

Southsea Green (2010-Present)

Introduction to Our Aims

Southsea Green was founded in 2013 with a simple yet powerful vision: To create a thriving community garden where local people can come together to grow their own food and plants, support local produce, and connect with nature. As our garden has flourished, so too has our purpose. Beyond encouraging sustainable growing, we are dedicated to preserving local plants and wildlife, offering a peaceful retreat for reflection and well-being, and providing a space for creativity and artistic expression. We strive to be a hub for learning, where people of all ages can develop gardening skills and embrace sustainable living. Our garden is also a place of friendship and community, fostering connections that bring people together. With deep roots in Southsea's history, we honour the past while shaping a greener, more connected future. Above all, Southsea Green aims to inspire a greater awareness and appreciation of our environment, enriching lives through nature.

The Southsea Greenhouse Community cooperative grew in 2010 from a seed idea that germinated a desire for collaboration, growing local and for sharing a secret seafront garden. From a small shop on the promenade to vegetable box delivery and seaside floristry, these seafront ventures in the heart of Southsea led to the discovery of a forgotten wasteland with a 500-year history inside Canoe Lake gardens. A piece of land, overgrown, which is now a thriving community garden—Southsea's very own experience of The Secret Garden brought to life. The discovery was made by visionary founder Sue Stokes with many others following in her footsteps to continue the garden's legacy and rich history.

Identifying Needs

Southsea Greenhouse was more than just a garden—it was a vision for a healthier, more connected community. We saw the struggles of families on tight budgets with the need for nutritious meals, the challenges of learning to cook well with limited resources, and the importance of a shared response to food poverty. By working alongside local food banks and community groups, we have helped bring people together to learn, grow, and nourish both body and sense of purpose.

- In a 2022 survey, 94% of Portsmouth residents reported an increase in their cost of living, with 97% attributing it to rising food prices and 88% to higher gas or electricity bills. Over half of the residents responded by spending less on nonessentials, using less fuel at home, or cutting back on food shopping and essentials (Portsmouth City Council, Public Health Annual Report 2023 - Executive Summary, 2023.)

- Available at: <https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2024/02/public-health-annual-report-2023-exec-summary.pdf>

We recognised the need for spaces where older residents, those with disabilities, and individuals with special needs could find solace, purpose, and companionship. A garden, after all, is not just a place to grow plants—it is a place to restore spirits. At the same time, the city’s need for green spaces and long allotment waiting lists made it clear that access to nature and growing space was more vital than ever.

- Community gardens have been shown to offer health benefits and foster a greater appreciation for the local environment, promoting sustainability and inclusion within urban settings (ResearchGate, Community Gardens: Sustainability, Health, and Inclusion in the City, 2013.)
- Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254316548_Community_gardens_Sustainability_health_and_inclusion_in_the_city

We have welcomed asylum seekers into the garden, offering them a place of belonging, skill-sharing, and community support. Many arrive in the UK with diverse skills and a strong willingness to contribute, and the garden provides a space where they can apply themselves meaningfully. Through plant labelling workshops and creative initiatives, they learn English in a practical, hands-on way—engaging with visitors, sharing knowledge, and gaining confidence in their new environment. The outdoor setting not only fosters language development but also provides a sense of purpose, connection, and well-being, helping them integrate into the wider community.

- Asylum seeker volunteers have been actively contributing to the Southsea Green Community Garden since autumn 2022, engaging in various activities such as building raised beds, repairing facilities, and enhancing the garden's aesthetics (Portsmouth City of Sanctuary, Asylum seeker volunteers use their gardening skills, 2023.)
- Available at: <https://portsmouth.cityofsanctuary.org/2023/08/07/asylumseeker-volunteers-use-their-gardening-skills>

Through our early projects like Portsmouth in Bloom, which encouraged homes, businesses and schools to brighten the city with flowers and food, grown between April and July. We placed flowers and vegetables in gardens and street verges, and on

balconies and in pots all over the city. Thousands of people from across Portsmouth participated in this celebration of colour, skills and creativity, which also enabled those with little experience to learn from others. We harvested opportunities to champion sustainable growing, encourage food sharing, and inspire a shift away from waste towards abundance—an ode to our discovery of this overgrown preservation site; a wasteland transformed into a community garden. At Southsea Green, every seed sown is a step towards a greener, more inclusive future—where the act of growing plants is also an act of growing community.

Our Vision and Growth 2010-onwards

Our vision for Southsea Greenhouse Cooperative Ltd has always been to create a community with local people at its heart. Through the dedication of many volunteers and various iterations, this remains our shared objective. Southsea Greenhouse was launched as a cooperative—a social enterprise that has evolved organically in response to opportunities, establishing itself as a trusted brand in the local area. By meeting identified needs and staying true to our local ethos, we have continued to deliver meaningful benefits to the community.

What began as an idea to promote local growing—offering multiple benefits such as improved health and well-being, reduced food miles, support for local businesses, and skills development—soon found its first home in a council-provided striped beach hut on the promenade. Selling fresh produce, the hut quickly attracted attention and became a hub for local artists and crafters.

