

SUSTAINABLE LIVING INITIATIVE



Annual Report 2012-2013



Paul Bassam
Charitable Trust



The Fitzmaurice
Trust
The Shelroy Trust



Sustainable Living Initiative (SLI) 2013 – Highlights

Sustainable Living Initiative is a charity based in Norwich. We aim to promote a sustainable way of living through collective practical action. We believe that small-scale action, such as growing fruit, vegetables and herbs on allotments and in our own back gardens, recycling, sharing tools and skills, helping each-other, avoiding car journeys and promoting a sense of community can have a far-reaching effect on natural, as well as on human environments. The name “Grow Our Own” itself reflects that collective spirit.

The year 2012-2013 was a hugely important one in the history of the Sustainable Living Initiative (SLI). After several years of planning and preparation, we finally achieved our ambition of creating a project where we can practise the principles of sustainable living all in one place: The Marlpit Community Garden.

Marlpit goes live

Marlpit Community Garden, at the junction of Marlpit lane and Hellesdon Road, was opened to growers in June 2013 and by the time of the official opening on September 21st, there was a bumper harvest. The Lord Mayor of Norwich, Councillor Keith Driver helped us celebrate the completion of that first stage by planting a tree. The next stage, scheduled for 2014, is the building of our community centre.

Our aim is for Marlpit to become a fully sustainable community scheme where people will be able to grow, preserve and cook fruit and vegetables as well as experience and learn about conserving the wider environment.

SLI gets charitable status

We received charitable status from the Charity Commission in October 2013.

GO² under new group-management

When work started on creating the Marlpit Community Garden, we had to create two new volunteer management teams; one for Marlpit and one for our established scheme - GO² at the Bluebell South Allotments.

Two members stepped forward to become joint Coordinators of GO² and after two great years of hard work, they decided to step down. Following a consultation with members in September 2013, a new seven-member management team took over the running of GO² Bluebell South Allotments from October 2013.

GO² Bluebell South Allotments gets “It’s Your Neighbourhood” award

GO² Bluebell South Allotments –Social



The Lord Mayor of Norwich Cllr Keith Driver planting a rowan tree with SLI director Peter Medhurst (L) and SLI project manager, Mahesh Pant (R).



The GO² Bluebell South Allotment scheme of SLI was awarded It’s Your Neighbourhood award of Level 5: Outstanding by the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) and Anglia in Bloom.

Grow-Our-Own (GO²) Bluebell South Allotments

An overview and progress made in 2012-13

SLI started a community based gardening scheme called Grow-Our-Own (GO²), as a pilot in the autumn of 2004 on Bluebell South allotments. It set out to help people with little or no experience of growing vegetables to make a start by providing practical help and advice on what to grow and how and when to grow it. By offering small, manageable sized plots as well as tools, seeds and seedlings, the scheme gives novice growers the self-assurance they need to become successful gardeners.

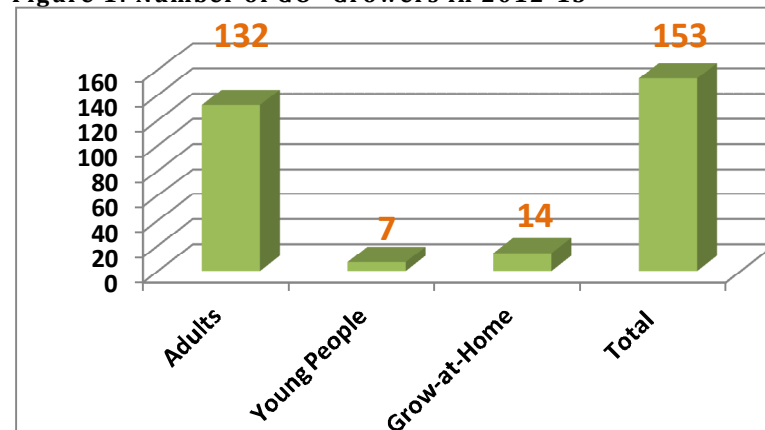
Starting with 8 growers, it now has more than 160 growers and volunteers. Apart from providing help and advice to its members, the scheme has been successful in creating an educational and social space where members can come and meet like-minded people. On the first Sunday of the month, members bring a dish made of seasonal produce to share with other members. Physical facilities on site, such as the centre building, which provides gardening information, seeds and a meeting place; the picnic area; the composting toilet; the communal tool-sheds; and the plant nursery, have all played a vital role in promoting a sense of community.

