

# STILLINGFLEET LODGE GARDENS AND NURSERIES

## ANNUAL SUSTAINABILITY AUDIT

### **Background.**

The management has long been aware of its responsibility towards the environment, society and the local economy, as embodied in its Sustainability Policy.

Each year management reviews the way it does business and questions whether it is doing as much as it should in order to keep abreast of the latest developments and thinking on sustainability issues.

### **Water Usage.**

We aim for a minimum water usage policy.

1. A dual flush system is installed on lavatory cisterns to minimise water wastage in the flushing process
2. A spray head has been introduced onto the hand wash facilities in the lavatory to reduce water flow while improving wetting coefficients.
3. Roof water is collected and piped to maintain water levels in the pond.
4. A water meter has been installed.
5. A low water usage dishwasher has been installed in the café.
6. ECO friendly washing-up liquid is used in the café.
7. Low volume instant water heating devices are installed to reduce water usage in the café.
8. Low spread water heads are installed in the automatic overhead watering systems in the nursery. A timer is used to ensure against wasting water through overwatering.
9. Water overspill from the nursery is piped into the pond to assist in maintaining the correct levels in the high season.
10. Staff are urged to report dripping taps so they can be repaired quickly.

### **Electrical Usage**

We aim for a minimum electricity usage policy

1. The hours of the working day are reduced in the low season so that the need for lighting and heating is minimised.
2. During periods of freezing conditions, the plants for the next working day are brought indoors and kept under insulating blankets, so the compost does not freeze, otherwise it is difficult and cold to work with the plants. This saves using fan heaters to thaw the pots.
3. Automatic PIR lighting is used where necessary and feasible.
4. Electrically heated seed beds have been replaced by a specially designed cold frame.

5. It is impressed on staff that all lights and heating must be switched off when buildings/rooms are not in use.

## **Recycling**

A business constructed around the growing of plants which absorb carbon dioxide and exhale oxygen is the ultimate in low carbon footprint and environmental sustainability. We aim to reuse every (so-called) waste product on site. We do not have a green bin for organic waste. In particular, since the site is run on organic principles with no pesticides or fungicides, all surplus waste material can be recycled internally without damage or concern. A very small proportion is transported off site to be re-cycled responsibly.

1. All soft vegetative matter, tree and shrub prunings, offcuts, kitchen waste, biodegradable café waste, newspapers etc is put into one of our nine compost bins or into the wormery. Because the garden is organic there is no vegetative matter that cannot be recycled; even the grass cuttings go into the compost bins or is used directly as an effective mulch. The compost produced from such varied content is an invaluable nutrient and weed suppressant for the flower beds.
2. Fallen leaves are collected and held in a decay bin to create leaf mould for spreading on the flower beds, to condition the subsoil.
3. Trimmings from trees are used (after seasoning) as logs or kindling for log burning fires. Other organic material (minimal) is converted to create potash or chippings for use in the garden or transported off site for composting.
4. Comfrey is specifically grown to compost down to very valuable nutrients, and for its use as a weed-suppressing mulch.
5. Nettle beds are maintained to maturity to provide habitat for a wide variety of butterflies, moths other beetle life.
6. Chicken manure collected from the seven chicken sheds is spread on the compost bins to speed up the decay process.
7. Any turf which is removed as a result of remodelling the garden is placed in a turf heap to rot down and makes excellent topsoil for use elsewhere in the garden.
8. Broken clay flower pots are kept to provide good drainage for other pot-plants.
9. The display vegetable garden provides all the vegetables for the house. Used as
10. The chickens provide eggs and meat for the house. Surplus eggs are sold to visitors and villagers.
11. Disposable plastic cups are not used.

### **Local Community Liaison**

We aim for a low food miles policy with no quality compromise.

1. Cakes for the café are made by a close neighbour using responsibly sourced materials.
2. The York and Selby business groups use the café without charge for their networking meetings. We also host the local reading group.
3. The café is used without charge by the Friends of St Helen's Church for its meetings to discuss how the income can be raised to keep this historic church open for future generations.
4. The attraction is opened during the year for the National Garden Scheme, raising money for Macmillan Nurses and our local church, amongst others.
5. Jams, condiments and chutneys are supplied by a farm diversification 8 miles away
6. Quality ice creams are provided by Yorvale, an award winning ice-cream maker 8 miles away.
7. We sell locally sourced low cholesterol cooking oil made from rapeseed.
8. Quality chocolates made by a small chocolatier in York are offered in the café.
9. Coffee, tea and cleaning products are Fairtrade or otherwise responsibly acquired.
10. High quality hand creams and lotions made from organic, paraban-free Fairtrade constituents are sourced from a manufacturer in York (7miles) and the beeswax wraps are from a supplier in Goole.
11. All items sold in the gift shop are UK made.
12. It is important to provide an outlet for other visitor attractions in the area, so we display their leaflets in the café and in the nursery shop.

