

# Bristol's first draft of our first city Declaration for Soils. Co-created during 'Soils of Bristol' as part of Soil Culture at Create 18.7.2015

## Contributors

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**Organisations represented** (people were invited to speak for themselves bringing their own expertise and perspective rather than specifically speak on behalf of their organisation. However, many brought their organisation).

Soil Association, Shift Bristol, Rising Up, Bristol City Council, Bristol Food Policy Council, Bristol Food Network, Rockefeller 100 Resilient Cities, Centre for Contemporary Art and the Natural World, Blue Finger Alliance, Touchstone collaborations, Incredible Edible Bristol, Greencuisine Trust.

## The process.

In randomly mixed groups we were invited to write about what we personally and collectively believe about soils, what we value in relation to that belief and what action we should therefore take as a city and as people of the city. As this emerged and was shared around the tables it was also distilled into those beliefs, values and actions that were felt to be most important and which are written below. This is an ongoing, journeying Declaration for Soil that will connect with many more across the city and beyond. But this is where it starts. We also had written contributions from Patrick Holden of the Sustainable Food Trust and Helena Norberg-Hodge of Local Futures which are written at the end.



## THEMES/STATEMENTS ARISING FROM THE FOCUS GROUPS

### **Soil as a climate stabiliser**

We believe healthy living soil play a huge role in stabilising the climate

In particular we value that when addressing Climate Change, the value and contribution of soils are fully appreciated and acted upon

Therefore we need to bring soil protection and regeneration into all actions related to climate change prevention and mitigation in the West of England

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### **Long-term, solution focussed decision making**

We believe that all people fundamentally want a reliable and resilient support system and that soil provides this to all living things. Currently soil is critically undervalued and poorly understood.

In particular we value long-term-view decision making – that which enables us to act responsibly on behalf of future generations so we stop depleting their life support system.

Therefore we need to gather the necessary evidence of solutions we can apply here, and start using collaborative, reflective and thought-allowing decision making processes, with future generations at the core of this.

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### **Planning policy and law**

We believe that the lack of dedicated expertise in soil science and sustainable agriculture within planning authorities at central and local level is putting us in a perilous situation.

In particular we believe that this expertise is vital to informed planning decisions for future resilience.

Therefore we need to introduce a legal requirement for expertise and knowledge of soil and sustainable food production to be integral to planning departments at all levels. We also need to create an agricultural use class for soils of a city region.

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### **Preferential and proactive support for regenerative agricultural practices.**

We believe that much of our soil resource has already been damaged and depleted be misguided agricultural development and industrial practices.

In particular we believe that the need to repair damaged soils and prevent future damage is essential.

Therefore we need to challenge economic drivers that damage soil and apply a convention for biological diversity to soils. We need to create accountable and measurable targets for soil biodiversity in agriculture in the West of England and planning and its effect on soil.

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## **City Education**

We believe that strong links between communities and their local soils can enable cultural, economic, health and wellbeing benefits leading to resilient, confident communities.

In particular we value approaches that connect communities to their natural wealth and the governance of them

We therefore need to ensure that education, awareness and access empowers communities to understand, value and use their local soils for local benefit.

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## **Embodied experiences in childhood**

We believe everyone has the right to have a full understanding of our vital connection with soils

In particular we believe that everyone should have access to embodied experiences of healthy soils

There fore we need to make building a relationship to soil integral to every childhood.

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## **One Planet Development / Interdependence**

We believe all life on earth is interdependent with the life of soils.

In particular we value cultural, economic, spiritual and political practices that prevent damage to and nourish and nurture the health and diversity of living soils

Therefore we need to place the One Planet Development strategy, and not exploitative and depleting practices at the heart of all our city and city region policies. This includes a declaration on the rights of soil.

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## **Education for decision making (1)**

We believe soil is one very important criteria in land classification

In particular we value a diversity of soils that facilitate different land uses

Therefore we need to develop information and understanding about land use appropriate to land type and use this when planning development to make good decisions that are defensible.

