

# Members' Handbook



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**Tree Planting February 2018 with Living Woods volunteers**

## **Welcome to Gibside Community Farm!**

Hello and welcome to Gibside Community Farm (GCF). You will be joining a friendly group of people from a range of backgrounds who benefit from membership in a variety of ways. Whether you want to have a share of the crop or come and help grow the produce or grow the organisation, we hope you will enjoy being a member of Gibside Community Farm. We grow produce in a field near Burnopfield which has the most fantastic views over the Derwent valley and beyond to the Cheviots. We can see and hear kites circling above us, larks singing as well as pheasant and deer in the field.





As a new member of Gibside Community farm you will no doubt have lots of questions – experience tells us it takes a while to ‘get to grips’ with how it works. Hence this Handbook which we hope will answer your questions, provide guidance and help you get the most out of your membership.

A great way to discover more about us and what we do is to come along to our members' meetings and field and social events which are run throughout the year or help out in the field occasionally or as a workshare (see below).

On a weekly basis we send out a GCF update, which is emailed to all members so that we all know what is happening.

See our [website](#) for more information and news

Follow us on [Facebook](#) for regular updates

[email us](#) if you have any questions

## What is GCF?

GCF is a Community Supported Agriculture scheme (CSA), run as a membership co-operative Community Interest Company. There are many different types of CSAs, but all help to reconnect local communities with the food they eat and the land on which it is grown. CSAs enable local communities to have control over what they eat and how it is produced and distributed. It is a shared commitment to creating a local, balanced system of cultivation.

### **We're all in it together!**

Members of a CSA form a community that comes together to commit time and money to invest in and share the risks of running a farm. In return they receive a share of the harvest. This is a very different approach from being customers (e.g. of a veg box delivery scheme) with no involvement other than purchasing specific products. The cost of the scheme and the amount that members contribute is negotiated and agreed together between Members and Directors.



## Seasonal and Sensible

We grow a wide variety of vegetables which are suited to the soil and climate in Northern England. Some vegetables do not generally appear in supermarkets as they don't have a long shelf life or need to be eaten shortly after picking, but if they can be grown on the field they will be included in your share of the crop. We have the first polytunnel at the field (2022) and this will extend our growing season and allow us to grow a wider variety of crops and keep all of our produce local and seasonal. Our members have found that initially, they have needed to adapt and be open to receiving, cooking and eating what is grown on the field (or what is locally available) in season. At first it may be a bit daunting, but with hints and tips from other members it quickly becomes part of the appeal.



## Gibside Community Farm structure, aims and values

It is very important to the founding group that GCF is a co-operative which encourages all members to participate in decision making and views all members as equal. We are also a social enterprise or Community Interest Company (CIC), which allows us to trade but all potential profits are ploughed back into the organisation to support its aims and purpose. Our constitution states that GCF's objects are

**“to carry out activities which benefit the community and in particular to link local people with sustainable agriculture, to develop land and grow food collectively, providing mutual support within the company and to other neighbouring land users and to enable people living in the communities surrounding Gibside and visitors to Gibside to access locally grown food and voluntary activities.”**

### So it is important to GCF that:-

- We provide benefits to the community, we do this by encouraging people to join us, by selling fresh, seasonal veg and by donating veg to a foodbank. We are starting to develop links with organisations that support people e.g. asylum seekers and refugees, homeless people so that they can have access to growing produce and fresh veg.
- We encourage a diversity of membership.
- We believe that sustainable agriculture is agriculture which nurtures the soil and the environment, so we formally started converting the field to organic production in October 2017, by using organic methods since we started. We use agroforestry in the field, where trees can support the plants, and we can sell produce from the trees as well as benefiting from the biodiversity and shelter they provide to the crops.
- We are keen to encourage all members to grow, to learn to grow and to provide opportunities for the wider community to learn about growing sustainably.
- We want to produce locally grown veg, in an area which has little history of farm produced veg, so that local people can reduce their carbon footprints and reduce their reliance on high carbon, mass produced veg with little taste.
- In connection with our co-operative values, we are keen to network with other small sustainable food producers and take part in projects to support each other to increase the availability of organic, tasty, seasonal, local veg.
- We aim to nurture an environment that is conducive to protecting and encouraging wildlife while conducting food production.

