



**Feasibility Study of Horticultural Social
Enterprise
March 2008**

**Commissioned by London Borough of Islington
Conducted by Peter Bedford Housing Association**

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1. Executive Summary

This is a report of a Feasibility Study of Horticultural Social Enterprise for the London Borough of Islington. It has been undertaken further to Peter Bedford winning a contract to deliver a feasibility study and training for horticultural qualifications for people with learning difficulties in Islington.

The study aims to establish the commercial opportunity locally for Horticultural Social Enterprise with the intention to develop the existing capacity, partnership opportunities and the possibility of co-ordinated horticultural social enterprise activities in Islington. The study was also required to investigate the viability of horticultural social enterprise providing paid employment to adults with learning difficulties and mental health problems (and other unemployed adults) who reside in Islington.

The study has focused on a number of key areas, including: supply and potential supply of horticultural services, the market and competition, production and labour requirement. It also provides self-assessment tools to help organisations assess the costs, the risks and think about their match to the opportunities under discussion. Appendices include questionnaires used in the study and a contacts list as further sources of useful information.

The study has looked at a number of national horticultural projects as well as those operating in the London borough of Islington. It shows evidence that horticultural projects in the UK as well as in Islington have already proven to have capacity to provide valued occupations for people with learning difficulties and mental health problems. Most appear to require supplementary external funding to pay for set up costs or additional support and training costs.

The study suggests that there is potential demand for horticultural services from public sector, private and not-for-profit clients, with *a big friendly client* in the form of London Borough of Islington's Greenspaces department. Latterly,

opportunities for up to £200,000 worth of business are currently opening up as part of the re-tendering of £2 million pounds worth of maintenance and horticulture contracts in 2009. Greenspaces is actively committed to partnership working with the local community and this is a route to increased social enterprise contracts which should be explored. The growing trend in ethical buying and its match to relatively large numbers of professional/managerial homeowners with high levels of disposable income is also thought to be a significant market in Islington

The keys to the success of horticultural social enterprise as paid employment for people with learning difficulties and people with mental health problems are believed to be:

- commercial realism and a clear understanding of the distinction between therapeutic, meaningful, and paid occupational horticulture
- marketing targeted to public and not-for-profit contracts as well as high income groups, and especially those committed to ethical buying
- accurate capacity assessment to determine right scale and kind of operation for each interested enterprise
- enough start-up capital to invest in set-up and sufficient reserves to back risks
- an off-season strategy which might include nursery/greenhouse operation
- additional funding for training to subsidise trainee employees
- additional funding for support or partnership working for support or advanced practices around making reasonable adjustments
- recognition that a volunteer labour force cannot be commanded in the same way as a paid workforce; volunteers should add value rather than form the core labour force on which any commercial contract relies – and should never be exploited.

The report examines ways to secure sustainable employment throughout the year, e.g. to establish a greenhouse for plants, which will allow work throughout the year and vertical integration of the project by supplying plants

to gardens. Other projects may include recycling of waste and production of compost for use in the projects or for selling to other businesses.

The additional funding of any form of social enterprise development will pose one of the major challenges, as it is unlikely to be feasible through business profits alone. The study identifies possible sources and proposes that efforts to mobilise funding should start as early as possible in 2008.

Employing people who have faced long-term social exclusion and who have disabilities or multiple needs can also present a number of challenges. This can include the need for additional supervision, issues around self-organisation and reliability, speed of delivering contracts, and so on.

For some organisations, social enterprise is never an option because they feel it presents conflicts of interest; this is especially the case where therapeutic activity (e.g. Thrive) or meaningful activity (e.g. Peter Bedford's current gardening project) is the objective. For organisations that are willing to take the commercial route, a commitment to being profitable is necessary, though funding is essential, especially at the initial stages of setting up the project. As the project generates more demand and increases its scale, a gradual decline in reliance on non-commercial finance is possible

Although it is not discussed in detail in this study, environmental sustainability must be a key component of any social enterprise; wherever practical, an enterprise should endeavour to recycle and reuse as many products as possible to help reduce carbon emissions and negative impact on the environment. While working with client's operations, as much as practically possible, the focus should be on developing sustainable planting strategies, promoting bio-diversity, and raising stakeholders' and customers' awareness of environmental sustainability and climate change. Composting, rain harvesting and water recycling should be mandatory good practices.

The demand for quality performance and high standards does not disappear just because social objectives are involved. For the enterprise to be successful, the service must be of a very high standard to be able to acquire

reputation for repeat business and recommendation. Given the competition that exists for this kind of service, the pricing strategy must also be right.

The study concludes that there are a number of options for exploiting the opportunities currently presenting in the market for horticultural services, namely:

- the development of a social enterprise network or umbrella group which shares intelligence about the market and agrees cross-referrals of customers, and is a forum for partnerships, etc
- the development of a completely new horticultural social enterprise geared up to provide work directly and through sub-contracts for smaller enterprises
- existing social enterprise gears up to the above
- continued ad hoc arrangements in which organisations seek and take business opportunities which present as they see fit

There are, arguably, significant advantages to be gained from a collaborative approach to social enterprise development, especially on the basis of sub-contracting and referral.

The tension between the mission, the needs of service users and the pressure of commercial demand is one which is shared to different degrees by all voluntary and community sector organisations contemplating or engaged in social enterprise. There are no shortcuts and these issues must be faced realistically and pragmatically if the goal of sustainable employment for socially excluded people is to be achieved.

Social Enterprise is a social business in a financially competitive market place; if it cannot compete, it cannot fulfill its social mission. This study includes initial assessment tools to help organisations start thinking about whether social enterprise, or more social enterprise, is right for them.

2. Background and Methodology

Peter Bedford (PB) won a contract to deliver training for horticultural qualifications from London Borough of Islington for people with learning difficulties and is currently delivering that contract in partnership with British Conservation Trust Volunteers (BCTV). A component of the contract was to conduct a feasibility study to establish the commercial opportunity for Horticultural Social Enterprise and its capacity to provide paid employment to people with learning difficulties and people with mental health problems who are residents in Islington.

2.1 About Peter Bedford

Peter Bedford Housing Association aims to support people with long experience of social exclusion to take control over their lives and achieve their social, educational and economic aspirations. As well as supported housing, it has 39 years' experience of running social enterprises, of working with people with learning difficulties and mental health problems, and of delivering and managing vocational training and skills for life. Its current social enterprises include Bedfords Shop (546 Holloway Road, Islington), Grapevine Catering Enterprises (Stamford Works, Gillett Street, Dalston) and Star Box Café (Newington Green, Islington). It is an accredited assessment centre for National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in Retail and Distribution, Catering and Hospitality, and Business Administration, as well as City and Guilds Literacy and Numeracy, and CLAIT IT.

At present, the organisation runs a gardening project on an environmental and permaculture basis and organises horticultural training, working in partnership with British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV).

In some sections of the study Peter Bedford is used to demonstrate a point (such as SWOT analysis and internal survey of participants) to indicate processes which other organisations may find helpful.

Peter Bedford's direct interest in the outcome of this study is threefold:

- To consider for itself the possibilities of developing a horticultural social enterprise either as a standalone or lead enterprise
- To seek to develop training, work placement and employment opportunities for the people it works alongside, including adults with learning difficulties and adults with mental health problems
- To seek opportunities to work in partnership with the public, private and voluntary sector to further our aims for social inclusion.

As well as meeting an annual target of 15% of its own tenants and service users in its regular paid workforce, Peter Bedford provides paid sessional work opportunities specifically for people with mental health problems or learning difficulties. Up to 20 current or ex-mental health service users each year are employed in its User Focused Monitoring project and 24 people with learning difficulties or mental health problems will be employed in its Social Enterprises during 2008/09. It is this experience and commitment which motivates and qualifies Peter Bedford for the development of this feasibility study

Consultation was carried out with key local players, including private contractors and local garden centres, voluntary and community sector organisations, public and voluntary sector clients, Islington Strategic Partnership, London Development Agency (LDA) and Islington Business Enterprise Team (IBET) Diversity and Procurement Team.

2.2 Methodology

A combination of methods was used to conduct this feasibility study. In order to establish capacity and interest, questionnaires and surveys have been carried out; these were conducted at social enterprises in Islington, using participants of Peter Bedford who have learning difficulties and mental health problems.

Consultation was carried out with key local players, including private contractors and local garden centres, voluntary and community sector organisations, public and voluntary sector clients, Islington Strategic

Partnership, London Development Agency (LDA) and Islington Business Enterprise Team (IBET) Diversity and procurement Team.

Meetings held with key people, site visits to local projects and horticultural enterprises winning national awards have helped inform this feasibility study. An analysis and evaluation of the findings was carried out to assess the viability of the project.

To establish the size of the local market, preliminary enquiries were conducted using the questionnaire that was circulated to Islington-based horticultural enterprises. Income-based data criteria were used to determine the potential size of the private clients' market. Secondary data was collected using internet sources to establish the level of competition.

