

The Threshold Centre



ANNUAL REPORT

September 2010 - September 2011

OVERVIEW

The year has been one of adjustment and integration as the expanded community continued to get to know each other and the newcomers settled in, with some new structures needing to be developed. Our maximum complement during the period, with all 14 units occupied and three rental tenants in the farmhouse, was 21 adults and 5 children, 1 dog and 3 cats. We have done our best to encourage families but the smaller size of the properties and the lack of on-site playmates of a similar age, plus transport issues, tends to work against this long term.

We continue to have a monthly business meeting, open to all members, and decisions are reached on a consensus basis. We have now formed 14 sub-groups looking at issues as diverse as Membership, Finance and Gardening. These groups can discuss items under their remit and make reports and recommendations, which saves time in the full meeting. The most recently formed group is the Holding Group with a remit for the social and spiritual welfare of the community, and a group to which issues can be referred which don't fit elsewhere. The reports of the Education, Facilities/Maintenance, Sustainability and Garden groups are included in this report.

We also now have a "House Love" team to ensure the shared farmhouse space is kept clean and welcoming for visitors and course participants, and Tuesday mornings are still kept as a time when those who are on site and able to join in can do gardening and more minor work tasks. We then enjoy a bring-and-share lunch together. We are often joined by local volunteers on these occasions and even by our Housing Association Director, who hopes to make it a regular occurrence.

We continue to have two shared meals a week, and a rota for preparing the food. With the increased numbers our turns are less frequent and the menu more varied!

Sharing meditation has always been, and continues to be, an important part of maintaining community glue and holding the vision. The space doubles as a therapy room and has been hired by on-site therapists as well as outside practitioners. Two of our members run a business from shared office space.

We have an active social life here – with so many residents there are always birthdays to celebrate. There have been walks, wood collections, outings to gardens, concerts, films, Stonehenge and more, as well as in-house activities such as circle dance, toning and Solstice celebrations.

OUTREACH

It was always our intention, once the building work was completed and our new residents settled in, to hold a 'thank you' celebration for all those who have helped in the creation of the Threshold Centre. It seemed appropriate to hold this on May 21st 2011, International Communities Day. The afternoon was open to visitors, some of whom were from other cohousing groups. Gillingham Town Mayor attended and we held a ceremony to 'plant' a Peace Pole - ours was the 2000,000th in the world!. In the evening we held a barbeque for invited guests from the local area – including District and Town councillors, architect and builders, representatives of the Housing Association and local groups, friends and neighbours – who have given us support and encouragement in various ways.

Other outreach in the community includes one member who has been a trustee of the local Community Partnership for several years, and now is a trustee of the Community and Leisure Centre, re-established by the Partnership after local council funding was withdrawn, and opened in 2011 by HRH Princess Anne. We also have involvement with our East Stour parish, two of our group helping with the Census. Several residents belong to various other local clubs and organisations. We support the Shaftesbury Positive Living Group events (some of us have been speakers at their meetings) and many of us are members of the Local Exchange Trading group – LETS – with a plant swap being hosted here in the Spring.

We continued to hold Open bring-and-share lunches on the first Sunday of the month and these are a good way of giving visitors the chance to look around and have an informal chat with residents. Our Work/Gardening weekends, mentioned elsewhere, are another popular way of bringing visitors in. We also hold an Open Meditation once a month.

We have hosted a variety of visitors, including other cohousing groups and Housing Associations. Synergy held an event here for councillors during Rural Housing Week; and special tours were put on for representatives from Purbeck council, Tor Homes and forming co housing groups in Frome and London.

Our furthest flung visitor was from Cameroon – famer Tanto visited us for 2 days and 2 nights and entertained us as much as we did him with his stories of local village life and attempts to provide his fellow villagers with clean drinking water. His visit inspired many of us and we hope to maintain a link with him in the coming years.

Plans for 2011-12

A May Fayre will be held to introduce more people to the work of the centre.

Our monthly open time is changing from Sunday lunch to tea on the first Saturday of the month.

Open meditation continues monthly

PUBLICITY - We have had articles written about us in the local and national press including features in Prima magazine and Kindred Spirit. We almost featured in a new Radio 4 programme about the joys of preparing and eating food together – but unfortunately this was cancelled at the last minute.

An updated leaflet has been produced as a handout for us to circulate at events and meetings.

We continue to produce a quarterly Newsletter which is sent to a few hundred people on our mailing list. This has just been revamped, thanks to an on-site graphics expert. Regular ads for our co housing courses appear in Positive News and Spark and consistently generate bookings.

We are members of the UK Co-housing Network and one of our residents, Amanda Pearson, has recently joined the Board or Directors. The Networks administrative officer has now participated in one of our co housing weekends and it is our intention to support the new project officer for the Network when funding is finally approved and s/he is appointed.

Plans for 2011-12

We will continue to seek media coverage in a range of relevant publications.

We will revamp our website, with more interactive content

EDUCATION

Cohousing courses – Five of these were planned for the year, and continue to be popular for those wishing to discover more about the concept generally or have plans for their own project. We welcomed a total of 27 delegates.