As a Community Interest Company, we are registered at Companies House. This requires us to have **Directors of the Company**. Currently the directors are Garry Jenkins (Company Secretary and Treasurer), Rachel Putz and Adrian Stanley. There is space for more directors and as we grow we want to encourage others to become directors. The directors meet every 2 months to keep an overview of the finances and the overall working of the company.

The main **decision making** body is the general meeting. These are held monthly, currently by Zoom and all members are welcome to join and contribute to the development of the organisation. These are the following areas of work:

- Management and Finance
- Growing
- Publicity and Marketing
- Funding
- Relationship with the National Trust

We have a separate monthly meeting to look at growing issues (including development of the field). All members are welcome to join the **Growers Group**. We are also looking for more members to be interested in making funding applications to support our development and to do more publicity and marketing.

## The GCF Community and membership

As a member, GCF belongs to you...and you belong to the GCF Community. This brings with it both rights and responsibilities.

Once you have paid your membership fee, you are a member of the co-op, whether you wish to receive a *cropshare* or become a *workshare* or *volunteer* member. This means that you have the right to a vote and a right to be kept informed.

### There are 3 types of members:

Volunteer	Members who want to support us, take part in the co-op and come to events we are organising, do some work in exchange for a few veg when they are on site (but who do not wish to receive a consistent share of the harvest)
Cropshare	Receiving a weekly share of the crop for weekly payment
Workshare	Weekly labour in return for weekly crops and an annual one off payment

### Responsibilities

<b>Get involved</b>	<p>As a member you have a responsibility to get involved. There are many opportunities to take part including social events and meetings to discuss the running of the co-operative. Whether you can help a little or a lot, co-operatives work best when members can contribute their time or talents.</p> <p>General Meetings take place monthly with one Annual General Meeting. We also have sub groups to look at some tasks in depth e.g. Growers Group (see below). Members are welcome to join these. We understand that not everybody can attend every meeting, but this is a chance to voice your opinion and contribute to the running of the co-operative.</p>
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<b>Be informed</b>	Our weekly bulletin is emailed out to all members to let you know about the work to do for that week, the veg that is ready for harvesting, and for upcoming events and other news. Minutes of all general meetings are also emailed to you. It is important to read these and keep yourself informed so that you know what needs to be done when you get to the field and so that you can form your own opinions and contribute these in meetings.
<b>Spread the word</b>	Perhaps the most important member responsibility of all! We need to grow and become sustainable and we can only achieve this by attracting more members. Experience shows it's our existing members who recruit new members most effectively, so tell all your friends (or like us on Facebook!)

## Member Involvement

Everyone brings their own skills and interests to GCF. Some people have more time to offer than others, but it is entirely flexible. People can get involved practically as much or as little as they want.

**Some of the events we organise for all members (and their families) include:-**

- **Summer : Picnic on the field**
- **September: Harvest food gathering and Quiz**
- **Christmas meal at a restaurant**

**Other events for members will be:-**

- **AGM (usually March/April), held once a year for all members**
- **Discussion forums, as they arise**
- **Learning exercises as they arise (weaving willow structures, tree planting, module planting, pruning for example)**
- **Group work efforts, e.g. potato lifting**



You don't have to wait for an organised event to get involved. If you would like to come to the field at any time to help out with some of the more practical growing tasks please [contact us](#).

Harvesting takes lots of time and help is always welcomed. We will call out for additional help for some harvests eg potato lifting, look out for the GCF update for details.

There are many other roles and tasks you can get involved with; e.g. organising and running events, marketing and telling people all about our co-op and assisting with Cropshare collection points and distribution. If you are interested in helping out in any of these areas please [contact us](#)

If you don't have a lot of time to spare, why not join in a discussion, send a recipe, share our page on or follow us on [Facebook](#)

From time to time discrete groups form to work on specific tasks. Some groups, such as the growers group, are more permanent.