Working closely with Peter Bedford's Fundraising Manager, a survey of possible funding streams was conducted and potential sources available for such projects were also identified.

2.3 About social enterprise

Social enterprises are businesses with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are reinvested in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners.

These enterprises empower local people to improve their wealth and wellbeing. While such enterprises need to be financially viable, profit is usually secondary to their ability to help individuals and communities to be both enterprising and creative in fulfilling their potential.

Social enterprises tackle a wide range of social and environmental issues and operate in all parts of the economy. Social enterprises have a distinct and valuable role in creating a strong, sustainable and socially inclusive economy.

Social Enterprises have government support. In July 2002 the British Government launched a three-year strategy, Social Enterprise: a Strategy for Success, setting out a programme of action that includes:

- creating an enabling environment for social enterprises
- making social enterprises better businesses
- establishing the value of social enterprises.

Today in the UK there are more than 55,000 social enterprises, which represent about 5% of all businesses with employees. Social enterprises generate more than £27 billion in turnover, which is 1.3% of the total turnover for businesses with employees. The sector has demonstrated the capacity to contribute to the local economy, contributing more than £8 billion to GDP per year.

Apart from the monetary contribution to the economy, social enterprises contribute to society in many ways. For example, they help

- tackle social and environmental problems
- set new standards
- raise the bar for corporate responsibility
- improve public services and shape public service design particularly as ethical consumerism increases in popularity
- offer a high level of engagement with users and a capacity to build their trust
- pioneer new approaches
- attract new people to business
- encourage groups under-represented in the national economy

3. Horticulture Social Enterprises in the UK

Horticultural projects and social enterprises in the UK appear to have high capacity to provide valued occupations for adults with learning difficulties and/or physical disability, and provide work experience, skills, training and employment to those who are disadvantaged and vulnerable to being socially excluded further.

Most UK horticulture projects tend to be located in the voluntary and community sector and are funded externally by a range of social care, health,

and education agencies. Fundraising from charitable trusts, corporate companies and individuals is also a feature of income streams. Few, if any, projects depend on commercial contracts alone for horticultural services. Most projects are seasonal; all year occupation or employment cannot be guaranteed.

Common horticultural activities include:

- clearing and maintaining gardens (clearing overgrown gardens, pruning shrubs [not trees], cutting hedges, weeding, etc)
- promoting interest and learning in gardening, enabling individuals to sustain their gardens by providing access to knowledge, tools and equipment and practical help
- facilitating garden maintenance by creating low maintenance and drought gardens
- creating safe gardens for children to play in (this means securing boundaries, cutting grass, removing rubbish, identifying poisonous plants, etc)
- taking on small contracts that will provide work experience, business income and create paid posts
- growing plants and producing other horticultural or associated products for sale to the general public.

As there are risks involved in setting up any business, basing a local Horticultural Social Enterprise Development and/or Network on models that are successful elsewhere would give the project a head start. Provided the circumstances are similar and a market research and business planning activity are conducted accordingly, this approach could help to minimise risks and maximise opportunities.

Three national examples of horticultural social enterprises:

3.1 COPE

Community Opportunities for Participation in Enterprise (COPE) was established in the Shetland Islands in 1997 following a three-year pilot under

the local authority. It is now a limited company with charitable status, employing more than 40 staff and trainees, and several volunteers. At least 25% of its paid employees are disabled and it qualifies for the status Social Firm.

As well as a nursery, COPE has a popular garden centre where the public can browse and purchase a wide variety of plants, shrubs and trees. It specialises in the propagation of native species; for example birch, alder, elder and 14 varieties of willow. One of COPE's unique selling points (USP) is that the products can stand up to the harsh growing conditions of the Shetland climate.

COPE operates a project composting waste generated from its own catering enterprise as well as from local restaurants using an innovative industrial composter. This business also has a contract for the manufacture of domestic compost bins for the Local Authority, making use of reclaimed timber.

Given its location it may not be practical to visit COPE, but it appears to be one of the most successful UK projects in terms of paid employment outcomes and successful diversification of trading in a local market

3.2 Mow and Grow scheme in Waveney, Norwich: Winner of the Enterprise Award and the Pride of Region award at the Celebrate Awards, 2007.

This award winning Mow and Grow scheme in Waveney has been running for two years. The original idea and aim of the project was to keep the neighbourhood tidy. It started working with volunteers and moved on to provide services to elderly and vulnerable people in the local areas.

The success of this project includes achieving a fully sustainable company with three full-time employees. Recruitment focused on volunteers who were struggling to find work, either through disabilities or disadvantaged backgrounds.

It has helped over 1000 vulnerable people and more than 70 voluntary bodies, has won numerous awards and also gained the BBC's 'neighbourhood garden' license to promote good practice. The success was based on receiving funding from European Social Fund to set up a Mow and Grow scheme over two years in Waveney.

This project may be worth visiting because it has adopted exemplary good practices, in particular:

- their commitment to safety is clear and both volunteers and clients are reassured about the extensive controls put in place to manage safety, health and well-being throughout Mow & Grow.
- reducing the use of pesticides in gardening using natural alternatives, wherever possible. This area is approached as a key target in further minimising the impact on the environment.
- the success of their business depends on how effectively they serve customers and respond to their concerns.
- their heavy investment in the team's training, development and well-being, and support needs.
- their respect for the environment
- their commitment to recycling and reducing waste wherever possible.
- a long-standing commitment to animal welfare.
- The project has made a positive difference to the community.

Mow & Grow has involved over 100 volunteers and staff across its schemes in the UK. The company is committed to the training and development of their volunteers, including engaging them in a vision for success, customer choice and community support. And their recruitment and retention policy is built on valuing colleague diversity on ethnicity, gender and age so that colleagues are treated fairly and can meet the needs of customers better.

3.3 Thrive

Thrive is a national Charity that has been in existence for over 26 years. It runs projects for disabled and socially excluded people and has hundreds of

projects throughout the country. It is reliant on external funding for the places available for clients at the projects via service level agreements, or special needs training provision and local fundraising. The focus of this charity is to run projects that create meaningful activities and a safe environment for its client group; it is therapeutic not commercial.

The project relies on other forms of funding rather than having to be self-sustaining. Working closely with social services it provides some financial security, but this comes with the need to implement all their policy requirements to ensure that the level of care meets their strict standards. This, in itself, is costly for a smaller project with less staff. The specialist training of supervisory staff, and the high care staff ratio, means that creating facilities suitable for providing meaningful work to those with learning disabilities tends not to be commercially viable without external financial support.

This charity's work is of interest to any proposed social enterprise, or network of social enterprises, as it will undoubtedly share some of the same issues around supervision and support, though the development envisaged by this study is to be sustainable and become profitable in order to support paid employment.

4. Supply and Potential Supply of Horticultural Services

The study has focused on public sector, private sector and voluntary and community sector activities in Islington and on organisations that have been working in partnership with residents to transform their environment. A survey (attached at appendix 1) was circulated to Islington-based horticultural enterprises (list attached at Appendix 2) to try to establish levels of activity, business capacity and investment requirement.

4.1 London Borough of Islington

The London Borough of Islington wishes to work in partnership with the community to improve its environmental performance and improve the quality

of life for all that live, work, and visit Islington by maintaining its green spaces. Despite being London's smallest borough, Islington has 16 sports courts and pitches and more than 60 children's play areas, as well as memorial gardens and parks. The council is committed to:

- protection of the environment
- careful use of natural resources
- a vibrant and sustainable local economy
- social progress that recognises the needs of everyone.

A meeting with Greenspace management and operational staff was conducted to establish a general overview of managing and running parks and green spaces. A meeting with Islington Enterprise Team aimed to establish London Borough of Islington's views and strategy on horticultural activities as well as getting local data and pointers on the size of the market. The aim of meeting with large local contractors and other operators was to establish the competition as well as assessing a potential opportunity for partnership.

4.2 Greenspace

London Borough of Islington's Greenspace Projects Team co-ordinates a number of projects to improve, extend and redesign the parks and open spaces. The team also leads for the division on the major regeneration initiatives in the Borough, such as New Deal and Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF). The projects team is currently delivering in excess of £2,000,000 worth of parks' improvements per year.

Most of the current projects run by Greenspace are large projects that require landscape designers and specialist work. Other projects are community led, addressing local problems of neglect and antisocial behavior. Such projects tend to be run and controlled by the local community.

Most of its work is conducted under commercial contracting which is subject to tendering rules. Some of the maintenance work for the council's smaller green spaces is done by local community groups, groups of volunteers from British

Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) and the country programme of pay back schemes for adult offenders.

Year on year, Greenspace is the largest purchaser of horticultural services in the borough. Though it would be exacting in its requirement of quality and performance standards, it is actively committed to community involvement. It's potential to be 'a big friendly client' is a significant driver for this study and, as such, is discussed in more detail in the section on The Market.

4.3 Glendale

Glendale, the largest operating division of Parkwood Holdings plc, is probably the largest specialist green services company in the UK and a leading provider of green service solutions to the public and private sector. The breakdown of its activities include:

- 65% local authorities
- 35% non public – private clients, e.g. golf clubs.

