



**SUSTAINABLE
LIVING
INITIATIVE**

**Annual Report
2017-2018**



Sustainable Living Initiative

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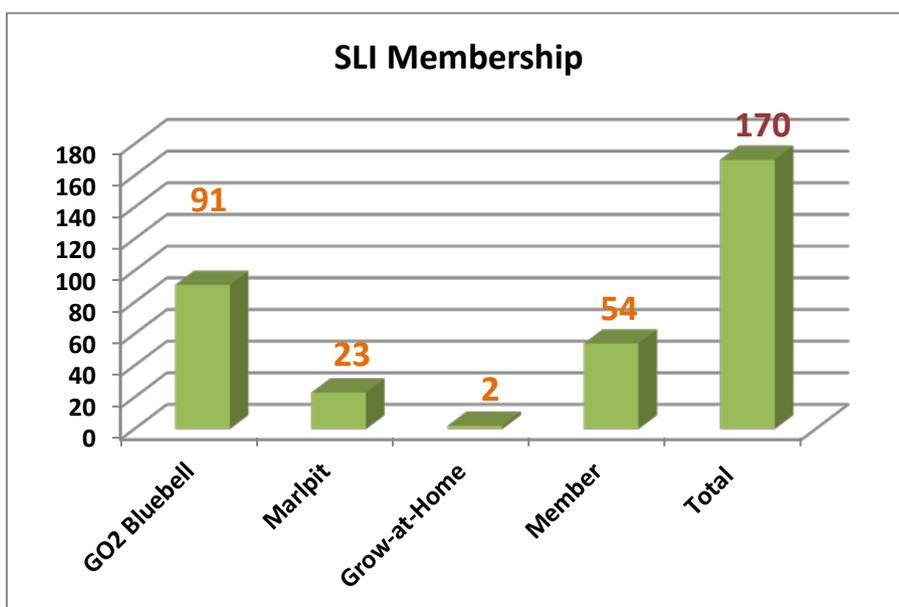
Introduction

The Sustainable Living Initiative (SLI) is a registered charity run by Trustees and [its office is at Marlpit Community Centre](#) on Hellesdon Road. Founded in 2004 as a pilot project, it now runs two community gardens in Norwich; Grow-Our-Own (GO²)Bluebell which is at the Norwich City Council's Bluebell South allotments, and Marlpit Community Garden, which is at Hellesdon Road, Marlpit.

SLI is a membership-based organisation and is open to those who support its objectives and wish to be involved in its activities. SLI works to improve the quality of life for individuals and communities through gardening and environmental projects. Members come together to grow fruit and veg **organically**, share resources, food and recipes, learn about and support the natural environment and to enjoy each other's company. SLI membership shows a commitment to promoting environmental awareness and sharing resources to improve our quality of life. It is a forum for sharing ideas and skills and initiating collaborative practical projects in growing and using food sustainably.

SLI in 2017-2018 at a glance

There were 170 members, more than half of whom, were growers at GO² Bluebell, and the majority of whom were female. About a third of our membership was aged above 55 and 13% had some sort of disability. Nearly 60% of our members were White British which also reflects the ethnic composition of Norfolk. The rest of the members were Asian (8%), European (6%), and the remainder included Irish and mixed race.



SLI ran eight training/workshop sessions during the year. These included growing and pruning soft fruit and fruit trees, soil care, plant care, pests and diseases, Shitake mushroom growing and scything refresher training. In addition, we organised jam, jelly and chutney making workshops using produce from the Marlpit Community Garden and one cooking session; making Nepali Sel Roti (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sel_roti). These training sessions which are mainly for our members were well attended although we could have more people attending our gardening training sessions.

We carried out an evaluation of SLI in January 2018. The purpose of this evaluation was to provide information to SLI trustees on what the SLI project has done well or not so well - particularly in the last three years - and how the project can be improved.

125 questionnaires were sent and the response rate was 30%. According to the results of the survey, everyone said that the project either 'more than' (76.3%) or 'mostly' (21%) met their expectations. The main reasons for joining SLI were:

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- Many members live in flats or have small gardens and want space to grow food and to spend time outside.
- A large number of members wants to grow in a communal way in order to have practical support and companionship.
- Specialist groups want to enable their members to access community based activities.
- Others joined “to learn new skills”; “for academic research”, “for opportunities to experiment”.

