



# SUSTAINABLE LIVING INITIATIVE



## Annual Report 2005-2006

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NORWICH  
City Council

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## Background

This is the first report since the inception of Sustainable Living Initiative (SLI) in June 2005. 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, a Secretary and a Treasurer (see Annex for detail) all of whom do not receive any payment for their services to the organisation. With generous help from members and volunteers, the Secretary manages the day-to-day activities of the organisation.

## Aims and objectives

We aim to promote a good quality of 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, engage in discussion and debates on sustainable consumption, and undertake innovative research on the links between consumption and the quality of life.

## Profile of Activities and Achievements

The main focus of our work, at present, is on practical projects and research into issues related to sustainable consumption. As part of the practical action, we have started a "grow-our-own" allotment project, aimed at encouraging and supporting people to grow their own vegetables and fruit. Other activities (proposed) include recycling, composting and organising a forum to initiate discussion on lifestyle and culture of consumption in the context of sustainable development. Details of activities and achievements are discussed in the following sections.

### ***Grow-Our Own scheme (GO<sup>2</sup>)***

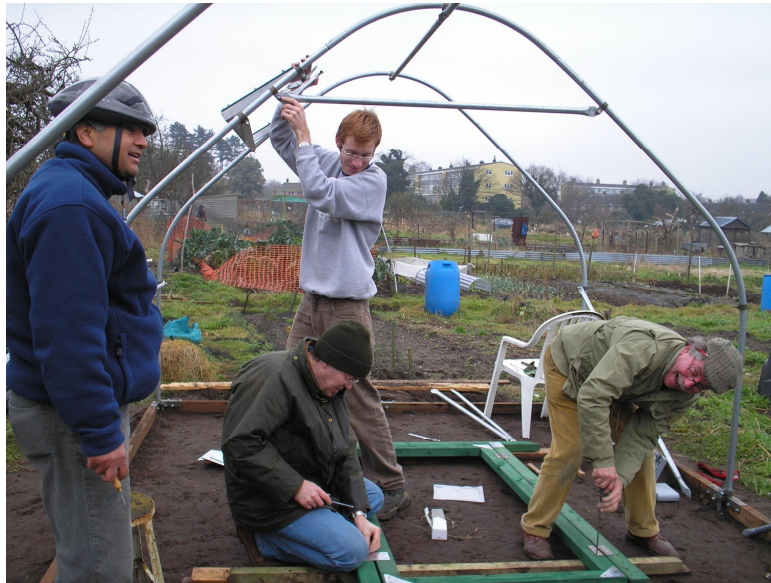
The main aim of the GO<sup>2</sup> scheme is to help those who are interested in growing fruit and vegetables but have little or no experience. Under this scheme, we offer practical help and advice on what to grow, when to grow it and how to get seeds, compost, and so on. The emphasis is on sharing resources such as tools, seeds and seedlings to minimise waste. The support is provided for at least a year, after which time the growers are encouraged to share a plot with someone else, thereby helping another newcomer to grow fruit and vegetables. In this way, we hope to nurture a 'grow-our-own' culture in Norwich.

Apart from growing fruit and vegetables of one's choice and maintaining the plot, we believe that it is important to promote collective action and to be kind to nature. To this end, we encourage cooperation between growers and promote organic practices in growing fruit, vegetables and herbs.

The GO<sup>2</sup> scheme started in the autumn of 2004 in Bluebell South Allotments (on the Avenues, Norwich). Two 10-rod size plots were rented from the Norwich City Council for this purpose. A leaflet explaining the importance of growing fruit and vegetables

and offering practical help and advice was circulated using personal contacts. There was a very good response to the call. Eight people took part in the scheme in the first year, some of whom are continuing to grow vegetables on allotments.

Encouraged by the success of the pilot project, we expanded the GO<sup>2</sup> scheme in the second year. We rented additional eight plots from the Norwich City Council. We also received a Community Grant of £5000 from the Norwich City Council for the scheme. This first grant enabled us to buy a greenhouse for propagating seeds, buy



*Members busy assembling the greenhouse*



*Ready-to-Use Greenhouse*

tools and office equipment and pay for plot clearing. Two of our members received mentoring training in organic gardening and second-hand gardening tools from Garden Organic, previously Henry Doubleday Research Association (HDRA) at Ryton, Coventry during this period.

We had a total of 28 growers in the second year, of whom 18 were women. Most of these growers (who had little or no previous experience in growing) managed to grow at least some vegetables, herbs and soft fruit. All but one have signed up for the second year, some expanding the size of their plots as well.