<https://fb.watch/xkZLiflKgl/>

As the community grew, so did our vision. The initiative expanded to include all locally made products, and a new home was found at the Pyramids in exchange for maintaining the tropical plants—bartering being another core pillar of our founding philosophy.

Recognising the importance of this local social enterprise, Portsmouth City Council supported our tender for land. With the backing of Councillor Lee Hunt and after a year of legal processes, including soil testing, we finally secured a permanent home. The council acknowledged the project's potential to make a real difference in the local community.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZDQE9RbqxnJU_selk8HNZLDTm7ilopcnFdwIA_1gc5s/edit

From 2013 onward, we worked to transform a derelict strip of overgrown land, littered with old masonry, into a thriving green space. While waiting for the land to be reclassified as agricultural, we collaborated with the council to encourage local growing

across the city—demonstrating that gardening and volunteering are valuable and viable activities. With a grant from Hampshire and Isle of Wight Community Foundation, along with countless hours of hard work and support from local businesses, we installed a cabin to serve as a space for selling and bartering produce.

Our launch event was a resounding success, attended by the Lord Mayor and covered by Radio Solent's *Good Life* programme. The celebration featured live entertainment from local bands, including the Batala band, Pompey Pluckers, and Becki Short. Local crafters showcased their handmade items around Canoe Lake Park, while raffles, cake competitions, and community activities brought people together. This event not only marked our official arrival but also helped attract many new volunteers inspired by our mission.

The transformation of the land was made possible through the dedication of many, including SSE, the Portsmouth Payback team, and our invaluable volunteers, who helped cultivate the soil and establish planting beds and garden structures. Eager to grow and collaborate, we reached out to organisations across the city, forging partnerships to strengthen and support the wider community.

<https://www.aboutmyarea.co.uk/Hampshire/Portsmouth/PO6/News/LocalNews/27704-2-Portsmouth-Community-Garden-In-Running-For-Funding-Boost>

Some interesting statistics

An early evaluation exercise counted 400+ visitors over one summer (figure extrapolated by number of days and times our gardeners were present).

- We helped 9 other groups with education and resources for growing and volunteering.
- Provided growing space for 12-14 groups and individuals who grow food and try new ways of growing.
- Supported campaigns/events for keeping the city's focus on the environment and community, these included:
 - Portsmouth Food Partnership
 - Open gardens Wildflower planting
 - Stronger Together Picnic to remember Jo Cox
 - Keep Pompey Green campaign
 - Keep Milton Green campaign
 - Green Drinks

- All things Bright and Beautiful (Portsmouth Cathedral)
- Victorious Festival <https://fb.watch/xkZzOqXYyW/>
- Square Tower events
- St Mary's May fair
- The Over 60s Festival
- Kitchen Theatre
- Southsea Food Festival
- The Southsea Show
- Portsmouth Friends of the Earth events
- Green Party campaign
- Friends of Cumberland House events
- Natural History museum events
- Hampshire and IOW Wildlife events

Workshops and Partnerships

We quickly discovered that one of the most effective ways to inspire engagement, make a lasting impact, and create a true sense of community was through hands-on workshops. With funding from several sources—including the European Social Fund, National Lottery Community Fund, Portsmouth Lottery, Tesco's *Bags of Help*, The Partnership, and the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Community Fund—we were able to offer free workshops focused on skill development. This led to the creation of our *Skillshops* programme, which soon became synonymous with the Southsea Greenhouse brand.

Recognised for nurturing local gardening talent, Southsea Green became a trusted community resource. Our experienced gardeners were always eager to share their knowledge, reinforcing the educational and social mission of our enterprise. This commitment to learning and inclusion earned us recognition as the *Best Social Enterprise* at the inaugural *Shaping Portsmouth Enterprise Awards*. We were equally proud to receive an *Outstanding* rating in the *South & South East in Bloom Awards* for our community garden—just one year after its launch. These achievements were made possible by the dedication and enthusiasm of our volunteers and supporters.

We established a number of exhibitions and events partnering with schools and businesses, for example, *Yellow Kite* and *Southsea Coffee Company*. These partnerships allowed us to engage across the breadth of the city, uniting our members via gardening

and crafting and growing events like 'A million Trees'. Local events proved to be great at communicating our messages, creating awareness throughout the area and providing a platform for participation throughout the community.

Our drive for inclusivity and outreach led to collaborations with organisations such as *The Beneficial Foundation*, *Shaw Trust*, *Pompey in the Community*, *Catch 22*, and the *Recovery Café*. These partnerships enabled us to share resources, expand skill sets, and create meaningful opportunities for individuals facing social and economic challenges. Through this work, many of our members found a renewed sense of purpose, building confidence and fostering personal growth.

