

SUSTAINABLE LIVING INITIATIVE



Annual Report 2011-2012

Promoting sustainable living through collective practical action



- New management team for GO² at Bluebell South
- Rainwater collection and irrigation system installed
- Improved website and weekly newsletters
- Gardening with school children
- Steady progress at Marlpit Community Garden

For further information please visit our website
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Background

The Sustainable Living Initiative (SLI) is a not-for-profit social enterprise based in Norwich. It was registered in 2005 as a “company limited by guarantee”. SLI has successfully completed eight years and this report covers the period from October 2011 to September 2012.

SLI started a community based gardening scheme called Grow-Our-Own (GO²), as a pilot in the autumn of 2004. The main objective of the scheme is to encourage those who are interested in growing fruit and vegetables but have limited gardening skills. By offering small, manageable sized plots and by providing practical help and advice on what, when and how to grow, the scheme gives novice growers the self-assurance they need to become successful gardeners.

Starting with 8 growers in 2004, GO² now has more than 160 growers (62% female) including young people and wheelchair users and 15 more who use their own gardens but get all seeds, plants, help and advice as part of the scheme.

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; help each other and share skills and resources. On every last Sunday of the month, volunteers come to carry out communal tasks such as maintaining paths and repairing tools. Likewise, on every 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. The scheme is run entirely by volunteers.

From October 2011, a new team of volunteers led by Bridget Beauchamp (one of SLI’s directors) and Clive Sexton (who has been a member of SLI for more than five years) took over the day to day running of the GO² Bluebell scheme. The new team has successfully completed its first year. This report was compiled by Mahesh Pant with contributions from Bridget Beauchamp, Clive Sexton, Peter Anderson, Debbie Payne, Rupert Read and Eddie Pleban. Jim Froud designed the lay out and Rochelle Wilson edited the report.

Aims and objectives

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, that is “let’s do it together”.

Our schemes

Grow-Our-Own (GO²), Bluebell South Allotments

Under this scheme, a standard full size Norwich City Council allotment plot is divided into mini plots (see below for details) of varying sizes depending on the needs and experience of individual growers. The rent includes tools, seeds, manure and hands-on practical

advice. The plot holder is responsible for maintaining the plot and the path leading to the plot. 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, constructing composting bays, and weeding in the greenhouses. Such collective actions are aimed at helping each other and promoting a sense of community.

We grow crops using organic standards, and the use of insecticides, pesticides and chemical fertilisers is not permitted.

Range of plots available:

Small, starter plot - 1.20 X 6 metres: For absolute beginners with no experience of growing fruit and vegetables. This size plot is also suitable for a single person and costs £17 per year (October, 2012-September, 2013). Additional plots (up to 4 strips) are normally available only to existing members who have successfully completed their first year, and cost £15.

Young People's Plot – 1.2 X 1.2 metres: Starter plot for young people to gain some practical gardening experience. Cost £5 per year (October, 2012 –September, 2013).

Wheelchair Accessible Plot – 1.2 X 1.2 metres: For wheelchair users or people with mobility difficulties. Costs £7 per year (October, 2012 –September, 2013).



Grow-at-Home Scheme

The Grow-at-Home (GAH) scheme provides practical help and advice for people who want to grow fruit and vegetables organically in their own gardens. Members of the Grow-at-Home scheme also have the opportunity to come and meet other growers on the allotment and learn from their experience. The small fee, currently £15 per year, includes seeds and seedlings, access to gardening information and updates and one home visit by a GO² member for advice. Members have access to the GO² website, which has plenty of gardening information, updates and useful tips.

If you live in Norwich and have a garden, no matter how small it is, and you are interested in growing at least some herbs, salads, etc., please get in touch with us.

Volunteering

The volunteering scheme is aimed at those who are committed to the broader objectives of the Sustainable Living Initiative and who are interested in collective practical action.

Volunteers help with a number of projects including gardening, at either the Bluebell or the

Marlpit schemes, writing press releases or designing posters, helping with website tasks or other internet projects and other future opportunities.

So anyone who is interested in gardening, DIY, recycling, cooking, food preserving and, above all, skill-sharing and meeting like-minded people can join SLI as a volunteer. If you are interested, please visit our website to find out how to apply.

