SOUTH LONDON

BOTANICAL INSTITUTE

BUSINESS PLAN

2021-2026

***Discovering plants, enriching lives, sustaining the future***

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The South London Botanical Institute (SLBI) aspires to be an inclusive place where people of all ages and backgrounds can develop and share a passion for plants and improve their knowledge of how to protect the natural environment and act to tackle climate change. We seek to combine a local focus with a global perspective.

Our mission can be summarised as: *Discovering plants, enriching lives, sustaining the future.*

The purpose of the SLBI Business Plan (BP) 2021-2026 is to embed the SLBI – a unique botanic garden and resource in an inner-city setting - more firmly into both local and scientific communities through four aims:

* To retain our current audiences and broaden our audiences in line with local demographics.
* To make the SLBI’s building and collections more physically and intellectually accessible.
* To maintain existing and build new partnerships and collaborations locally, regionally and nationally to fulfil our aims.
* To make the SLBI more financially resilient and sustainable, reducing dependency on grants.

We have six principal strategies to deliver these aims. We will:

* Enhance our blended programme of face-to-face and online events to ensure a range of activities which are exciting, appealing and accessible to all, highlighting urban botany, health and well-being and Hume-themed events.
* Raise income from individuals and from trusts and foundations to enable us to deliver low-cost learning and engagement.
* Invest in marketing and communications to extend our reach and appeal.
* Implement a commercial fundraising strategy.
* Invest in the building to make it more welcoming and accessible and as one of our ways to reduce our carbon footprint.
* Introduce an annual audience satisfaction survey, to include demographic/socio-economic/geographical information.

Given the uncertainties surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic, we have taken a pragmatic approach, balancing recovery with growth. We are assuming little or no access to the building, other than the garden - a key asset - until early 2022. The Business Plan is designed to be responsive to changes in circumstances through frequent review, particularly in Year 1. Budgets, targets, activities, use of reserves and other actions may be refined, adapted or modified as a result of review, including bringing actions forward or delaying them if circumstances change. Initially, we will keep current staffing levels, plus 1 dpw for marketing, another for book-keeping from Year 1 and allowing for a Community Engagement Coordinator from the start of Year 3. Receipt of Covid-19 grants in 2020-2021 mean we can guarantee present staff contracts to 30 September 2021.

Year 1 will be a recovery and preparation year, prioritising:

* Expanding our programme of digital and socially distanced activities.
* Developing a digital marketing and communications strategy.
* Developing a maintenance and management plan for the building.
* Setting a baseline for measuring and improving our carbon footprint.
* Refurbishing the kitchen to improve potential for room hire.
* Increasing memberships and individual donations.

Year 2 will be a year of consolidation and growth, prioritising:

* Building audience numbers and increasing diversity
* Reducing our carbon footprint and improving accessibility to the building
* Increasing the number of commercial hires
* Developing the retail offer.

Year 3 will prioritise:

* Improving professionalism regarding the care, development and commercial use of the collections.

Years 4 and 5 priorities will include:

* Building on the successes and lessons of earlier years
* Further improvements to the building if required
* Developing a new Business Plan

We have set measurable annual targets for activities, audiences and income so that we can monitor our progress and evaluate our impact. These targets include number of visitors (adults and school children), number of members, number of room hires, amount raised in donations and the ratio of grant funding to other income, as well as overall income targets, all set against pre-pandemic baseline figures. We will also seek qualitative feedback on our activities and aim to collect the demographics of our audiences in order to measure reach and diversity. The two most significant diversity targets are:

* Using annual survey to set Year 1 baseline of people from non-white backgrounds and thereafter measure annual % increase, with target of 10% p.a. increase by 2026.
* Using annual survey to set Year 1 baseline of people under 50 and thereafter measure annual % with target of 10% p.a. increase by 2026.

Taking a cautious approach towards the resources required, the SLBI will initially focus on investing in the building and in digital, marketing and commercial strategies. With projected (but reducing) deficits in general income in Years 1-3, we expect to call on up to £70,000 from reserves for investment in the building and Business Plan - approximately 14% of our general (both designated and unrestricted) fund reserves of £512,419 (at 31.3.20). With unrestricted earned income (exc. investment income) projected to rise from about £44,000 in 2021-2022 to about £95,000 by 2026, we expect to claw back to reserves about 50% of the investment in years 2024-2026. A continuing need for grants for core costs as well as project delivery means we are aiming to raise between £80,000-£100,000 in grants each year. This means we will reduce, not remove, the need for grants, from about 75% of total income at present to 50% by 31.3 26. Applications will focus on subsidising delivery and extending audiences

We have taken steps to mitigate the risks associated with the business plan, which include:

* Unrealistic focus on new markets and new offer leading to neglect of established income streams
* Over-reliance on existing market and offer leading to underinvestment in new streams
* Inadequate infrastructure to support expanded income streams threatening to undermine sustainability of new initiatives
* Inadequate staffing to meet targets, leading to and (some) targets being missed.
* Over-reliance on Board of trustees for operational management of SLBI, leading to inadequate response to challenges

There is flexibility within the business plan, for example if grant or other income targets are not met, to enable us to delay certain aspects of implementation or investment, consider reducing staffing levels, identify alternative funders, reduce the claw back to reserves or draw further on reserves. Alternatively, some budget lines could be reallocated. Specific actions would depend on our assessment of the circumstances at the time.

This Business Plan is unlikely to meet all the challenges ahead, but it will leave the SLBI in a stronger and more resilient state and lay the groundwork for future growth and development.

Acting on this Business Plan will further our mission as even more inclusive and wide-ranging programming and a more welcoming building encourage more people to discover plants. Lives will be enriched through varied opportunities for learning, engagement, participation and volunteering. Our focus on attracting young people to botany and increasing awareness of climate change and inequality through our programming will share knowledge across generations, support young people to consider plant-focussed studies and careers and inform discussions about the role of plants in the future of the planet.

*Approved by the SLBI Board of Trustees on 9 March 2021*