Strong working relationships were also formed with *Friends of the Earth*, *Friends of Cumberland House*, *John Pounds Centre*, and *The King's Theatre*, further embedding Southsea Green within the wider community. By supporting environmentally focused campaigns in a non-political capacity, we extended our reach across the city and gained the support of local councils and MPs, creating mutually beneficial relationships that strengthened our impact.

One of our most valued partnerships was with our neighbours, *The Canoe Lake Leisure Group*, who manage the nearby tennis facilities and café. Recognising our role in the community, they offered invaluable support with signage, security, transport, waste management, and practical advice.

Our long-standing media connections—including *Portsmouth News*, *About My Area*, *Love Southsea*, *Radio Solent*, and *Express FM*—have helped amplify our message. Our weekly articles in *The News* continue to keep those without online access informed about our latest projects and initiatives. Additionally, meeting notes, short films, and community updates are archived on our website, ensuring a living record of our journey remains accessible to all.

Art and Expression

Art and creativity have long been intertwined with our vision. Throughout the summer months, arts facilitator Beverley Richardson continues to lead inspiring weekly art groups, offering a space where individuals of all backgrounds can explore their creativity in the tranquil surroundings of the garden. Meanwhile, project contributor John Ashlin hosts weekly gardening groups, guiding participants in cultivating plants to build purpose, knowledge, and community.

In the summer of 2024, our community garden welcomed individuals from over ten different countries. A remarkable exchange of languages, stories, and traditions unfolded—proving that outdoor spaces are places to grow plants and grow understanding, unity, and shared purpose. The simple act of working together in nature

fostered a deep sense of belonging, demonstrating the profound role that green spaces play in building cohesion between diverse communities.

Our commitment to harnessing the power of creativity continues through our collaboration with Claire and Steve from *Seekers Create*. Their passion for blending nature and artistic expression has brought a new dimension to our educational outreach. Through school workshops and immersive outdoor lessons, they help students connect with the natural world, using creativity as a tool to inspire environmental awareness and artistic confidence. By planting these seeds of imagination, they nurture the next generation of thinkers, makers, and caretakers of our planet.

At Southsea Green, every seed sown—whether in the soil or in the imagination—contributes to a future where community, creativity, and sustainability flourish side by side.

Through the Grapevine

Our well-maintained website, social media platforms, and online garden talks enable us to remain successful at delivering our messages and are a constant link with the community even when there are no current events or workshops. While it is important in maintaining a profile, we found that it was always the events and workshops that were offered that increased community and volunteer engagement. It is through good relationships with other voluntary organisations like Action Hampshire and Learning Links, with support from the Partnership and Portsmouth Together that we grew stronger.

Back to Our Roots: 2025 and Beyond

As we look ahead to 2025, Southsea Green is launching an exciting new initiative: Themed plot allocation. This project will transform our growing beds into living exhibitions, each designed to educate and inspire the public while strengthening collaboration with local artists, educators, and community groups.

Through this initiative, selected projects will be allocated growing beds where plants will serve as interactive learning tools and enhance community collaboration. Each themed plot will tell a unique story—whether it's about sustainable textiles, historical uses of plants, cultural traditions, or ecological conservation. Visitors touring the garden will gain new insights into how plants shape our world, fostering a deeper connection between nature, creativity, and community.

A standout example of this concept is our ongoing collaboration with Alice Hume of Vanderhume, a Hotwalls Studios artist who exhibited at the historic Round Tower. In her project, she grew flax in one of our beds, harvested the fibres, and spun them into yarn to create woven artwork such as tapestries. This process not only demonstrated the journey

from plant to textile but also educated visitors about traditional fibre arts, sustainability, and craftsmanship.

For 2025, we will expand this initiative by inviting more community-led projects to create themed beds that offer diverse educational experiences.

Conclusion

As Southsea Green continues to evolve, we remain steadfast in our commitment to fostering an inclusive, sustainable, and educational community space. What began as a vision to reclaim and restore a long-forgotten piece of land has flourished into a nature-inspired outdoor hub for environmental awareness, artistic collaboration, and community connection. Through the power of growing, creativity, and shared knowledge, we have demonstrated that green spaces are more than just places to cultivate plants—they are essential to learning, expression, and community resilience.

Looking ahead, our 2025 Themed Plot Allocation Initiative marks an exciting new chapter. By integrating storytelling into our growing beds, we will provide interactive and educational experiences that connect visitors with the historical, cultural, and ecological significance of plants. This initiative builds on our tradition of innovation and collaboration, inviting local artists, educators, and community groups to engage with nature in meaningful and inspiring ways.

The success of Southsea Green has always been rooted in the dedication and passion of its people. Volunteers, supporters, and partners have been instrumental in shaping our journey, and as we move forward, their contributions will remain at the heart of our progress. We invite everyone—whether experienced growers, aspiring gardeners, or those simply looking for a sense of community—to join us in cultivating a greener, more connected future.

With deep roots in Southsea's past and a clear vision for the future, we can continue to nurture and grow a lasting legacy of sustainability, creativity, and community. 2010

Founded by Sue Stokes, Marion Dawson, and Nigel Huggins

