



# SERPENTINE COMMUNITY GARDEN SOCIETY

Serpentine Community Garden Society CIO  
Serpentine Walks, off-Burlington Road, Buxton, SK17 9AR

## Report of the Trustees 1 April 2020 - 31 March 2021

Registered Charity number - 1188016

Registered office - c/o 39 Park Road, Buxton, SK17 6SQ

Date of registration as a charity - 18 February 2020

### Trustees

Anne Holloway	resigned	01/04/20	to	15/11/2020
Margot Ferris	resigned	01/04/20	to	15/11/2020
Madeline Hall	re-elected	01/04/20	to	31/03/2021
Simon Fussell	re-elected	01/04/20	to	31/03/2021
Pete Brown	elected	15/11/20	to	31/03/2021
Carole Garner	elected	15/11/20	to	31/03/2021

### Solicitors

Brooke-Taylor Solicitors  
4 The Quadrant, Buxton, SK17 6AW

### Bankers

Cooperative Bank

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## 1. Structure, Governance and Management

The Board currently comprises four trustees, all of whom take an active role in organisational development. Further trustees - to a maximum of eleven - will be recruited to the Board in response to a recognised skill or capacity need. Recruitment is done via advertising the role with a description of the key skills, knowledge or experiences being sought and an overview of the role and responsibilities of a trustee. SCGS's own networks and communication channels are used. Selection is through dialogue with other trustees.

Under the terms of the constitution agreed when registering as a charity, trustees might serve on the Board for up to 3 years with a third of trustees required to stand down each year. Whilst these provisions encourage freshness and dynamism, they could create unhelpful churn. Members considered the issue at the AGM in November 2020 and again at a special meeting on 31 January 2021 to confirm the decision to amend provisions. The term of office for trustees is now three years, renewable for a further three year term. After a break of a year trustees may stand for election for a return to office. For each of the first three years the longest serving trustee will resign, but may stand for a second term's appointment.

Response to the Covid-19 crisis has included rapid development of IT capabilities and use for meetings. As lockdown measures are eased, we will continue to work with trustees to improve how we exchange and share information.

The Board of Trustees has sustained practice from its precursor Board of Directors of Serpentine Community Farm CIC, meeting every six to eight weeks to review finance, projects and activity and to discuss long-term strategy and direction. The business plan approved in January 2020 is under thorough review, informed by appraisal from a financial consultant engaged with support from the Heritage Fund for Culture Recovery.

## 2. Objectives and Activities

The object of the CIO is to advance the education of the public in the subject of horticulture and horticultural practices.

In addition we aim to:

- teach and learn about sustainable growing practices in the High Peak climate;
- share knowledge with our volunteers and visitors;
- introduce initiatives and practices that support the aim of long term food security;
- build and maintain an environment where all people are welcome, enjoying what they are doing and having social interaction with others.

Planned activities were adapted in a rapid response to the need for precautionary measures against Covid-19 transmission.

**March 2020** – Seeds shared from foyer of Pavilion Gardens until required to close by nationwide lockdown. Presentation to 30 GPs on well-being project for social prescribing. Covid-19 pandemic declared. Serpentine Community Garden Society Detached established in growers' home garden. SCG closed to visitors. Volunteer team established to maintain site and sustain the growing cycle. Wednesday workshop programme postponed.

Activities in 2020-2021 included:

**April 2020** – Rota for essential growing work covers four days a week – to allow physical distance of workers when on site. 184 volunteer hours onsite – compared to 309 in April 2019.)

**May 2020** – Weekly cover continued. 194 hours logged onsite. (471 in May 2019). Maximum of six volunteers on site together. Some groups chose to work with lower numbers. Hours contributed in growers' home gardens and studio (for production of signs and posters) not formally captured. Contribution of salad bags to food parcels for families in need.

**June 2020** – Weekly cover continued. 177 hours logged onsite. (452 in June 2019.)

**July 2020** – Weekly cover continued with slight easing of group size – maximum of ten volunteers on site. 221 hours logged. (397 in July 2019.) Old garage condemned as unsafe by DCC contractors. Emptied, locked and surrounded with security fence pending demolition. Fringe event postponed to 2021, replaced with Secret Garden event – booked tours for groups, maximum 6 per group.