With regard to the benefits from the project:

- 81% said they eat or cook with more or a greater variety of fruit and vegetables because of the project.
- 73% said they save money from being part of the project.
- 84% said they have learnt more about growing things organically since joining the project.
- 95% said they have benefited from informal advice about growing/cooking at the project.
- 60% said they have attended formal training about growing/cooking at the project
- 63% said they have developed skills other than growing skills by being part of the project
- 74% said they think their physical health has improved as a result of the project
- 89% said they think that their mental health or general wellbeing has improved from being part of the project.

These results are very encouraging; we need to continue doing our good work and encourage more people to join our community gardens.

The grant funding from the Tudor Trust enabled us to employ an office manager who among other things revamped our website, further developed our accounting system using QuickBooks and improved communications with schools and community groups in Norwich. The grant also enabled the programme manager to dedicate more time in further developing the Marlpit Community Garden and spending more time with regular members, volunteers and visitors.

Following on the announcement by Mahesh (our founder and programme manager) to retire at the end of 2020, we held a planning workshop day on 8th September 2018 to discuss the future of our scheme, particularly to plan how we would manage once Mahesh leaves.

We had group exercises with the following headings: our hopes and fears, our values, our vision for the future, and finally our three-year action plan for how we get there. Trustees will go through the plan suggested by SLI members and decide how to move forward. There will be a further workshop next year.

Below is a summary of the year in our two gardens. Detailed reports are contained in the annexe.

GO2 Bluebell

Grow-Our-Own (GO²) at the City Council’s Bluebell South Allotment site in Norwich was the first pilot scheme of SLI. It grew rapidly between 2007 and 2010 but after that declined steadily, from 180 members at its peak to 91 now. As a result, we have reduced the number of allotments rented from the City Council (from 18 full-sized plots to 11 plots now).

A team structure was set up to manage the GO² Bluebell Scheme, following the decision of the SLI

to start a new project at Marlpit in 2011. The new system has worked well with responsibility divided among teams to include the tasks of providing seeds, plants, compost and tools, maintaining the land and water supply, sharing gardening knowledge and skills, administering the scheme, and organising food sharing lunches. Currently, seven team leaders and a coordinator are managing the day to day activities of our Bluebell site.

GO² at Bluebell had another very busy year. A team of volunteers staffed the shed on Wednesday and Sunday mornings helping members with advice and directing them to seeds and plants.

Marlpit Community Garden

Marlpit Community Garden is a seven-acre site with plots for individuals, families, schools and community groups. It is also home to a wildlife area, a herb garden, forest garden, bee hives, an orchard, a soft fruit area and a demonstration plot which provides vegetables for our volunteers' lunches. During 2017-18, there were 23 individual growers, two schools and two mental health community groups growing food in Marlpit Community Garden in specially designed raised beds.

Soft fruit such as red, white and black currants, gooseberry and raspberry and tree fruit such as apple, pear, plum, greengage planted after 2014 are all bearing fruit. In some cases for example red and white currants, we are finding it difficult to harvest all produce on time.



The tasks of maintaining the orchards, forest garden, herb garden, wild flower area, communal vegetable growing patch and other facilities in Marlpit Community Garden have been carried out by a group of regular volunteers who attend weekly on Tuesday and on Thursday. On Tuesday, volunteers get a home-cooked lunch and are offered any surplus fruit and vegetables to take home at the end of their work. The communal vegetable growing patch serves as a demonstration area; it also provides the bulk of food for Tuesday lunch.

In addition to our regular volunteers at Marlpit, we had volunteers from MARSH and AVIVA (both Norwich based insurance companies), GoodGym, students from University of East Anglia, and young volunteers from Talent Match, MINT and the National Community Service. Apart from getting the much needed help from these volunteers in maintaining our community gardens, volunteers have enjoyed being out in the garden, eating fresh fruit and vegetables, learning new skills, meeting new people and developing confidence. We have received very positive feed-back from our volunteers.

SLI Finance

Income for the year was £32848 and the expenditure was £36067, creating a shortfall of 3220. However, there was unspent grant money from the previous year to cover the shortfall.

