

# SUSTAINABLE LIVING INITIATIVE

Annual Report 2006-2007

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## **Background**

This is the second annual report of Sustainable Living Initiative (SLI) covering the period from October 2006 to September 2007. This report documents activities undertaken, progress made so far and plans for the future.

Sustainable Living Initiative is a non-profit distributing social enterprise based in Norwich. It is registered as a "company limited by guarantee". It has five Directors and one Secretary and a Treasurer (please see Annex 1), all of whom do not receive any payment for their services to the organisation. With generous help from SLI members and a growing number of volunteers, the Secretary manages the day-to-day operation of the organisation.

## **Aims and objectives**

We aim to promote a good life based on the values of self-reliance, self-help and care for nature. To advance these broader goals, we promote practical action, individually and collectively. We believe that small-scale actions, such as growing some fruit, vegetables and herbs on allotments and in our own back gardens, recycling and reusing, avoiding car journeys and promoting a sense of community can have a far-reaching effect on natural, as well as on human, environments.

## **Profile of Activities and Achievements**

The year 2006-2007 on the whole brought mixed blessings. In December 2006, we succeeded in obtaining a grant from the National Lottery to improve facilities on the allotment. We were delighted by this news and were encouraged to work even harder to take the project forward. Sadly, in February 2007, we had an arson attack on our shed which stored tools and seeds for the growers. The fire not only destroyed our tools and stock of vegetable seeds, but also our greenhouse and the plants in the greenhouse. It was a big blow to us financially and to our morale. It is thanks to the generous help from our friends and well-wishers and the determination and commitment of our members and volunteers that we managed to overcome this tragedy and carry on business as usual.

During the year, we focused on consolidating the achievements made in the previous years and in improving access and participation. We also spent a lot of energy on improving the infrastructure. As a result, we now have an information centre, an environment-friendly composting toilet, a composting site, cycle stands and a large picnic area. We have ensured that these new facilities are wheelchair accessible. We have also managed to replenish the stock of our tools and seeds.

Details of activities and achievements are discussed in the following sections.

### *Grow-Our Own scheme*

As a practical action project of Sustainable Living Initiative, the Grow Our Own (GO<sup>2</sup>) scheme started in the autumn of 2004. The main aim of GO<sup>2</sup> scheme is help those who are interested but have little or no experience in growing fruit and vegetables. The standard 10 rod size allotment plots are divided into mini-plots of varying sizes depending on the need and experience of individual growers. The plot holders get all the necessary training, tools, seeds and seedlings, manure and hands-on practical advice.



*Figure 1: An example of a mini-plot (1.20 x 6 meters)*

Apart from growing fruit and vegetables of their own choice and maintaining the plot, growers are reminded of the importance of self-help and collective action. We are also trying our best to use organic practices wherever possible and do not use insecticide, pesticide and chemical fertiliser.

Since the start of the scheme in the autumn of 2004 with eight novice growers, GO<sup>2</sup> has grown from strength to strength. During the year 2006-2007, a total of 41 people signed up for the scheme, of whom 28 completed successfully. The remaining 13 growers dropped out before the end of the year or did not look after their plots well. The majority of the growers (27 out of 41) were women. A total of 12.5 x 10 rod size plots were rented from the Norwich Council during the year 2006-2007 for this purpose.



### *Pick-Your-Own Scheme*

A Pick-Your-Own (PYO) scheme started at the same time as GO<sup>2</sup>. The main aim of the PYO scheme is to offer an opportunity to those who have little spare time or are physically unable to work on the allotment to come and pick organically grown produce. It is hoped that the PYO scheme can help people see how the fruit, vegetables and herbs they eat are grown and get a regular supply of locally grown fresh produce straight from the land. The PYO scheme also helps raise funds for the organisation by turning surplus produce into cash.

During 2006-2007, the PYO scheme took a new turn. Almost all the past PYO members have now joined GO<sup>2</sup> scheme, which means that they are producing their own fruit and vegetables. In addition, as more and more growers are working as volunteers for the GO<sup>2</sup> scheme, they are all entitled to take any surplus produce free of charge in return for their contribution. This certainly is an encouraging development. We will try to promote the PYO scheme to attract new members in the coming year.

### *Volunteering*

The volunteering scheme is aimed at those who are interested in gardening and growing but are unable to commit time on a regular basis. It provides an opportunity to learn gardening skills and get fresh produce from the allotment free of charge in return for help.

Last year, we had a total of 10 volunteers, some of whom were also members of the GO<sup>2</sup> scheme. The range of help provided by these volunteers included plot clearing, digging, looking after plants, building the shed, toilet, paths, car park, cycle stands, poly-tunnel, etc. Such cooperation has helped to promote a sense of community and self-help. It also has helped reduce our cash expenditure, thereby reducing our dependence on grant money.

