



31 January 2024

Annual Report and Accounts

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Opening thought

We may not like to admit it but as a species humans tend to get things wrong a lot more than we get things right. Famously Thomas Edison made 2774 failed filaments before making the one that worked. Less famously the first electric light had been made 64 years earlier and the light bulb Edison used was designed by Joseph Swan, people still make the mistake of crediting Edison with inventing the lightbulb. In some cases, human error can have wide reaching and damaging effects and it is our duty to correct them, from abolishing slavery to ending hunger in a world with enough food to feed everyone. Sometimes our faulty thinking permeates on a deeper level with less awareness and I feel the impending climate catastrophe has fallen victim to this faulty cultural conditioning.

There is a sense of the natural world being something outside us and separate from us. Even those working in the field (pardon the pun) talk of nature connection as if it is something we could be disconnected from. Like we ourselves are not nature and there is a sense that we have risen above it. We see this in 17th century philosopher Thomas Hobbes' image of man in the state of nature as living a life which is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short". (This may say more about the men around him than about humans generally). Hobbes did not base this conjecture on evidence and would not have been aware that homo sapiens had existed in harmony as nature for (according to the current theories) over 250,000 years before he came along. The 17th Century also ushered in the industrial revolution, the culmination of the renaissance and the celebration of science and rationalism - exhibited by the likes of Hobbes, and a mechanistic reductionist approach. All factors that contributed to the illusion of our separation from and dominion over nature.

So nowadays people talk about the environmental crisis as if it is not happening to us but to the earth or animals or forests, or ice caps; as if we could exist without them or even that we could harm them without harming ourselves. You might think dropping your plastic bottle on the beach doesn't actually harm you and yet the average human is walking around with a credit card of micro plastic in their bloodstream. In the UK last year there were on average over 18 medical prescriptions issued per person. We have endemics of chronic disease, mental health disorders and dramatically increasing auto-immune diseases (where the body is literally attacking itself). We have to understand the environmental crisis is another form of auto-immune disease, we are attacking ourselves. Planetary harm is self-harm. Most people know the earth is not under threat. it has existed for most of its life without humans and would continue to do so if we disappeared. Currently, in harmony with the other living organisms from the bacteria in our gut to the fungi in the woods, to the plants breathing our oxygen and the bees pollinating our food crops the earth supports our lives.

Recognising and experiencing 'interbeing', as Thich Nhat Hanh called our connection to all life around us is an empowering, healing and restorative process. It comes with a role in the web of life; giving purpose and meaning to our actions and a sense of belonging. It empowers us by showing that our actions matter, they can help (or harm) the web of life and by extension we matter. Our role as a charity is to continue to show people that they are part of the most beautiful, intricate, harmonious, web of being and they have place, purpose and community flowing around and through them. This is how we counter eco-anxiety, this is how we initiate change and this is how we move away from faulty logic or the magical thinking that science or some other force or power outside of us is going to heal the world.

Thank you to everyone who has been a part of our journey this year.

Nick Grist
Chair



Our vision and strategy

Vision:

People living deeply connected vital lives with a clear sense of their role and responsibility in the human and more than human world.

Mission:

To create spaces that allow for sharing of skills, knowledge and ideas along with the experience of connection, purpose and integration with all beings.

Values:

- Respect (for ourselves, each other and the natural world)
- Connection (with our entire being, each other and the natural world)
- Vitality (physical, mental, spiritual and ecological)

How we will get there

We achieve our mission through:

1. organic food growing for the community and local food banks
2. sharing traditional skills
3. cooking
4. storytelling
5. nature connection
6. activities that foster vitality

We run volunteering sessions open to anyone in the local community with volunteers coming from across East and West Sussex ranging in age from 18 to 80.

Our project gives anyone the opportunity to enjoy the space we are creating and be a part of our organic food growing community.

