

The Oak Tree Low Carbon Farm

Community Environmental Fund Final Project Report

Produced by Suffolk Coastal District Council as part of the Community Environmental Action Project funded by Suffolk Coastal LSP and the Environment Agency.



Physical and mental health



Building a low carbon local economy



Supporting Wildlife



Developing community spirit



1. About the fund

The Community Environmental Action Fund ran between 1 July 2010 and 1 July 2015, with the last grants being issued in July 2012. The aim was to encourage and support community led action which raises awareness of and acts on the need to reduce reliance on fossil fuels, cut greenhouse gas emissions, and increase community resilience so that they are both acting to reduce the impacts a changing climate will have on their live and able to cope with change. It was made possible by the kind support of Suffolk Coastal Local Strategic Partnership, Groundwork East of England, Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB SDF Fund, the Environment Agency, the Suffolk Coastal Greenprint Forum and Suffolk Coastal District Council. Many others have also provided their invaluable advice including the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership, Suffolk Acre and SAVO.

2. About the Community Group

The Oak Tree Low Carbon Farm in Rushmere St Andrew, started in 2010 and made into a Community Interest Company in September 2012, is Suffolk's only Community Supported Agriculture project. It received £1000 of Community Environmental Action Fund money in March 2013 to develop materials for and trial the provision of courses and farm tours as a way of: generating income for a way of farming that builds communities, supports mental and physical health goals, reducing carbon emissions; and helping others learn ways to reduce their environmental impact.

The farm now has 65 vegetable shares and 200 members. It has utilised innovative growing techniques, including regenerative agriculture and agroforestry to make our food production as resilient as possible in the face of a changing climate. The courses were developed and positively received. However the income from members alone and plus this grant and a grant of £20,000 from the Esmee Fairburn Foundation and £10,000 from the Big Lottery Fund was not sufficient to keep the teacher employed nor sufficient to pay the three growers needed to make the farm function the minimum wage. To avoid the farm having to close a crowd funding campaign with some brilliant perks has been launched to raise at least £27,000 by Autumn 2015.

<https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/save-the-oak-tree#/story>

Progress against commitments



The primary aim under the funding was the development and trial of courses and farm tours – this engaged over 40 people in the concepts of low carbon, climate resilient growing and eating. The bike trailer proved less successful as only one keen cyclist was able to use it safely on the country roads – however it is still used at times around the farm. The additional request from the panel to look at engaging schools was explored, however it was found that a building with toilets would be required before this was practical. This has been looked into however further funds and work are needed to progress this.

3. Planned next steps for the community

To raise sufficient funds to:

- Expand the number of veg shares to include more families in the community.
- Develop a small farm community building to enable us to host a wide range of exciting new courses and workshops as well as school parties from across the county.
- Grow our blossoming cut flower business.
- Harvest fruit in the future from our trees and bushes planted over the past few years.
- Introduce new wildlife habitats to increase biodiversity.
- Develop exciting new technologies to help increase productivity and reduce costs.

Appendix 1 Break down of Expenditure

1. A bike trailer was purchased for the distribution of vegetable boxes - £350.
2. Publicity materials for May 2013 organic gardening course - £100
3. Course materials to accompany the May 2013 organic gardening course - £100
4. Rental of a marquee for the May 2013 pilot organic gardening course – £350
5. Publicity materials to promote our farm tour autumn 2013 – £100.