The discreet **Groups** within GCF are

Growers

Wildflower

Agroforestry

Social Events

Events/Training/Markets

Meetings for these groups are announced in the Weekly Update.

## How did Gibside Community Farm start?

Gibside Community Farm was formally established in November 2013 as a Co-operative Community Interest Company. Prior to 2013 a small group of people living close to Gibside had been meeting and talking to the National Trust for about 3 years. Gibside NT bought a farm next to the Gibside estate and Burnopfield to stop a proposed opencast mine from being created. Gibside NT were allocated the funding from the national organisation on the condition that they involved the local community in some form of community project on a field and they rented out the rest of the farm to a tenant farmer. The Gibside Estate Manager, Mick Wilks, contacted a number of organisations and some people who were interested in establishing a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) project. These founder members of Gibside Community Farm (GCF) visited other CSA projects and started to develop the model and the structure of the organisation.

Originally 3 organisations were going to share the field and GCF was allocated 6 acres of the 14 acre (5.8ha) field. Over the past 4 years, the other 2 organisations did not commit to working the field, so eventually the lease of the whole field was given to GCF and signed in May 2017.

In 2013/2014 Gibside NT moved the car park from the walled garden to the entrance and GCF was offered 3 plots to grow veg in the walled garden. We were told that this was likely to be a temporary measure as they did not know what the future of the walled garden would be. So, we

grew produce in the walled garden from 2014 - 19, after which the National Trust decided to use it for other purposes.

We now work the 14 acres of land (5.8ha) located just outside Burnopfield on Fellside Road. We have a 25 year lease from the National Trust.

We have experimented with growing veg in the field since 2014. We put most of the land down to clover, as this is a nitrogen fixing plant, so will help the fertility of the soil. We then grew small strips of veg and experimented with larger areas of broad beans (also a nitrogen fixing plant). One year we grew a small patch of wheat, which we tried to harvest by hand, but recognised that we needed a combine harvester to succeed! In 2016, Newcastle University conducted a research project by planting different types of rye and spelt. This was harvested in 2017. We've also grown fava beans and hay. Our fava beans were processed by Hodmedods and our hay was sold to the neighbouring riding school.

2017 saw the creation of the "market garden" plots based on the overall shape of the field and we grew veg in most of the 9 plots. With the aid of a grant we were able to employ 2 growers for one day a week each which helped our learning and increased our productivity.





## The Field at Burnopfield



### How to get there

**By Car**, from the A692 turn onto Fellside Rd, (sign directs to Whickham), past the Pack Horse pub, pass the lane to the Holly Riding Stables on left and just after you will see a layby and some bollards beside the road. You can park between the bollards or a few cars can drive onto the field. Alternatively you can park in a little road on the right, just after you have turned into Fellside Rd from the A692. (You will have to stop to open the fence).

**By Bus** get the X70 or X71 from Gateshead/ Consett to Burnopfield and get off near the Pack Horse pub or the Sacred Heart school on the A692, or the 6 Stanley to Newcastle, get off at Crookgate Byermoor. Walk along Fellside Rd to the field, but take care as there is no pavement and the road is busy.

There is some hard core to create a track and some hard standing by the gate. There is also a shipping container for tools and a portacabin as a shelter for members/office and veg storage. We also have a plan for a composting toilet. Lunch is currently outside on chairs but previously and hopefully in the future, we will be able to sit inside the portacabin. Please bring your own refreshments. We have a 60 year old Ferguson tractor maintained and operated by members.

## Record keeping

We achieved Organic Status in September 2019/2020 and therefore we have to follow all the organic standards as set by the Soil Association, our certification body, who inspect us once a year. These require that we record everything that is brought onto the land and everything that is taken away. So, we need to record all the soil improver that is put on the land, all the seeds and modules that are planted and the weight of the harvest. For our records we want to record the amount of time it takes to do things and how many volunteer hours are being devoted to the GCF work.

Anyone going to work on the field logs their time and date on the **Google Docs GCF Field Working sign up sheet** in advance. There is a limit on the number of people at the field at any one time during current Covid 19 restrictions. This number can vary and will be explained to you. Access information is supplied by one of the Directors to new members. Please read the current procedures for Covid 19 below.

