

Operation Farm - a vision

A feasibility report funded by Local Food Fund

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Introduction - executive summary

Introduction

Operation Farm began as an idea in a co-operative workshop sometime in 2009, since then the idea has grown significantly and is (we hope!) on the way to becoming reality.

In 2011, Operation Farm received a grant from the Local Food Fund to:

“to investigate and, if feasible, instigate the creation of a community farm project in the Tameside and Glossop area.”

Our initial idea was to deliver a creative approach to health care and prevention whilst also providing community growing land.

This vision details the work we carried out, outlining the vision and exactly how that vision might come to fruition.

Executive summary

The benefits to Operation Farm as a result of carrying out the feasibility study have been huge and the process has been invaluable in allowing us time to focus on future plans and developments.

The internal and external outcomes are summarised below.

Internal

- A more focussed and dedicated board. The consultation process has afforded the board time and space to assess their involvement and to ensure that we have a clear, shared vision going forward. A board skills audit has identified strengths and weaknesses.

- The potential for new board members. The consultation process raised interest from many people in joining the board with the skills audit enabling us to recruit to address weaknesses

Credits

Current Operation Farm board:

Dave Wilson (TMBC), Ingrid Galbraith, Laura Bannister (both Tameside and Glossop MIND), Alison Shockledge (Park Cafe), Anna Seward, Jonathan Atkinson, Rachel Summerscales

and create a robust board.

- A clear plan of action for the short and medium term. The consultation has revealed our community's local food priorities and explored their expectations of Operation Farm. We can now prioritise opportunities and have a clear picture of what we wish to achieve when we secure land.

- Opportunities for members. To allow community members and organisations to become more involved in Operation Farm we are developing a member offer and working groups. One working group, the Community Orchard Supporters Group has already formed with a view to becoming an independent group.

External

- Higher profile locally and regionally. The study has vastly increased interest in our organisation helping build further our relationship with Tameside Council.

- New links and opportunities. We have made vital links with similar organisations and developing the potential for a network of local growers who wish to gain new skills – we are currently raising funds in order to deliver training to meet this need.

In hindsight Operation Farm had fallen into a trap that catches many young organisations. We began with a vision which got rather lost as we pursued a variety of opportunities that came our way. Whilst this work was valuable and had clear community benefits it did mean that, as a board, we never had the time to focus on anything other than the here and now. Following the feasibility study we are now content that the 'here and now' is actually taking towards a future that is in line with our original aims and objectives.

Park Cafe, Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council, Helen Woodcock and Matt Fawcett of the Kindling Trust, everyone from Tameside and Glossop MIND, Making Local Food Work, Mark Simmonds, Tameside Green Interest Group, Co-ops UK, Anne Gilligan, everyone who came to the workshops, replied to a survey or agreed to be interviewed.

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Design: Ann Gilligan/Jonathan Atkinson

Photographs: Dave Gee, Muoo Photography

Thanks to: Alison Shockledge and all the staff and trainees at the

How we carried out the feasibility study

Work was carried out September 2011-May 2012
Overseen by Operation Farm board, carried out by three researchers.
Funded through Local Food Fund programme of BIG Lottery

Stakeholder mapping - 118

118 contacts found and sent Survey Monkey survey...

Surveys returned - 49

49 surveys returned including from 25 different organisations and council departments...

14 interviews

14 interviews conducted with a wide range of interested people/organisations...

70 people at Visioning events

2 all day visioning events attracted 70 people who created their 'dream farm' and gave us loads of ideas...

Launch event

Draft vision presented at an event in April 2012 at the Park Cafe, Hyde Park, Tameside