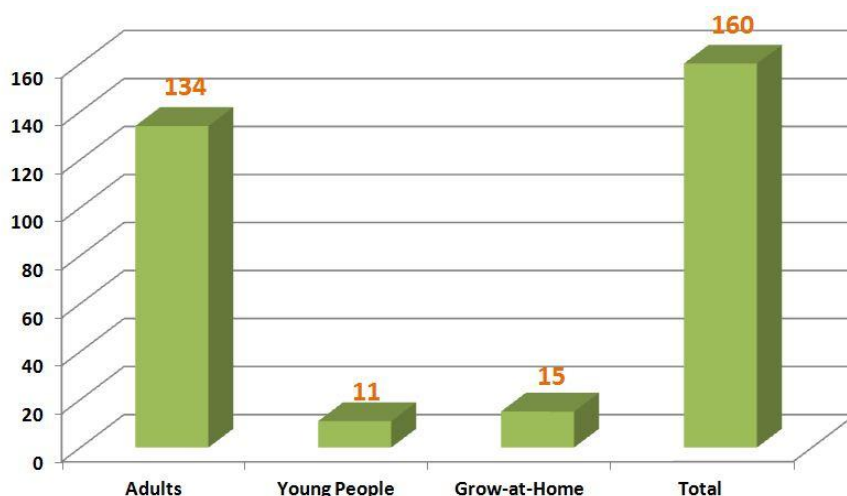
Profile of activities and achievements

Grow-Our-Own Scheme

During the past eight 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.

The chart below shows the total number of growers in 2011-2012. Of the total 134 adult growers, 41 were “new” growers who joined during 2011-2012 while the remainder were growers continuing from previous years. In addition to this, we had three local primary schools growing fruit and vegetables on the allotment (see the section on the School Gardening Project). Norwich City Council’s (NCC) current policy is to not allocate us any further plots, so any growth of the scheme will need to occur on other sites. However we hope to establish collaborative working relationships with NCC over the next year. Meanwhile we are continuing to expand the number of growers within our Grow-at-Home scheme.

Figure 1: Number of GO2 Growers in 2011-12



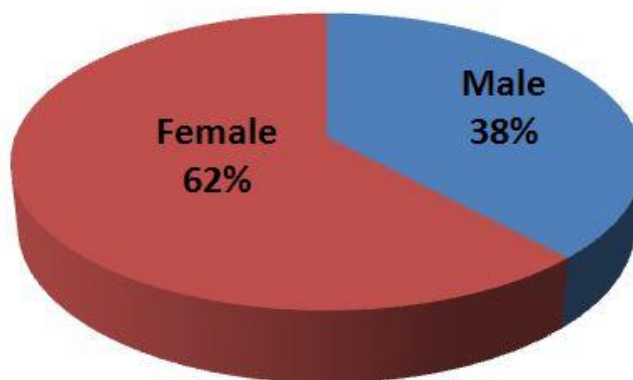
Of the total number of adult growers in 2011-2012, 34 people (25%) left before the end of the year. The reasons for growers leaving were:

- Moving away from the area (27%)
- Too busy to maintain their plot (15%)
- Illness (9%)
- Allocated a plot direct from Norwich City Council (6%)
- Unknown (18%)

The remaining 25% were asked to leave because they had failed to maintain their plots.

Figure 2: Number of GO² Growers by Gender

Looking at the gender composition of the growers, just under two-thirds is female (see Figure 2). The participation of women in GO² schemes has always been high, mainly due to the availability of facilities such as the toilet, picnic area and the child-friendly environment.



Distribution of growers by plot size

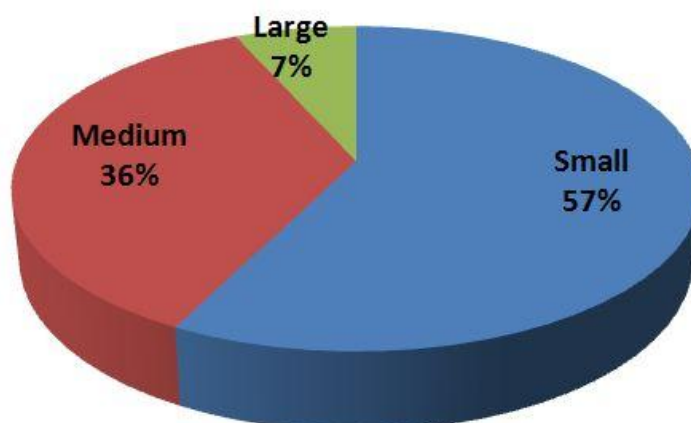
As in previous years, the majority of the growers, 57% (2010-2011: 66%) had only one strip measuring 6 x1.2 meters; however, the number of growers who moved on from one strip to two and more increased from 42 in 2009-2010 to 48 in 2011-2012.