Records of daily work carried out at the field, the planting plan and the activity timetable is all kept electronically.

A **GCF Harvest Record Only** WhatsApp Group is used daily for recording the produce harvested and its weight. A **Gibside Community Farm** WhatsApp Group records who has worked on the field on any one day and what jobs they have done.

Communication between members and for passing on information to the next member who goes to the field is also primarily electronic. There are some WhatsApp groups for individual days on the field, e.g. **GCF Tuesdays**.

## When to come and work? – Workshare and Volunteer members

Once you have been fully inducted into where everything is you will be very welcome to sign up on google docs and come to the field when other members are there. A weekly email is sent to all members to say what jobs need doing each week.

## How is the veg grown?

From October 2017 we started to convert the land on the field to organic production. We have chosen the Soil Association as our certification body, which means we need to follow their standards for organic production and they will inspect us once a year. We have always aimed to follow organic principles in our growing and have not used artificial fertilisers, pesticides or herbicides. Now we need to ensure that all seeds and modules have been raised organically as well. We aim to provide an average of 7 varieties of vegetables in your weekly share of the crop, (the range is between 4 and 12 veg varying on the season) over 36 weeks from 20<sup>th</sup> July to 30<sup>th</sup> March. The share will be small but should be enough for a 2 person household. You will be able to buy additional veg, if you wish. To do this the field and the crops are carefully planned and managed by our Growers Group.

The field has 2 main areas for growing: the field plots which have a 7 year rotation which includes 2 years of green manure and the market garden area with a 10 year rotation which includes 2 years of green manure.

As we don't have any polytunnels at the moment, we buy modules of plug plants from Stakeford Nursery (Blyth Star) who raise the modules using organic standards. Blyth Star supports people with learning difficulties through horticulture.

As we are committed to local and seasonal veg, we do not buy any veg in. This means that some times of the year we have no veg or little veg.

## Crop Planning

The range of crops grown each year varies but include:

Radish, Lettuce (leaf), Shallots, Turnips, Lettuce (heads)

Chard, Onions, Beetroot, Kale, Potatoes

Strawberries, Calabrese, Cauliflower, Runner Bean, French beans

Beans (broad), Peas, Mangetout peas, Garlic, Cucumber, Tomatoes, Cabbage, Carrots, Mixed leaf, Courgettes,

Florence Fennel (bulbs), Leeks, Broccoli, Parsnips, Swede, Brussel Sprouts, Squash





## How does the veg get to me?

The harvest list for the following week is compiled on Saturday and then sent out by email on Sunday.

We harvest the veg daily. Each member will need to bring a bag, and the crop is weighed according to the weight for that week. You can buy additional veg if there is some available.



We know not everyone will be able to get to the field so we need to know if that is the case so we can try and link you to someone who can who lives near you. This will need some discussion with each member to ensure that they are able to get their cropshare.

## FAQs

### How do I pay?

Workshare and Volunteer members need to pay their annual membership fee by cheque or BACs transfer to the GCF Treasurer (Garry Jenkins). BACs is preferable.

### I sometimes have a glut of apples/fruit/other veg – can I share them through Gibside Community Farm?

This can be done between members, but we would not be able to sell them at Gibside or at markets as they will not have been grown to organic standards. Bring the glut to the field and promote them.

### What if I'm moving out of the area, how long am I tied into membership for?

Your membership is for the 36 weeks of the cropshare season, but we recognise personal circumstances change. We would be grateful if you could give us as much notice of any change as possible so that we can fill your space.

### **What if I have a complaint?**

We hope that you love being part of the co-op and nothing will go wrong, but if you feel that anything isn't quite right or could be done better we need to know about it.

Please [email us](#)

### **I want to be a workshare, what might I be doing?**

There are many ways of helping GCF in its day to day operations and to help it grow and develop. If you are a workshare then you commit to providing 180 hours of work over the course of a year. This is about 4 hours a week over 45 weeks.