Secure
Land

Link with
other
projects

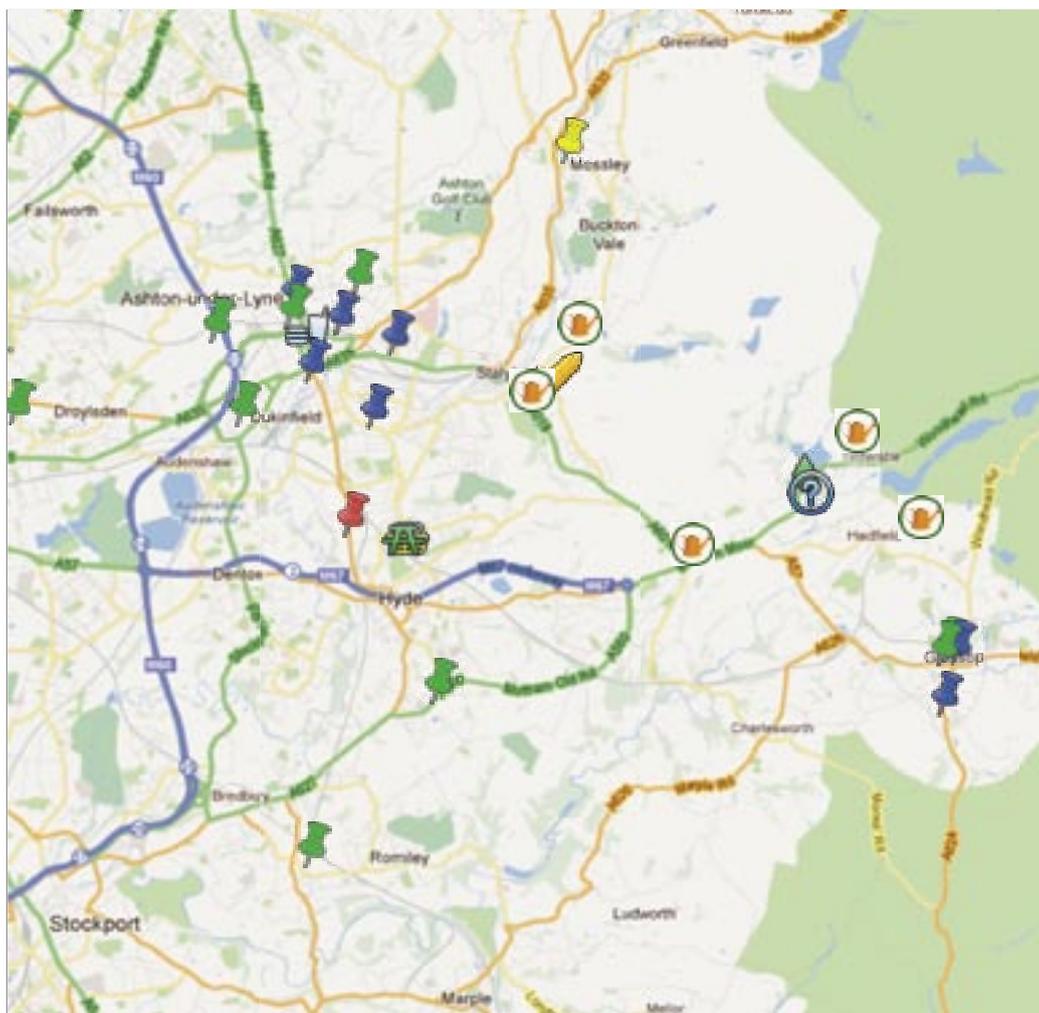
Plot
to
Plate



Selected photos from Operation Farm visioning sessions, credit: Dave Gee muoo photography

Growers and groups in Tameside

During the stakeholder analysis we mapped the locations of community food projects, allotments, home growers, and other local food sites of interest in and around Tameside....



See the map in full on our website.

Groups listed include:

Community allotments in Padfield, High Peak, Community allotments in Tintwistle, High Peak, Community orchard in Etherow Lodge Park, Hollingworth, Possibility of land available, near Etherow Lodge Park, Hollingworth, Allotments (TMBC): Council-owned allotments in Mottram (Mottram Moor), Tameside, The Park Cafe, Bayley Hall, Hyde Park, Tameside, Swap Shop - Swap your home-grown/home-made produce with other local, growers at the swap shop located in The Park Cafe, Hyde, Allotments (TMBC): Council-owned allotments in Stalybridge (Mottram Road), Tameside. Home Grower: GYO in pots, Brushes Back community growing project run by the Brushes Estate Management Board, Edge Lane Allotments, Clayton, Hurst Knoll Community Allotment, Volunteer Centre Glossop, Community Fire Station Allotments, Tameside Community Radio, TMBC - Joint Commissioning Team, Ashton Allotment Action, Tameside Green Interest Group, GAFA - Glossopdale Action For Allotments, Incredible Edible Glossop, Access Glossop, Housing 21, Opt-In Services, Derbyshire County Council - Adult Services, Volunteer Centre Ashton, Farming and Countryside Education, Manchester Environmental Education Network, Mossley School, Topaz Cafe, Tameside and Glossop MIND allotment, 4 C Community Centre, Agricultural Rural Centre CIC

Operation Farm case studies

As we have considered the options for developing Operation Farm we have looked to learn lessons from the achievements and experiences of other community projects combining farming/horticulture with education/care:

Growing Well, Cumbria



- Mental health support through Community Supported Agriculture.
- A community supported agriculture project which was set up to benefit volunteers who work there with mental health problems.
- A membership base of buyers who understand and sympathise with the core values, which means they pay in advance for veg boxes so the project can be “farm led” rather than “customer led”.
- An experienced grower is crucial. Important to decide the balance between care and

- commercial viability from produce.
- Have been active in seeking out and engaging with referrers in health and social care system to build understanding and acquire referrals.
- By providing training to volunteers they encourage them to progress and take on greater responsibility over time.