### *Community Support Scheme*

The main idea behind the community support scheme is to provide help to people to grow fruit and vegetables in their own back garden. Under this scheme, people living in the close vicinity of Bluebell South Allotments can get training, seeds and seedlings through our Centre based at the Bluebell South Allotments, off the Avenues.

Due to the extra work created in the aftermath of arson attack and due to our involvement in building the shed and toilet facilities, this scheme did not start during the 2006-2007. We plan to revive this scheme in the spring of 2008 subject to local demand and funding.

## **Events**

### *Food Events*

Our annual food event took place on 21<sup>st</sup> July and was attended by SLI members and invited guests. The weather turned out to be perfect and over 30 people attended the event. A wide selection of dishes based on the allotment produce was available.

The event was successful in further promoting cooperation and friendship between SLI members and friends of SLI.

### *Open day*

The open day took place on 18<sup>th</sup> of August to coincide with the National Allotment week. The newly built Centre was finished just in time for the open day.

In addition to the stall of cooked food and recipes ideas using allotment produce, the event also included educational games and tours of the allotment. Norfolk Organic Group (NOG) also had a book stall and information desk at the event. Jam, chutney and preserve made using allotment produce were available for sale. A raffle, organised by one of our members not only added extra entertainment for the open day, but also helped raise funds for the organisation.



*Figure 2: Grow-Our-Own Open Day Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> August 2007*

Over 50 people attended the Open Day. Some of the visitors of the Open Day have already joined the GO2 group, while some others have signed up as volunteers.

### *Volunteering Day*

During 2006-2007, we started a monthly volunteering day (last Sunday of each month) when members, growers, volunteers come to give help for communal activities, such as clearing plots, making paths, painting the shed, and so on. The number of people turning up for volunteering work varies but we often have a very good turnout. Volunteers get free drinks and fresh produce from the allotment in return for their help.



*Figure 3: Volunteers making paths*

Apart from improving the facilities on the allotment, the volunteering day has helped bring growers together, share gardening ideas and experiences and develop a sense of community. We hope that more and more growers will find time to attend the volunteering day in the coming year.

### *Food-Sharing Day*

Growing our own fruit and vegetables eventually prompts us to make greater use of home produce. So we started a cookery session in November last year with a view to sharing cooking ideas and developing seasonal recipes using allotment produce. Since we do not have kitchen facilities at the allotment, this meant hiring a hall (so had cost implications). As an alternative, we started a food-sharing event instead on the first Sunday of each month, when people bring food made using allotment produce to share with other members. Basic tea-making facilities, plates etc. are available on the allotment. With the completion of the Information Centre, we can now organise the food-sharing event whatever the weather.





*Figure 4: First Food-sharing Event June 2007*

Apart from learning recipe ideas and eating tasty meals, this is yet another opportunity for the growers and members to promote a sense of community and to learn from each other.



*Figure 5: Food-Sharing Event June 2007*



## Web site

The original website ([www.grow-our-own.co.uk](http://www.grow-our-own.co.uk)) was revamped to make the site attractive and user-friendly. We plan to add new features such as an encyclopaedia of fruit, vegetables and herbs and information about recipes and storing surplus produce. We hope that the new site would be useful not only to the GO2 members but the general public who are interested in growing their own fruit, vegetables and herbs either on the allotment or in their back garden.

## Media, Publicity

In 2007, we had a lot of publicity in the media including features on BBC Look East and the EDP Evening News. In addition to this, articles about GO2 were published in Norfolk Organic Group Newsletter May-July 2007 issue.

We also took part in the Picnic in the Park event organised by the Green Grocer and Notcutts Garden Fayre organised by the Norwich City Council and Notcutts Garden Centre.

## Other Activities

### *Information Centre*

During the year 2006-2007, we carried out major construction work, thanks to the funding from the National Lottery. We now have a shed large enough to accommodate up to 30 people for meetings or other social events. The shed has been built using timber and no power tools were used in the construction. The shed will provide shelter for the growers and members from the rain and wind during the winter months. It will also be used as an information centre for organic gardening.



*Figure 6: Newly Built Information Centre*

### *Composting Toilet*

During this period, we also succeeded in building a composting toilet. The toilet uses the latest technology and is totally environment-friendly. More information about this toilet can be found at [www.natsol.co.uk](http://www.natsol.co.uk).



Figure 7: Composting Toilet

### *Composting Site*

A composting site has been established, with a view to providing information and hands-on practical advice to the growers and general public about how to convert garden and kitchen waste into useful food for plants. The composting site comprises a number of plastic bins, tumblers, wormery, compost heap and Russian comfrey beds. Two of our members, who are also master composters, have played a key role in setting up and running this composting site.





