

# SOUTH LONDON BOTANICAL INSTITUTE - BUSINESS PLAN 2021-2026 SUMMARY (Sept 2020)

## Introduction and context

The SLBI mission: to be a place where people of all ages and backgrounds can develop and share their passion for plants, summarised as: *Discovering plants, enriching lives, sustaining the future*

The purpose of the SLBI Strategic Business Plan 2021-2026 is to embed the SLBI more firmly into both local and botanical communities, so that even more people can benefit from our activities.

Our plan will ensure that the SLBI attracts and engages with more people from the local community, which is increasingly young and ethnically diverse, and will also have a greater geographical reach through digitalisation. It will give us increased opportunities to educate more people more widely, including on topics such as climate change, the healing effect of plants and inequalities and colonial legacies in botany. It will improve our scientific credentials and collaborations with botanists and other professionals.

It is of course, Covid-19 contingent, and as such is designed to be responsive to temporary, sudden and longer-term changes in the real world. Rather than being a strict linear plan, it will evolve through experimentation, review and adaptation so that it can best achieve our 3 strategic objectives.

## Objectives

The SLBI has three strategic objectives:

### Objective 1 Audience

- Ensure that we use our programme, educators and position as an inner-city botanic resource to broaden, reach and engage with our communities effectively. As well as ensuring that our existing audiences continue to participate, we will focus on engaging with younger people, people from minority ethnic backgrounds and those whose health and well-being has been compromised by the pandemic and arising social issues.

### Objective 2 Programme

- Ensure more people are able to access our collections and building for educational, recreational and community purposes. We will do this by ensuring that our building is accessible and welcoming, finding new ways of sharing our collections and resources and developing digital resources,

### Objective 3: Partnerships

- Ensure we build and maintain partnerships with organisations and individuals in the local, botanical, environmental, health care and educational sectors to make the organisation as diverse and inclusive as possible.

## Plan

We will achieve our objectives in the following ways:

### 1 Audience:

- Implement an inclusive marketing and communications strategy, including more strategic use of social media.

- Put in place a grants application programme to support and subsidise low income-generating activities.
- Use our USP as an inner-city botanic garden/resource broaden our audiences.
- Seek funding to enable more proactive community engagement.

## 2 Programme

- Build and promote a programme centred around the collections, urban botany and well-being and health.
- Initiate, adapt and build on a range of different learning activities and methods, including developing a digital strategy.
- Embed activities and educators relevant to our Climate Emergency Declaration and Black Lives Matter statement throughout our programme, as well as responding to other relevant emerging social concerns.
- Put in place a building maintenance programme to ensure the SLBI's Victorian home remains in sound order, and plan other physical improvements to the building to make the SLBI more inclusive and accessible.

## 3 Partnerships

We will engage:

- Special interest groups – such as botany, gardening, history, art, ecology, etc.
- Social groupings – age, ethnicity, disability, culture, faith.
- Those working with and for marginalised, vulnerable or socially isolated people.
- Schools and colleges.
- Museums and similar public bodies.
- Healthcare and mental health sectors (GPs, bereavement services, CAMHS, Sickle Cell Soc., MIND, including those for people from BAME backgrounds).
- Local organisations such as tenant organisations, community gardens, allotment groups, 'Friends of'.
- Local councillors and community development organisations whose interests match our strategic priorities.

### **Year 1 (2021-2022)**

April 2021-March 2022: learn, research, experiment, make new partnerships and evolve more detailed planning for subsequent years. Our activities and planning will be Covid-19 responsive, and we'll stay in touch with our current members, supporters, audiences, partner organisations and volunteers and reach out to new ones.

We will apply for grants to keep our staff in place after 1 April 2021, even if their roles change, and also to carry out more proactive audience development.

We will frequently review both the SLBI and the outside world with a view to Covid-19 to ensure we are making the best decisions about how to achieve our strategic objectives in the coming years.

## 1 Audience

- Launch an audience development plan, including a focus on digital engagement.
- When safe to do so, we will make the library and herbarium available for study.
- We will pilot a Summer School for 16-18 year olds.