A number of established growers added to their existing plots having gained more skills and confidence. 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 the size of our plots is manageable.

Figure 3: Adult Growers and Plot Size

Offering a small plot initially gives new growers the opportunity to find out whether or not they really want to grow their own food. This approach offers a model to local authorities and others involved in promoting allotments.

Our project provides the support and training for prospective allotment holders to develop the skills and self confidence to go on to a bigger size plot. At the same time we have also observed that many growers find it hard to maintain the level of commitment required for successful growing. Our growers are more likely to succeed than those renting full sized allotments direct from the local authority. But when our growers are not able to use their plots effectively, firstly, we offer necessary support to them; if that does not work, we reallocate the plot to others.



Several of our growers are members of Garden Organic’s Master Gardeners programme. Research into the impact of this scheme, conducted by Coventry University, has highlighted the benefits of supporting people to grow some of their own food. Outcomes identified included greater life satisfaction, buying more local and organic food and using more seasonal and fresh produce. Case studies and further details can be found at www.gardenorganic.org.uk/tow.



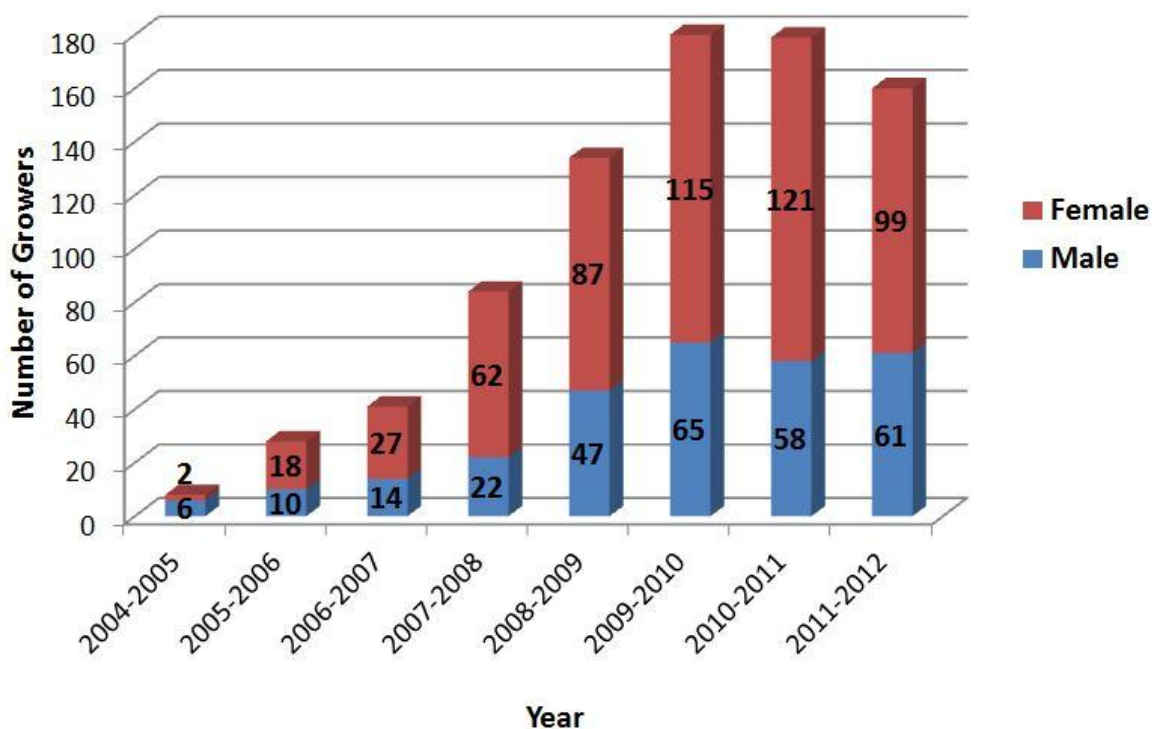
Eight years of GO²

The GO² scheme has grown 20 fold in eight years (see below). Owing to the increasing demand for plots, last year we introduced a policy of allocating only one plot to new members and encouraging the existing, successful growers to take on more plots when they are available. Such a policy has enabled us to take more new members and, in the meantime, reward our existing members who look after their plots well and play an active role in communal activities. We never have a waiting list lasting for more than a month.

The high retention rate of members in GO² scheme is an indication of the popularity of the scheme among its members. Some of our members have been with the GO² scheme for more than 5 years. These graduate members are increasingly taking responsibility for the management of the group and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the organisation.

The number of applications for new plots fell during the period (see Figure 4 below). Whilst the wet summer may have played a part in this decline, we do not know for sure why this happened. In recent years we have recruited new growers mainly through personal contacts, but we are currently promoting the project more actively to the local community through, for example, social networking channels.

Figure 4: Eight Years of GO²



Volunteering

The number of regular volunteers who are also GO² members is growing rapidly. In fact, this is the sort of co-operation that has helped make the work of Sustainable Living Initiative truly sustainable. We also have volunteers who do not have a plot but come and help us occasionally. In most cases they end up as regulars.

Working with regular volunteers