In 2012-13, a total of 153 growers took part in various GO² schemes, slightly lower than in the previous year (160). Of the total 132 adult growers, 32 were “new” growers who joined during 2012-13 while the rest were growers continuing from previous years. In addition to this, we had three local primary schools growing fruit and vegetables on the allotment.

A total of six growers left the scheme during the year; three due to ill health and three were too busy to look after their plots.

As in previous years, the majority of the growers (64%) had only one strip measuring 6 x 1.2 metres. These figures confirm our view that the “new generation” of allotment enthusiasts are quite happy with a small strip of land. In fact, many of our growers joined the GO² scheme precisely because of manageable-sized plots and welcoming environment.

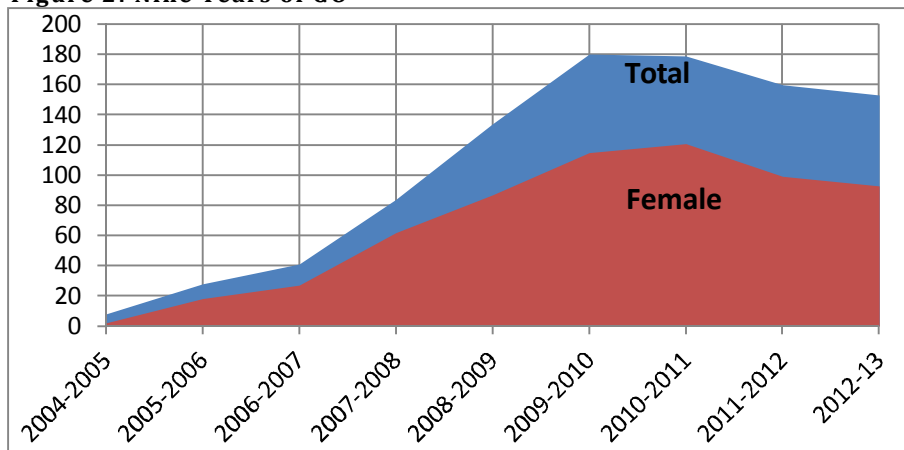
Figure 1: Number of GO² Growers in 2012-13



Nine years of GO²

During the past nine years, GO² has evolved to enable participation by as wide a section of the local community as possible. We have plots for young people, adults and people with physical disabilities. Our Grow-at-Home scheme

Figure 2: Nine Years of GO²



provides seeds, plants and advice for people who prefer to grow fruit, vegetables and herbs in their own gardens.

The GO² scheme has grown 20 fold in the past nine years. We now have a total of 17.5 full-size plots rented from the Norwich City Council. We never have a waiting list lasting for more than a month. While we are taking in new members each year, the majority (over 80%) of our members stays on; some of our members have been with us for more than five years. These 'graduate' members are increasingly taking responsibility for the management of the scheme, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the organisation.

Figure 2 suggest that our membership peaked in 2009-10; since then it has been decreasing gradually. The majority of our members are female, a trend which has been continued since 2005-2006.

School Gardening Project

During the year 2012-13, we worked with school children from three primary schools in Norwich - Magdalen Gates, Tuckswood and Valley. We ran sessions on various aspects of gardening - digging, composting, seed sowing, planting, weeding and harvesting four times a year between September and July. Our work with Country Trust's Norfolk Food Discovery project has come to an end; we are now working with Valley Primary School and Marlpit Nursery school on our new Marlpit site (see below).

Marlpit Community Garden

A Brief Overview

Based on the GO² Bluebell South model, the purpose of the Marlpit Community Garden is to help local residents learn how to grow basic fruit and vegetables, how to preserve and store them and to exchange recipes so that they can utilise all that they grow. As well as gaining health benefits from the exercise of gardening, members will also be able to reduce their shopping bills by producing their own food. All the growers will be sharing land, tools, seeds, plants, skills, support and fellowship which will eventually foster good community relationships. We encourage experienced growers to work as mentors and share their skills.