This year in the garden

Little things have a big impact:



Much of the work we do in the garden is informed by the people who join us in the garden. As an example, many of our refugee community like to cook and make stuffed vine leaves but nowhere sells the leaves just the pre-stuffed variety. For the first time this year we had two vines planted in the polytunnel and a welcome harvest of vine leaves. The added bonus was after the leaves came delicious bunches of grapes. This small act was seen as a clear communication to our community that this garden is



for them to co-create and to enjoy. It said to our participants your happiness matters, and we would love you to share, celebrate, educate and enrich our lives with your knowledge and traditions. That grape vine said your being here enriches our community.

There is magic in nature when observe it and anyone coming to the garden is encouraged to spend time observing the plants and other animals around them. We pool our knowledge and observations of these beings and together learn a little more about their lives.

With the damsel and dragonfly having established themselves in the pond last year there were many larvae overwintering in the water and as may approached we were lucky enough to witness the incredible process of the larvae climbing the reeds and the dragonfly emerging from the larva’s shell. The fascination and amazement experienced witnessing this process is part of the journey back to being awed by the ecosystem that supports us and wanting to do more to protect it. These little moments help shape our collective response to the environmental crisis.



Refugee and Migrant Community



Once again, we have had the pleasure and the privilege of sharing our garden with the refugee and migrant community. They have filled the space with so much love, joy, knowledge and delicious feasts. It is heartening to see how much they enrich our community and how everyone benefits from their presence whether it our Sudanese chef schooling local volunteers in the fine art of Tamiya (falafel) making or Vietnamese advise on how to cook squash leaves.

Again, this year we ran our dedicated refugee and migrant sessions with Voices in Exile over the Spring and Summer. In those sessions we hosted over 48 refugees at our site. We grew food together, cooked up genuine feasts, planted trees, played games, and laughed, a lot. We also continued to welcome participants from these sessions to our open sessions when they built the confidence to come without a facilitator.





We also celebrated the end of Ramadan with a feast of food from the community



“Coming to the garden has been a highlight of my week and I have felt so welcome and enjoyed meeting all the lovely people and the food”.

Harvest

2023 was another challenging year for food growers. As well as being the warmest November in recorded history the global temperature on 17 November was for the first time ever 2 degrees above the pre-industrial average used as a reference for the Paris agreement. The 12-month period from February 2023 was the first in recorded history to see an average global temperature increase of over 1.5 degrees. Shifting seasons led to early blossoms, and sprouting and in many cases a lower yield as crops struggled to adapt to the unseasonal and unsettled conditions that we encountered throughout the year.



In spite of this we managed to create a thriving food garden once again and participants were able to enjoy the produce from their labour in the session meals and to take home food to cook with and plants to grow at home.



With the lockdowns no longer affecting attendance the emphasis shifted from transporting food to foodbanks to encouraging our refugee and migrant community to take produce home with them and also encouraging more volunteers to enjoy the fruits of their labour. This in turn has created a stronger sense of ownership and involvement in the life and direction of the garden.

Our volunteers

We have been blessed throughout the year with volunteers aged 18 to 80 coming from across East and West Sussex. They are the wonderful people that have made our project possible and worked alongside our refugee and migrant community and help grow fresh organic produce. They have stood by us in all weathers and humbled us with their dedication, enthusiasm and energy.



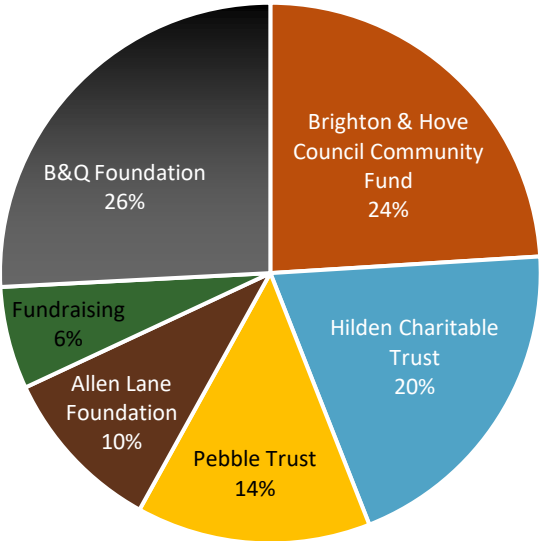
We welcomed 68 different volunteers to the site on 73 volunteering sessions and many have become regular fixtures at our sessions. Together they gave us over 938 hours of their precious time.