Before he handed over, Mahesh recruited a team of regular volunteers, growers in the project who would take on specific tasks. In exchange, the deal was, they would get two plots rent-free. So, by the beginning of October, Andrew Hughes and Kieron Moore had agreed to deal with compost, Jane Graham and Christine Wilson took on the maintenance of tool sheds, the big shed and composting toilet. Juyna and Charles Lewis became responsible for flower beds and containers around the big shed. Charlotte Dickens took on the sowing of seeds while Hadija Thompson and Jo Cole offered general help wherever needed. Since October, because of changes in circumstances, several of these helpers have left the project and new people joined the team. Laurie Steel and Jane Chittenden now deal with compost. Jane has also taken over the Heritage Seed growing project from Peter Anderson.

There is now a rota of people on duty when the GO² Centre is open, on Wednesday and Sunday mornings. They have been supporting growers, handing out advice, seeds and plants and welcoming new growers and visitors. There is also a rota for watering the greenhouse and polytunnel and on volunteering mornings, and at other times, people water, cut grass, weed and generally do the hundred and one tasks required to keep the project operating smoothly.

There are many people generous with their time and effort, realising that for a community project to flourish all growers need to contribute to its running. However, the question of how to encourage more growers to see beyond the boundaries of their own plots to the wider picture is still there. It does seem that people prefer to have a specific task to take responsibility for, a task that can be done as and when they wish. To mention a few; Peter Anderson cares for the project's soft fruit bushes, Janet Heathcote for the flowerbeds and grass around the car-park and Alistair Grieve for the area around the bike racks. Lesley Ashby has taken charge of the wild-flower area under the plum trees. And Nicola Simpson is planning to recruit other parents with young children to help develop a sensory garden in the family picnic area. The hope is that slowly more growers will feel sufficiently confident in what they can offer and that the workload of the project is more evenly spread.



Weekly newsletter

A good friend of the project, Robert Bailey, who has an allotment nearby, devised and installed an ingenious system to harvest and make available the rainwater collected from the big shed in four huge black tanks. Robert and his helpers laid pipes and installed four homemade cisterns, one beside the wheelchair accessible beds, the others alongside the main path running down past the greenhouse. Of course there has been no shortage of rainwater this year, so the system has been well tested. And it works superbly; not having to lug cans of water

from the mains taps to water seedlings in the greenhouse has been wonderful. However its reach is limited and one of the tasks for the regular volunteering mornings has been to make sure as much rainwater as possible is harvested from all the sheds.

First aid

There is now a well-stocked First Aid station in the big shed. As well as a St John's Ambulance kit containing plasters and bandages, there is an eyewash station and instructions for what to do in an emergency. Two volunteers, Christine Wilson and Juyna Lewis, attended a day-long first aid course in May, 2012.