- Growing – preparing the ground, sowing seeds or modules, weeding
- Harvesting – for the cropshares, farmers markets, display stands
- Trees – planting, pruning, coppicing
- Delivering wholesale produce to Abundant Earth or The Paddock
- Collecting modules from Stakeford Nursery (Star) near Blyth
- Making food to be the enticer at a market
- Being on the stalls at the markets
- Stocking the display stand
- Overseeing the cropshare process
- Being Treasurer
- Supporting and communicating with members
- Managing Facebook and the website
- Uploading pictures and posts to Facebook and the website
- Making equipment, eg display stands, compost bins, cladding around buildings
- Make funding applications
- Building relationships with other organisations
- Planning what to grow and where
- Ordering seeds and equipment
- Come to the general or growers meetings to discuss what we are doing



# Policies and Procedures

## COVID 19: (7<sup>th</sup> January 2021 Update)

We want to make sure that everyone stays as safe as possible, especially as so many members are either in a vulnerable group or live with people who are! So please follow this updated advice below.

### Meetings

In May 2020 Gibside Community Farm members decided they will not hold any face to face meetings until it is safe to do so. We began using Zoom for online general meetings in July 2020.

### Members

We all have a duty to try and not to get ill and to put a burden on the NHS. Please be aware that some members are vulnerable or live with people who are vulnerable if they were to catch the virus. They are self-isolating in the rest of their lives but are still coming to the field, hoping to remain safe there. Therefore, all members must behave in ways that will reduce the potential to transmit the virus to other members.

### Main symptoms

The main symptoms of coronavirus are:

- a high temperature – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature)
- a new, continuous cough – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual)
- a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste – this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal
- You may have no symptoms or other recognised less common Coronavirus symptoms (headache, fatigue, muscle pain, diarrhoea, loss of appetite, confusion or skin rash) and still carry the disease.

If you have any of these symptoms you should not come to the field.

Please follow all the most recent government advice on social distancing and self-isolation. It is up to each individual to inform GCF if you develop any symptom of Coronavirus. In addition you must inform every person who has been at the Field with you in the previous 14 days so that those members can take appropriate action to self-isolate.



## **Work on the field**

We hope we will be relatively safe as long as we are careful.

Rule of 6: We are using a Google Doc. sheet to ensure we have no more than 6 people on the Field at any time. Please make sure all members AND any visitors are entered on this BEFORE attending the Field.

This document is our record for helping to keep us all safe. It needs to be accurate.

- Wash your hands before you come and use hand-gel (in Portacabin)
- Wear gloves on the way in and a different pair of gloves on the field
- Clean the gate latches and padlock with Gel or Bleach-spray (1 in 40) to open and close the gate..
- Keep 2m away from any other member at all times including while working and for lunch. This is even more important with the more easily transmissible variant of the virus now identified.
- Wear the disposable gloves that are in the portacabin when harvesting or handling the veg
- Clean tool handles with Bleach-spray before and after use. (Spray container in each of Portacabin and Container)
- Use chairs for lunch outside at 2m distances (the bench is too close to others)
- Use your car for lunch if raining
- Only one person to use the portacabin or container at a time
- Regard the Portacabin as a Mask-wearing area. If you are required to wear a mask in these areas please do so here.
- Any visitor to the field needs to have been sent this advice before attending and agree to follow it. It is the responsibility of the member inviting the visitor to ensure all the rest of the group are informed of the visit and agreeable to it.

## **Our produce**

Advice from NHS about coronavirus states that “It is unlikely it can be spread through things like packages or food”. However, we need to take as much care as we can when picking or packing the veg, by wearing the disposable gloves and making sure we don’t cough or sneeze over it! Washing and cooking the veg will help to protect from the virus and bacteria.

## **Health and Safety**

Please look after yourself and others when working as part of Gibside Community Farm. All members have a responsibility for the safety of themselves and others. Generally don’t lift anything too heavy and use tools properly to support what you are doing. Always get some training from an experienced member to show you how to use the tools.

