



## Southsea Greenhouse: Our Roots and History

*“They don’t just grow plants, they grow people too”* Wendy Allen, a valued volunteer who we sadly lost to Cancer in 2018 - A Damson tree is planted in her memory halfway up the garden.



**Vision:** To make locally grown and made produce the economy of choice and way of life in Portsmouth, through co-operative and community approaches.

Our ethos is growing, volunteering and sourcing of local produce, to establish a community garden and encourage local people to grow their own food and plants and buy local produce.

Portsmouth is a wealthy city of 208,889 people with pockets of deprivation broken down as 37,900 children (under 15), 140,400 aged between 16-64 and 28,500 aged over 65. Portsmouth has a diverse population, White, Asian, Black, Polish and

Chinese communities and 750 to 1,000 of no settlement, i.e. refugees or homeless people.

These statistics support the need for a community garden. When we started Southsea Greenhouse we also recognised additional priorities in the area, the need to support families with low skills and low incomes with healthy eating and exercise programmes and how to cook on a budget and improve cooking skills and nutrition. We wanted to be part of a coordinated community response together with local food banks and agencies supporting families in poverty. Additionally, Portsmouth has a rising older generation of those aged over 65 and the disabled or groups with special needs who we knew would benefit from a community garden and outreach services from it. The City also has diminishing green spaces and therefore, access to gardens and grow space and there is a long waiting list for allotments. We also wanted to support a drive to reduce food waste, share food and encourage people to grow their own and buy local.

3.5% of local population are aged over 60, there is a growing elder generation and rising unemployment, particularly for over 50s, and for people with mental health issues. The people in these group we have surveyed are concerned about isolation and price and access to quality food in Portsmouth.

[Southsea Green website](#)

[Source figures Star and Crescent](#)

[Portsmouth Poverty Strategy](#)

### **Southsea Green Timeline by location**

2010: SG was founded by Sue Stokes, Marion Dawson, and Nigel Huggins. In the period 2011-2014 we were based at the Pyramids Centre. Between 2013 to 2020 we operated from the Community Garden on Canoe Lake Park.

Our vision for Southsea Greenhouse Cooperative Ltd has always been to create a community with local people at the heart of it. Through many volunteers and various iterations, this is still our shared objective. Southsea Greenhouse launched as a Cooperative, a social enterprise which has evolved organically responding to opportunities, establishing itself as a trusted brand in the local area, delivering for the community by meeting identified needs, always staying true to our local ethos.

Beginning as an idea to promote local growing with multiple benefits of health, well being, reduction of food miles, buying local and delivering skills. The first premises were a council provided striped beach hut on the promenade selling produce which attracted much attention and soon became a hub for local artists and crafters. The community quickly evolved and the brief was expanded to include all local products while a new home was found at the Pyramids in exchange for maintaining the tropical

plants, bartering being another core pillar of why the organisation was founded.

Portsmouth City Council recognised the importance of this local social enterprise and our tender for the land at Canoe Lake was supported by Councillor Lee Hunt and after a year of legalities and soil testing etc, we found a forever home. PCC recognised the project as having the potential to make a difference in the local community.

Extract from email written by Councillor Lee Hunt that endorses the use of the land for the community...

"As we come to the end of the year - gardeners and growers will be preparing the earth for this season's growing of fruit & vegetables. The Southsea Greenhouse local cooperative is becoming more ensconced in the local scene and winning backers every day.

We have committed to leasing the land, described above, so that Sue and her volunteers can grow a ready supply of seasonal organic produce; this scheme also forms part of the city's bid to the HLF 'Parks for the People' bid being led by Vincent Mount in the design team. If successful and so long as the Cabinet agree to keep the 'capital' budget money in place, and even add to it - then this could see a £1million ' Canoe Lake Park' improvement scheme. The use of the land by a local cooperative is one of the headline grabbing features we are promoting.

For the reasons above it is important that we complete this agreement with Southsea greenhouse forthwith, so where are we on a timescale with this.

Kind regards,  
Cllr Lee Hunt"

So, from 2013 we developed the garden from this derelict strip of land which was overgrown and full of old masonry. We waited for the land to be categorised as agricultural land and then worked with the council to encourage more local growing across the city and began getting the message across that gardening and volunteering is a valuable and viable activity.

Thousands of hours later, and by as many people, the garden has transformed into a community green-space which we are proud to share with others, especially those with nowhere to grow their own.

A grant from Hampshire and IOW Community Foundation and many hours of hard work where we were supported by local businesses meant that we were able to install our cabin which provided a space to sell and barter produce. In celebration, our launch event was a huge success, attended by the Lord Mayor and Radio Solent's 'Good Life' programme, with entertainment by local bands, including the Batala band, Pompey Pluckers and Becki Short.