Financial summary 2023-24

Income

The sector is facing increasing hardship and demand has been amplified by the cost-of-capitalism crisis. Budgets, funds and support has been cut and many funders were only able to provide a proportion of the money we applied for. We are enormously grateful to those who have continued to support our work through this difficult period.

Where our income came from

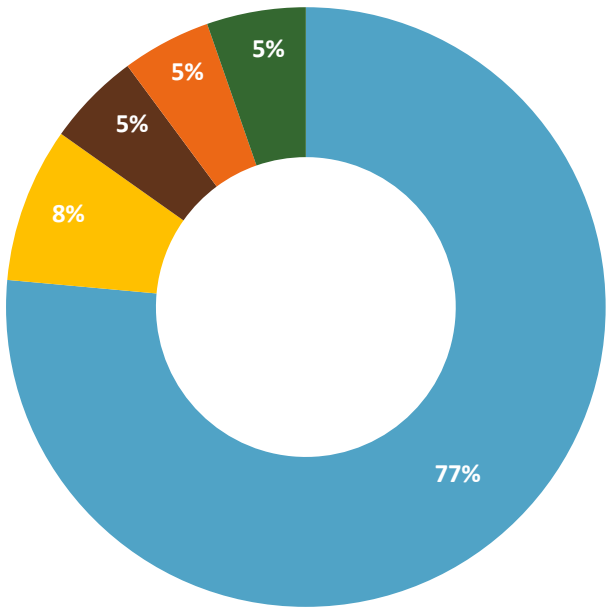


We remain heavily reliant on grants for much of our income and we are enormously grateful to the organisations that have supported us throughout the year and enabled us to achieve so much. The money we receive allows us to plant our crops, develop our site, grow our food and host sessions with local volunteers and with the refugee and migrant community. Thank you to those funders who supported us this year:



There have also been many generous donations of materials, tools and time from our volunteers and supporters to whom we are eternally grateful for their generosity and their continuing support.

Where we spend our income



- Staffing:**
Our focus was to ensure we ran as many sessions as possible. Session workers were able to receive recompense and less of their time was donated this year as we ran 73 open volunteering sessions and 7 specifically for the refugee and migrant community.
- Session food and transport:**
This includes hot drinks and refreshments for volunteers and for the refugee sessions all the ingredients being used in cooking. We also provide soups and snacks for the volunteering sessions. Participants who can't afford transportation have bus tickets provided and this section includes the costs of getting provisions and materials to and from the site.
- Rent, insurance and office costs**
These have been kept to the minimum with a competitive insurance policy secured through Social Farms and Gardens and a reasonable rate for our independent examiner for the accounting. Some of the administrative and funding work for the project is still unpaid.
- Seeds and inputs**
As a certified organic grower, we can only use organic seeds and inputs such as compost. We save seed each year, and are increasing our capacity to produce our own compost. This year we have planted green manures and our food forest is being predominantly planted with perennials helping to keep these costs down.
- Building materials, tools and utensils**
As our sessions grew and our volunteer numbers swelled, we needed to ensure we had enough tools for everyone to get stuck in. We also needed utensils for cooking and preparing food. Many of these were donated but some had to be purchased. We needed materials for the repairs to site, improvements in the irrigation systems and site development.

Financial performance

Now in our third year of operations we have significantly reduced reliance on individuals donating time and personal tools and equipment. After a challenging start to the year and the ongoing cost of capitalism crisis we were delighted to secure the level of funding we did. The charity needs to generate more income and diversify income sources to remain sustainable. We also need to grow our reserves to help us weather uncertain times.