Glendale delivers quality, value for money and innovation through its extensive range of green solutions, including:

- grounds management
- countryside management
- green waste recycling
- golf management
- horticulture.

Glendale is one of the main contractors working within the London Borough of Islington. Glendale maintains about 50% of Islington's parks and green space. They maintain high standards of work. London Borough of Islington has worked in partnership with Glendale to focus on greater public involvement in setting and monitoring of targets and performance. The contract has delivered four key priorities - customer focus, sustainability,

regeneration and performance management. The partnership has achieved Awards for Excellence.

Glendale has been working in Islington for 10 years and in Camden for seven years, providing landscape and maintenance of the green spaces in the borough.

In the last two years, its largest contract has been from the London Borough of Lewisham – a £5 million contract for the company to maintain and develop all the green spaces in Lewisham. Its smallest jobs are as low as £10 in value from private clients (these small projects are managed by the Glendale Estate management department). In its future plans, Glendale is aiming to tap into new, up and coming projects, such as the 2012 Olympics development and Thames Gateway project.

The peak trading months are March to October, while the worst months for trading are December to January. The seasonal nature of the work has contributed to a staff retention problem and Glendale is now working towards developing activities that take place around worst periods, including tree surgery or planting trees as it is believed that this will help in maintaining the same levels of business throughout the year.

The company employs 4500 staff of which 200 work on the horticultural side of the business. In the past, Glendale has worked with individuals with learning difficulties (Harrington gardens project in Islington) and appears willing to do so again in the future.

The future plan and interest of the company is environmental sustainability and to reduce carbon footprint. Methods in which Glendale are committed to this plan include:

- at present the company is planting trees at Heathrow airport to help their client, British Airways, offset their carbon footprint

- diversity within the company by growing their own plants in local areas. At the moment the nurseries are located along the M25, while the largest one is in Tunbridge Wells
- producing their own compost using local waste.

Glendale is a well-established company with a large capital base and provides excellent potential to work in partnership and/or in a sub-contracting relationship with horticultural social enterprises in Islington. It presents a wealth of experience in horticultural projects.

Glendale has co-operated on initiatives to include disabled employees in its workforce but, unlike social enterprise, its main motive is commercial not social. London Borough of Islington's current interest to substantially increase paid work opportunities for individuals with learning difficulties and mental health problems might present a challenge to such a commercial and business-focused company. Nonetheless, it is a major employer of people in horticulture and the potential for disabled people achieving sustainable employment with Glendale (and indeed other private contractors) should not be underplayed.

Part of the challenge for Glendale and other private companies, regarding meeting support and training needs, might be met by organisations already working to support people with learning difficulties and people with mental health problems.

Glendale would be interested to work in partnership with social enterprise companies. In turn, partnership would provide an excellent opportunity for existing or proposed social enterprises to work and learn from a large national company.

4.4 Groundwork

Groundwork is an environmental charity that supports communities in need. They work with communities in Camden, Islington, Westminster and Haringey to develop and deliver projects and programmes that benefit:

- people: creating opportunities for people to learn new skills and become more active citizens.
- places: delivering environmental improvements that create cleaner, safer, greener neighbourhoods.
- prosperity: helping businesses and individuals fulfill their potential.

Groundwork has been working in Islington since 2001, delivering a wide range of programmes, from encouraging recycling, setting up and running an environmental networking group, open space improvements and innovative youth programmes.

Since April 2006, Groundwork's Community Gardener has been working in partnership with two Islington communities; the Mildmay Community Partnership, a local regeneration organisation, and Mayville residents to set up a gardening club to look after community planting beds. The project was funded by Neighbourhood Renewal Funding and Tenants Compact, while the partners on the project were Homes for Islington, Islington Council, Mildmay Community Partnership and the Mayville Tenants and Residents Association. The Mayville project is very close to Peter Bedford's Hackney office, as well as a recently established social enterprise - Star Box Café - based on Newington Green (providing healthy food, employment for people with learning difficulties, fair trade products, and also uses recycled and biodegradable materials).

Other horticultural projects that Groundwork is involved in Islington include:

- Canonbury Station
- Kings Square
- Islington Environment Forum
- Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School

During 2007, Groundwork carried out an audit of 168 green spaces and 300 housing estates in Islington. This work was commissioned by Greenspace and included an audit against an agreed standard, as well as input from the

local community into their priorities for open spaces and engaging them in the process.

Social enterprise is a very small part of their activities. At present they provide services for the Beneton Estate project for which they provide maintenance services and are paid £800 per month. This project recruits local unemployed people and provides work experience and training opportunities via supervised work placement within the 'Green Team' undertaking small scale horticultural and ground maintenance works. They have 2.5 members of staff working on this project with 5 beneficiaries. Groundwork provides personnel with protective equipment and pay for the beneficiaries transport cost.

Groundwork would like social enterprise activities to increase as they are approaching the end of the London Development Agency (LDA) contract 2010 and social enterprise growth would provide sustainability. The plan is to secure maintenance contracts from the local authorities, particularly the regeneration work that is going on in East London as part of the Olympic 2012 project. This would help to develop a solid team that will continue will continue to train and provide employment to local unemployed people.

The key interest of Groundwork would be to involve more local residents in participating in development and implementation of projects by providing support and employment. The main unanswered questions that they hope this feasibility study will address include what level of support the council is prepared to provide in developing a social enterprise that addresses social issues within the borough.

Groundwork is not keen to be a lead organisation, but is keen to be part of a social enterprise development that will focus on specific projects and areas /parks in the borough.

4.5 Sunnyside Community Gardens

Sunnyside Community Gardens has been running for over 25 years. The area was a wasteland and local residents lobbied the council to let them use

the land to create a community garden. In 1992 the community decided to register the gardens as a charity with the aims of providing horticultural therapy to people with “special needs” and promote sustainability and horticultural practices. The project is also governed by a management committee.

Volunteering and mental health work continues to be an important part of the charity’s activities. The project offers horticultural sessions for people who would like to learn about gardening or to garden for therapeutic reasons. The project tends to take volunteers with long-term mental health problems and physical disabilities.

During 2006, and with the help of volunteers, the project built a new wildlife garden, a sensory garden and managed to maintain the Peace Garden in Elthorne park. This project, however, faces continuous funding difficulties despite providing very valuable service to the community for individuals with mental health problems.

To address environmental issues the project also run a community composting project that proves to be very successful. The plan is to secure funding that will enable expansion of the capacity to compost more gardening waste for the local community.

There is a small vegetable garden and its produce is sold on the Saturday Organic market. This market aims to promote healthy eating and runs every Saturday from 10am to 3pm, selling fresh vegetables, cheeses and bread.

The project has a community contracts worker who runs the community gardening service. The sole worker tends to be very busy with a variety of different customers ranging from small organisations that include housing associations, care homes and private home owners. Gardening contracts for local private gardens are delivered at a competitive price, transporting tools with a trailer. The project is sustainable financially and it provides an important service of promoting the Sunnyside Community Garden within the

community and offers service users the opportunity to gain gardening experience outside the park. The service has not been able to generate any surplus.

Sunnyside Community gardens currently have no aspiration to grow or increase the size of their social enterprise activities. They felt that this might shift focus from the aim of the organisation, which is to provide a therapeutic service to the service users. There is concern that pressure from social enterprise contracts might make staff start to focus on delivering contracts instead of the well-being of the service users. Another main issue is that the project relies on volunteers' commitment and expectations; sometimes very few turn up and are not willing to go anywhere else.

This project is similar to the Thrive project that was discussed in Chapter one (national example models), in that it's aim is to create meaningful activities and a safe environment for its client group and is not commercial. The current aim of the social enterprise activity for the organisation is to provide service to the clients and any new ideas will have to complement the core aims of the charity. The fact that they have one worker who works locally provides flexibility without pressure for volunteers to go and work outside the community garden. This tension between the mission, the needs of service users and the pressure of commercial demand is one which is shared to different degrees by all voluntary and community sector organisations contemplating or engaged in social enterprise.

4.6 Freightliners Farm

Freightliners Farm is a registered charity, and a not-for-profit organisation, founded on wasteland behind Kings Cross station in London in 1973. Freightliners is also the only city farm in the UK which has a non-slaughtering policy. The funding for this community-led farm and garden comes partly from Islington Council, but the greater part of income is secured through fundraising. Generating sufficient income is a challenge and always a priority. Entrance to the farm is free, although visitors are encouraged to leave donations.

The farm provides the opportunity for local individuals and groups to learn from and interact with the environment and each other through animal care, horticulture and sustainable practices. Its purpose is to provide an educational and recreational recourse for the community, promoting social welfare and quality of life through a collaborative and inclusive community project. Up to 45, 000 individuals and 200 school visit each year. This farm will be of interest to this project, potentially providing opportunities to learn from their horticulture and sustainability practices.