Crafters showed off their local and handmade items around Canoe Lake Park and

there were raffles, cake competitions and our community hub was established. This not only announced our arrival to the world, but also gained us many potential volunteers excited by the concept.

Ambitious to grow and collaborate we reached out to organisations across the City and developed plans to strengthen and support the community. This report aims to share the highs and lows of the social enterprise as we look back from 2020 over the seven years of the community garden.

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### **Cross Pollination**

Open and inclusive, we established relationships with organisations such as The Beneficial Foundation and Shaw Trust, Pompey in the Community, and the Recovery Cafe. This great initiative was fantastic for Southsea Greenhouse, who benefitted from a wider skill base and shared resources, and by providing new opportunities for the clients of these organisations, who found the work empowering and benefitted from increased confidence on their road to recovery.

We established great working relationships across the area successfully collaborating with Friends of the Earth, Friends of Cumberland House, John Pounds Centre and the King's Theatre.

**A special mention must be for our golden girls Vik Burnand and Sarah Clark of 'Marigold Loft'**, whose gentleness and perseverance brought young people to our midst.... some troubled, some inspired to take part in creative enterprise and therapeutic delights which we all shared. Their warmth and creativity is still captured in the revamped portacabin, the painted benches and the marigolds in the Catch 22 bed.

We supported campaigns on green issues (apolitically). Using this joined up approach to community we were able to benefit the North of the City as well as gaining support from our local council and MPs, and relationships were mutually beneficial. One of our most important relationships was formed with our neighbours, The Canoe Lake Leisure Group, who recognised our role in the community, as did PCC giving us practical support with signage, time, security, transport, waste and advice.

Our long running relationship with Portsmouth News, About my Area, Love Southsea, Radio Solent and Express FM helped keep our message alive and our weekly articles in the News, even today, keep those who are not online briefed on our latest news. All

this along with meeting notes and film shorts, are kept archived on our website, which is kept up to date by Chris of Webations with gardening stories and updates on the community garden.

[www.southseagreen.uk](http://www.southseagreen.uk)



### **Engage, Encourage and Nurture**

Bartering has been an important part of the Southsea Green model. This concept is perfectly encapsulated by our seed swaps. Such a simple way to achieve our objectives and build community. We have swapped plants for runner beans and our expertise for free space at area events which all our crafters were able to benefit from being able to sell and promote their crafts. Although in the early days this mutual arrangement worked very well, it made it a double blow when many of them left the garden for new art space at the Arches in 2017 leaving us shorthanded and the garden abandoned. However we found a way to fight back from this and with a little help from our friends we reviewed our set up and made new plans.

### **Keep Pompey Green**

With the emphasis on our green credentials we established a number of exhibitions and events with partners across the City including 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 events. Once again, local events proved to be great at communicating our messages, creating awareness throughout the area and providing a platform for participation throughout the community.

### **Eat, sleep, dream exhibition**

### **Growth**

The garden thrived, there was always much excitement and goodwill for this project and public visits, particularly during the summer, demanded volunteer time to “do the tour” and allow visitors to enjoy the garden experience. During this time we found that maintaining the garden and all the new exciting activities required a great deal of planning and managing of processes to succeed. As we took on more and more, one of the challenges we faced was volunteer burnout - a major factor in this project being parked or run with a skeleton management team for a time. It was also a significant reason for introducing the 'Adopt-a-plot' scheme which has led to the

current Association via an interim management group.

Our great growth success, to be celebrated, created issues that morphed into opportunities and the green shoots of a new management and structure.

### **Through the Grapevine**

Our social media platforms, a well maintained website, and regular weekly newspaper columns 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.

### **Magic Money Tree**

As we all know, there is no such thing. A social enterprise, in common with commercial businesses must have a plan to ensure financial commitments are met. Even with few liabilities, we discovered the importance of a financial reserve to cope with the unexpected and cover any regular commitments such as insurance, peppercorn rent etc. The accountant and Secretary have been key players in this, and attention to fundraising activities coupled with good financial management must be an overarching garden parasol to keep us, and our visitors and volunteers safe in the garden environment.

In the early years at the garden we ran a busy weekend farm shop, selling produce sourced from local farms. This gave us a tidy profit to pay for the garden running costs – compost etc, and especially tea and coffee for the volunteers. Most of the garden supplies - seeds, tools, sheds and even the solar panels, were donated.

Later we raised funds from such bodies as the Heritage Lottery. H&loW HF, the EU and others. Out of these we gained the cabin and polytunnel, and the rest, near on £30,000 was spent on projects in the local community.