- We'll look in detail at the volunteer roles we'll need and can offer, such as volunteer co-ordination, digitisation or making our collections more accessible and professional.

## 2 Programme

- Until we can safely have visitors in our building, education will focus on on-line talks and activities, outdoor walks and workshops. The pandemic has highlighted that online learning and engagement should become a permanent feature of our presence, so we will develop a digital strategy for programme delivery.
- We'll look closely at the best ways to use the building and garden, so that we have an informed and strategic basis to make decisions as the pandemic evolves.

## 3 Partnerships

- A key priority is for our audience and educators to more closely match the socioeconomic, ethnic and cultural diversity of the part of London where the SLBI is based (Lambeth/Southwark).
- We expect to apply for funding for a Community Engagement/ Audience Development role within the next 12-15 months.

### **Years 2 to 5 (2022-2026)**

- We anticipate that from early 2022, either social behaviour will have returned to normal or we will have adapted to the new circumstances, meaning that:
- We can put in place firmer, more long-term actions to achieve our 3 objectives, subject to annual review of the business plan and the longer-term impact of the pandemic.
- As well as continuing the Year 1 actions, there will be additional developments arising from them.

### **Marketing and Communications**

We are developing a marketing and communications strategy, aimed at attracting and retaining new and potential audiences, as well as keeping existing audiences. We will utilise a range of media to promote our activities and projects. Concepts of accessibility, community, inner-city botany and relevance will be key to this strategy, which will aim to be inclusive and embrace diversity.

The marketing strategy will underpin the three strategic objectives of the SLBI by;

- Supporting the audience development plan, through delivery of tailored, audience-specific content via audience-appropriate channels
- Pairing closely with the digital strategy to ensure that we are able to reach and engage new and existing audiences, regardless of geography and/or social-distancing requirements, now and in the future
- Working to ensure we're effectively telling the story of the SLBI, engaging with funders and potential donors, and supporting partnership development

### **Resources required**

- Current staffing levels (4 part-time plus 2 part-time freelance gardeners) plus additional staff for community engagement, collections and volunteer management.
- Investment in equipment, technology, accessibility, training.
- Income generation and fund-raising.

### **Finances**

Although the SLBI is planning for an uncertain future, our adaptability in recent months, plus the generosity of grant funders and individual donors, have created opportunities and optimism as well as challenges. Key to our success will be our ability to fund our plans.

Our income-generating plans will increase revenue from earned income, donations and grants, making our unrestricted income larger and more sustainable and reducing dependence on grants. We aim to increase our income from £120,000 (exc. investments) in 2019-2020 to £170,000 in 2025-2026, with the proportion of non-grant income rising from 32.5% to 40%, and increasing thereafter.

### **Earned income**

Based on a recent Commercial Strategy consultancy we will:

- Prioritise activities that give a relatively high return compared to the cost, complexity of delivery and risk
- Conduct development in a phased fashion, so that the organisation is not overstretched
- Work with partners, where possible, to bring in missing expertise and to share risk
- Concentrate on the areas which generate most income (whilst remembering that events generating little or no income also have added value)

The consultancy report identified various viable options for generating increased income. As well as all-age learning and plant-focussed events, they included: venue hire; 3<sup>rd</sup>-party catered events; merchandising on-site; office rental; and licensing commercial use of SLBI resources e.g. herbarium images.

### **Donations**

We aim to increase income from membership renewals and new memberships, small/medium donations (under £100), major donations (over £100), legacies and In Memory gifts.

### **Grants**

We'll continue to apply for grants, but across a wider range of funders, for different projects and focussed on our programme, partnership and audience development priorities.

### **Conclusion**

We have ambitious plans to raise our scientific profile, to serve the local community more closely, and to continue our wide-ranging and inclusive programme of activities.

The three objectives support our mission by enabling as many people as possible to learn about and enjoy plants, by giving people opportunities to share their enthusiasm and to develop knowledge and skills and by encouraging a scientific basis to discussions about the environment and the importance of plants to life on earth.