*Vegetable Plants Growing in the Greenhouse*

### ***Pick-Your-Own Scheme (PYO)***

For those who have little spare time or are physically unable to work on the allotment, the Pick-Your-Own scheme offers an opportunity to come and pick organically grown produce from the allotments once a week. Additionally, organisers of parties and special events can come and get fresh salad and herbs, simply by contacting us in advance and then collecting their order. It is hoped that the PYO scheme will help people to 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. Since the start of the scheme in the summer of 2004, over £300 worth of fresh produce has been sold. In addition to this, the surplus produce has been used in exchange for goods and services such as beanpoles and plot clearing.

With regard to the number of pickers, it is changing all the time; most of the pickers have now joined the GO<sup>2</sup> scheme, which means that they are producing their own vegetables. Others are working as volunteers in the organisation - in which case they get produce free of charge in return for their contribution. We hope to have new pickers in the coming season. In addition to individuals, we also supply fresh vegetables to a nursery school in the Earham area.



### ***Food Events***

The main purpose of the food event is primarily social - that is to bring together the friends and families affiliated with the organisation. The event provides opportunities for children and families of the affiliated members to gain greater awareness about sustainable living and promote cooperation and friendship.

The first annual food event took place in the summer of 2005. Over 30 people attended the event. This included all the first Directors of SLI and their families, some of the growers and their friends and families and other well-wishers.



*Figure 4: SLI Food Event July 2006*

The menu for the food event was based around the produce available on the allotments. All the members and growers brought a dish made out of allotment produce. The result was an impressive range of dishes made from the fresh produce grown on allotments.

Following on from the success of the first food event, a second food event was organised in July 2006.

### ***Open day***

As the food event was mainly an "invitee only" event, it was decided to organise an open day with a view to sharing knowledge about growing and using allotment produce. The event was organised in association with the Norfolk Organic Group (NOG). A committee was set up to plan and organise the event. SLI members, NOG executive members and the participants of the GO2 scheme played active roles in organising and making the event a success.

Apart from advertising the event in the local media, over 500 leaflets were distributed in areas adjacent to the Bluebell South Allotments with a view to encouraging local

people to grow their own fruit, vegetables and herbs on allotments and in their own gardens.



*Open Day, August 2006 – Visitors Appreciating the Display of Food*



*Open Day - Range of Dishes Available*

Despite the torrential rain, the event was a success; more than 40 people visited the event and a wide selection of food cooked using allotment produce was available for tasting (see the box below for a sample of menu).

### ***Sample of Menu***

- Spicy Potatoes
- Fat Hen<sup>1</sup>, Chard and Courgette Quiche
- Baked Beetroot
- Barbequed Courgette
- Summer pudding
- Spiced Blackberry and Apple Crumble
- Apple Pies
- Courgette Cake
- Basil Pesto

In addition to the display of cooked food and recipe ideas using allotment produce, the event also included educational games and a tour of the allotment. The main purpose of these games was to raise awareness about local food and food production. In a game called 'know your fruit, vegetables and herbs', participants were given a list of fruit, vegetables and herbs (see the box below) without the code number; they had to find out the fruit, vegetables and herbs on the allotment by matching the name on the list with the corresponding code number cited next to the plant. Of the total 6 people who took part in this game, two knew all the plants on the list and the rest knew more than half of the plants on the list.

### ***Know Your Fruit, Vegetables and Herbs!***

13. Apple	21. Cucumber	11. Pumpkin
02. Asparagus	18. Gooseberry	19. Raspberries
16. Aubergine	03. Leek	30. Rhubarb
27. Basil	20. Lettuce	22. Rosemary
10. Beetroot	20. Melon	28. Runner beans
12. Blackberry	25. Parsley	23. Sage
08. Butternut squash	14. Pear	06. Strawberry
04. Carrot	17. Pepper	07. Sweet corn
05. Chard	15. Plum	26. Tarragon
01. Courgette	09. Potato	24. Thyme

The 'taste the potatoes' game was aimed at assessing the differences in taste between the produce from allotments and the supermarket. For this purpose, two lots of boiled potatoes – one organically grown on the allotments and the other bought from the supermarket – were offered without disclosing the origin of the produce. Participants were asked to give their opinion by placing a tick in the appropriate box (see below).

<sup>1</sup> *Chenopodium album* (a small wild plant that grows profusely in summer).



***Taste the Potatoes!***

Number of people taking part	Which is the tastiest potato?		
	A	B	Cannot Tell the difference
24	20	3	1

Note: A was an allotment potato, grown organically, whilst B was a value potato from a supermarket.

***Research***

With a view to exploring the links between sustainable consumption and knowledge about food production and consumption, we would like to carry out research focusing on how to make greater use of allotments for growing food. Since allotments are concentrated in city areas, they could play a key role in promoting knowledge about food and food production among the urban population.

The UK has a long history of people growing fruit and vegetable on allotments. During the Second World War, the "dig for the victory campaign" encouraged self-sufficiency at the national and regional level. Evidence suggests that allotments produced about half of the nation's fruit and vegetable needs in the 1940s.