4.7 Green Firm

This is a horticultural social enterprise registered as a Community Interest Company (CIC) and has been trading since 2006 and is based in Islington. The enterprise provides maintenance and designing of community gardens within Islington, working with 2-3 members of staff. Main customers include the Grafton Primary school, Landseer Gardens Friends Group and private clients. The largest job the enterprise has worked on so far was £2,300 and smallest job is a basic maintenance work 2 hours every three weeks. The annual turnover for the company is £34k. The peak trading period is spring/autumn and the worst is mid and late winter.

The company considers Groundwork and the BTCV to be their main competitors. At present none of their staff members has learning difficulties or mental health problems, but they would be willing to work with such individuals in the future if they receive the appropriate support.

Future development plans include the company working as part of a social enterprise network or as a lead company. They are keen to develop projects that can be rolled across the borough, employ seasonal workers, trainers and skilled labour. The enterprise has also realised that there is a gap between the landscape designers, the builders and those involved in maintaining horticultural projects. Hence they are working towards developing in-house capacity so that they can provide the full service directly.

The enterprise is also working towards addressing the recycling of waste and plastic plant pots. Green Firm appears to have the will and potential to grow into a leading company but initially will require considerable support in developing capacity to work with people with learning difficulties and mental health problems, as well as to manage larger contracts.

4.8 St Mungo's Putting Down Roots

St Mungo's Putting Down Roots project is a horticultural social enterprise that provides opportunities for vulnerable people to build confidence, self-esteem, gain qualifications and employment. It has branches all over London, including the Finsbury Park Horticultural project in the London Borough of Islington.

The project creates teams that deliver gardening contracts to other organisations, including local authorities, companies and residents' groups. For volunteers, the project provides all equipment needed, covers travel expenses and offers £3.00 to cover lunch expenses.

Established in 2001, with the help of Bankside Open Space Trust and the Waterloo Community Charity, Putting Down Roots is open to all people who are currently experiencing homelessness, have experienced homelessness in the past or are at risk of homelessness. The project has involved more than 400 individuals from a variety of backgrounds. Many of St Mungo's homeless volunteers struggle with alcohol and substance dependency and many are also ex-offenders. The organisation helps homeless people and local communities design, plan and work on gardening projects to rejuvenate local areas.

Volunteers often progress to one of the project's gardening courses, and many simply enjoy being outside, caring for public gardens, doing some physical work, learning some gardening skills and meeting other people.

The project is set up as a social enterprise working with disadvantaged individuals and has been running for over 6 years. The ownership of the projects and decision-making is very democratic and empowers the community to make decisions on where they live. On the whole, this project provides many aspects of what the feasibility study requires for a lead organisation, i.e. experience of running a horticultural social enterprise, working with people with learning difficulties and mental health problems, while also providing training in horticulture. In addition, it is already operating in Islington creating employment opportunities. However, it should be noted that it currently relies on a volunteer workforce for the majority of its horticultural labour.

4.9 Peter Bedford

Peter Bedford has a long track record of involvement in social enterprise activities going back to 1972. It started out with a trading company, John Bellers Ltd, which traded with Local Authorities in London and provided paid work for Peter Bedford's own tenants and participants in gardening, cleaning and printing, catering and decorating. It operated until the end of the 1980s. It was also the originator of the Oasis Café in Highbury Fields.

Other current social enterprises include external catering (Grapevine Enterprises) and a high street shop (Bedfords), as well as a portfolio of contracts for services with Local Authorities and Primary Care Trusts. The organisation also has two small production workshops, responsible for delivering low volumes of sales in Joinery and Soft Furnishings. I

In 2007 Peter Bedford opened Star Box Café, a new seasonal social enterprise at Newington Green. This project is supported by London Borough of Islington Greenspace and Islington Learning Disabilities Partnership and takes positive action to employ people with learning difficulties.

Social enterprise sales account for about £100,000 of Peter Bedford's annual turnover. This is expected to increase by 50% during 08/09 with the

expansion of Grapevine catering enterprise and the improvements in Bedfords' shop sales.

Peter Bedford's current social enterprises provide work experience, paid sessional work, and a commercial context for the assessment of NVQs in Catering and Hospitality, Retail and Distribution, and Business Administration.

The organisation also employs a Social Enterprise Business Development Manager and a Fundraising Manager.

A gardening project was started in October 2006, and funded by 'Awards for All', which is part of the Big Lottery fund. This project was started as a result of internal surveys conducted in 2005 to assess what activities participants and tenants would like to be involved in. The activity takes place at Clissold Canteen, one of our community centres. The overall objective is to engage socially excluded adults in a meaningful activity. The project is managed by a Community Services Co-ordinator and run by paid Community Gardeners and volunteers.

The communal gardens themselves belong to Peter Bedford tenants living in flats along Clissold Road. It backs on to the rear of the canteen that is situated in the basement of one of the blocks of flats. Tenants are consulted about any major initiatives in the garden and their views are heard and acted upon.

The decision-making process and structure strives to accommodate the interests of all participants. Participant's wishes are respected and tasks are delegated accordingly. People can decide to do as little or as much as they want or just stay for a chat. The project has been able to achieve the following objectives:

- opportunities for 12 people to learn gardening and horticultural skills
- improve communication skills for some participants and team work by encouraging horizontal decision making

- raising awareness of healthy eating and living by growing and supplying organic vegetables
- providing an opportunity for people to socialise
- encouraging people out of the house
- helping older and vulnerable people to lead independent, active and fulfilling lives.

In terms of popularity and progress against original objectives, the project has been a great success and PB has decided to continue funding the project directly to enable it to continue.

4.10 The Harrington Scheme

The Harrington Scheme is a unique learning programme for young people with learning difficulties to help them into employment or further education. Set up as a charity by the local community in 1980, it is situated in London Borough of Islington but attracts learners from all over London.

The training programmes are tailored for individual needs - every learner has an individual programme of activities to support their personal development and skill needs. The majority of learners are supported to find a job or further training when they leave. The scheme provides continuous support for as long as it is needed and liaises with employers also.

A Horticultural Training Scheme is aimed at young people aged 16-24 and offers full-time training, usually four and a half days per week, to prepare young adults with learning difficulties for work. The scheme helps them to find employment and supports them in their new jobs. The training is also funded by the Learning and Skills Council.

Harrington Gardeners is a supported employment initiative offering a stepping-stone for those who cannot go straight into work; a subsidiary of the Harrington Scheme, it was established to provide supported employment opportunities to learners who have graduated from the training centre. The Assistant Gardeners are offered paid employment and the opportunity to gain

real work experience and further develop their gardening skills.

The company provides garden maintenance services at competitive prices. Customers include many private households as well as local organisations, schools and estates. Their services include hard and soft landscaping, garden maintenance, clearance and design, and all work is supervised by suitably qualified and experienced gardeners.

They have a Day Service which offers a therapeutic horticultural service to adults with a learning difficulty or mental health support need.

They also offer Foundation Skills to young people aged 16-24 including employability skills, life skills and basic skills. It prepares learners who need additional support to enter mainstream training, further education and work, and is funded by the local Learning and Skills Council.

At minimum, the objectives of a social enterprise project are to have commercial success as a main outcome alongside the achievement of social benefit. Increasingly, social enterprises also have environmental sustainability as an objective, forming three bottom lines: Financial, Social and Environmental.

5. The Market

5.1 Assessing the demand for horticultural services

Research to determine the kind, size and potential of the market and, furthermore, the level of competition was conducted using local newspapers and the internet. This approach was also relevant in establishing the level of demand from both the public and private sector.

5.2 Individual private clients

On a national level, Islington's social economic profile is notable for its high proportion of residents in the higher managerial, professional classes. This group tends to own their own homes and a higher proportion have the kind of disposable income which means that they can afford to employ someone to look after their gardens. This is potentially the economic group that a horticultural enterprise can target for providing its services. The table below shows the home ownership and tenure for the area.

Tenure by ward for West Area and Islington

Area	Ward	% Owned	% social rented	% Private rented	% Living rent free
West	Barnsbury	34%	46%	18%	2%
West	Caledonian	29%	54%	15%	2%
West	Holloway	27%	56%	15%	2%
West	St. Mary's	31%	47%	20%	2%
	Total	30%	51%	17%	2%
Borough	Islington	32%	49%	17%	2%

There is an important and growing trend for ethical purchasing which also has a bearing on the market for Horticultural Social Enterprise. Based on social and global conscience, and embracing themes like world poverty and climate change, there is increased demand for and supply of fair traded goods. The rise in farmers' markets and locally produced foods, and in the sale of organically grown food more generally, reflects this shift in supply and demand. As these goods are at a higher cost than regular produce, demand is generally higher from professional and managerial classes, and the affluent areas of Islington are no exception.

Ethical purchasing can and does extend to supporting local charities and not-for-profit enterprises because of their additional social benefit. Peter Bedford's shop in Holloway Road benefits from substantial repeat custom from customers who expressly wish to buy from an organisation supporting people to gain qualifications and paid employment. In this market, social benefit is a unique and empowering selling point which any and all social enterprises should gear up to exploit.