Income sources:

- £ Cropshare veg box income
- £ Social care service payments
- £ Training courses

www.growingwell.co.uk

Woodhouse Community Farm, Lichfield

- Care Farm and CSA project
Based at a farm owned by Birmingham City Council and leased for community use this farm will be developed as a food hub and community resource. So far the project has secured funding for a group with mental health issues to grow fruit and vegetables in the walled garden and have a new CSA veg box scheme – “Cut of the Crop.”
- Wider community support from Third sector important in getting the lease from the council

Multiple income streams identified to demonstrate viability as an enterprise “Plot to plate” – cooking and eating area an important part of the care farming activity programme.

Income sources:

- £ Grant funded as it develops
- £ Host visits from schools and other groups
- £ Veg box scheme/CSA from walled garden selling food to local community
- £ Will develop care farm services for local health related statutory bodies
- £ Plan to develop educational services and as a general visitor destination

www.woodhousecommunityfarm.co.uk



Amelia Trust Farm, Glamorgan

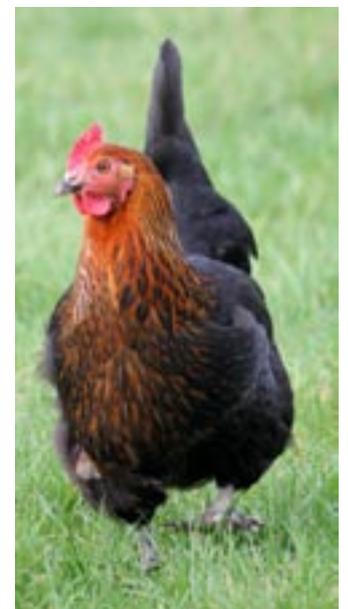
- **Community farm for young people**
This livestock farm was donated to the Methodist church and provides educational, training and recreational facilities in a tranquil rural environment.
- Services are offered to everyone, but the focus is disadvantaged, especially young, people.
- Started by offering services to young offenders only. Now, though maintaining a focus on young people, they now deliver to a much wider range of people including users with learning disabilities.
- Now a visitor attraction it delivers to the general public, but this does require staffing and opening at weekends

- Volunteers are central to the operation - over 100 volunteers with enhanced CRB checks help to maintain the farm
- The farm is developing a wide range of income streams to achieve financial sustainability.

Income sources:

- £ Social care services
- £ Shop/visitor centre income
- £ Donations

www.ameliatrust.org.uk



Grassroots Community Allotment, Failsworth

- Disability care & community project
The Grassroots allotment is a place for people with a disability to engage in horticulture and animal welfare, and creates a relaxed and secure atmosphere to socialise and learn. Developed jointly by Oldham Council parks and adult and community services it is now a vibrant and successful resource to the wider community.
- Close involvement and backing of existing care service providers.
- Now used by a much wider group of people from local community.
- Small animals eg chickens, provide experience of animal care to complement horticultural activities and skills development.
- Products are sold on a small scale at the site – organic veg and honey from bees to support income but this isn't the major income stream.
- Training forms an important part of the activity at the site – users can get ASDAN qualifications.

Income sources:

- £ Care services (local authority funded and staffed)
- £ Produce sales
- £ Training income

www.wix.com/grassroots_11/grassroots/



Walton Lea project, Warrington

- Care through growing, shop and visitor attraction
- A horticultural enterprise working with adults who have learning disabilities, it is situated in a Victorian walled garden and has a newly refurbished shop selling grown and locally sourced produce. As an interesting and accessible example of local food production it's a visitor attraction in its own right.
- The attractive walled garden is a local attraction helping increase footfall to shop and gardens
- Shop is crucial to the business mix and sells produce including high value products such as honey and preserves
- Project balances the care needs of learning disabled users with those of running a busy shop and delivering a visitor attraction

Income sources:

- £ Shop sales
- £ Care services

www.waltonlea.org.uk



Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Community Farm, Sussex



- A community-based co-operative with over 400 'partner' members oversees these two biodynamic farms with buildings and land owned by a charitable trust. Tablehurst is mainly dedicated to meat and Plaw Hatch mainly dairy and other livestock with large market garden with twelve poly-tunnels. Both sell majority for produce direct from the farm via onsite farm shops as well as at farmers markets.

