



Strategic Plan 2021-2025



Opening inspirational gardens to enhance everyone's
health and wellbeing



“Our garden means everything to us. It’s helped my mental health more than anything else in my life.”
Respondent to Gardens and Coronavirus 2020 Report

OUR VISION

That everyone has access to gardens and values the benefits to their health, wellbeing, and enjoyment of life.

OUR PURPOSE

To raise funds for nursing and health charities by opening an unrivalled portfolio of gardens to visitors, enabling them to experience the benefits to their own health and wellbeing that gardens offer to everyone.

We will do this by:

- Inspiring garden owners to open their exceptional and diverse gardens to raise funds for our beneficiaries
- Offering everyone, including those who do not usually have access to green spaces, a unique and personal experience in a garden
- Raising awareness of the health benefits of gardens through public engagement and the example of gardens and health projects that we fund
- Demonstrating how gardens are a gateway for people to enjoy nature and the environment, and to understand the importance of sustainability
- Influencing government policy and public opinion around both the social importance of gardens and the work of our beneficiaries

WHO WE ARE

The National Garden Scheme gives visitors unique access to exceptional private gardens in England and Wales and raises impressive amounts of money for nursing and health charities through admissions, teas, and cake.

Ever since our foundation we have championed inclusivity by making gardens accessible to everyone in return for a modest charitable donation. In 1927, the charity’s first year, all gardens opening charged just one shilling. By 2020, thanks to the generosity of garden owners, volunteers, and visitors we had donated a total of almost £60 million to nursing and health charities. In 2019 alone we made an annual donation of £3 million.

Founded by The Queen’s Nursing Institute to support district nurses, our beneficiaries now include Macmillan Cancer Support, Marie Curie, Hospice UK, as well as the QNI. We support our charities for the long term, giving annual donations continuously from year to year. As a result we are now the most significant charitable funder of nursing in the UK.

The National Garden Scheme doesn’t just open beautiful gardens for charity – we are passionate about championing the benefits of access to gardens for everyone’s mental and physical health and wellbeing. We give substantial grants to projects which make gardens accessible to disadvantaged groups and minorities, as well as gardens in hospitals and other health settings, and we run an annual Gardens and Health communications campaign to raise awareness of the topic.

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Our portfolio of exceptional gardens, and the generosity of our garden owners puts us in a unique position to showcase the value of gardens for everyone's health and wellbeing at the same time as raising funds through their opening to donate to our nursing and health beneficiaries.

The Coronavirus pandemic had a wide-ranging impact on our activities. It brought a surge in people's interest in and reliance on gardens, at the same time as highlighting the inequalities for those with no access to gardens or green space. It highlighted people's appetite for high-quality online content and accelerated the widespread adoption of digital technology. As with all charities, it also impacted on our ability to raise funds and highlighted the need for greater financial resilience.

Over the next five years we intend to broaden and diversify our audiences of garden owners, supporters, and visitors, as well as to increase awareness of our support for nursing and health charities and its impact. We will focus on inclusivity, strengthening the National Garden Scheme's position as the leading advocate of access to gardens for everyone. We will create financial resilience, develop an innovative and robust digital infrastructure and communications system, and continue to nurture our volunteer network.

A. Widen our public reach

The appeal and rewards of gardens are universal and varied. As well as being horticultural, they can derive from personal or family quality time, they can be emotional and health-enhancing, and they highlight our relations with nature.

With its broad range of gardens that are accessible to everyone, at the same time as offering a uniquely personal experience to visitors, the National Garden Scheme has the potential to encourage a broader public engagement with gardens through its activities and messaging. We will work to promote and provide access to gardens and green space for all of society, so that everyone feels they are welcome.

In recent years the diversity of our gardens has grown. Continuing this growth will be a priority, at the same time as ensuring we provide an inclusive welcome to all audiences, particularly to those communities who may not currently feel

that the National Garden Scheme is for them. Urban gardens, community gardens, allotments, gardens with a health purpose, and groups of gardens opening together, are where we have begun to develop diversity and inclusivity in our gardens, volunteers, and visitors. We will actively build on this in the coming years.

B. Increase supporter engagement and loyalty

Over recent years engagement with our garden owners and a growing audience of active supporters has strengthened. We are also developing supporter groups with particular interests, such as gardens and health or our online video content of gardens. A strategic priority will be to nurture and develop these relationships and continue to increase the long-term loyalty of all our different audience groups.

We will do this in a variety of ways, from a possible membership scheme to audience segmentation and targeted communications, and



increasing our educational offerings through our virtual lectures, video garden tours and online webinars.

C. Transform our digital platforms and infrastructure

A wide range of our activities and operations will be increasingly reliant on our digital platforms and technology which we will continue to advance to keep pace with the demand. Embracing this technology has drastically reduced people's readiness to use cash. The impact of this on an organisation like the National Garden Scheme which has to date operated on a wholly cash basis at our fundraising events will be substantial – with considerable potential benefits. Alongside this we will respond to the shift from marketing and promotional materials being dominated by print, to being a wider portfolio embracing both print and digital channels. Further evidence can be seen in our growing digital database of supporters, in the widening audience with an appetite for digital content,

many of whom are international, and in our burgeoning social media audiences and their active engagement.

D. Create financial resilience

The National Garden Scheme's principal source of income has always been garden openings, from admissions and the sale of teas and plants. Developing additional income streams to give added security to the charity, as well as modernising the flow of garden income, will become a priority. It is intended to develop a long-term programme to build capital reserves (via legacies) with a shorter-term programme for financial diversity from developing income streams already identified, such as the possible development of a membership programme, monetising content and developing additional fundraising streams such as the Great British Garden Party and premium ticketed events.



OUR APPROACH: HOW WE WILL WORK

The National Garden Scheme is a charity with volunteering at its heart. This ethos of volunteering is integral to the charity's character and performance. It is governed by a Board of volunteer Trustees and throughout its history it has operated with a broad national team of volunteers and a small central hub of employees. At the same time the responsibilities of the central hub for overseeing operations, marketing and communications, digital development, financial management and beneficiary relations have grown considerably in recent years.

We will continue to strengthen this balance, with volunteers focusing locally on the gardens that open, associated operations, support and publicity and the central hub continuing to support the volunteers and manage the charity's centrally-driven strategy and marketing, communications and financial operations. At the same time we will improve our support and training for both volunteers and employees so as to identify and address any major skills gaps, we will strengthen our volunteer recruitment and retention and help everyone to embrace with confidence new technologies and procedures.

SUMMARY

The ambitions set out in this plan encompass some significant changes. Our portfolio of gardens, their owners and visitors, and the funds they raise for nursing and health beneficiaries remain at the heart of all we do. However, rather than being our sole purpose, they will be the inspiration and example to enable us to broaden our reach, enabling more people to experience the benefits that gardens bring to our health and wellbeing, and increasing our charitable impact.

Coronavirus has changed everyone's perception and appreciation of gardens with an impact that is likely to last. The National Garden Scheme intends to seize this opportunity to demonstrate the health and wellbeing benefits of embedding access to gardens into our social fabric.





“We are enormously grateful to the National Garden Scheme, which funds the Queen’s Nurse programme and a wide range of other activities of our charity, helping to improve nursing care for people of all ages in their own homes and communities, when they need it most.”

Dr Crystal Oldman
Chief Executive, The Queen’s Nursing Institute



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