5.3 Social Landlords and the not-for-profit sector

Horticultural Social Enterprise could also target social landlords. In Islington, a number of housing associations are well established in the borough as indicated below. There is a need to conduct market surveys to find out the size of the market, ascertain current supply and identify whether there is any opportunity to try the services of a social enterprise. Peter Bedford, for example, spends ? annually on gardening and maintenance. Although 50% of this spend is on specialist services, e.g. tree surgery, the Association would be willing to consider suitable contracts with a local social enterprise. Peter Bedford also belongs to a benchmarking group of smaller housing associations (Optimum), all of whom work with socially excluded groups and are active in support of social enterprise as a means to paid employment for service users. The following larger housing associations could also be targeted by the project:

5.3.1 Affinity Sutton

The group is now one of the largest providers of affordable housing in the country. Affinity Sutton successfully own and manage a large estate in Islington and are currently involved in the redevelopment of a number of former under-used council sites for affordable housing.

5.3.2 Circle Anglia

Circle Anglia is the largest housing association in Islington, owning over 3,000 properties and a further 700 homes for sheltered housing. Circle is also an important development partner and is involved in a number of schemes throughout the borough, including 213 Junction Road. In early 2007, Circle completed a new development on Caledonian Road which contained homes for both shared ownership and general needs social rent. Peter Bedford has a longstanding management relationship with Circle Anglia.

5.3.3 Community Housing Association

Community Housing Association has won numerous awards for its new developments in London, including one from the Royal Institute of British Architecture (RIBA).

Its past developments in Islington include the Priory Heights Scheme. The first scheme of its kind in London, it was built without subsidy using the money raised through the private sale of properties, allowing it to subsidise its social housing. The Community Housing Association is currently involved in a number of new developments in Islington, including 26 Laycock Street.

5.3.4 Family Mosaic

The merger of Family Housing Association and Mosaic Homes provides homes and housing services to approximately 2315 families located in Islington. Family Mosaic is one of Islington's leading development partners. The largest scheme that they are involved in is the prestigious City Road Basin which is expected to deliver 196 new affordable homes.

5.3.5 Genesis

The Genesis Housing Group currently owns approximately 50 homes in Islington. Genesis have recently been involved in an important development in Islington, The Wintons in Kings Cross. This development provided large family sized units for social rent and a number of shared ownership units. The Wintons was unique in Islington as it was the first in the borough to have used environmentally sustainable modular construction methods.

5.3.6 Islington and Shoreditch Housing Association

Islington and Shoreditch Housing Association (ISHA) owns over 500 properties in Islington. ISHA has seen its share of the approved development programme grow significantly in the last two years. Its most recent schemes include the development of affordable housing at King Henry Walk and Charles Lamb School in partnership with Islington Council and CEA Islington.

5.3.7 Newlon Housing Trust

In 2000, London Borough of Islington transferred over 600 properties to them as part of the Barnsbury Estate stock transfer. Newlon is now the sixth largest

association in Islington with approximately 900 properties located in the borough.

5.3.8 Peabody Housing Trust

Peabody Housing Trust currently owns nearly 20% of all the housing association properties in Islington. Peabody has recently been involved in refurbishing a number of estate properties for intermediate rent for Key Workers.

5.3.9 Southern Housing Group

Southern Housing Group is a large association that has been heavily involved in community regeneration and development in Islington. It is currently undertaking the regeneration and renewal of the Market Estate, which will see the demolition of the estate and replacement with a mix of affordable rented, shared ownership and private sale properties.

5.3.10 The Guinness Trust

Guinness is currently involved in a number of large developments in Islington, including the redevelopment of Naish Court and the forthcoming development of the Hornsey Road Baths and surrounding areas. The Guinness Trust is also working in partnership with Barnsbury Housing Association on the Eden Grove School redevelopment, which is due to complete in February 2008.

5.4 Public Sector – the Big Friendly Client

Islington Council is responsible for 106 parks and green spaces in the borough and responsibility for these spaces is charged to Greenspace. Greenspace forms part of the Council's Environment and Regeneration Department and is responsible for:

- Islington Parks
- Play grounds
- Council estate grounds and
- Trees.

The department also grows its own plants at its Horticultural Resource Centre in East Finchley.

Greenspace has been referred to throughout this feasibility study as a 'big friendly client'. It is important, therefore, to make a preliminary assessment of Greenspace as an actual and potential customer of horticultural social enterprise in the borough.

Islington Council states that it has developed the "One Islington" vision that sets out an ambitious programme of change for the borough, building on the following key priorities:

- regeneration
- sustainability
- performance improvement
- customer focus.

The vision is to develop a community that is socially cohesive and prosperous; develop a vibrant local economy and empower people in Islington to have greater control of their lives and to have access to a full range of leisure, cultural and retail services. Islington Greenspace department works towards achieving the Council's vision. The vision is achieved building on key priorities as follows:

Regeneration:

- Contractors must assist the Greenspace and Leisure Team in the production of Individual Site Management Plans so that 20% of all sites are covered per year. Between January & March each year the contractor must submit to the Greenspace and Leisure Team individual Site Improvement Plans for 50% of their sites so that every site is covered on a two year rolling programme

Sustainability:

- The Greenspace and Leisure Team is committed to increasing re-cycling, sustainability, biodiversity, and promotion of Local Agenda 21 and has produced a Sustainable Planting Policy. The Greenspace and Leisure Team is also committed to reducing the amount of inorganic pesticides used in its sites. Particular emphasis is placed on materials and fuels used, re-cycling of litter, composting and management of compost and leaf litter bins, planting regimes and site management.
- In this regard, any contractor will be required to provide a Sustainability Strategy to realize these aims. This must be reviewed on an annual basis and an updated report given to the Greenspace and Leisure Team annually also.

Performance improvement:

- The Islington Council states that it is proud of its parks and other sites, and the specification and schedule of works set out by Greenspace is designed to enable the continuation of the high standard of horticultural maintenance. The works have to be carried out in such a way as to maintain the Council's reputation and allow the public continued enjoyment of the facilities.
- The provision of sports pitches, games facilities, conservation and ecological areas are also regarded as a major contribution to the wellbeing of local residents.

Customer Focus:

- The Council's aim is to put people first and to involve and empower communities and individuals. Community Liaison is a priority for all contractors working with Greenspace. Contractors are expected to send representatives to Friends of Parks meetings, Council Area Committee meetings and other meetings and events upon request. Contractors are also expected to support the Greenspace and Leisure Team and the local community with community initiatives such as planting days, clean-up events, festivals and school activities.

- Health and safety is of paramount importance to the Local Authority and contractors are required to work within the framework of all Health and Safety Legislation. This means, for example, that protective works to safeguard the public and/or Greenspace and Leisure property may be carried out at the Contractor's expense if necessary. They are also strict on the provision of documentation proving compliance with a range of legislation.

5.5 The scope of the work

At present Greenspace has its own team; an internal workforce that sort work in-house. They would like to maintain this as an important element of being able to react and respond quickly and flexibly without relying on external contractors.

Greenspace also works with a community-led design process which was instigated in 2006, providing the local community with the opportunity to design their green space and surroundings. Local communities and 'Friends of' groups choose what they want to do and contractors /Glendale delivers the plan. The plan is to work with the communities and help them to get involved in delivering the overall design or improvements.

Possible business opportunities for social enterprise exist in ground maintenance work in such local authority areas as housing estates and parks. The majority of this work is, at present, carried out by Glendale Plc. However, all contracts are currently being reviewed and are due to be put out to tender in January 2009. Islington's green spaces will be divided into four areas and companies will be invited to bid for work on that basis. It is envisaged that Greenspace will work with up to two different contractors. Given the scale of the work (contracts to a total of £2 million per annum), it is unlikely that a local social enterprise will be well developed enough to be successful in bidding independently for either of these potential contracts. However, at least 10% or £200,000 worth of these contracts overall are flexible and there are

opportunities to bid directly or to enter into partnerships and sub-contracting arrangements with private sector bidders. There are also opportunities to persuade Greenspace to enter into smaller contracts – via ‘Friends of’, Action and other Community groups – for some of the parks and green spaces in the borough. This is already a tried, tested and preferred way of working to which Greenspace is committed.

It is advisable that interested social enterprises – or an interested network of social enterprises - gear up well before the invitation to bid for the new contracts at the beginning of 2009. It is worth looking at the possibility of setting up a business model on one of the dedicated sites, e.g. Highbury Fields or Newington Green. . The lead social enterprise might sub-contract some activities on the site. Developing a relationship with current contractors with a view to mutual learning and partnership bidding might be helpful to a current or new horticultural social enterprise.

Examining the way contracts are issued on maintenance, it has been identified that jobs are broken down to components of:

- Grass Maintenance
- Shrub Bed Maintenance
- Rose Bed Maintenance
- Annual Bedding
- Tree Maintenance
- Water Feature Maintenance
- Compost Bin Maintenance, etc.