- Biodynamic and Steiner principles are key to the farms' ethos, community engagement and activities.

- Both farms host a woodland day care project for Pericles, a

local organisation run on Steiner principles for people with learning difficulties and Tablehurst farm has three learning disabled adults who live and help on the farm.

- Both farms employ tenant farmers and farm management teams who make all the day-to-day decisions about the enterprises

- Host open days and community events

Income sources:

- £ Farm produce sales

- £ Partner members invest £100 shares in the co-operative

- £ Hosting of care services

www.tablehurstandplawhatch.co.uk

Governance issues

Governance issues include the way the organisation is organised and managed and how it embodies community and wider social interests. Proposed strap-line: "Operation Farm - people, food and fun!"

Proposed mission statement

Operation Farm is a community-led organisation operating in Tameside and Glossopdale providing opportunities for local people to come together, grow sustainable food and to develop new skills. We provide educational and therapeutic services that promote healthy living, well being and respect for the environment.

Legal structure

Operation Farm is currently an unincorporated association, a basic community group with a constitution and board but without an incorporated legal entity. Whilst there is no immediate need to constitute, the board are advised to research possibilities now and be ready to move if an opportunity arises.

Points to consider:

- Liability both for board members (should be limited through legal structure to protect board and members) and the public (through insurance).
- Issuing of community shares offer: if the board consider share options to be likely in the future this could be addressed in the new company structure (ie an IPS co-op), otherwise it is likely that a subsidiary would need to be created in order to issue shares.
- Can a return be paid on any shares if these were issued?
- Do the board wish to have charitable status (useful if applying to some more traditional trusts and for tax benefits)?
- Can the structure have an asset lock in place to protect any assets (such as land or buildings) in the future?

The table in the appendix below outlines various options in relation to these points.

Membership

Operation Farm's current constitution allows for a range of membership options:

Full members - 18+ years and living in the community of benefit, ie Tameside or Glossopdale

Associate members - live outside the community of benefit, non-voting

Junior members - below 18 years of age, non-voting

Affiliate members and statutory members - associations, organisations and local authorities, non-voting but representatives can seek election to the board

Membership benefits/fee

A member offer needs to be developed in order to recruit new members. A balance needs to be made between benefits offered and membership fee required. Does Operation Farm want a few members paying a relatively large annual fee or many paying little or nothing?

Potential benefits:

Newsletter, discounted training, work days, attendance at AGM and voting rights, part of working group, name on plaque or bench, discounted purchases.

Governance structure

The current Operation Farm constitution allows for the following relationship between members and board.

Executive committee

Day-to-day activity

Instigated at perogative of management committee, membership drawn from committee and/or co-opted

Working Group

Sub-committee

Instigated at perogative of management committee, membership drawn from committee and/or co-opted

Working Group

Sub-committee

Instigated at perogative of management committee, membership drawn from committee and/or co-opted