*Figure 8: Composting site*

### *Picnic Site*

The original picnic site with just one picnic bench is now inadequate to accommodate the rapidly increasing number of growers, members and volunteers. A new picnic site, next to the information centre, will be developed and will be large enough to accommodate up to 50 people.



*Figure 9: Picnic Site (under-development)*



Other activities undertaken during 2006-2007 included the provision of water butts for the growers to collect rainwater and a polytunnel for growing vegetables in winter and for preparing seedlings for the growers during spring.

## **Finance**

During 2006-2007, we received a major grant from the Big Lottery and other smaller grants from East of England Cooperative Society and the Royal Bank of Scotland Community Cashback Awards. We also received donations from the T & G benevolent fund and from our members and volunteers to replace tools and seeds lost in the arson attack.

With regard to the income from our own sources, it has gone up substantially despite the fall in the number of PYO members. The main source of income was from the sale of jams, chutneys, preserves and a raffle on the Open Day.

Most of the money spent during the year was for the information centre, composting toilet, poly-tunnel, water butts and to replace the tools and seeds lost in the fire. Due to the increasing number of volunteers, we did not have to pay any money for plot clearing and digging. For a summary of income and expenditure, please see Annex 2.

## **What the Growers Say**

The number of growers joining the scheme has been growing continuously. The majority of the growers have stayed on and have become part of the scheme offering help in number of ways. Apart from the growers, we now have more volunteers who provide much needed help in a range of activities. Likewise, the number of visitors to our project site and to our website has been expanding as well.

This achievement in expanding the coverage of our service and in promoting the participation of our growers and volunteers is a good indication of our success. However, we need to do more to improve the quality of services we provide and to reach out to those who for one or other reason fail to take advantage of our scheme.

With a view to getting feedback from our growers, we sent a form asking them to give their opinions and views on the following questions:

- a) What do you think of the services you received during the last year?
- b) What needs to be done to further improve the quality of services?

It is disappointing that of the total 30 growers contacted, only 4 replied. Below are some excerpts from the growers' evaluation of the GO2 scheme.

"I have continued to find the supply of plants/seeds and the advice from you on what to plant and when very useful. It would even more useful to find out about growing the seeds before planting.

The toilet was also a great idea, particularly for long stints on the allotment."

"I haven't been able to manage to get over to the allotment for a few Sundays now however I have been harvesting from my plot and I'm really pleased with the variety of things I've learnt to grow. In answer to your questions; I think the quality of service is great. We know when we can come to the allotment and speak to someone and your emails about what's available are really good too. I dare say the information centre will also allow you to leave messages and updates for people to see (I noticed the what to do in October note this week). I think it would be good if we could share information about particular gardening skills (such as clearing the plot or planting particular crops) in workshops etc and it would save having to repeat the same information on to each person that asks. I'm sure everyone will agree that the composting toilet is a lifesaver!

How about asking people to record particular successes and failures each year? I've had a great year for peas and cabbages on my plot but wire worms got to the potatoes before me, the slugs and snails saw to most of my beans and carrot root fly destroyed my carrots - at the moment there's a mole under the strawberries! The second sowing of carrots (and in fact all my later planted crops) look much better so perhaps this type of information will help us understand when to plant things to avoid pests and diseases. I know the weather plays a big part but over time we can also understand which plants grow best in our allotment soil."

"Very good. Everything is there ...and the key planters are great sources of information and help. GO2 has gone from strength to strength and will surely continue like that.

Possibly slightly more indication of which seeds are which in the greenhouses and what you can do with the more unusual vegetables (though maybe that is somewhere and I haven't seen it). We have social occasions together (though some don't come) but we don't have any time when we could hear about developments and maybe have some input. This might have to be the occasional meeting which people don't like generally. Does the scheme have public liability insurance? Maybe we should also look at raising awareness of the hazards around, particularly as small children go up there."

"Difficult to know what was available for planting or sometimes what plants actually were, I missed out on some plants I would have liked. Generally friendly and helpful...

Less salad and lettuce please."

We thank those who sent their comments and will promise to do our best in addressing the shortcomings. We would also like to urge other members to voice their concerns and to become active members of the scheme. The GO2 scheme cannot run without the co-operation of its members.

## **Plan for the future**

The GO2 project has evolved from a pilot scheme to a full-grown project. To keep the project going and to make it sustainable in the long run, we need greater participation by the growers. We also need to encourage the participation of younger children, people with disability (ies) and people from disadvantaged communities.