As usual, the majority (68%) of our income came from grants and donations. The Tudor Trust's grant of £20000 for core costs enabled SLI to employ an Office Manager and to pay a little bit more to the Programme Manager.

SUMA cooperative where SLI members can buy ethically traded dry foods and drinks from SUMA is now administered from our office account (previously it was run from Mahesh's personal account). We started charging 5% to our SUMA members as administrative fee which has almost covered

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SLI's food purchase for volunteers' meal.

Of the total expenditure, about 35% was spent on staff salaries. Other major expenses were improving the fencing in MCG, replacing tools lost due to theft at MCG and the purchase of a lap top to replace the aging desk top computer. For further details, please see the Financial Activity table below.

Grants and donations received in 2017-2018

Name of the Organisation	Amount received	Notes
Tudor Trust	20000	Grant
Thomas Wall Trust	1000	Grant
Paul Bassam Charitable Trust	1000	Grant
Small donations to replace tools stolen	199.56	Donations
Total	22199.56	

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Financial Activities: October 2017 to September 2018

INCOME	£
Allotment Sales (including Open Days and miscellaneous income)	1440.72
Suma Coop Management Fee (5% of all purchase by members)	142.23
Grants and Donations	22199.56
Membership Fees	145
Plot Rental (including the rent from the grazing field at MCG)	4513.05
Services (income from Mahesh taking MCC booking and cake making)	590.02
Suma Food Coop (payments from members for the purchase of SUMA goods)	3817.69
TOTAL INCOME	32848.27
EXPENDITURE	
Accounts and Book Keeping	216
Bee Keeping	95.51
Deputy Programme Manager	3454.8
Equipment and Supplies	1035.41
Grant Refund (Comic Relief grant which we could not use)	1000
IT costs (laptop and software)	1281.86
Keys	223.5
Maintenance	3827.95
Manure and Compost	133.8
Members Training (Bee Keeping)	75
Office Rent	2784
Other Expenses	193.39
Plot Rental Expenses	1760
Postage and Stationery	31.3
Professional Fees including training	894.01
Programme Manager	9303.9
Seeds and Plants	470.41
Small Tools and Repairs	1131.65
Subscriptions	88
SUMA Food Coop Expenses	4083.24
Tax and National Insurance	1432.73
Telephone and Internet	670.58
Travel	61
Volunteer Costs	1819.21
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	36067.25
NET OPERATING INCOME	-3218.98
OTHER EXPENDITURES	
Reconciliation Discrepancies	1.13
Total Other Expenditures	-1.13
NET OTHER INCOME	-1.13
NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE)	-3220.11

Plans for 2018-2019

Both our community gardens – GO² Bluebell and Marlpit Community Garden – still have plots available for individuals, families and groups (Marlpit only). As ‘word of mouth’ has proved to be the best way of attracting new members, we will ask our members to spread the word about our project. In addition to providing small individual plots, we also need to encourage individuals, schools and community groups to come and visit our community gardens and enjoy a short walk or learn about gardening, bees and wildlife. We will also make good use of social media in publicising the benefits that our community gardens offer.

We will continue to run practical training sessions on growing fruit and vegetables as well as making jam and chutneys. As mentioned earlier, the attendance in some of the gardening training sessions could be improved. We would also like to hear our members’ views on the sort of training they would like to attend.

Most of the plants in Marlpit Community Garden are now bearing fruit. To make it easier for the visitors to learn about these plants, we will have plant labels with detailed information about each plant printed and attached to it.

For a small charitable organisation like ours which does not generate much needed revenue, finding adequate funding is an ongoing struggle. Thanks to the hard work of our trustees and members and the generosity of charitable donors, we have managed not only to carry out our regular work but to improve our services and facilities. The volunteers coming from the corporate sector not only help us maintain the garden but also minimises our operation costs. We need to build on this success and institutionalise it.