Management Committee

Strategic development

Drawn from membership, elected at Annual General Meeting

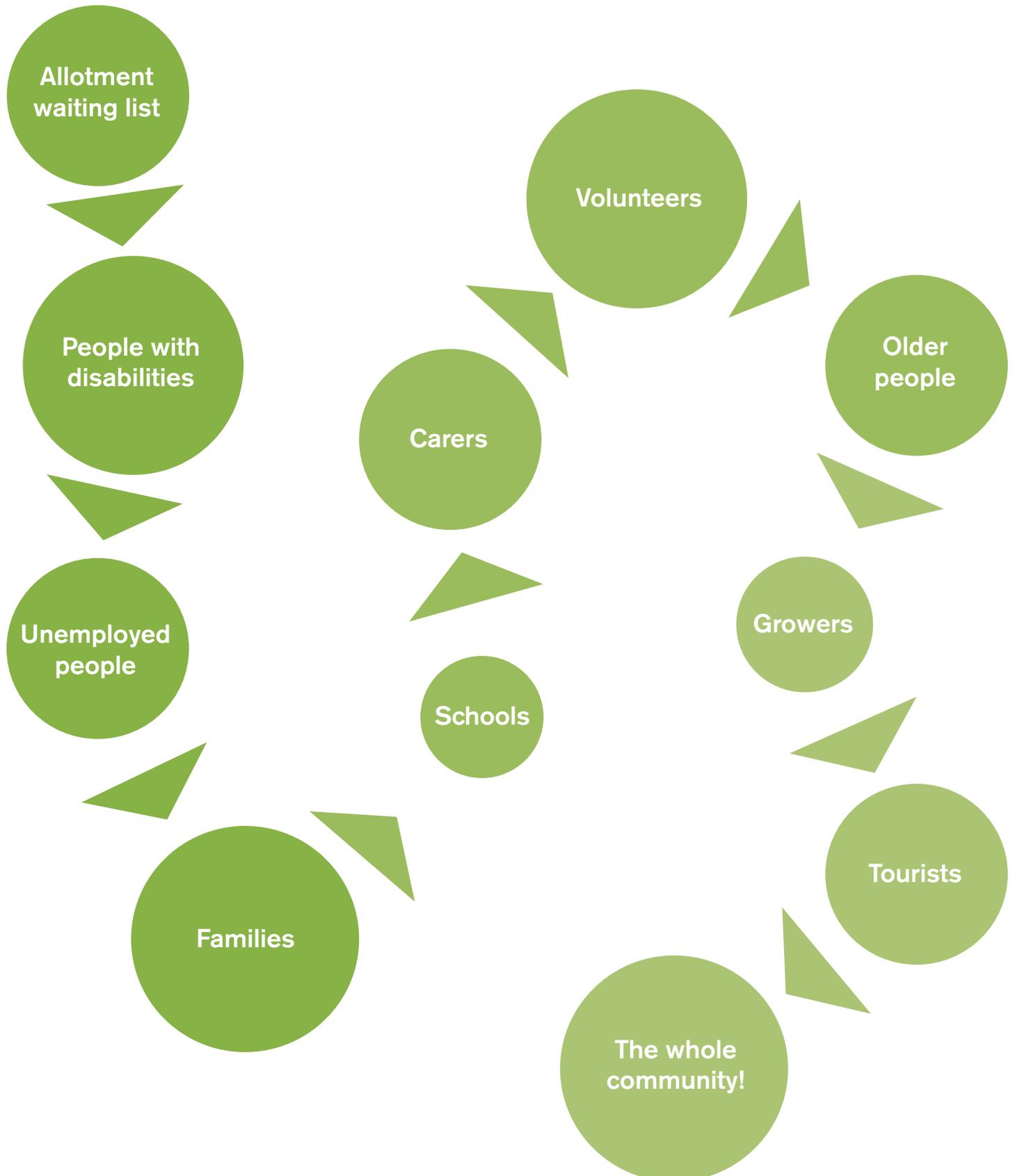
Members

Full - Associate - Junior
- Affiliate - Statutory

May or may not pay annual fee, voting members elect board at AGM

Who might use our farm?