**August 2020** – Booked tours for groups well-received.

**September 2020** – Old garage demolished by DCC contractors. Cost met by High Peak Borough Council.

**October 2020** – Successful application for Cadent award – £10,000 for Give Peas a Chance Saturday programme 2021-2022.

**November 2020** – Successful application for Heritage Fund award – £21,120. Successful application for Family Zone award - £1,000.

**December 2020** – Appointment of part-time Garden Manager. Transition Buxton talk - online and recorded with link on website. Website developers identified.

### **January 2021**

Application submitted for planning permission to erect polytunnel on concrete base of demolished garage.

Appointment of part-time social media support worker.

Lease negotiations continue.

Well-attended and popular fortnightly Zoom meetings established. Zoom subscription taken out.

Growing Plans discussed, developed and shared electronically and in hard copy on whiteboards.

Website training for webmasters and editors.

### **February 2021**

Finance report commissioned.

Agreed partnership with Buxton Junior School for Give Peas a Chance courses.

Zoom meetings - special interest groups, online workshops.

Gardens Update padlet notice board set-up to complement whiteboards and noticeboards on site.  
 Additional WhatsApp group set up for coordination of herb growing. Four volunteers training as editors of new website.

### March 2021

New website launched.  
 Successful completion of Culture Recovery Fund (Heritage Fund) project.  
 Planning approval secured for third polytunnel: 16 letters of support including one from Stewart Medical Centre GPs.  
 Science Week - soil analysis project in partnership with Transition Buxton, funded by British Science Association, engaged 63 families.  
 Probus Buxton and District talk online.  
 Commissioned aerial footage of Buxton icons for introductory section of video showcasing the Community Garden's place in the town and community. Big dig working parties for polytunnel groundwork preparation.

## Serpentine Community Garden Society - Volunteer Hours on site

	2019-2020	2020-2021
<b>April</b>	309	184.5
<b>May</b>	471	194
<b>June</b>	452	177.5
<b>July</b>	397.5	220.75
<b>August</b>	244.5	230
<b>September</b>	331	209
<b>October</b>	421	226
<b>November</b>	242	240.25
<b>December</b>	218	153
<b>January</b>	294	111.25
<b>February</b>	212	140.5
<b>March</b>	172	304.5
<b>Total</b>	3764	2391.25

### 3. Achievement and performance 2020/ 2021

Volunteers contributed 2391 (3764 in 2019-2020) hours over the year in registered attendance on site. In addition unregistered, but highly appreciated, hours were invested off site on administration, publicity, planning and practical gardening enriching cultivation of a range of produce. We thank our team of volunteers for their ongoing commitment. Many

go well beyond what is asked of them: supporting events, creating posters and labels, growing at home on windowsills, investing time and thought in the garden and the organisation and always going the extra mile with the work they do to support our community in Buxton and the High Peak.

## **Education**

We advance education in the science, art and practice of horticulture. The teaching and learning is not externally accredited but has its foundation in the authoritative gardening and horticultural advice provided by the Royal Horticultural Society. There is a particular focus on organic gardening methods based on the principles of organic gardening promoted by Garden Organic (previously the Henry Doubleday Research Association). In an informal setting, we work with volunteers to identify the skills they bring and the knowledge and skills they wish to develop. More formally, we offer regular training workshops and courses to consolidate and extend learning. All ages are covered with interventions modified to meet age and experience and to take in to account such factors as learning or social disabilities.

We promote active use of our facilities by local educational and therapeutic providers. Our briefing session for social prescribing was attended by thirty local GPs. The planned well-being course, overseen by a qualified Person Centred Counsellor working alongside horticulturalists, has been postponed due to the Covid-19 crisis but will be rescheduled as circumstances allow.

## **Children and Young People**

Formalising the relationship with our partners who work directly with young people (children's nurseries, child minder groups, schools and colleges) through the provision of a range of services and experiences enables the charity to introduce more young people to the site, allowing them to experience not only food growing, cooking and crafts, and all the associated benefits, but being part of a community space that they can feel a part of. Whilst onsite activity in this area has been constrained, work has continued with online initiatives and with planning for return of groups to the garden. (A new Saturday programme launched on 1 May 2021.)