This might make it easier for social enterprise companies to sub-contract, or share the work and focus on the strengths and skills of particular companies, rather than trying to become ‘Jack of All Trades’.

It would also be useful to approach the community led groups who are able to design and plan, but unable to manage their own green space, to instead

evaluate the business opportunities for social enterprise as the work tends to be small scale and quite flexible.

5.6 Growing Fruits and Vegetables

There is a shortage of allotments in the borough. A project carried out two years ago on community gardens through the Staying Alive Project tried to identify locations for allotments on housing estates in the Junction and Hillrise wards. Two potential estates were identified but tenants and residents associations did not want to take the project forward. Although there were suitable spaces found in both wards, the Tenants and Residents Associations did not want to see allotments on their estates or there were too few residents keen enough to help drive the project and make it successful. The majority of residents were more interested in growing flowers and having a nicer space they could use, rather than growing food.

However, this does not mean that all tenants and residents groups will feel the same. For example, consultation with Peter Bedford's tenants about their communal garden produced "No" to the introduction of a water feature but "Yes" to the production of fruit and vegetables, which many of them subsequently already benefited from via their locally run Peter Bedford canteen.

6. Marketing

Marketing is identifying and satisfying customer's needs profitably. The marketing strategy therefore must focus on identifying the customers, identifying products or services that are required in the market place, and developing relevant marketing tactics. At the marketing stage there will also be a need to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the planned social enterprise, capitalizing on strengths and reducing the incidence or impact of those weaknesses envisaged.

6.1 Size of the market

There is clear scope for social enterprises to gear up for Greenspace's re-tendering processes with a market share to the value of £200,000 potentially up-for-grabs from January 2009. There is also another set of potentially 'friendly clients' amongst social landlords and other not-for-profit organisations. Detailed consultation about the gardening/maintenance budgets of small and larger housing associations in Islington would give a better view of the potential market but, based on Optimum's activity, it is thought that viable portions of the work are likely to match or exceed the £200,000 of the public sector.

As already indicated, another group of potential customers are homeowners with gardens, busy lives and disposable income. It is difficult to ascertain the market share of this group and the business development phase would need to conduct detailed market surveying for more intelligence.

6.2 Reputation and unique selling proposition/point

Developing good working relationships based on reliable reputation is vital as it will generate more business by repeat work and recommendation. To some extent, the reputation for performance of all horticultural social enterprises depends on the performance and reputation of each social enterprise as bad experiences of one type of contractor can lead to rejection of all contractors of that type. Fortunately, the experience of Greenspace with social enterprises like the Green Team, Groundwork and the Harington Scheme is very positive and forms a constructive basis on which to build.

Quality badges (including awards for excellence and membership of professional bodies like the British Association of Landscape Industries) are persuasive as they reassure the customer of the worker and contractors professional competence.

Individual social enterprises can and do develop their own unique selling points to distinguish their products from their competitors and must continue to do this. Collectively, the trend for ethical buying in more affluent parts of Islington could be matched with marketing the social benefit of the social enterprise as a unique selling point. In line with many of the people we talked

to throughout this study, Peter Bedford's view is that such marketing should be empowering and present able images of disabled and socially excluded people, i.e. as net contributors to society, not as drains on society or 'charity' cases. Nonetheless, well-handled, the status of the organisation as a charity, not-for-profit or community interest company might generate more business and provide positive publicity for those who wish to generate social and not just financial profit.

6.3 The competition: existing garden services in Islington

As has been noted elsewhere, it would be a mistake to see the common goal of social benefit as eclipsing competition between social enterprises. Nonetheless, on the face of it there is greater scope for synergy and co-operation where objectives are mutually beneficial.

A survey of local newspapers and internet advertisements has shown that there are quite a few private sector companies and individuals advertising for gardening services in Islington. As well as Glendale already discussed, the bigger companies operating in the area include:

1. Ground Control

6 Birchmore Walk
London, N5 2TJ
020 73541051

2. Alfie Bines Gardens

20 Princes Ave
London, N22 7SA
020 88810776

3. All Seasons Edens

210A Mount Pleasant Rd
London, N17 6JQ
020 83527501

4. Supagrass Ltd

Ground Floor 8A Mill Mead Road Lockwood Industrial Park
London, N17 9QP
020 83659955

5. Green Earth Garden Services

20 Hermitage Road
London, N4 1DE
020 75033932

Most of these companies provide landscaping and design, tree surgery, gardens maintenance and planting projects. Some companies provide specialist services like introducing native flora and fauna into gardens; this includes the planting of native, northern European species to actively encourage wildlife into your garden. Their client base includes:

- London Borough of Islington
- managing agents
- housing associations
- care homes
- schools
- hospitals
- companies in the commercial sector
- churches
- private Old peoples homes
- industrial estates
- private households.

They variously employ gardening professionals and landscapers to provide a friendly, professional gardening service with the appropriate expertise for each project undertaken.

Most of them also hold professional membership of the British Association of Landscape Industries, the industry's leading trade body that demands a

vigorous vetting procedure and an ongoing commitment to quality. This area will need to be considered by the social enterprise, especially when aiming to work with large organisations, i.e. social housing or local authority projects that might require professional recognition.

Gardening companies tend to be small and some of them are family run businesses. They provide guarantees for their work that are covered by public liability insurance. They also tend to be quite flexible to undertake varied jobs.

Social enterprise would compete with these companies on general maintenance that includes: mowing, digging, pruning, general garden tidying and clearance, light tree pruning, soil conditioning and weed control.

6.4 Existing garden centres in Islington

Whilst taking appropriate account of garden centres as competition if/when it becomes relevant, social enterprise might benefit by working in partnership with some local garden centres. Some of these, like North One Garden Centre, have already shown willing. This could include discounted purchasing and procurement arrangements. It could also involve garden centres providing work placements where social enterprises are also involved in pre-employment training .

North One Garden Centre
The old Button Factory
25A Englefield Road, Islington
London, N1 4EU
Tel: 0207 923 3553

7. Production and Labour Requirement

This section considers what services could make the social enterprise sustainable and how these services might be delivered successfully by socially excluded or disabled people in the borough.

7.1 Production and types of service

Choosing what services to provide would be vital. The skill levels of participants and delivery capacity should be assessed so that the social enterprise is able to handle and fulfill the demand and compete effectively in the market place. Choosing to provide horticultural services which are not provided by the large companies would mean less competition and price undercuts from large companies. As discussed earlier, this will require flexibility and last minute requests that need to be addressed.

The performance specification and standards of work required for public and not-for-profit clients will be at least as exacting as the private market. Social enterprise needs to be able to deliver timely, high quality and safe work at a price which the market will bear.

It would be inadvisable for a small or start-out social enterprise to invest in heavy plant or machinery necessary, for example, the maintenance of large areas of grass or landscaping, as well as prohibitive capital and storage requirements, these activities can be carried out more cheaply and to a high quality by large contractors or specialists and it would be difficult to compete.

It would be wiser for a social enterprise to start by focusing on labour intensive, simpler tasks and small contracts working on the following jobs:

- clearing and maintaining gardens (clearing overgrown gardens, pruning shrubs [not trees] cutting hedges, weeding
- securing boundaries, cutting grass, removing rubbish
- growing plants for sale to the general public.

Gardening equipment would be relatively cheap and easy to provide and with closer supervision one or two participants working with one supervisor would be able to achieve good results, especially for small private gardens which is a market that large and medium companies tend not to be involved in. Local demand would need to be established in much more detail at a business planning stage.

Ideally, establishing a greenhouse or nursery facility for plants would allow for work throughout the year as well as vertical integration of the project by supplying plants to the gardens. There is a market for specialised herbs that can be grown to be sold for people's gardens. Houseplants are also a viable option for growing to sell. As with COPE in the Shetlands, the development of a nursery activity could provide sustainable employment throughout the year when combined with gardening.

The project would thus require the following equipment

- digging spades
- digging forks
- protective boots
- protective gloves
- wheel barrows
- shears
- hosepipes, etc.

The work gang will also need to be mobile; therefore, a vehicle will also be necessary.

7.1 Labour requirement and employment opportunities

There is good potential for providing employment opportunities for those at such a distance from the labour market that they effectively require entry employment. Peter Bedford is clear that paid work in horticulture would benefit its own tenants and participants and achieve one of the main objectives of the organisation, i.e. to empower individuals to achieve economic independence.

However, it is important that the therapeutic nature of horticulture present in some forms of horticulture projects (and an active objective in many like Thrive) should not accidentally mislead people. Much of the work is outdoor in all weathers, can be physically arduous and employers' demands (e.g. for punctuality, for notifying absence, for co-operation and industry, etc) are the

same as the demands in any commercial venture or paid employment in any results-driven environment.

The nature of work and the projects that the social enterprise will focus on are not viable for achieving employment throughout the year. This problem can be reduced if the project combined gardening work and nursery bedding and indoor plants. These tend to be grown in green houses that can be maintained throughout the year.