We were proud of course to pay our taxes which support the NHS, welfare and state education.

Great financial management has been a key pillar of our success.

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## Southsea Green - What failed to flourish

One of the trickiest areas to navigate in the third sector is volunteer retention and churn and has always been a concern. Any one volunteer's link to any organisation is always tenuous and relies mainly on goodwill. Volunteers are bartering, if you like, saying "I'll give you my time but in exchange what can I expect?" Certainly no volunteer will return if they do not feel rewarded by their activities. With financial rewards unavailable, how can we reward and maintain this valuable resource? Community and the pleasure that can bring, a feeling of self worth for a good job done, a sense of achievement and being part of something bigger is hugely important.

Circumstances that have caused churn such as volunteers moving away, personal issues, illness or changes in availability are unavoidable. We have tried to understand and mitigate circumstances which may have led to the loss of volunteers. History has shown that people who feel unwelcome, unappreciated and disregarded will withdraw. There have been issues where people have become unhappy with how things are managed, or where they fit in, and disagreements that have resulted in people leaving where this hasn't been resolved for them. After this type of event it is almost impossible to persuade the former volunteer to return. Whilst undoubtedly everyone would like to continue in harmony there will be clashes and at this stage perhaps introducing an arbitrator, someone with the soft skills who can help to diffuse the situation before it escalates, a quasi HR function which can welcome and introduce new volunteers, and find a compromise or mediate in disputes to ensure that no one walks away in dissatisfaction.

### **A Garden blight**

Southsea Greenhouse suffered a severe blow when a number of the management team and volunteers all left simultaneously to engage in a craft-led enterprise at the Arches in Old Portsmouth and never returned. During this time the loyalty of the remaining volunteers ensured the garden endured but this too caused issues with volunteer burn-out and fatigue. At this time we discussed a rewards programme in tandem with a local coffee shop and although this idea never came to fruition there is some merit here that could be developed in future. We also instigated the Adopt-a-Plot scheme to enable the upkeep of the garden.

### **Permaculture**

Sustainability and working together as a Cooperative in a complimentary way is a tricky prospect. The idea to introduce a membership fee, whilst sound in intention, created an unintentional hierarchy. There were two levels of membership, one costing considerably more than the other and whilst the higher fee carried additional membership benefits this caused additional work in signing up local businesses as sponsors. This also raised another issue, a community garden for the people should not exclude those unable to afford to join.

Another issue arising was, should someone who is a volunteer, who is already contributing time and effort, have to pay for the pleasure of doing so. Throughout this time we needed to be mindful of our contract with PCC allowing us to make use of their land for the benefit of the community.

These membership variables were contentious and as a result, after taking legal advice from Community Empowerment, who had helped us to set up as a Coop, we abandoned the paid for membership scheme which took up a lot of volunteer time in administration, and took the decision to wind up the Coop, as we felt this structure was not the best fit for the community garden. During this time we decided to work towards becoming an Association, which would simplify our structure and processes, and be less daunting for volunteers, allowing more time for garden-led activities and less on administration.

Over the years and in order to manage funded projects, Southsea Greenhouse trialled paid, part-time positions including two or three volunteer coordinators to manage or at least supervise volunteers. At the third coordinator's departure, we decided to abandon this idea designed as a means for ensuring that the gate remained open and the garden accessible to the community. It also proved difficult to maintain sufficient funding for the position to remain viable. Another solution was required.

Involving major strategic thinking, the adopt-a-plot idea was born as a way of keeping the gate open and the garden maintained and honouring our commitment to PCC. This scheme also brought challenges, who would receive a free plot, and how to ensure the plot holder took part in the general upkeep of the garden in return for what is a valuable commodity that is paid for elsewhere i.e. an allotment. Ultimately, all parties worked to ensure that the gate could remain open to the public preserving our contract with the council.

### **Trampled flowers**

The break-in to our premises was a major lowlight, unable to find anything of value the perpetrators proceeded in breaking as much as possible and drenching the entire cabin with water, this caused a great deal of upset and a proudly-won trophy awarded by South East in bloom competition was destroyed in the process. Whilst it would have been easy, at this point, to give up most of the wonderful volunteers worked hard to restore the garden and repair the damage 'make do and mend'.

### **Garden Pests**

Able to cope organically with the usual suspects, blackfly etc, we were thwarted a few



times by a rodent infestation that caused Health and Safety concerns. The garden was closed in order to deal with this public health issue. Fortunately, we had sufficient reserve funds to manage this crisis.