Acknowledgements

We would like thank the Tudor Trust, Thomas Wall Trust and Paul Bassam Charitable Trust for the grants which have enabled us to continue our activities and further improve our services. Likewise a big thank you to all our regular volunteers and the volunteers from AVIVA, MARSH, Volunteering Matters, GOODGYM, National Community Service, Talent Match and Students from the University of East Anglia for the number of hours they have dedicated to maintaining our community gardens. Volunteering in our community gardens not only provides much needed help but also provides opportunities for volunteers to learn new skills, meet new people and enjoy freshly cooked organic, wholemeal food (every Tuesday in Marlpit). So it is win-win and a good example of running a community garden in a sustainable way.

ANNEXE

GO² Bluebell report 2017 – 2018

Gillian Damerell, Co-ordinator

By September 2018 we had 85 members occupying 128 mini plots and 14 raised boxes, with one plot held communally and a further 6 plots and one raised box vacant – some of which were occupied during the year by members who left before September. The one communal plot is the plot which is badly shaded by the big shed.

The raised boxes which were vacant in October 2017 were rapidly occupied, and with further demand being apparent, three more were constructed in the autumn (numbers 13-15) and immediately occupied. The decision was taken to remove the communal soft fruit area (apart from the gooseberries) as the fruit bushes were not receiving enough attention and were not thriving. The currants and raspberries were dug out over the winter and distributed to members, and the area was measured out for a further 6 plots.

The Open Day took place on a rainy Sunday, 1 October, 2017, the deadline for renewal of membership and many people came and enjoyed good food, bought mostly jam made by members and honey from Marlpit, sampled pear juice (competently pressed by Phil, despite the rain) and generally had a good time. Allotmenting on a small scale such as in GO² ticks all the boxes for health and wellbeing: exercise, fresh air, organically grown vegetables, and companionship, and we are constantly seeking to publicise the benefits of joining such a scheme.

The team structure continued to work well this year. The team leaders and Bluebell coordinators met quarterly to make decisions affecting communal areas (such as the decision to remove the fruit bushes), discuss progress with communal tasks and priorities for the next quarter's volunteering Sundays, and other organisational matters. Minutes of these meetings are available to all members in a folder in the main shed, or by emailing bluebell@grow-our-own.co.uk.

At the August team leaders' meeting it was decided to reorganise the responsibilities between various teams, with these alterations coming into effect at the start of October:

- The previous tools & sheds team, with responsibility for tool maintenance and inventory and shed maintenance (eg painting) was replaced with the tools & toilet team. This team retains responsibility for tools, but also wider stock taking of GO² property plus responsibility for training in tool use, in particular the annual power tool training session.
- The previous land & water team, with responsibility for maintaining the water tanks plus some communal gardening areas (such as the flower beds and rock garden) was replaced with the maintenance/DIY team. This team retains responsibility for the water tanks, but also the shed maintenance previously part of the tools & sheds team's remit. Thus the DIY-type tasks are collected together.
- A new communal gardening team was created, with responsibility for the areas previously covered by the land & water team but also a wider remit to look after the communal herbs, fruit trees and soft fruit, and also to provide support for older or less able members. It was hoped a dedicated team would reduce the neglect of these areas.

Further details on team responsibilities can be seen on the admin noticeboard in the main shed, or by emailing bluebell@grow-our-own.co.uk.

Team leadership also altered considerably at the end of this year. Jane stood down as tools team leader, with Anne-Marie volunteering to replace her. Similarly, Elena has volunteered to replace

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Christine as admin team leader. Peter stood down as land & water team leader, and we do not as yet have a team leader for maintenance/DIY. (Please speak to Gillian if you could volunteer for this role!) Last but not least, Lucy and Tom have volunteered as joint leaders for the communal gardening team. I would like to thank all team leaders, past and present, for their support, dedication and friendship – GO² wouldn't be the same without you!

Admin report – Christine Wilson

After seven years as admin team leader I am stepping down and intend to concentrate on growing vegetables! During that time, I must have met dozens of people, many of whom became members, and I must have allocated every plot we have. I have really enjoyed all this. This year saw some changes: Gillian and Roberta grew into their role as joint coordinators, Hannah went to work in the office, and stricter data protection legislation meant a more controlled way of accessing members' details.