A number of recent studies have highlighted the 'practical' and 'therapeutic' value of allotments. These include: fresh produce, physical exercise, social cohesion, emotional attachment, environmental benefits, benefits to the general public in terms of green space, and promotion and maintenance of bio-diversity. It has also been suggested that allotments and community gardens still could supply a substantial amount of our fruit and vegetable requirements.

At present, there are 1450 allotment plots on 18 sites across Norwich<sup>2</sup>: that makes one allotment plot per 38 households on average. The City Council's statistics about the waiting lists for an allotment tell us little about how allotments are managed and utilised in actual practice. In fact, nearly half of the plots that are officially termed 'occupied' are in a state of neglect<sup>3</sup>. It is hard to comprehend why such a valuable source of leisure, pleasure, physical exercise and food production has been overlooked.

As part of the initial enquiry, we have completed the field-based observation of individual plots in two allotment sites in Norwich City Council area to assess the extent of utilisation, under-utilisation and neglect. This task was carried out in the summer of 2006 with the help of two local plot holders who knew the two sites well. Further work including a questionnaire survey and in-depth case studies involving the current allotment users will be carried out in 2007 subject to the availability of funding.

<sup>2</sup> This figure includes Norwich City Council managed allotments only.

<sup>3</sup> Based on personal observations of allotment sites in Norwich during the summer of 2005.

### **Website**

Following a test run of the SLI web site, the final version was launched in April 2006 (please see [www.grow-our-own.co.uk](http://www.grow-our-own.co.uk)). The site contains useful information about growing vegetables. We plan to add information about organic and fair-traded goods, ethical services and recycling in the near future.

### **Media**

In 2006, we had a lot of publicity in the media including Radio Norfolk and EDP Evening News. In addition to this, articles about GO<sup>2</sup> were published in Norfolk Organic Group Newsletters (see February-April and May-July, 2006 issues).

### **Finance**

The Community grant received from the Norwich City Council for the GO<sup>2</sup> allotment project at the beginning of 2006 helped to create facilities for the project. In addition to this, donations from members and well-wishers and the income from the sale of plants and vegetables have contributed to improve the financial position of the organisation (please see Annex for details). Moreover, the voluntary contribution of labour and time offered by members and volunteers for a range of activities has been the major source of support for the organisation and greatly accounts for the success we have achieved during 2005/06. We will build on this success in the years to come.

### **What the People Say**

As mentioned earlier, the number of growers, pickers and volunteers joining our scheme is increasing rapidly. In addition to this, the number of people visiting our website and contacting us by telephone and e-mail for information and advice is growing. With a view to further improving the quality of services we provide, we asked our growers to send their comments about the scheme. Here are some excerpts from growers' feedback:

*"Good that you provide a shed with the basic tools - so I can go up there on my bike no problem. Even better that you help with seedlings and compost - these are major services and make it easy for someone with limited time on their hands. It's been nice meeting some new people too."*

*"The scheme has been a useful way of getting some basic knowledge about identifying and growing common garden vegetables. I found your advice and help in planting and supplying seedlings and bulbs very useful. My family have been eating all of my produce and we have only bought a few vegetables from the market. Other members at the allotment site have been supportive and inspirational. The lack of time available -when working fulltime is a problem. The plants show the lack of care, especially when frequent watering is needed. I hope to grow some winter vegetables and use a bicycle instead of my car next year."*

*"Excellent: friendly, welcoming, useful advice, leaflets by e-mails, tools, seedlings to plant out, social events."*

*Could improve: tool care cleaning order in shed, compost bins – what to put in and what not, information on plant varieties, i.e. names, attributes.”*

*"Fantastic! I would never have thought to grow anything on my own. But the concept of small manageable plots of land, with both knowledge and materials available has made it surprisingly easy. Most of all, it's been fun to do it in a loose community of people and share events etc.*

*I don't like change! It seems great as it is.”*

*"As a single woman, recently retired, the project is excellent for people on their own. I would not have taken a full-size plot; it would have been far too big for my needs... A by-product is the sociable nature of the project. There are often people nearby and this makes the allotment site feel a safe place to be.*

*Sharing resources (seeds, plants, tools and greenhouse space) means that I've tried out things, growing a greater variety of plants that I might otherwise have done.*

*I have found the physical activity enjoyable and energizing – I'm sure it does and will keep me healthy. The fresh vegetables and fruit taste immeasurably better than anything I could have bought. It's also good to be part of a project that enables me to have a more ethical lifestyle – that encourages making good use of the planet's resources. The sharing ethos works for me too; it feels unforced and sustainable.”*