The Garden is divided into different areas (see the Master Plan - http://grow-our-own.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/050_D02_Masterplan_Layout.pdf). Just over half of the site is dedicated to conserving existing wetlands and restoring habitat and species diversity to the level of nearby protected sites in the Wensum valley. The second half is dedicated to vegetable plots, an orchard, coppicing area and a community building. The Garden is a car-free zone, with car-parking facilities only available to disabled-badge holders.

The main features of the Marlpit Community Garden are:

Start-up plots measuring 1.3 x 10m for up to 200 local residents - Members will be offered a single plot to start with and the successful growers will be allowed to have additional plots depending on availability.

Plots for school and community groups - Schools and community groups will have the freedom to choose the size of the plot and to plan it according to their needs.

Community orchard – This area will be planted with most common English fruits – apple, pear, plum and yellow and green gages (of Norfolk variety wherever possible).

Coppicing- This area will be planted with hazel and willow plants which, once fully grown, will supply beanpoles and pea sticks to all the growers thereby replacing the use of bamboo poles imported from overseas.

Progress so far

The garden was opened to the public in June 2013. By the end of September, 2013, a total of 26 growers (16 women) had signed up. In addition to individual growers, more than 90 children from Valley Primary School, 14 children from Marlpit Nursery School and a group of adults from St Michael's Church are growing fruit, vegetables and herbs. We have planted trees donated by the Woodland Trust to improve the existing hedgerows and have installed a bee-hive.

We have a central tool- store, an outdoor learning/meeting place, a polytunnel for growing plants and a reliable water supply for irrigation. Other facilities include cycle stands, disabled car-parking, an environmentally-friendly composting toilet and a wheel-chair accessible path up to the central area of the Garden.

Marlpit Community Garden: September 2013



The first phase of the Marlpit Community Garden is complete, thanks to the help and support from various organisations, friends and well-wishers. We would like to invite more individuals and families as well as schools and community groups to join and make use of our excellent facilities.

Finance

Overall, SLI's financial position at present looks good. With the opening of the new site, Marlpit, it is expected that the overhead costs as well as the cost of inputs per member will decrease in the coming days due to the economy of scale. This will in turn enable us to make investments in improving physical resources (tools, irrigation, etc) and human resources (training).

More specifically, the total income including rental income from Bluebell site has decreased significantly due to the decrease in the number of members. However, because of the sharing of overhead costs between Marlpit and Bluebell, there is a small surplus in Bluebell. In the case of Marlpit, it will take time before the income from the plot rent is sufficient to cover the cost of inputs and overheads. So at present, almost all the money spent comes from grants and donations (see Table 1).

Plans for 2013-2014

GO² Bluebell South Allotment will be completing 10 years next year. We would like to celebrate the success of this innovative scheme by bringing together as many alumni as possible to share their experiences of the scheme.

After the successful start of the Marlpit Community garden, our focus in the coming year will be on more tree-planting for hedgerows and coppicing, establishing a herb garden and an orchard, installing bird boxes and habitat management. We will be exploring various options for the Marlpit Community Centre building and start fund raising in 2014. If all goes well, we should have our building ready by late 2014 or early 2015.

Table 1: Sustainable Living Initiative – Annual Account Summary October 2012 to September 2013