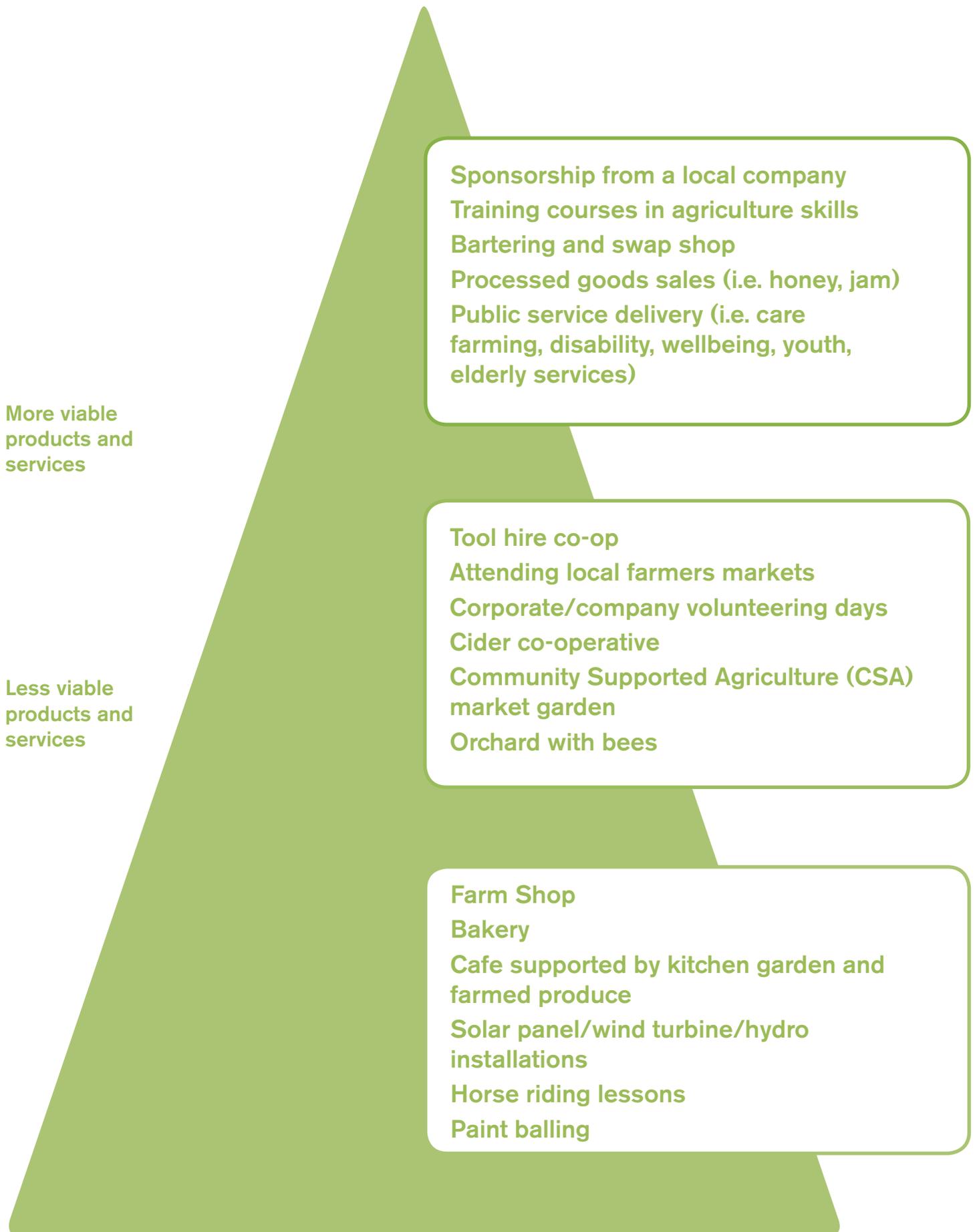
We looked at what kind of people might visit the farm and use our services
All agreed our farm must be accessible, welcoming and well supported





Products and services

The visioning workshops identified a wide variety of potential products and services and facilities. We ranked these ideas in terms of their viability ie how easy or expensive they might be to set up, how much income they might generate and how in keeping they were to our social mission.



Facilities and buildings

More viable
facilities and
buildings

Community growing land
Schools workshops
Herb garden
Temporary class room - perhaps using a shipping container
Temporary kitchen

Less viable
facilities and
buildings

Accessible raised beds
Accessible toilets
Good signage/clear entrance
Parking area

Play area
Performance area
Bunk house
Biofuelled vehicles

Operation Farm Action Plan



Short term (1-2 months)	Medium term (2-6 months)	Long term (6-12 months)
<p>i) Land</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Negotiating with local council, public sector organisation and land owners - First target is to investigate possibility of land at Pole Bank in Gee Cross <p>ii) Products and services</p> <p>Visit more case studies for learning and inspiration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meeting Tameside Council to explore possible service delivery options - Seek more advice on recruiting professional, dedicated growers <p>iii) Funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Submit a funding bid to build our reputation and keep people involved - Focus on useful agricultural skills that can be applied at home or on the farm <p>iv) Board</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Carry out a board skills audit <p>Once development plan agreed expand the Operation Farm board</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop working groups on funding, land, services etc <p>v) Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Oversee Community Orchard development 	<p>i) Land</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work with Tameside to conduct a survey of spare land - Start to make links with local farmers and growers <p>ii) Products and services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pilot some workshops and services - Attend Farmers Markets - Look into Country Markets model <p>iii) Funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assess start up costs for land/site development - Investigate sponsorship/pro bono opportunities <p>iv) Board</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access Co-op Enterprise Hub support to review and develop structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify potential site/start delivering services - Start to build balanced business plan, identify start-up capital costs and possible sources - Develop board, structure, user involvement and social mission <p>Once land is identified:</p> <p>Priorities are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community growing land - Herb garden - Temporary structures to enable basic workshop/ service delivery - Basic workshops and service delivery