### **Through the Grapevine - a different view**

With external communications a success, internal communication was a difficult nut to crack often causing misunderstandings and upset. One issue was the way that information was or wasn't cascaded around the collective. We sought to rectify this with a dedicated facebook group, again this had some teething problems and the management, in hindsight, handled this poorly, closing communications without consultation. The resulting page, set up by volunteers and plot holders proved to work better and there were less problems and disagreements, a lesson learnt here by all.

### **Garden Maintenance**

Managing goodwill and keeping the garden thriving was and remains an issue, see the link to an interview with our favourite news media, Star and Crescent, outlining some of the challenges faced by an organisation with volunteering at its heart.

### **Challenges of maintaining a community garden**



## **The Garden Path - some conclusions and recommendations for a flourishing Social Enterprise**

Please recognise that this report is by no means exhaustive and documents key milestones over time. Day-to-day matters arising can be found in the historic meeting minutes should you require additional detail. This document serves to review challenges and celebrations, with this section acting as a springboard for discussion in determining the direction of the association post cooperative.

In order for our social enterprise to grow and continue to flourish in challenging times we need to understand our supporters. Some important questions to answer therefore are

**Who is the garden really for, is the garden perceived as for all or as a place for**

## **the benefit of adopt-a-plot holders?**

**How can we hold onto the original green principles on which the organisation was founded.**

**Has the key message changed over time and how do our core supporters view the garden now?**

It is clear from the earlier discussions that education is at the heart of some of our greatest and most successful times and that anything we do might be shared with our local community and visitors. So what is required...

**How can we communicate a clear strategy and goals to benefit all of the community?**

**How can we emphasise our core values and develop a message that supports these?**

The garden remains a community asset, as demonstrated by PCCs continued support

**So, how do we make this community asset sustainable?**

**How can it be maintained effectively without draining resources and volunteers?**

**How to keep the garden open and accessible going forward, does the plot holding solution remain viable?**

## **What the garden means to me - a few words**

"If we save the bees we save the world and keep our city green"

### **Our story**

Our story began as a seed, an idealistic daydream perhaps, grown over many seasons into a wild but beautiful garden. Wild because it's an uncontrollable thing, Beautiful, because together we have brought so many together - to grow and share stuff, and through ups and downs, we have made change. Behind the gates, is a community garden, just teeming with diversity and life, and willing hands to water and grow it - what more could we have dreamed of ?" **Sue Stokes, Founder**

Blood, sweat and tears.....love, joy and happiness.

A sanctuary, a haven, a port in a storm.

The little hut, the crafters, the gardeners.

The Strawberry thief.

The Black Gates.

The 18 month paperwork.

The SSE digger team.

Grace, the Portacabin, re-roofed, re-decorated.

Solar energy.

The pond.  
The poly tunnel.  
Our Connections.  
Friends of the Earth.  
Greenpeace.  
Green party.  
Budd's Herbal.  
Fire Monkey Arts.  
Charmaines.  
Portsmouth City Council.  
The people (from all walks of life, all backgrounds, all faiths and religions, working together).

**Nigel Huggins, Founder**

"To me the garden is a space where people from the community can come together, to learn and share grow your own and other skills, but is also a small but amazing oasis where you can see all kinds of wild life from robins, goldfinches and sometimes rare gold-crests, to frogs newts and dragonflies or just sit in the sun in the peace and quiet." **Goff Gleadle, Head Gardener**

Although only about 700 square yards, the garden has quite an illustrious history. While finds in the area date back to Roman times, the garden itself features in the Cowdray print depicting the sinking of the Mary Rose in 1545. The print shows a column of troops making their way down the garden path towards the watchtower that stood a few yards west of Lumps Fort, so was in existence as a man-made feature nearly 500 years ago.

In 1885, while Princess Beatrice was waiting to marry and join her parents at Osbourne House she stayed at our neighbour, Cumberland House. While there she planted the fig tree which is still extant at the bottom of the garden.

During the Second World War the telephone line from Ventnor radar station to RAF HQ at Stanmore came ashore due south of the garden. The BT line that serves the Isle of Wight runs through a conduit beneath the garden to this day.

In 2013 the overgrown council dump was cleared by the original volunteers to become the garden we see today, winning both Portsmouth in Bloom and South East in Bloom the same year. **Graham Newcombe, Accounts, Legal and Garden Historian**

**Green strategy for Portsmouth**

**The Vista**

This report provides an holistic view of the actions that have driven the evolution of the project to this point. We are happy to discuss any points raised but believe that the new management, armed with the information in this report, will be able to make decisions about the future that support the original ethos and allow sustainable

growth. Our hope would be to create a green legacy for the community as time moves on.

Happy gardening all!



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