Income

Income for the year was again largely in the form of one-off grants. We continue to look at diversifying the income streams and approached more corporate supporters who are devoting time and money to the project. We are primarily focused on securing additional grants but hope to reduce our reliance on grant funding as we develop the charity.

Costs

Our costs this year are a more accurate reflection of the amount of time and resources dedicated to the project in order to deliver the services we have. We are shifting from investment in the site to delivering our services but where possible we are looking to fund small projects to continue developing. We are still reliant on individuals devoting time, energy and resources without financial recompense. Our intention is to continue increasing our income to enable us to fully remunerate all individuals working for the charity.

Net Assets

The charity's net assets position depreciated slightly over the year due to the lack of investment in the site and the structures. This is to be expected as we are not looking to invest heavily in site development but to maintain the existing infrastructure.

Reserves

The purpose of the reserves policy for the charity is to ensure the stability of the delivery of our mission, sessions, employment and ongoing operations of the charity.

Unrestricted general fund reserves are intended to provide an internal source of funds for situations such as a sudden increase in expenses, one-time unbudgeted expenses, unanticipated loss in funding or uninsured losses. The reserves are not intended to replace a permanent loss of funds.

The current target minimum for unrestricted general fund reserves is equal to three months' average operating costs, including all recurring, predictable and unavoidable expenses. It is our intention to build our reserves as we grow our expenditure and ideally increase the reserves to cover six months of operation.

Our principal risks and uncertainties

The board of directors identify risks, assess potential impact and review mitigating actions. The directors update the board of trustees on significant risks for the charity. The trustees have examined risks and established systems to mitigate the significant risks facing the charity.

Generating Income

This is an ongoing concern for the charity as it is currently heavily reliant on grant funding. Resources are being allocated to fundraising and the diversification of the sources of income for the charity.

Partnerships and external relations

We work cooperatively with other organisations to be able to support people and create impactful change. This can mean that we are sometimes managing different sets of expectations and that we are reputationally associated with other organisations. We will continue to carefully assess the potential consequences of entering into partnerships before doing so and ensure that key relationships are managed by an experienced team.

Loss of key personnel

As a small charity the loss of a senior team member would have a dramatic impact. Policies, process and information dissemination are all in place to reduce the requirement on any one individual. We are also prioritising funding for key roles within the organisation so everyone can be fully remunerated for their time and contribution to the project.

Relationship with local council

We operate on land rented from the local council and continue to work closely with them to ensure we are effectively communicating the value of our work and that our charitable objects are clearly seen and understood by them to align with their vision for the site and the local community. We are enormously grateful to them for their enthusiastic support for our project and continued funding and were delighted to welcome the mayor to the site this summer:



Plans for the year ahead

We start our fourth year of operations in a stable financial position, with good facilities, equipment and infrastructure. We are keen to build on the strong foundation created in our first two years and expand our activities into new areas.

- We have funding to ensure we can host refugee sessions up till the summer and we are looking to secure further funding for the rest of the year.
- There is a good deal of work that goes into maintenance of the site and structures as well as ensuring the production and harvest of our crops and we will be continuing this work with the help of our volunteers throughout the year.
- We are introducing more nature connection and Eco-therapeutic work to the sessions so all volunteers can benefit from improved nature connection, mental health and reduced eco-anxiety.
- Our website continues to develop and we are finalising our first video content which we hope will generate further donations and more volunteers for the charity
- We are planning to complete work on the cob oven this year and trial bread and pizza making workshops
- We of course need to continue to fundraise and will be putting time and resources into securing funds and opening new income streams

Subject to securing additional funds we are hoping to:

- We are actively fundraising to improve water harvest and irrigation across the site with climate shifting to heavier rains over winter and drier summers we are keen to make better use of natural resources, reducing reliance on mains water and so reducing core running costs.
- Tree felling – necessitated by ash die back and recent heavy winds we urgently need funds to reduce the height of some trees and fell damaged trees to maintain the safety of the site.
- We are hoping to plumb in an outdoor sink to allow for the washing of hands and utensils.
- We are hoping to develop the food forest bringing in additional plants to increase the site yield and diversity. We are also keen to add plants to the wildlife pond and create more habitats for reptiles and amphibians
- If we can secure funding, we would love to create raised beds on the site. For some participants accessibility is an issue and these beds remove the need for kneeling and bending over while working as well as being accessible to people in wheelchairs.