The Field – The *tractor* is very dangerous. Do not use it unless you have been properly trained by Paul Gertig or a paid grower. The power drive at the back of the tractor keeps turning when the tractor engine is on, so you need to keep well away from it. You also need to be fully trained and equipped to be able to use the *strimmers* and *scythes* as they can also be very dangerous.

## Safeguarding

We have a *Children's Safeguarding Policy* and a *Vulnerable Adult Safeguarding Policy*. If you see something that you think is abusive towards a child or a vulnerable adult it must be reported to the appropriate authorities. If you bring a child or a vulnerable adult to Gibside Community Farm activities, you are responsible for their supervision and safety. **(Need to put the policies on the website for members to access).**

## Biosecurity

It is really important that we think about biosecurity and not bring any vegetable diseases onto our plots. For example, white onion rot can be in the ground for 20 years once the ground is infected! So, if you go anywhere that has it, make sure you wash your boots thoroughly and don't bring any soil onto the plots. We know that Abundant Earth has onion rot, because they have asked us to grow their garlic, so if you go there it is really important to clean your shoes/boots.

The following policies are being written

**Data Protection**

**Equality and Diversity**

**Procurement**

## Selling Our Produce

We have the following priorities for distributing our produce.

1. Members, Friends and Neighbours
2. Food Bank
3. Retail sales
4. Wholesale

### Members

All cropshare and workshare members will receive a small cropshare for 36 weeks.

Volunteer members harvest, weigh and record all produce from the field in accordance with the requirements of organic status and for our own records. The recording is done daily at the field on a **'GCF Harvest Record Only'** WhatsApp group.

### Foodbank

We have agreed to donate 5% of our cropshares to foodbanks each week. We have a relationship with the foodbank in Blaydon who are keen to take our veg. A weekly task over the 36 weeks of

the cropshare, will be to take the veg to the foodbank. If we have 20 members then 1 cropshare will be taken. If we have 30 members then 1.5 cropshare will be taken.

## **Retail Sales**

### **Farmers Markets**

We sell our produce at **Staiths food market**, on the Dunstan Staiths (second Sat of summer months) and at **Kells Lane food market** (First Sat of the month). We ask for donations rather than price and weigh the veg. This is a good way of promoting GCF as well as selling the produce. We are investigating whether we can set up a stall somewhere in **Rowlands Gill**, so that we have a regular outlet in the village.

Members can help by running stalls. Running a stall outside of Gibside means collecting the veg, gazebo and market equipment, before the market (the previous day or early in morning) and taking it to the venue. Depending on the length of the market and how many members are available then there might be just the one shift or two. 9 – 12.30 or 12.30 to 4pm.

The equipment would then need to be returned to the trailer when convenient for the member. It is often a good idea to make something from the produce on offer to entice customers to the stall. These have been beetroot cake, parsnip cake, broad bean hummus and leek and potato cake. But other ideas are very welcome! It is good to print off some recipes of what is on offer, so that customers can taste and take the recipe home, preferably having bought the key ingredient. If you can get talking to customers, explain what we do and try to encourage them to join or become a supporter. (getting their email address and postcode is needed so take a clip board and pen/pencil/ paper for names and contact details ) A supporter will get an email every now and then to let them know what we are doing, which markets we are selling at and any events that we are organising.

It is useful to have a small float of change so that customers with £20 notes can still buy something from us! At the end of the market email Garry to let him know how much was taken and arrange with him how to hand over the money.

### **Display Stands**

We have display stands in the market place in Gibside. This is where visitors can help themselves to produce in exchange for a donation. So, when we have spare produce we need to keep them stocked up on a regular basis. Members can join the stocking the display stand rota. This means tidying up the display, taking out the veg that has gone limp and Bringing fresh veg from the field.. As Gibside is busiest at the weekends, we try and make sure they are fully stocked on Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sundays.



## Wholesale

We don't get as much money selling wholesale as we do from the retail outlets, however it is less effort to sell large amounts in one go. We have agreed that we will sell to other projects that have similar aims to ourselves. At the moment these are Abundant Earth, near Durham, Go Local in Ovington, and The Paddock in High Spen. From time to time we negotiate growing specific crops in exchange for labour and expertise. Members can help with taking veg to Abundant Earth or The Paddock.