A policy on the use of allotment space

A new policy for the use of allotment space within GO² was developed. The policy drew together what had emerged in practice over the years. It made clear how plots are allocated to new growers, the provision for growers to move plots, the management of communal spaces and the procedure for when plots aren't maintained during the growing season or when the rent is due. This document is available on our website.

Social events

The tradition of bringing a dish made from allotment or local, in-season produce to a food sharing lunch on first Sunday of the month is well-established. This year there have also been other social events; suppers to celebrate midsummer and the clocks going back, with poetry and prose readings, and mince-pies and mulled elderberry cordial on the Sunday before Christmas.

Open meeting

On 25th March, 2012, an Open meeting was held at St Thomas Church Hall, Earlham Road. The aim of the meeting was to explain how the GO² and Grow-at-Home schemes operate, talk about what needs doing to keep the projects running smoothly and invite ideas and suggestions for the year ahead. Attendance was encouraging; by 2.30pm forty three growers had arrived. The Co-ordinators gave a brief history of GO² and then explained how the new system of volunteer roles worked. A question and answer session followed with issues of rainwater harvesting, composting, care of paths, security and overgrown plots being raised. The mood was positive and forward-looking, with much discussion during the business of the meeting and later over tea and cakes.

Open day, 29th September 2012

As in previous years the open day was held at Michaelmas, the time for marking the end of summer and the beginning of autumn, when accounts are settled. The weather was fine and there was a steady stream of growers coming to pay their plot rent, eat cake and talk about the successes and failures of the past year. The tombola, donations for refreshments and the sale of produce, jam and chutney raised a total of £142 for project funds.

Growing-at-Home Scheme

The number of growers joining the Grow-at Home scheme increased from 10 to 15 during the year 2011-12. A few Grow-at Home members also join the social events on the allotment but the majority come only to get seeds/plants and advice. In the coming year, we need to review the scheme to find out whether the scheme is fulfilling their expectations. With the opening of the Marlpit Community garden in the near future (see Section on Marlpit), there is a scope for further expanding this services.

Growers Stories/feedback

We always ask our growers to give feedback about our services and make contributions to our annual report. We believe that the feedback process is important for improving the quality of our services. Below are stories of some of our growers and we hope more and more growers will feel inspired to write their experiences in the coming days.

Juliette and I took on a regular sized small plot last autumn. What a great decision it has turned out to be! It is so excellent at GO², having all the tools provided, plus plenty of seeds and plants, and lots of friendly expertise. We've already successfully grown far more different stuff than we would have done if left to our own devices: cabbages, lettuce, nasturtiums, marigolds, rhubarb, sunflowers, Jerusalem artichokes (they grew back, even after we thought we'd harvested them all!), onions, garlic, dwarf French beans, broad beans, broccoli, squash, and much much more. All organic, and nearly all delicious... We've had less success with beetroot, carrots and strawberries, but you can't have it all... We've also planted asparagus and sloes for future years. We didn't anticipate how much we would enjoy the social aspects of the thing: especially the monthly shared lunches, which are amazing! We are now about to take on a second plot. . .

Rupert Read

My name is Eddie Pleban I am a 63 year old youngster who lead an active lifestyle which included skiing hill walking, mountaineering, and canoeing you name it I tried it that is until the 6th February 2011 while flying home from visiting my daughter in Australia I had what the medical staff say was a catastrophic brain stem stroke and the prognosis was bleak but as you can see I survived. After 8 months in hospital some of which I suffered with 'locked in syndrome' (paralysed and only having my eyes to communicate) I was discharged to home.



As part of my rehab and recovery I was encouraged to get involved in the community. I have the support of a community development officer. With her help it didn't take long for me to find the Blue Bell grow-our-own initiative where I was introduced to Clive. This was October 2011 and winter was setting in, I took on two of the raised beds in the wheel chair area, I have three plots now and enjoying the fruits of my harvest.

Since then I have enjoyed meeting and conversing with so many people - many like me complete novices at growing veg. Being able to converse with other members has been very important to me as my wife Jeannie works full time and often long hours so a lot of the day I am alone.