### **Encouragement of Wildlife.**

Our objective is to encourage as much wildlife as possible to live in harmony. It is known that suitable wildlife habitat is under increasing threat as the countryside becomes more developed and suburbanised. Our aim is to provide an oasis which is especially suitable for small birds. As a result of our endeavours we are pleased to report that we can identify up to 45 different bird species in an average season.

1. There are many bird-boxes situated throughout the garden, mostly on north facing situations. They are of different designs known to encourage different bird species. There are some for woodpeckers, owls and sparrows and varieties of tit.
2. A substantial bird feeding area is maintained throughout the year.
3. We are a hedgehog safe garden with a local hedgehog rescue charity using us as a release site.

4. The feeder channel to the pond is netted to protect frog spawn from predatory mallard.
5. Piles of logs are left undisturbed when freshly cut, so as to season until ready for firewood (thus replacing expensive oil central heating), and also to provide habitat for a multitude of small mammals, beetles, frogs, toads, newts, hedgehogs etc.
6. We keep and breed guinea fowl which roam freely in the garden. They are excellent for clearing up the slug population, and other pests!
7. We breed several varieties of rare breed poultry. While these are interesting for visitors, provide eggs for the house and for sale, they also turn over the compost heaps, remove bugs and add to the enrichment by their droppings. It is vital that rare breed lines, which by definition are of no value to the commercial operator are kept going to preserve characteristics which may fall out of favour, never to be recovered.
8. Our beehive provides pollination to all the various plants in the garden and beyond. It is believed that in one year one hive can provide £1000 worth of pollination to agricultural crops within a three mile radius.
9. We keep fantail pigeons to entertain our visitors. They breed prolifically and provide premium feeding for a family of sparrowhawks (a protected species) in an adjacent wood!
10. Our meadow is a typical lowland hay meadow, or ancient grassland. This was once the ubiquitous type of old meadow in the English lowlands, but there is now less than 6,000 hectares remaining in England. It is maintained to support a profusion of butterflies, moths and British native plants. This is cut and left to ensure all seeds drop. The meadow is used for workshops, with visiting guest presenters educating attendees about perennial wildflower meadows.
11. No fungicides or pesticides are used with benefits to wildlife and staff who are not at risk. Slug pellets are never used.
12. Since 2012, David Baker of the Butterfly and Moth Conservation Society has been carrying out regular moth counts here. Over 9 summers he has recorded 347 different species of moth.

### **Economic Sustainability**

It must be a key objective for every business to remain economically viable, which means maintaining a cost base below the level of income, while at the same time offering the customer a price-competitive product or service which meets their highest expectations

1. We make price comparisons of raw material products which meet our specification requirements, from different suppliers.
2. Consideration is always given to changing our market offering. ie We now present plants in larger pots than previously; this reduces the

frequency of plant handling and re-potting during the season, and also reduces the amount of watering required.

3. At the start of the season, a competitor price comparison is carried out to ensure our plants are competitively priced bearing in mind our location. Our prices are posted on our website.
4. Group visits are very welcome outside our normal opening times and we welcome visiting groups from across Europe and North America. We also have a lot of visits from gardening groups and the University of Third age. Many of these are booked more than 6 months in advance.
5. Where possible we offer employment to trainees, work returners or part-timers. We like to introduce a young man or woman to the routine and responsibility of regularity of earning money in a first job, by offering a 4hour Saturday morning job to a local youth, who may not be able to find a job immediately on leaving school. This may put a first job on his/her CV and can give a good reference for a subsequent full time job.
6. Plant pots which contain dead plants are emptied and re-used rather than tipped, as are labels.
7. Recycled paper is used wherever it is feasible.
8. When capital investment is contemplated, consideration is always given to second hand equipment. For instance, the tunnel frames and the watering systems in current use were rescued from a farmer who abandoned them as impractical over twenty years ago. This leads to environmental and economic benefits

Much of this philosophy is noted in marketing material in the café and elsewhere on the premises, without over-emphasising a lifestyle which many people may find irrelevant or not wish to subscribe to. However, we do believe in extending our personal commitment to living a low carbon footprint life into the business and also to explaining and sharing this with visitors who are interested. We prefer to make the point by example rather than preaching and proselytising.