We have had another very busy year and signed up several new members. The rota for Wednesday and Sunday mornings in the shed has worked very well so special thanks to Rita for organising it. Apart from receiving visitors and potential members, those mornings are for catching up on general tasks, and a companionable time to swap news and views over refreshments! We are apparently known around the site for sitting around drinking tea but we spend a great deal of time talking to our growers about plants, to new members about the scheme, other site allotmentees and anyone who turns up!

We continued to publicise the project, putting posters in local shops and the library, and we had a piece in *The Citizen* and also in the EDP.

We may be facing a time of change but I know GO2 has a great future. I am sure there will always be a core of people who will work hard to keep the project running efficiently and open to all. I will always support it as long as I can, and I hope more members will get involved with running it. I would like to thank fellow team leaders for creating such a good team spirit, other members for support and companionship, and, of course, Mahesh who started it all!

Compost – Phil Young

We've had two or three workdays over the last year. These were enough to tidy the compost areas up; cover full composting bays; and open up those ready for use. Many thanks to those of you who have helped over the last year. Please keep an eye on the SLI newsletters for the next workday.

I'm usually around on Sunday mornings – if you have any queries, please feel free to have a word – there is plenty of compost available for use. If you need any advice, just ask – though the general rule is: you can never have enough compost! By the time you read this we should have had another delivery of manure, please also ask if you need any advice on using this.

Food – Moira Froud

This year the Food Team has been busy organising our monthly Foodshare events on the first Sunday of the month. It has been great tasting the variety of different and imaginative recipes baked by our members. Foodshare events are welcoming and friendly and are a good opportunity to share ideas. These occasions were organised and well supported by the Team and plenty of

others contributed. Members also made a variety of jams and chutneys to be sold for the benefit of SLI at Open Days at both Bluebell and Marlpit. There was also the Christmas party with food cooked on the premises at Marlpit Community Centre. Much of the food was grown at the Community Garden. It was a well-attended and enjoyable social occasion rounding off 2017.

Land & water – Peter Medhurst

With the help of many of our fine volunteers some major tasks were completed during the year. All of the water tanks and several of the sheds were rubbed down and re-painted, including the main shed, blue shed and toilet shed. Approximately half the tin shed was painted with galvanised metal paint, but unfortunately we did not have enough time to complete the job. Repairs to shed doors and general maintenance of the Bluebell infrastructure were carried out as and when required.

The toilet shed was found to have some rotting planks on the side wall. These were replaced but the decision was taken that the raised boxes either side of the shed should be removed in the coming winter, as these restrict airflow to the planks of the shed which was believed to be the reason for the rot.

As chair of SLI I would like to record our thanks to those team leaders who are stepping down after quite a few years of service to this great project: they include Jane, Moira, and Christine. I wish the new team leaders all the best for 2018-19.

Seeds and plants – Bridget Beauchamp

My favourite time in the gardening year is a moment in May, when the GO² greenhouse is full to bursting with little plants; runner and borlotti beans, yellow and green courgettes, butternut and other squashes, sweet corn, salads, herbs, flowers – it's a lengthy list. The plants overflow to the holding bed behind the greenhouse, waiting for the last risk of frost to go. This year, the profusion was due to the hard work of many people. Heather, Sheila, Sue, Carole, Mansurah and I sowed the seeds; Janet E and Janet H pricked out salad into modules; Laura, Janet E, Janet J and Christine kept all watered; Roberta, Sheila and Heather planted out tender peppers, aubergines and tomatoes. And many others, whether on duty on Sundays or Wednesdays or just passing by, kept an eye on the trays of plants.

May is also the time when rows of newly germinated seeds appear on plots. Mandy and Caroline kept the supply of seeds for this to happen topped up, making sure there were sufficient little packets available in the main shed. There were popular varieties and, after midsummer, new seeds to try, black radish and different oriental vegetables sown to provide a crop into autumn and over winter.

The extremes of weather, a long cold spring and then the burst into a hot, dry summer, created problems. Not so much for the greenhouse - germination rates were reasonable and there were no thefts of whole trays of plants as there had been last year. But once the plants were out in individual plots, regular watering was needed for them to thrive. A task for this winter is to find ways of communicating how best to combat dry weather, with spacing of plants, mulching and effective watering.