I have watched the small amount of veg that I have grown and have been pleasantly surprised at how big they grew. In fact I have been asked on many occasions "how did you get those onions that big" my answer has always been "I have no idea" and that is true. I pulled a parsnip the other day I had to dig around it to loosen it, when I got it out it was about 18" long.

I have enjoyed been part of the voluntary team even though my role is small and look forward to the new season. I have learned a lot this year and hope I can grow my onions with success next year. **Eddie Pleban**

Seed Saving

Despite the adverse weather, we were able to grow and save most of the Heritage Seed Library selections. As a result there were available the following varieties for 2013: parsnip Guernsey; broad bean Mr Jones; asparagus kale; dwarf French bean Hutterite Soup; and climbing French bean Bed and Breakfast. The Brussels sprouts did well and will be available for taking seed in 2013.

This is the final report on seed saving by Peter Anderson; the work has been taken on by Jane Chittenden.

Composting

Three volunteers redesigned and developed the communal composting area. We have supplemented this with a number of smaller sites to take plant waste. These sites will be filled, covered, and have compost extracted on a rotational basis. Larger heaps break down faster and at a higher temperature than smaller ones, and we are now producing a steady supply of usable compost. We take the view that anything that is compostable should be retained on the site, and regarded as a resource rather than waste. One of the co-ordinators undertook Master Composter training, and has assisted another allotment group in Norwich to establish a composting system.



Schools Gardening Project

We (SLI) started working with Country Trust's Norfolk Food Discovery project in March 2011. During the year 2011-12, we worked with school children from three Primary Schools in Norwich - George White, Henderson and Catton Grove. Just over a quarter size plot was allocated for this purpose and as part of the agreement, we ran sessions on various aspects of gardening - digging, composting, seed sowing, planting, weeding and harvesting four times a year between September and July.

The decision on "what to grow" is influenced by the school academic year which ends in July before the main summer harvest. So we tried to grow vegetables including potatoes that were going to be ready by mid July. Practices such as chitting potatoes, sowing seeds in the greenhouse to start with and the use of horticultural fleece helped us speed up the growing process. By using Thermacrop (a hard wearing fleece), we managed to grow potatoes and courgettes just in time for schools' harvest festival in mid July.

In 2012-13, we will be working with three new Primary Schools – Valley Primary, Tuckswood and Magdalen Gates.

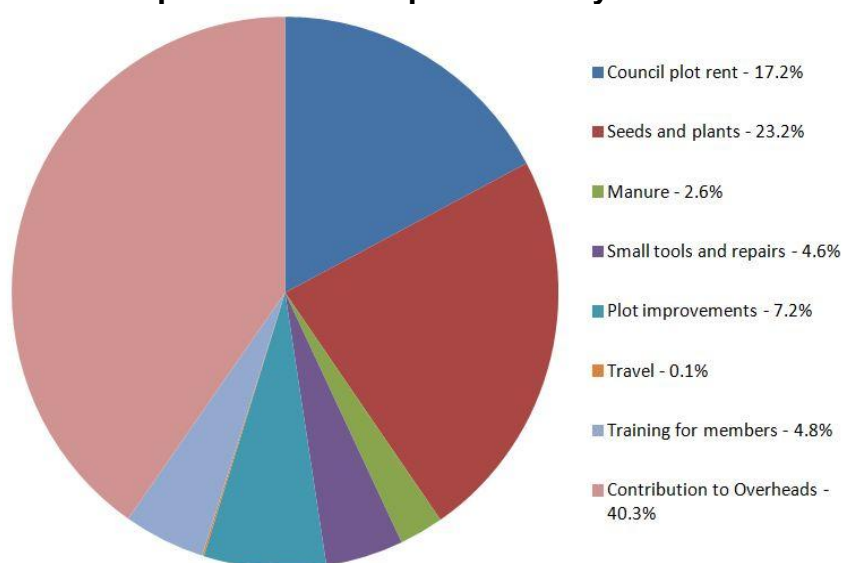
Finance

The income for GO² in the current year is similar to the previous year, with the main decrease relating to sales on the Open Day held at the end of September. The direct costs of running this scheme are substantially lower than the previous year, mainly due to the previous year including the cost of a part-time gardening assistant.

Overheads for the year are lower than the previous year, despite an increase in insurance costs. This is mainly due to reductions in telephone and internet costs as well as depreciation.