Right levels of supervision and support are critical, as evidenced by our experience at Star Box and that of other Social Enterprises. Dividing the projects and tasks into manageable sizes that will not be overwhelming will be necessary for entry-level employees and trainees. For a social enterprise business to succeed for the client groups in question, an enterprise will need to operate small gangs of two to three people with a supervisor and up to six people for bigger jobs.

Usually the client will issue the job specification and the supervisor needs to have enough knowledge to run the work. As well as being technically knowledgeable, they also need to be able to manage the group well. They do not need to be a specialist at working with people with learning difficulties or mental health problems, but they do need to have good interpersonal and communication skills and be reasonably empathic with those they are supervising. They also need to know when to ask for support and advice themselves.

Work is normally available for 6 months of the year, and it will not be easy to get work 5 days a week. Winter months can only be for preparation. For such an enterprise to succeed, it would need to be very flexible and be ready to take on work at very short notice. The more flexible the business is, the better the chance of getting work and succeeding.

When asked about the possibility of working in partnership with some of the current operators, a need to be cautious was suggested because of a

potential for exploitation. There is a need to be clear about the nature of partnership and payments.

On obtaining work from private clients, it was thought that this would be a great opportunity and an enterprise would need to advertise in local newspapers and distribute leaflets, since there are parts of Islington that have affluent people who will require such services.

A volunteer labour force cannot be commanded in the same way as a paid workforce; volunteers should add value rather than form the core labour force on which any commercial contract relies

The tension between the mission, the needs of service users and the pressure of commercial demand is one which is shared to different degrees by all voluntary and community sector organisations contemplating or engaged in social enterprise. This does not fit very well with the objective of the gardening project whose focus is developing meaningful activities for socially excluded people. Nonetheless, there is scope for synergy and relationship between the two types of project. For example, the income generated from a social enterprise can be used to support meaningful and therapeutic activity. At the same time, some participants who might have started attending a gardening project for meaningful activity purposes might progress further and move on to horticultural training, social enterprise activities and earn income through paid employment.

In order to start to establish the level of interest in a social enterprise project at Peter Bedford, a survey was conducted to establish the number of participants and tenants who would be interested in getting involved in a gardening training project or take up employment opportunities that might arise from the social enterprise. This involved a multiple-choice questionnaire to enable the participants and tenants to complete the questionnaire easily and quickly (Appendix 2). Supported Housing Workers at Peter Bedford were also requested to conduct the survey with some of their tenants. On the question of employment, a survey of 120 participants and tenants yielded the following result:

- If there were employment opportunities in gardening, would you be interested?

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	48	40%
No	68	56.7%
Don't know	04	3.3%
Total	120	100%

A 40% 'yes' vote is sufficient for Peter Bedford to conclude that there is enough interest to warrant further exploration of horticultural social enterprise as potential paid employment for its beneficiaries.

8. Self-Assessment for Prospective Enterprises

Whether an organisation is deciding to go it alone on social enterprise, to gear up to be a lead enterprise or a sub-contractor, to grow existing enterprise or begin an entirely new enterprise, self-assessment and analysis across a range of financial risks and other factors is critical to planning whether and how to go ahead. To that end, this chapter offers some self-assessment tools as a starting point, not as an end point.

8.1 Cost analysis

Because costs depend on content and scale of any prospective enterprise, and on existing infrastructure, costs analyses are organisation or company-specific and are most useful at the business planning stage. In the context of a feasibility study, analysis is abstract at best. Nonetheless, it is worth scoping likely elements of costs prior to a detailed business planning process. In broad headings they include:

- Premises

- office
- storage
- parking
- nursery or greenhousing

- Capital

- equipment/tools/machines
- transport
- reenhousing/polytunnels
- rain barrels
- composting equipment

- Staffing

- supervisors
- specialists
- gardeners
- assistants
- advisors or external support
- training costs
- recruitment costs

- Infrastructure

- management
- administration
- finance
- communications
- IT
- HR
- health and safety

- Other revenue costs

- marketing and publicity
- transport and travel
- materials
- Replacement equipment
- maintenance (Portable Appliance testing [PAT] etc)

8.2 Note on fundraising

Efforts to mobilise funding for this project would need to start early in 2008 if organisations are to prepare for Local Authority tendering in January 2009. Our Fundraising Manager has conducted initial prospect research and

believes that the right proposal, containing realistic outcomes, stands a good chance of getting funded. In addition to any regeneration funds that may be available, the following organisations have been identified for possible asks and applications:

The Social Enterprise Investment Fund

www.dh.gov.uk

Adventure Capital Fund

<http://adventurecapitalfund.org.uk>

The Big Issue Invest

www.biginvest.co.uk

Esmee Fairbairn

www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk

Scarman Trust

www.thesacrmantrust.org

Comic Relief

www.comicrelief.com

If Peter Bedford were to take this on, the approach would be to develop contacts and discuss the project with possible funding agencies before submitting an application, as this would help us to match bids to funding priorities and funder interest, and improve the chances of success.

8.3 Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities threats (SWOT) analysis

Knowing the opportunities that are out there, and the strengths that an organisation brings to those opportunities, is very important – but recognizing your potential weaknesses and the threats that exist to any development are equally important.

Peter Bedford has applied a SWOT analysis to itself in order to show other interested enterprises how they might evaluate themselves for a lead or sub-contracting role. No conclusions should be drawn at this stage as to whether Peter Bedford would put itself forward for such a role.

The question we have applied is “What are the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of Peter Bedford setting up a horticultural social enterprise for the employment of adults with learning difficulties and mental health problems”?

Strengths	Weaknesses
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reserves to back risk • Healthy infrastructure • Fundraising capacity • Experience of employing, training and supporting people with learning difficulties and people with mental health problems • Experience of running a (small, meaningful activity) gardening project • Current experience of running successful social enterprises • Current active partnerships with local organisations • Experience of sub-contracting; as contractor and sub-contractor, as customer and supplier • Current partnership for NVQ training in Horticulture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not currently commercial horticulture specialists • Not great on transport • Squeezed accommodation and storage • Parking problems on Islington site • Other PB priorities vying for attention • Set-up costs not guaranteed or available in time for tendering opportunity • Already running one high risk seasonal social enterprise (would another be a bridge too far?)
Opportunities	Threats

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To increase Social Enterprise activity • Big friendly client offers sustainable contracts opportunity • Links with commercial employers for work placements • Income generation if profitable • Intermediate paid employment for beneficiaries • Partnership with established voluntary and community sector • Sub-contracting to increase capacity to respond to customers • Referral networks to increase capacity to respond to customers • Internal custom – our own gardening contracts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of contracts for sustainability • Interest from beneficiaries not translating into participation • Not being able to recruit suitably qualified supervisors • Competition with larger, more experienced private sector • Competition with established voluntary and community sector • Not being able to generate enough commercial income • Seasonal nature affects business momentum, staffing continuity, etc • Problems associated with partnerships – agreements, adjusting to accommodate each other, sharing work and liabilities, etc.
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8.4 Project Risk Assessment

Many organisations have their own risk assessment and management processes. There is a version of one below, together with examples of risks and prompt questions to show how it might be used. This model is indicative, not definitive.

Identification of risk	Estimation of risk 1=Low 2=High	Evaluation of risk when managed 1=Low 2=High	Management of risk
Organisational risk			
Unable to meet funding or investment requirement			<p>Can you identify and apply for appropriate sources of funding for set-up and revenue purposes?</p> <p>Can you use organisation's own funds to invest?</p>
Process risk			
Inadequate level of capacity to carry out contracts			<p>Can you build capacity slowly by starting off small and limiting your target market?</p> <p>Can you work in partnership with experienced organisations?</p> <p>Can you sub-contract to experienced organisations to increase capacity?</p>
<p>Failure to attract suitably skilled supervisors for extra support needs</p> <p>Inadequate monitoring and control process</p>			<p>Can you get training for staff from Elfrida Society, Umbrella, Peter Bedford</p> <p>PB and Elifrida society to provide support to supervisors and people with learning difficulties</p>
Output-orientated risk			
Commercial viability/completion			
Unrealistic assessment of levels of demand			Business assessment has been based on Council assessment and internet survey of the private sector demand
Over-ambitious outcome targets			Employment creation will depend on the levels of contracts obtained. Training opportunities will depend on funding obtained.

Identification of risk	Estimation of risk 1=Low 2=High	Evaluation of risk when managed 1=Low 2=High	Management of risk
Over-ambitious sales targets			Can you monitor income and expenditure on a regular profit and loss basis?
Poorly defined objectives for the project and undefined assumptions about the project			Do you have clearly defined objectives of the project modeled on social enterprise, i.e. income generated that will be re-invested for the benefit of participants and the organisation. Do you continuously review your business objectives in relation to the organisation's strategic plan and priorities?
Failure to generate sufficient income through charges			Have you defined your unique selling point? Is your marketing strategy robust? Robust monitoring and evaluation procedures in place to pre-empt failure of initiatives?
Time-related risk			
Delay in completing work according to agreed programme or customer order			Is your project management programme robust? Staffing contingencies for planned and unplanned absences?
Weak cash Flow Management			Can you increase capacity in your finance administration?