Tools and sheds – Jane Graham

The tools and sheds remain in a stable condition with minor repairs being carried out as and when needed. It was hoped that a tool day could be arranged in October 2017; however there was another event on the same day and it was felt that a check of the tools by the team leader would suffice until the spring of 2018. The shed and tool day was then scheduled for March 2018 but unfortunately the weather situation (snow!) resulted in the event having to be cancelled and again the team leader did a quick inventory and tidy up. Overall the tool supply remains adequate although hand tools still vanish. Some forks and spades could be replenished.

The metal shed containing the lawnmowers and strimmers plus petroleum and various substances remains locked with designated members holding a key. The upkeep and inventory is kept within the shed and is the responsibility of the key holders.

At the volunteering Sunday in May the big shed, blue shed and toilet were prepared and painted with a good turnout of members helping. The blue shed was finished the following week by the team leader when more paint was obtained.

In July the carpet in the big shed was lifted and the floor checked which was found to be in good order. The carpet was re-laid and strong carpet tape used to seal the edges, but unfortunately in the excessive heat of the summer the glue melted so a different method will have to be found to secure the joins.

Marlpit Community Garden

Marlpit Honeybees Report October 2017 – September 2018

by Tish Kerkham

Following a successful season in 2017, our honeybees went into winter 2017 in good condition. All five colonies survived the winter in spite of the stress of a late, cold spring and the 'Beast from the East'.

This season proved challenging for a number of reasons. My poor health meant I was unable to give the bees the attention I would have liked and John also suffered from health problems. Good Samaritans from the Norfolk Bee Keepers' Association, the Norwich and District Bee Keepers' Association and Robin, one of our own grow-at-home members, stepped in to help. However, we lost two swarms early on, and my attempts to prevent further swarming were unsuccessful, with the result that we are going into this winter with only three colonies.

The drought also presented difficulties for our bees, with many species of plants flowering at the same time, and producing less nectar because of lack of water. I observed that on very hot days our honeybees were flying in the early morning and evening, and staying at home during the heat of the day. The result was honey production down on last year's, with 25lbs being extracted in June and a further 20lbs in August. We had to feed the bees with sugar syrup from August through to October.

On the plus side, we are building up a small team of committed bee keepers. John, who has worked with me regularly since summer 2017, attended a bee keeping course this May. Kieron, too, is interested in learning about the management of honeybees, and Simon has been joining us

when work commitments allow. We have given adults and children the opportunity to learn about bees and beekeeping and see bees at work within their hive on our open day and other occasions. I have built up my knowledge by studying for the British Bee Keepers' Association's Module Examinations 2 and 5, 'Honey Bee Products and Forage' and 'Honey Bee Biology', passing both with credit.



Our three colonies are healthy and have good levels of stores for the winter.

Plans for next season

If our colonies overwinter well, I hope to work with the team to build up the numbers again to five colonies. We will continue to offer educational opportunities to members and the public by showing them inside a working hive as well giving talks and providing activities.

Forest Garden Report, by Aaron Wheaton

The past year in the forest garden has been one of getting organised to stay on top of what we already have. More effort was made to keep up with regular chores such as path maintenance. With what extra time we had, we prioritised clearing and mulching smaller trees which were under threat of competition from the vigorous grass growth beneath.

Overall, the garden is developing well, with most of the trees growing nicely having coped with the harsher than normal summer drought with no fatalities.

Despite the hot dry summer, we still had some reasonable yields. Sour cherries, sweet plums, mulberries, sea buckthorn, quince and medlar all cropped nicely. The mulberry and quince were as reliable as ever and fruited very well. Earlier in the summer it looked like we were going to get a good yield of hazelnuts, but it didn't materialise; whether this was due to weather or pest pressure such as squirrels, we are not sure. It also looked like we were going to have a few apricots, but they failed to come to anything. We did however have some Elaeagnus berries to eat in the autumn, Elaeagnus is a very useful species within the forest garden, being both an edible and a nitrogen fixing plant.



Next year, we hope to lay out some larger areas of woven black plastic mulch. The aim of this is to starve the ground of light and create an area of fresh soil ready to be planted into in the future. Hopefully by autumn 2019 or spring 2020 the ground will be ready for planting. We plan to plant a variety of edible herbaceous perennials into this area when ready.