Thanks to our supporters

It has been another successful year for us as a charity with many happy memories. Much of that success is down to our incredible supporters. We have benefitted from the generosity, enthusiasm and expertise of many who have donated their time, tools, money and resources to the project.

Our promise to supporters

We care for each and every one of our supporters and in response to their generosity, we promise to:

- Safeguard their personal details
- Communicate transparently with them about the allocation of funds
- Treat them with respect, honesty and openness
- Take into account the needs of individuals who may be in vulnerable circumstances or require additional care and support to make an informed decision
- Never put them under pressure to make or continue a gift
- Use their gifts for the purpose for which they are given, and spend donations so they have the most impact
- Respect their wishes and preferences
- Listen to them about how they want to be contacted and honour their choices
- Be receptive to feedback and use this to improve our processes and procedures
- Take appropriate action if they are unhappy with our services, and accept the authority of the Fundraising Regulator if we cannot resolve the issue

How we support our Volunteer Fundraisers

It is important to ensure that all our fundraising is conducted in an ethical way and we are committed to fair treatment of all our supporters. We work with our volunteer fundraisers who notify us that they are organising their own event in aid of Living Vital. We ensure they are provided with the appropriate information, support, resources, and acknowledgement. If we have not been notified in advance, we provide a receipt and acknowledgement after the donation has been made.

Volunteer fundraisers who are appointed by the charity must provide their contact details and two references before they are able to begin their roles. All volunteers have a designated point of contact with Living Vital and are supported in their role.

Organisational Structure

Living Vital became a registered charity in England and Wales on 4 January 2021. Living Vital has been set up as a CIO using the foundation model.

Our constitution outlines the charitable purposes and the rules that govern the operation of the charity.

The charity's day-to-day activity is run and managed by the board of directors who report to the board of trustees. Trustees meet on a regular basis to set the vision, strategic framework, and discuss the budgets under which the charity operates.

The trustees set the strategic direction of the organisation and are regularly updated on grants, budgets, activities, and fundraising. New initiatives are normally developed by directors in consultation with our participants and trustee working group, supported by an assessment of project needs. Trustees receive regular financial updates which form the basis of the routine financial monitoring. The charity works to ensure all stakeholders in the organisation are able to participate in its development. We listen to our client groups and many of the service delivery improvements come from our stakeholders.

Specific projects are managed by the directors who share regular project updates with stakeholders, including volunteers, staff, and trustees as appropriate.

Public Benefit Disclosure The trustees confirm they have referred to the guidance contained in the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit when reviewing the charity's aims and objectives, and in planning future activities. The trustees refer to public benefit throughout this report.

Recruitment and appointment of trustees

The charity is managed by a board of five trustees selected because they strongly endorse the charitable objectives of the organisation and reflect its values. When selecting trustees, the charity aims to ensure there is a broad range of relevant skills.

Trustees are appointed after interviews with existing trustees and formal visits to the organisation to ensure that they understand our vision and values. Trustees are subject to Disclosure and Barring Service checks where applicable.

Our Details

Registered charity number:

1192957

Registered office:

Living Vital, Stanmer Organics, Stanmer Village, Brighton BN1 9PZ

Trustees:

Ms M Amoridge	(appointed 04 January 2021)
Mr N Grist	(Chair of Trustees from 04 January 2021)
Ms R Khan-Williams	(appointed 04 January 2021)
Ms R Limage	(appointed 04 January 2021)
Mr A Weston	(appointed 04 January 2021)

The trustees have not received any remuneration or reclaimed any expenses during the financial year for their work as Trustees. All members of the Trustee Board have given their time voluntarily and received no benefits from the charity.