Permaculture – The first course held here was successfully completed by 4 participants over 7 weekends (see Garden report).

Personal Development – The 7 Words weekend course is ongoing and proving popular.

Plans for 2011-12

Community Experience weekends – it is planned to replace two of the cohousing courses next year with weekends that are more experiential

Permaculture. It is intended that we will become a Centre of Excellence for teaching permaculture.

Personal Development. A series of evening classes is planned from September 2011 to explore how sound, light, colour and aroma can be used as tools for personal growth and healing

GARDEN REPORT

Despite a slow start in Spring, the vegetable beds this year were very productive, and we have extended into some areas for perennial crops such as artichokes, asparagus and cardoons. We have also created more beds in the polytunnel and are continuing to harvest salad leaves through the winter months.

We have constructed a rainwater harvesting system consisting of guttering along the sides of the polytunnel and 2 large collection tanks at the end, plus a pond for the overflow. This has proved very successful, but we still need to connect up an automatic irrigation system to save all that manual watering.

We had three very well attended gardening weekends, but unfortunately the October weekend had to be cancelled as work was being carried out in the farmhouse and we were unable to accommodate guests at that time.

However, two of our residents have been running Permaculture courses here at the Threshold Centre, and with the help of the students we have created some additional garden features such as a 'herb spiral' and an octagonal shaped medicinal herb bed.

We also now have a yurt which we leave up during the summer months, and which has made a great additional space for courses and workshops. In 2012 we plan to

construct a wooden floor for the yurt which we hope will make it a more attractive venue for local people to hire.

Our fruit trees are doing well despite the cold wet conditions, and we are in the process of planting a mixed native hedge to provide our crops with some protection from the prevailing winds.

We registered for Wwoofers (volunteer workers on organic farms from around the world) and enjoyed having their company as well as their work input! However, as they require accommodation, board and supervision – a lot of extra work for others! – we may not continue with this scheme.

We tend to commemorate as many events as possible by planting a tree!

FACILITIES/MAINTENANCE

The information contained in the previous Report relating to upkeep and servicing of our biomass boiler and biodisc sewage system is still relevant, as is the list of ‘other work undertaken’, which now reads –

- Clean biomass boiler (including emptying ash boxes)
- Monitor wood pellet level and reorder as necessary
- Arrange regular biomass boiler servicing
- Respond to boiler ‘faults’ and ‘failures’
- Inform new residents how to use their heating and hot water controls
- Change pump timers in accumulator tank room
- Arrange regular emptying of biodisc (and septic tank)
- Respond to biodisc alarms ‘faults’ and ‘failures’
- Inform new residents what **not** to put down drains
- Recycling – putting recycling containers out, taking some (eg tetrapaks) to recycling centre
- Informing new residents and visitors what recycling goes where
- Checking and maintain electric fence around community garden in field, keeping battery charged.
- Laundry drainage check
- Fire and smoke alarm checks in farmhouse
- General repairs and maintenance to farmhouse and site
- Managing completion of builder repairing ‘defects’

SUSTAINABILITY

The biomass boiler was commissioned in January 2010. There was initial dismay with operational costs! However, this is now levelling out. We may save costs next summer (2012) by turning off the hot water for some months.

The heating system in the farmhouse proved ineffective during the very cold winter, after connection to the biomass. However, the whole system has been upgraded in time for winter 2011 (at considerable expense). Usage will be monitored.

Water:

Domestic – our target is an average of 80 litres per person per day. During the time of this report consumption averaged 82 litres

Rainwater harvesting – the number of water butts around the site have been increased. Rainwater is used for the 3 washing machines. The community garden continues to be watered from huge rainwater collection tanks located on the main site and, if practicable, the existing electrical pump will be replaced by a solar powered one. We have explored the possibility of our own well. The original one on site was filled in long ago and cannot be reinstated. The cost of boring a new one is likely to be prohibitive.

Electricity:

PV Panels – the 26 panels have produced 11251 KW up to September 2011. We have investigated the possibility of installing more, under the Government scheme.

Domestic – residents have their own meters, read monthly.

Farmhouse – Has been monitored

Future plans 2011-12

We will continue to monitor water and energy use. Now the farmhouse is effectively connected to the biomass system, this will reduce the demand for electricity.

We will improve insulation in the farmhouse, to further reduce energy requirements.

We plan to further increase the amount of rainwater harvested on site.

RECYCLING – We continue to recycle the majority of our waste, clothes swap and always offer unwanted second-hand items to other residents. For 14 households we only have six dustbins for waste to go to landfill.

TRANSPORT – 3 residents do not have a car. Some residents are happy to loan theirs and we have 1 pool car, so no-one is stuck! We have a ‘Lifts offered and wanted’ list on the notice board and residents link up for shopping and social trips where possible. We have a full bike shed!

Future plans 2011-12

We are introducing a carbon offset scheme for residents who fly, with the money raised being used for planting trees and hedges.

We were given a GOLD AWARD by Green Tourism and will be applying for a renewal of this shortly.