSA membership.

4. The medium- to long-term plans

As soon as funds permit, the intention is to extend the food season by introducing polythene tunnels and food storage. The range of foods can be expanded to include fruit, and later possibly animal products.

The Management Committee, in consultation with the membership, will work to set up the permanent structures. To this end they will determine the following:

- the type of legal entity it will be;
- whether the CSA will employ the grower or contract with the grower as self-employed;
- how the risks will be shared between the stakeholders;
- whether or not the CSA will expand to include other growers and other land.

In the long term, the CSA will work to expand local food production and consumption by encouraging the setting up of other CSAs or similar organisations in the area. If other CSAs are set up in the area, it is envisaged that they will work together as part of a network.

Thornbury CSA, 7 May 2010