## Promoting what we do

Facebook and the website are useful tools to promote what we do but need to be updated on a regular basis, to show that we are an active and vibrant group! So please take photos, add comments and send them to the email address so they can be uploaded. Please make sure you have permission to take photos of other people at the field - see the Data Protection Policy Tell your friends and contacts about us, and encourage them to join. Distribute our leaflets and use our jute bags which say Gibside Community Farm. If friends don't want to join, they might be prepared to join the supporter list. Send their email address and postcode to the email address and they will be added to the supporter list. They will get an email every now and then to say what we are doing.

## WhatsApp guidelines

- A. It's OK to disagree but not to disrespect.



1. **Remain objective** - -use factual rather than emotive terms, avoiding naming individuals wherever possible.
2. Try to **read and correct** your message before sending to avoid misunderstanding.
3. **Stop before you reply.** Read your reply again and try to see other's point of view
4. **Be considerate and respectful of each other.** Be kind and if you can't be kind be civil.
5. **Don't get into in-depth conversations or arguments.** If things start to get heated or complicated, shut the discussion down and decide to talk about it face-to-face or by personal text/What's App. If a disagreement starts, clearly state that you are happy to discuss the issue, but that a group chat is not the place.
6. **The lack of physical cues may lead to miscommunication.** Without facial expressions and gestures or the ability to retract immediately, there's a big risk of misunderstanding. It's suggested that one solution to this is to leave irony at the door when you enter a forum. Some people find emojis helpful, but don't assume these will be understood.

#### **B. Interruptions/timing**

7. **Try to avoid messaging late at night or very early in the morning, except if urgent.** Remember we all have different bedtimes and getting-up times.
8. **You can mute the group** to prevent repeated or out-of-hours notifications.(You can turn off the ping)

#### **C. Difficulty following/finding conversations.**

9. **Think** - Is What's App the **most appropriate communication channel?** (Be aware that not everyone uses What's App - would Gibside CSA e-mail, personal text or personal discussion be more useful)?
10. **Keep discussions relevant** to group matters and the whole group– individual conversations should happen outside of the group. Before you take to the group chat, think about whether what you're about to say is relevant to the whole group. If not, message that person directly. Go to the green strip at top that says Gibside Community Farm and touch it for group information. It then lists all the people in the group, and you can tap their name to message them.

**Things that are relevant are** – urgent questions, requests for help for things that e.g. people on field need to know quickly; general social conversations with group, not just with one or 2 people; queries to the whole group e.g. does anyone know what's happened to the shears?; exchange of information such as recipes, gardening, wildlife info. ; gauging opinions e.g. do we want to grow mooli next year? ; links to items of interest; photos of the field. Fun and laughter is allowed!

#### **Things that are not relevant or helpful are.**

Trying to make **collective decisions**. This is because people engage in groups at different times, with different frequencies, and some people choose not to engage at all for periods of time.

Important decisions should be left for meetings (real life or digital) when things can be discussed as a group.

**12.** In order to keep conversation subject traceable **use the “reply” function**. Put finger on subject you’re talking about and move it to the right. A new box should come up with the original comment in smaller letters underneath. This avoids confusion re what you’re responding to.

**13.** It is possible to **create small groups** within the GCF What’s App group (e.g. a day group) if you only need to send info to a few people.

## Contact Details

Website: <http://gibsidecommunityfarm.co.uk>

General and membership enquiries: [gibsidecommunityfarm@gmail.com](mailto:gibsidecommunityfarm@gmail.com)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/GibsideCommunityFarm](http://www.facebook.com/GibsideCommunityFarm)

## Appendix A

Rachel Putz

Garry Jenkins

Adrian Stanley

Garry Jenkins (Company Secretary and Treasurer) [Garry.Jenkins@phonecoop.coop](mailto:Garry.Jenkins@phonecoop.coop)

Paul Gertig [Pgertig@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:Pgertig@tiscali.co.uk)

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This Handbook is reviewed annually following the AGM in April