

LEARNING VISIT REPORT
Spitalfields City Farm 11173

<p>1.1 Date of visit: 11 February 2016</p>	<p>1.2 Name of visiting Grants Officer: Tim Wilson accompanied by Shegufta Rahman and Jack Joslin</p>	<p>1.3 People met with: Mhairi Weir (Farm Manager)</p>
<p>1.4 Programme Area & Outcomes: Working with Londoners: London's Environment</p>		
<p>1.5 Purpose of the award: £102,500 over three years (£28,000; £36,500; £38,000) towards the Manager of Spitalfields City Farm.</p>		
<p>MONITORING INFORMATION</p>		
<p>2.1 Project Outcome 1: Restructure and expand the farm's environmental education programme. Progress made: In 2012 the farm requested funds to develop relationships with schools, deliver a programme of environmental workshops, offer work placements and produce an environmental education package. With the exception of the latter initiative (which transpired to be a larger project than expected), the farm has made considerable progress with all activities. Starting with local schools, the farm now extends its reach to many Tower Hamlets' primaries where it runs its 'chickens on tour' scheme. The farm also hosts two work placements each week, with many of the placements continuing at the site as volunteers. The education package is still planned, but will be delivered by a full-time Education Coordinator with funding from a corporate partner.</p>		
<p>2.2 Project Outcome 2: Extend the farm's biodiversity programme. Progress made: The farm has been delivering two days' community growing work with residents of the local Selby Estate, an area home to several housing associations. The farm reports that this work has had a positive impact not only on the physical environment of the estate, but also in encouraging cross-community dialogue. The work is now coming to its natural conclusion as the local residents manage and maintain the new growing spaces, but with expected input from the farm as needed. The other focus of the farm's biodiversity work has been improvements to the centre's wildlife garden and growing space. The farm now keeps bees, has extended its vegetable plot, and brought some of the 'hidden' corners which had little previous practical use into the body of the space. The farm is pesticide free and grows a wide variety of plants.</p>		
<p>2.3 Project Outcome 3: Drive infrastructure improvements in the form of a community building.</p>		

Progress made: At time of application the farm had ambitious plans to construct a substantial community building on site. This, at end of grant, unfortunately remains a plan as fundraising has proved to be more challenging than expected. However, development work in the area, including Bishopsgate Goodsyard and Norton Folgate is expected to bring Section 106 monies that may allow for this in time.

Despite the absence of the single large community building two new indoor learning spaces have appeared on the farm: a yurt (provided by M&G) and a 'glamping' tent. Both are used for service delivery as well as revenue generating activities including children's parties, discos and weddings.

2.4 Project Outcome 4: Increase the farm's financial sustainability through social enterprise.

Progress made: Mhairi believes that, in order for the farm to remain fully accessible to local communities, and to engage with a wide range of vulnerable clients, a certain degree of grant subsidy will be necessary in order to keep costs low. Funding from the local authority has been cut, which was expected, and the grant funding environment is increasingly competitive. However, excellent progress has been made building relationships with corporate partners who have offered in-kind support to develop the site. This list of organisations engaged with the farm in recent months includes Clifford Chance, Salesforce, and Unilever. The farm manager has been proactive and creative, for example, securing from the owner of the Daddy Donkey burrito chain funding to buy a new donkey, called Derek.

The farm has opened a shop selling produce grown on site as well as goods created by voluntary organisations involved with the charity such as the Zimbabwean Refugee Association and the Coriander Club.

GRANT OFFICER COMMENTS

The farm's written monitoring reports to the Trust have not done justice to the impressive amount of work delivered over the three years of grant-funding. The charity has built strong relationships with a range of local organisations including schools, housing associations and corporates. This is mainly due to the farm manager, who has helped position the city farm as a much more visible member of the local community. The farm has also benefited from the ongoing gentrification of the area and the availability of Section 106 funds, but remains focused on remaining accessible for what remains a high concentration of low income local families.

Now that City Bridge Trust funding has come to a natural end the farm manager's post will be covered by revenue until such stage that a replacement grant is secured. Mhairi reports that several promising proposals are under review.

Overall, this can be viewed as a successful grant that helped the charity to develop its work.