## **Plan for the future**

The GO<sup>2</sup> project has evolved from a pilot scheme to a full-fledged programme within a short period of two years. Our priority for the next year is to consolidate the achievements made so far and further improve access and participation. To this end we have developed an outline proposal for the establishment of a Centre in Bluebell South Allotments site. The main features of the centre are:

- An information centre which will provide advice and information on growing fruit and vegetables and composting. For this purpose, a timber shed will be built. The centre will be open for visitors from schools, clubs, scouts and gardening groups as well to the general public.
- More plots of various shapes and sizes for growers. We will have space available for up to 60 growers at any time. We are also working on improving facilities for children and people with disability and making at least some plots accessible to these specific groups. A small number of plots will be made available to groups of young people from schools, scouts etc.
- A larger picnic/sitting area for the growers as well as for visitors.
- A composting toilet with disabled access for the growers and visitors as there are no toilet facilities on the allotment at present.
- Community Support Scheme. Apart from helping people to grow vegetables on allotments, we are extending our support to people who live around the Bluebell South Allotments site and are interested in growing vegetables and fruit in their own gardens. We will provide all the help people need – training,

seeds and seedlings - through our centre based at Bluebell South Allotments on the Avenues.

- Volunteer Scheme. For those who are unable to commit time for growing but are interested in helping others in return for free produce from the allotment, there will always be opportunities to get involved in various aspects of gardening work.
- Pick-Your-Own Scheme. We will increase the range of seasonal fruit, vegetables and herbs available for picking, particularly focusing on the needs of families with children.

Other activities planned for the coming year includes:

- Re-use and re-cycling. At the moment, we use a range of packaging materials for growing seedlings in the green house, collect juice/milk cartoons and take them to the recycling centre at Mile Cross now and again. One of our members has successfully lobbied the management of Waitrose at Eaton in Norwich to install a bin on site so that customers can bring back the plastic bags they use to take home their Waitrose shopping. We will do more work in this area in the coming year.
- Cookery club. The idea is to introduce simple, seasonal recipes using allotment produce. We would like to organise a couple cookery sessions and produce a newsletter in the year 2007.
- Discussion forum on life style and culture of consumption. The activities, such as growing our own fruit and vegetables, recycling and reusing, composting certainly contribute to sustainable living. However, it is our values and attitudes towards consumption and possession of material wealth that are key to sustainable living. The key question is: How much do we really need to live healthily and happily? We would like to set up a forum to discuss about various aspects of life style and consumption for this purpose.



## **Acknowledgements**

The Community grant received from the Norwich City Council; training and tools received from Garden Organic; the continuous help and support provided by the members and volunteers; the moral and financial support and encouragement from the Directors (current as well as past) and well-wishers; and the enthusiasm and commitment of the growers and pickers have greatly helped us to travel forward smoothly. We would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your help, support and commitment over the past year.

Happy Gardening!

Mahesh Pant

## **Annex**

### **Company Information** **for the period from 6<sup>th</sup> June 2005 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2006**

**DIRECTORS:** S Clinch  
C O'Hanlon  
K Hudson  
G Kaufmann (resigned 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2006)  
P Medhurst  
A Pittock

**SECRETARY:** M Pant

**TREASURER:** A Taylor

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

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

**Income and Expenditure Account Detail**  
**for the period from 6<sup>th</sup> June 2005 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2006**

<b>INCOME</b>		<b>£</b>
1.	<b>Sales Income</b>	<b>378</b>
	Vegetable sales	331
	Plant sales	47
2.	<b>Recurring Income</b>	<b>399</b>
	Plot rent	315
	Members fees	65
	Seed kitty	19
3.	<b>Other Income</b>	<b>6,441</b>
	Income from individual donations	1,429
	Income from grants	5,000
	Interest	12
TOTAL INCOME		<b>7,218</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>		
1.	<b>Direct Expenditure</b>	<b>1,322</b>
	Plot rent	191
	Seeds	433
	Manure	221
	Labour	239
	Small tools	238
2.	<b>Office &amp; Garden Equipments</b>	<b>2,564</b>
	Computer & printer	1,015
	Garden equipments	1,549
3.	<b>Overhead Expenditure</b>	<b>768</b>
	Telephone & Internet	278
	Postage	30
	Stationary	71
	Travel	105
	Training	100
	Subscriptions	57
	Professional fees	127
4.	<b>Corporation tax payable on surplus</b>	<b>261</b>
TOTAL EXPENDITURE		<b><u>4,915</u></b>

<b>Surplus income for period</b>	<b><u>2,303</u></b>
Cash at bank at period end	3,281
Less amounts payable to Creditors:	
Corporation tax	261
Due to Mahesh Pant to reimburse payments made on behalf of SLI from own pocket	648
Key deposits repayable to members on leaving Scheme	<u>69</u>
Surplus funds carried forward	<u><u>2,303</u></u>