- Making good use of infrastructure and facilities created so far – possible additional components – cooking class and training/workshop on basic vegetable gardening.
- Sharing experiences – encourage growers to take part in events like Volunteering Day, Food-sharing Day and Open Day.
- Improving access and participation of young people, people with disabilities and people from disadvantaged communities.
- Promoting visits to the centre to learn about composting and growing – target groups - schools, clubs, and other groups.



## Acknowledgements

The practical action project of Sustainable Living Initiative, Grow-Our-Own, has grown from strength to strength. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the many individuals and organisations for their help, support and commitment over the year.

The National Lottery grant enabled us to improve facilities on the allotment. The grant provided by East of England Cooperative Society and the Royal Bank of Scotland helped us to pay for the additional cost of the composting toilet. T & G Union's financial help was invaluable in replacing tools and seeds lost in the fire. Both the financial help and support from the staff of the Norwich City Council has been invaluable in taking the project forward.

Individually, we would like to thank Peter Tobin for his ingenious work in building the Information Centre using only hand-tools. Tony Felton's help in giving his precious time in supervising the composting toilet work helped us to finish the project on time. Likewise, Dave Ruel's help in assembling the tool shed, Blake Darlin's help in improving the SLI website and a range of activities on the allotment were invaluable. A big thank you is due to Janet Wicker, Angela Beckett, Sian Jones, John Elliott, Christine Wilson, Claire Pinky, Jenny Cunningham and Jane Graham for donations and for regular help on the allotment and to Geraldine Terry for organising the raffle on the Open Day. We also would like to thank young members – Ben Clinch and Ben Pant for their IT support and Anita, Jaya and Sally for organizing a quiz on the Open Day. Of all the well-wishers of SLI, Brian and Jo Baxter have been a source of great support and encouragement.

Of all the SLI members, Clive Sexton's tremendously hard work in digging and clearing the plot, Peter Anderson's superb management of the composting site and for incessant help in running the allotment, Vicky Leconte's excellent organisation and management of the tool shed and the Information Centre, Peter Medhurst's endless work on the building despite his broken hip, Andy Taylor's help in accounting and food processing and Kim Hudson, Nanda Nakarmi, Christine O'Hanlon, Steve Clinch and Bridget Beauchamp's regular help and support deserve special mention. Last but not least is the continuous support provided by the Directors, current as well past, of SLI. We would particularly like to thank Steve Clinch who ends his term as director this year, and welcome Vicky Leconte who joins as a new director.

Happy Gardening!

Mahesh Pant

## **ANNEX**

**Annex 1**

**Sustainable Living Initiative Limited**

**Company Information**  
**for the period from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2006 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2007**

**DIRECTORS:** C O'Hanlon  
K Hudson  
P Medhurst  
A Pittock  
V Leconte

**SECRETARY:** M Pant

**REGISTERED OFFICE:** 37 Buckingham Road  
Norwich  
Norfolk  
NR4 7DE

**REGISTERED NUMBER:** 5472105 (England and  
Wales)



**Annex 2**

Income and expenditure account detail for the year to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2007  
*(Comparatives for the period from 6<sup>th</sup> June 2005 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2006)\**

	2007 £	2006 £
<u>Income</u>		
<b>Sales income:</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>378</b>
Vegetable sales	308	331
Plant sales	27	47
 <b>Recurring income:</b>	 <b>1,252</b>	 <b>399</b>
Plot rent	1,175	315
Members fees	45	65
Seed kitty	32	19
 <b>Other income:</b>	 <b>10,915</b>	 <b>6,441</b>
Donations	781	1,429
Grants	10,040	5,000
Interest	94	12
 <b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	 <b>12,502</b>	 <b>7,218</b>
<u>Expenditure</u>		
1. <b>Direct expenditure:</b>	<b>2,266</b>	<b>1,322</b>
Plot rent	414	191
Seeds	749	433
Manure	383	221
Labour	0	239
Small tools	720	238
 2. <b>Investment in equipment &amp; facilities:</b>	 <b>12,458</b>	 <b>2,564</b>
IT equipment	63	1,105
Gardening equipment	1,420	1,549
Meeting hut	5,171	0
Composting toilet	5,804	0
 3. <b>Overhead expenditure:</b>	 <b>1,123</b>	 <b>768</b>
Telephone & broadband	143	278
Postage	14	30
Stationery	125	71
Travel	0	105
Training	27	100
Subscriptions	665	57
Professional fees	149	127
 4. <b>Taxation:</b>	 <b>0</b>	 <b>261</b>
Corporation tax payable on surplus for period	0	261
 <b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	 <b>15,847</b>	 <b>4,915</b>

*\* These are draft figures subject to account adjustments.*