## **Culture**

Art and culture is a developing strand of SCG volunteer interest. We work with locally based voluntary organisations and individual artists. The site is valued by artists as inspiration and a welcoming host for direct interaction with communities. The site has the potential to play a significant role in delivery of a thriving cultural life in the town as a space where the public and creatives can interact and collaborate on joint projects, often bringing more investment in arts and culture to the local area in the process. We are already recognised as an excellent informal performance space and a great setting for external artworks. As lockdown provision ease, the benefits of a venue in the open air are being widely recognised.

## **Organisation**

Acceptance of our application for registration as a charity was a big step for the organisation. Alongside that recognition, work on securing the future of the project on its current

site has progressed. Our landlords, High Peak Borough Council, approved in principle the terms of a 25 year lease, subject to detailed negotiation with council officers. Discussions over the status of near derelict buildings on the site have proved complex and have been frozen as other essential services were prioritised following the national lockdown. Hopes for resolution before the end of 2020 were not realised but we work towards signing the final documents before the end of 2021.

Local press and social media were used effectively for a re-branding exercise following registration as a charity. The new name is reflected in a new website domain name, a new organisational email account, an updated facebook page and updated twitter feed. We also launched an Instagram feed in January 2021. Weekly working notes are circulated to all members and volunteers. Each month an update is circulated to all supporters.

In March 2020 we set up a daily blog on the website, detailing gardening activity of our chief growers as they worked with us but at distance as they shielded from the pandemic. The blog was maintained for 100 entries between April and November 2021. Its wealth of information and interest was transferred in full to the new website, preserving an invaluable resource.

We reviewed procedures for health and safety and for volunteers and developed action plans to address improvement points. Risk assessments for Covid-19 were drawn up and reviewed regularly. Individual reviews with all active volunteers were completed.

Our organisational resilience was stress tested from the start of the reporting year. As noted above, our chief growers, along with three skilled and knowledgeable horticulturist members of the team were confined to home and their own gardens, as was our resident artist. Other core volunteers conducted personal risk assessments and decided against exposure to groups of other volunteers. The structure for sustaining growing on site and respecting individuals' needs and personal boundaries whilst maintaining contact was swiftly established and has proved robust. Links with other community groups have been strengthened as ventures arising in response to the Covid-19 crisis have brought the importance of community mutual aid into sharp relief.

#### **4. Financial review**

Income for the year totalled £28,276, made up of £25,882 in grant awards and £3,196 in donations and sales. (This figure is £100 more than the comparable income in 2019-2020 of £3097: remarkable stability in an extraordinary period.)

Expenditure has been modest outside of financial commitments in completing contracts, allowing an additional £2,394 to be carried forward in cash reserves. This provides a cushion against the anticipated additional costs - rental and service charges - incurred once a lease is on force.

Prospects for significant grant funding in future are good. £10,000 is pledged to be released when our new lease is signed and discussion have been initiated with major funding bodies about potential support.

#### **5. Risk management**

As Trustees, we are responsible for overseeing the charity's risk management activities. The Trustee Board manages and monitors SCGS's risks through a Strategic Risk Register

which is incorporated in the Annual Business Plan. Strategic Risks are identified following the Annual General Meeting of members, drawing on response to the annual Future Strategy briefing paper.

Risk management of high-level risks that could prevent SCGS from meeting its objectives and of more routine operational matters are kept under regular review. The new risks associated with a national pandemic required a focused review in 2020-2021. Engagement of trustees and a committed volunteer cadre and membership supports on-going review which is both sensitive and robust.

## **6. Future Plans**

Our plans for 2021/2022 involve building on the foundations laid during 2019-2020 and the experience of working through the challenges, and unexpected opportunities, of response to the global pandemic, to sustain our focus on growing plants and growing people.

We believe that the Serpentine Community Garden can become a centre for sustainability and community development in Buxton, with regional reach and national recognition. The site will provide multiple benefits to the town through the services it provides, contributing to learning and helping to raise the profile of the town and its heritage.

We will continue to develop our profile and external-facing activities; improve our internal systems and processes; reappraise organisational risk and plan to grasp opportunities to extend our community reach.

### Trustees

Simon Fussell (Chair)

Madeline Hall (Treasurer)

Pete Brown

Carole Garner