	2013				2012				
	Schools	Marlpit	Bluebell	Total	Schools	Website	Marlpit	Bluebell	Total
Members' plot rent		110	3,486	3,596				3,834	3,834
Sales	3,063			3,063	2,352			36	2,388
Grants and donations		12,262	22	12,284		279			279
Open Day		127		127				142	142
Miscellaneous Sales		23	114	137				198	198
Operating Income	3,063	12,522	3,622	19,207	2,352	279	0	4,210	6,841
Council plot rent			723	723				660	660
Seeds and plants		202	673	875				888	888
Manure and compost			182	182				100	100
Services	1,112			1,112	1,591				1,591
Small tools and repairs	68	944	163	1,175				176	176
Conservation		869		869					0
Plot improvements			0	0				277	277
Keys		565	55	620					0
Equipment and supplies		206	3	209					0
Depreciation		6,252	107	6,359					0
Volunteer costs		54	0	54					0
Travel			0	0				4	4
Training for members	768	270	0	1,038				185	185
Direct Expenditure	1,948	9,362	1,906	13,216	1,591	0	0	2,289	3,880
Gross surplus/(deficit)	1,115	3,160	1,716	5,991	762	279	0	1,921	2,961
Insurance		212	212	424				424	424
Office rent		450	450	900					0
Programme manager	1,115	1,385		2,500					0
Accounts		570		570					0
Telephone & internet		276	277	553				366	366
Stationery and postage		97	96	193				132	132
IT Costs		33	33	66		280		96	376
Travel		70	70	140					0
Subscriptions		31	32	63				46	46
Depreciation			0	0				681	681
Sundries		15	15	30			923	180	1,102
Overhead Expenditure	1,115	3,139	1,185	5,439	0	280	923	1,924	3,126
Operating surplus/(deficit)	0	21	531	552	762	(1)	(923)	(3)	(165)

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the following individuals and organizations who have helped and supported us in bringing the Marlpit Community Garden to life:

Firstly, Norfolk ProHelp (Business in the Community) for designing and preparing the planning application and in providing invaluable legal assistance. In particular, we would like to thank Mills & Reeve, Feilden & Mawson, Richard Jackson Ltd., Sexty & Co., Davis Langdon, an AECOM company and Arnold Keys for their unwavering support during the planning stage. We would also like to thank the Woodland Trust for donating the “year round colour” tree pack and the volunteers from the University of East Anglia (UEA) and the participants of the UEA Summer School programme for their help in planting trees and installing an irrigation system.

We were fortunate to receive adequate funding for the first phase of the project, mostly from Norfolk-based charities and statutory organisations. We would like to express our thanks to Norfolk County Council, Norwich Consolidated Charities, the Broads Authority, The Geoffrey Watling Charity, Paul Bassam Charitable Trust, Norwich City Council, The Fitzmaurice Charitable Trust, ROYS, The Shelroy Trust, and Waitrose Community Matters for their generosity in providing grants and donation for the Marlpit Community Garden.

Last but not least, a big thank you to all our members, volunteers, friends and well-wishers for your support which we very much hope will continue in the coming days as well.

Happy gardening!

Maresh Pant
December 30, 2013

Sustainable Living Initiative

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Registered Charity Number 1154190

Join us

Allotments for individuals and families

You'll get a plot that is big enough to provide food for a small family but small enough to manage with just a few hours a week. Tools, seeds, manure and hands-on practical advice on what to grow, will all be provided. We'll advise you when to harvest your produce, and suggest recipes and tips for storing surplus produce for use in the future. We expect more experienced growers to help 'new' growers and everyone to give at least some time towards communal activities such as maintaining tools, weeding paths and composting.

We use only organic methods so the use of insecticides, pesticides and chemical fertilisers is not allowed. Our website www.grow-our-own.co.uk has plenty of gardening information, updates and useful tips for our members.

Plots are available in Bluebell South Allotments, and at Marlpit. The Bluebell site also has specially designed wheelchair accessible plots. Residents of Norwich City Council area are eligible to have a plot in our Bluebell South allotment site while only those living in Marlpit, Larkman and West Earlham are eligible to have a plot in Marlpit.

Ours is a very sociable scheme with group training sessions, food-sharing lunches and other group activities. Contact us if you're interested in joining.

Grow-at-Home Scheme

You get advice, seeds and plants to grow at home. You'll also be invited to our social and training events and have access to the website. If you live in Norwich and have a garden, no matter how small it is, and you are interested in growing fruit, vegetables, and herbs, please get in touch with us.



Plots for schools and community groups

Our newly opened site, Marlpit, offers tailor-made plots for Norwich-based schools and community groups. We have a wealth of experience in helping groups to set up and maintain allotments. Ask us for more information.

Volunteering

If you want to learn basic skills in gardening and conservation, make new friends or you already have skills that you'd like to offer, please get in touch.

Contact us at 01603 920147, Mob. 07969996646 or sustainable@grow-our-own.co.uk