8.5 Social Business Criteria Model

With the proviso that a private company cannot, strictly speaking, be a social business, assessment against the following social business criteria suggests that types of business across the 'for profit' and 'not for profit' sectors are not

necessarily worlds apart in their potential relationship to social business and the benefits it can bring.

Objective	Social Enterprise	Charity/ other not- for-profit	Private Sector
Are you set up for social or charitable objectives?	✓	✓	x
Are your objectives compatible with commercial imperatives?	✓	maybe	✓
Do you have experience of working with people with learning difficulties or mental health problems (or transferable experience from other client groups?)	maybe	maybe	maybe
Do you have (or can you acquire) the ability to work with and support people with learning difficulties and mental health problems?	✓	✓	✓
Do you already provide paid employment for (socially excluded or disabled) service users?	maybe	maybe	maybe
Do you already provide training for (socially excluded or disabled) service users?	maybe	maybe	maybe
Do you already apply the Disability Discrimination Act and reasonable adjustments in your HR practices?	must	must	must
Can you provide pathways to seasonal employment	maybe	x	✓
Work with communities to design their surroundings and regenerate their own neighborhoods	maybe	maybe	maybe
Ability to come up with innovative and creative project delivery methods	✓	✓	✓

When it comes to economic inclusion, there is no substitute for sustainable employment. No sector has a monopoly on social benefit, and private, public and voluntary sector partnerships have much to offer in this respect.

There follows below two further self-assessment tools to help organisations think about being a viable lead or subcontracting social enterprise.

8.6 Viability Lead Social Enterprise: self-assessment criteria

Assessment Criteria	✓ or x
Have capital (or loan finance) to back risk	
Can provide paid jobs	
Start up capital or fundraising capacity	
Intellectual capital or viability to buy intellectual capital	
Experience of running successful Social Enterprise	
Experience of working with socially excluded people	
Established a base or operating in London Borough of Islington	
Able to specify and manage contracts (including performance monitoring and payments)	
Able to work with community-led design	
Able to deliver under contract, commission and customer orders	

8.7 Sub-contracting capacity: self-assessment criteria

Assessment Criteria	✓ or x
Able to manage and deliver specified tasks	
Able to cost and time work	
Consistent standard and quality of work,	

Assessment Criteria	✓ or x
Reliability and flexibility on delivery	
Understanding legal requirements and operating within health and safety	
Can provide staffing contingency for planned and unplanned absence	

9. Overview of Business Opportunities and Next Steps

This study has identified business opportunities for horticultural social enterprise in the public, not-for-profit and private sector market. These have the potential to provide employment for people who have faced long-term social exclusion and unemployment. There are already a number of horticultural social enterprises operating in the borough and these have been referred to in this study. Research and analysis has also revealed that the scale of operations is currently fairly modest. The overall conclusion is that some level of horticultural social enterprise is feasible and that there is a definite market for it.

A critical mass of regular business through contracts makes an enterprise far more sustainable than relying solely on the general public as customers. Taking into account the 'big friendly client', Greenspace, and the potential that 10% of its contracts offer, together with a guesstimated equivalent amount of potential business amongst social landlords, there is probably business to a value of at least £0.4m to be exploited in regular contracts. However, no organisation is currently in a position to single-handedly exploit this potential business opportunity, and it is most likely to be exploited successfully by a number of social enterprises, co-ordinated or otherwise.

There are a number of options which present themselves to interested organisations in the borough:

- the development of a social enterprise network or umbrella which shares intelligence about the market and agrees cross-referrals of customers
- the development of a completely new horticultural social enterprise geared up to provide work directly and through sub-contracts for smaller enterprises
- existing social enterprise gears up to the above
- continued ad hoc arrangements in which organisations seek and take business opportunities as they see fit.

Employment for people who have faced long-term social exclusion and who have multiple needs can present a number of challenges to the employer. These include additional supervision, commitment and reliability, speed of delivering contracts etc. For some organisations, social enterprise is never an option because they feel it can present conflict of interest. For organisations that are willing to take this route, funding and financing is essential, particularly during the initial stages of setting up the project. In time, as the project generates more demand for its businesses, a gradual decline in reliance on funding can occur.

This study shows that gardening companies - a potential competitor for this particular social enterprise in question - tend to be small and some of them are often family run businesses. As discussed earlier, they provide guarantees for their work covered by public liability insurance, and are also quite flexible to undertake various jobs. The proposed social enterprise will compete with these companies on general maintenance work. For the enterprise to be successful, the service provided should be of a very high standard to be able to acquire reputation for repeat business and recommendation. Given the competition that exists for this kind of service, the pricing strategy must be right.

It is suggested that a marketing strategy should target public, private and voluntary sector clients. It should also aim to work with local communities and

use the unique selling point of providing employment for long-term socially excluded people.

To create a sustainable horticultural social enterprise, organisations must deliver on financial, social and environmental performance targets. Self-assessment tools relating to different modes of delivery (i.e. main contractor, subcontractor) are included in this study to help organizations make assessments against social business criteria, as well as to think about their capacity to lead as a main contractor or sub-contractor.

A number of organisations have been identified as able and interested to lead a larger initiative around horticultural social enterprise, while some would be able to develop a larger horticultural business with or without the partnership of others. Indeed, organisations so minded can do this at any time.

However, there are arguably significant advantages to be gained from a collaborative approach to social enterprise development, especially on the basis of sub-contracting and referral. In short, they are:

- a lead social enterprise would not need to be either very large in capacity or equipped to be 'Jack of All Trades' as this would be a prohibitive initial investment for most organisations. Capacity might be built more slowly.
- a combined approach might better lever development funding at critical stages
- it would increase the benefit to a greater number of social and charitable missions and potentially reach a more diverse group of socially excluded people
- under sub-contracting, organisations can play to their strengths and capacity, e.g. delivering the product, while referring the infrastructure tasks to someone else
- Social enterprises can refer on to each other customers whose needs they cannot meet, and this could be a welcome extra source of custom, but on a take-it-or leave it basis.

- risks of no or low customer orders are shared across organisations

It is recommended that a meeting of all interested parties be convened in Spring 2008 with a view to exploring ways forward and determining next steps.

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'Report on the Feasibility of a Horticultural Social Enterprise in Calstock Parish'
(March 2007)

Lawrie A., The Complete Guide to Business and Strategic Planning for Voluntary Organisations (Second Edition),

Are you interested in Growth and improved business opportunities?

London Borough of Islington is keen to look at the possibility of increasing business opportunities for horticultural social enterprises in Islington. To help build up the picture in scoping services and activities we would like to ask you to share information about your business that will help build up a picture. The questions below are aimed at helping map interest from existing enterprises, work out the business capacity of the sector, investment requirements and discuss options in the form of a feasibility study.

From the above information we will be able to suggest possible models that Islington might adopt that will include engaging one or more social enterprises in significant business under contract for horticultural products and services.

The report will be shared and discussed in the meeting of 10th Jan 08 to look at the next stage of feasibility study that will be to meet the demand of the horticultural business in the borough.

About Your Business

1. How long have you been trading as a Horticultural Social Enterprise?
2. List the horticultural services that you offer under contract
3.
 - a. Who are your main customers?
 - b. Indicate (value in money) the largest job and smallest job in the last two years
 - c. What is the annual turnover of the horticultural side of your business?
 - d. When is your peak trading month and worst trading month?
4.
 - a. Where is the business based?
 - b. In which boroughs is the business carried out
5. Who do you consider to be your main competitors?
6. How much did you invest originally in capital equipment, including transport?
7. How much do you spend annually on replacement equipment?
8. How much storage space (In sq ft if possible) does your equipment take up?
9. How many staff work on the horticultural project directly?
10. How many of those staff are disabled (including people with learning difficulties and people with mental health problems)
11. How many staff work indirectly on the horticultural project (e.g. also manage or deliver other projects)
12. What is the legal constitution of the enterprise (e.g. charity, charitable company, community interest company, IPS – or part of a larger not-for-profit organisation)

Development

13. Would you be interested in becoming a sub-contractor for a larger lead Social Enterprise Yes/No/Not sure

14. Would you be interested in becoming a lead Social Enterprise engaging other sub-contractors Yes/No/Not Sure
15. What would most assist the development of your business in respect of the following achievements:
- a. Financial profit
 - b. Social benefit
 - c. Environmental sustainability

Peter Bedford Horticultural Training and Social Enterprise Survey

Overall Results

1. Do you have a garden or access to a garden?

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	71	59.2%
No	49	40.8%
Don't know	0	0
Total	120	100%

2. Would you like to be involved in a gardening training project?

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	48	40%
No	60	50%
Don't know	12	10%
Total	120	100%

3. If there were employment opportunities in gardening would you be interested

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	48	40%
No	68	56.7%
Don't know	04	3.3%
Total	120	100%

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