There has been a lot less work with the Schools project than the previous year, but despite this, the Schools project still provided net income of £762 which, together with net income from the Schools projects in previous years paid for the initial planning fees on the new Marlpit Community Garden.

Figure 5: How GO² plot rental was spent for the year ended 30 September 2012



Sustainable Living Initiative – Annual Account Summary October 2011 to September 2012

	2012					2011				
	Schools Project	Website Grant	Marlpit Project	Bluebell Allotments	Total	Schools Project	Website Grant	Marlpit Project	Bluebell Allotments	Total
Members' plot rent				3,834	3,834				3,836	3,836
Sales	2,352			36	2,388	10,672			89	10,761
Grants		279			279		221			221
Open Day				142	142				316	316
Miscellaneous Sales				198	198			102	119	221
Operating Income	2,352	279	0	4,210	6,841	10,672	221	102	4,360	15,356
Council plot rent				660	660				601	601
Seeds and plants				888	888	58			851	909
Manure				100	100				244	244
Services	1,591				1,591	8,433			864	9,297
Small tools and repairs				176	176				183	183
Plot improvements				277	277				640	640

Travel				4	4	1,111				1,111
Training for members				185	185					0
Direct Expenditure	1,591	0	0	2,289	3,880	9,602	0	0	3,383	12,985
Gross surplus/(deficit)	762	279	0	1,921	2,961	1,070	221	102	977	2,371
Insurance				424	424				270	270
Telephone & internet				366	366				534	534
Stationery and postage				132	132				119	119
IT Costs		280		96	376		221		120	341
Travel					0				40	40
Subscriptions				46	46				124	124
Depreciation				681	681				847	847
Sundries			923	180	1,102			102	160	262
Overhead Expenditure	0	280	923	1,924	3,126	0	221	102	2,213	3,647
Operating surplus/(deficit)	762	(1)	(923)	(3)	(165)	1,070	0	0	(1,236)	(1,277)

Marlpit Community Garden, Hellesdon Road, Norwich

Based on the **GO²** Bluebell South Allotments model, Marlpit Community Garden aims to expand into a fully sustainable community based garden scheme where people will not only be able to grow, preserve and cook fruit and vegetables but also be able to experience and learn about conserving the wider environment.

The main features of the proposed Marlpit Community Garden are:

- **Growing fruit and vegetables, start-up plots** – for up to 200 local residents who live within 20 minutes walk from the Garden.
- **Community orchard** - This area will be planted with common English fruit trees of Norfolk variety wherever possible. All the members of the Garden will have access to the communal orchard and members will be offered training on how to preserve surplus fruit.
- **Coppicing area** – Members will plant hazels and willows which will eventually be used as beanpoles and pea sticks thereby replacing imported bamboo poles.
- **Group plots**- Plots of varying sizes will be on offer for schools and community groups to grow fruit and vegetables of their choice.
- **Conservation area** – About a third of the 2.8ha site will be dedicated to conserving existing wetlands and enhancing biodiversity by restoring habitat and species diversity.
- **Community building** - A place for members to meet, work, socialise and attend events organised around growing, preserving and cooking fruit and vegetables.
- **Car-free zone** – The garden is going to be a car-free zone; only 5 car-parking spaces are available for blue-badge holders. There will be ample cycle stands.

Marlpit Community Garden Site, July 2012



Norwich City Council finally granted planning permission for the proposed Marlpit Community Garden in May 2012. We would like to thank the local residents for their

unwavering support for the project during the planning application process and their keen interest in joining the project.

We are now working on removing some legal obstacles related to the covenant which restricts “development” defined as any project work that requires planning permission. The help and support from Norfolk Prohelp has been invaluable throughout this process.

We have now started applying for funds to turn this empty land into a fully functioning community garden. We would like to ask Norwich businesses, and the public, to help us implement this worthwhile project for the local community. Apart from much needed cash donations, we also welcome contributions in the form of goods and services, for example:

- Building materials
- Employees giving time to help with the construction of a fence, access road, disabled car park and gate
- Metal storage containers
- Gardening Tools
- Plants and seeds.

You are welcome to come and visit our existing project at Bluebell South Allotments to see how we work in practice or to visit our website to find out more.