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## **Education for decision making (2)**

We believe the direct correlation between healthy soils, healthy people and a healthy world must be recognised and acted upon

In particular we value those who support the living soil and who provide wise leadership around education about soil and those who use it wisely.

Therefore we need to develop education and engagement with all communities of Bristol around decisions and actions concerning soil and land use whilst ensuring good information is available to all to support this.

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## **Reconnection**

We believe that soil is undervalued and that humans are generally disconnected from soil and food production

In particular we value that working with soil has the potential to bring people together, connecting them and strengthening communities

Therefore we need to conduct

- education and outreach – give more people the opportunity for direct connection with each other in the natural world

- Modernise – smoother routes to access allotments / land

- more school projects – so issues become part of normal life

- social prescribing

- make it more visible where people are – growing, foraging, via health services etc

- make it cool!

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## **Access to land**

We believe we need to reconnect to soil as a fundamental building block of **of** a sustainable resilient city

In particular we believe everybody should be able to access to soil and land for food growing and we value the resilience and security that comes from collectively owning our food systems

Therefore we need to create and protect more places for people to access soil and land.

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## **Scaling for diverse local production and security**

We believe that high quality soils are essential for ensuring global and local food security in the present and in the long term. It is a finite resource and irreplaceable asset

In particular we value the opportunity to grow and buy food on a local scale across the city region

Therefore we need to

- Identify, map and designate the existing and potential food growing spaces across the West of England as food growing sites

- Create ways to make food growing profitable, attractive, accessible and fair to workers

- Change the image of organic and local to be less elitist

- Protect space for small scale retail to support small scale production

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## **Community-connected agriculture**

We believe in the power and value of people coming together to grow food

In particular we believe in the interdependence between community and food security

Therefore we need to equip people to set up community-centred sustainable urban agriculture projects and enterprises.

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## **Experiential learning of the interconnections between healthy Soil, Food and Nutrition**

We believe that living soil is the foundation of all health and that soils in their natural living form have the power to sustain our future and the diversity of all life on planet Earth.

In particular, we value food grown in balanced, living soils as it provides the vital nutrients and subtle energies that cultivate our capacities and consciousness for living responsibly with the Earth.

The actions needed are community education and life-long learning practices about the interconnections between healthy soil, food and nutrition. This knowledge and skills-sharing will support greater awareness that we are all responsible as food citizens for our health and the health of the soil.

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## **Food and Soil Rituals for Resilience**

We believe that we need to honour our connection with the Earth through thanks-giving soil and food rituals that ground us in the natural world, reconnect us to our ancestors and remind us of the sacred in the every day.

In particular, we value food rituals and culinary traditions which empower people from all walks of life to remember the connection between agriculture and culture and enable us to become active guardians of soil.

The actions needed are to nurture a food culture within family, work and school environments which creates time, space and resource for us all learn to cook, grow, share food and give thanks. An idea would be to promote food-sharing practices in the workplace at least one day a week.

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## **Words of support for the Soil of Bristol day and Soil Culture at create**

PATRICK HOLDEN

As a past director of the Soil Association, now heading up an organisation that is working internationally to accelerate the transition towards more sustainable food systems, I would like to add my voice to this coalition of Bristol based organisations and individuals who are campaigning for better stewardship of the world's soils. The soil is not only our planet's greatest repository of stored carbon, but also its organ of digestion - I have recently come to realise that we can reach a better understanding of the dark interior of our fertile soils by relating it to the process of our own digestion. We can imagine the earth as the collective stomach of all the world's plants, ensuring their nutrition through the extraordinary and symbiotic relationship between plant roots, soil bacteria and fungi. It is an eternal truth that the health and fertility of soils, plants animal and people are one and indivisible.

HELENA NORBERG - HODGE

I'm so grateful for this inspiring project that focuses our attention on soil. For too long, we have treated the miracle of living soil as inanimate dirt. Now is the time to recognise and celebrate the beauty, the joy, and the healing that comes from this fundamental reconnection with the Earth.