In accordance with the conditions in, sections 185 to 188 of the Charities Act 2011, and in line with our Governing Document, Clause 6, one trustee Mr N Grist receives remuneration for services to the charity outside the services provided in his capacity as a Trustee. All remuneration is subject to the conditions set out in the Charities Act

Statement of Trustees' Responsibilities

The trustees are responsible for preparing the Report of the Trustees and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

The trustees are required to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity and of the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, of the charity for that period. In preparing those financial statements, the trustees are required to

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles outlined in the Charities SORP;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charitable company will continue in business.

The trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and to enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the latest guidance from the charity commission. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charitable company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Approved by order of the board of trustees on 02 August 2023

And signed on its behalf by:



N Grist – Chair of Trustees

Statement of Financial Activities for the year ended 31 January 2023

As a CIO with gross income less than £250,000 our accounts are prepared on a receipts and payments basis.

	Unrestricted Funds (£)	Restricted Funds (£)	Total Funds (£) 2023
RECEIPTS			
Grants			
Brighton and Hove Council		6,000	6,000
Pebble Trust		3,500	3,500
Allen Lane Foundation	2,500		2,500
Hilden Charitable Trust	5,000		5,000
B&Q Foundation		6,450	6,450
Fundraising			
Corporate donations	384		384
General fundraising	1,148		1,148
Total	9,032	15,950	24,982
PAYMENTS			
Charitable Activities			
Staff Costs	5,020	19,440	24,460
Session Food and Transport	229	2,500	2,729
Seeds and Inputs	596	970	1,566
Tools and utensils	400	776	1,176
Rent, Insurance and office	1,653		1,653
Building Materials		568	568
Total	7,898	24,254	32,152
Net of Receipts/(payments)	1,134	-8,304	-7,170
Cash funds last year end	3,984	10,884	14,868
CASH FUNDS AT YEAR END	5,118	2,580	7,698

Statement of Assets and Liabilities at year end

	Unrestricted Funds (£)	Restricted Funds (£)	
Cash Funds			
	5,118		
			2,580
Total Cash Funds			7,698
	Details	Cost (£)	Current value (£)
Assets retained for charity's own use	Buildings and Fittings	8,600	5,981
	Seeds, crops and plants	400	330
	Details	Cost (£)	When Due
Liabilities	Prepayments – rent	185	June 2023

Notes to the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 January 2023

Basis of preparing the financial statements

The financial statements of the charitable company, which is a public benefit entity under FRS 102, have been prepared in accordance with the Charities SORP (FRS 102) 'Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2019)'.

Going concern

The trustees consider that there are no material uncertainties regarding the charity's ability to continue as a going concern.

Receipts

All receipts are recognised in the Statement of Financial Activities once the charity has access to the funds. Any income is only deferred when: - the donor specifies that the grant or donation must only be used in future accounting periods; or - the donor has imposed conditions which must be met before the charity has unconditional entitlement.

Volunteers and donated goods and services

The value of services provided by volunteers is not incorporated into these financial statements.

Payments

Expenditure is accounted for on a payments basis and has been classified under headings that aggregate all cost related to the category. Where costs cannot be directly attributed to particular headings, they have been allocated to activities on a basis consistent with the use of resources.

Tangible Fixed Assets

Depreciation is provided at the following annual rates in order to write off each asset over its estimated useful life.

Buildings and structures	- 10%
Fittings and fixtures	- 25%

Fund Accounting

Unrestricted funds can be used in accordance with the charitable objectives at the discretion of the trustees. Restricted funds can only be used for particular restricted purposes within the objects of the charity. Restrictions arise when specified by the donor or when funds are raised for particular restricted purposes. Further explanation of the nature and purpose of each fund is included in the notes to the financial statements.

Contact Us



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[@Living_Vital](https://www.linkedin.com/company/@Living_Vital)

www.livingvital.co.uk

