

# *The* GARDEN CENTRE GROUP

## Corporate Responsibility Strategy 2013



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# Section one

## Our Corporate Responsibility



## Introduction

It's difficult – in fact, almost impossible – to separate gardening from the environment, or from the community in which it takes place.

We already know that a garden stocked with carbon-capturing plants, growing ultra-local food, harvesting rainwater and providing a safe haven for wildlife is good for the environment.

When we include the social and community benefits of gardening – gentle exercise, feeling connected to nature, creating pleasant and beautiful spaces, swapping seeds with friends, spending time relaxing, pottering or just having fun – it's clear that horticulture plays a key part in supporting more sustainable lifestyles.

However, if we don't manage it sustainably, horticulture can also have a negative effect on the environment – for example, through the use of peat in garden compost (see page 24) and timber (see page 23). The large volume of water needed for plant irrigation can also affect the local water supply.

At The Garden Centre Group, our ambition is to be a catalyst for change in the horticulture industry, making sure that the UK's gardens become part of the solution to the environmental and social challenges of this century.

We've made a solid start, but we still have a long way to go – and we want to take the rest of our industry with us.





## About The Garden Centre Group

The Garden Centre Group was purchased by Terra Firma Capital Partners III L.P., a private equity partnership, in 2012. It operates 130 sites throughout England and Wales under various brands including Blooms, Bridgemere, Country Gardens, Heighley Gate, Jack's Patch, Old Barn, Sanders, Woodlands and Wyevale.

We are by far the largest garden centre operator in the UK garden centre industry in terms of size, customer loyalty and employee training.

We generate our revenue through the sale of gardening and associated retail products, our on-site restaurants, and subletting space to third party retailers. Our product range is extensive and includes plants, fertilisers, garden tools and furniture, food, giftware and cards, and pet supplies.

For more details about The Garden Centre Group, please see our 2012 Annual Report at [www.thegardencentregroup.co.uk/reports-and-reviews](http://www.thegardencentregroup.co.uk/reports-and-reviews).



### Our corporate responsibility

The following document outlines our corporate responsibility strategy for 2013, with some details of our planned activities for 2014 and beyond.

In 2013, we're focusing on gathering data for a baseline of all our corporate responsibility activities, and piloting a number of different initiatives. We're planning to review this data and develop a longer-term corporate responsibility strategy during 2014.

We use Business in the Community's framework for corporate responsibility. Business in the Community ([www.bitc.org.uk](http://www.bitc.org.uk)) is a business-led charity that is committed to building resilient communities, diverse workplaces and a more sustainable future. Their framework has four pillars:

#### Environment

The impact of our direct operations (our offices and garden centres) on the environment.

#### Marketplace

The impact of the products we sell, and how we engage with our suppliers and customers, on society and the environment.

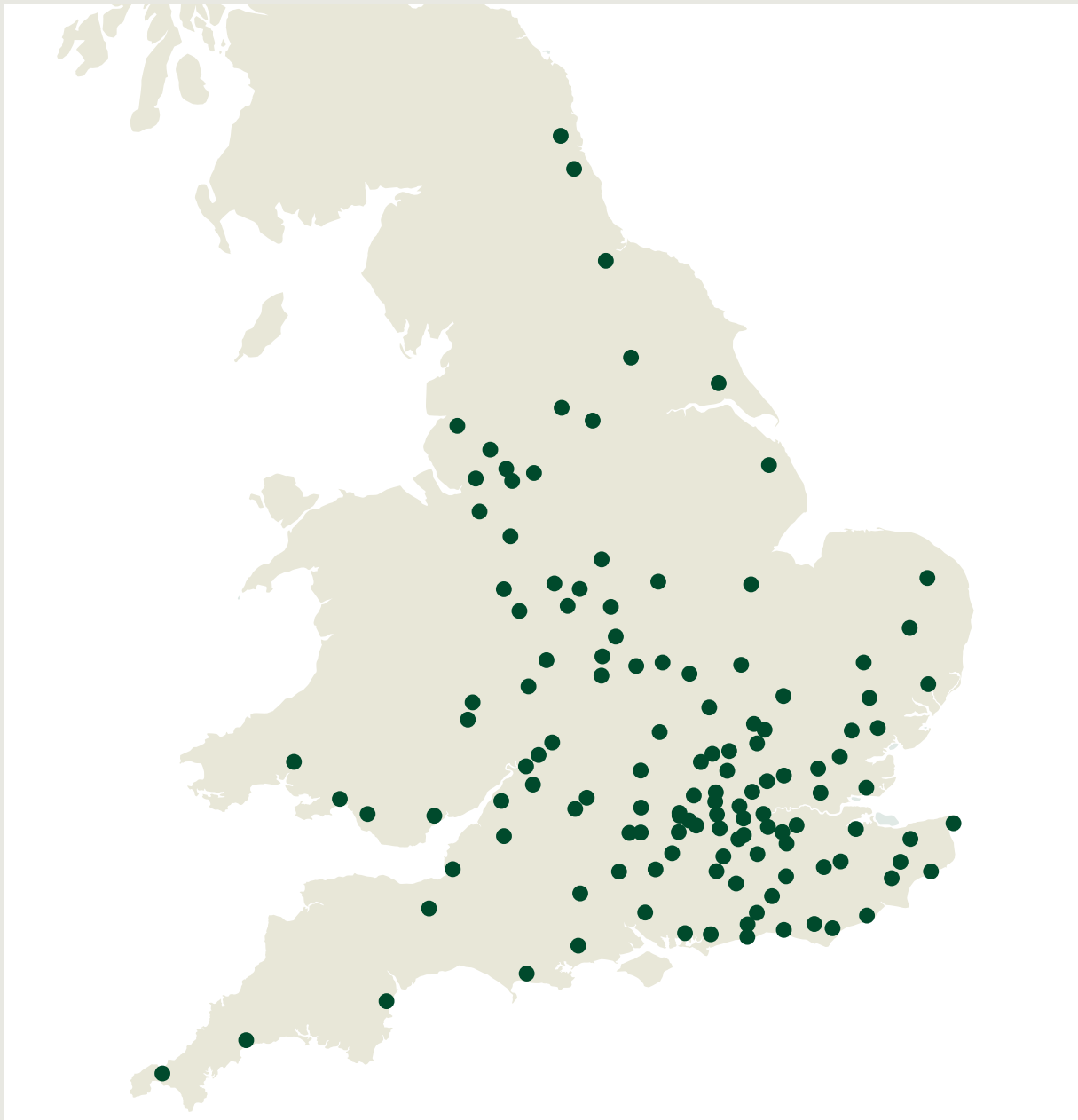
#### Community

The impact of our business on our local communities.

#### Workplace

How we treat our employees, foster their development, and involve them in our corporate responsibility activities.

## Location of garden centres



● Garden Centre

## Foreword



**Stephen Murphy**  
Chairman  
The Garden Centre Group

I'm delighted to introduce The Garden Centre Group's corporate responsibility strategy for 2013.

We're a company for people who love gardening and the outdoors. Our customers visit our garden centres because they want to create beautiful, welcoming spaces, and our employees work for us because of their knowledge of, and respect for, nature.

So it's really not surprising that we're committed to minimising our environmental impact and maximising our positive contribution to local communities and society at large. We also believe that our commitment to corporate responsibility benefits our bottom line, and will continue to support the growth of our business in the future.

It's critical for us to reduce our own environmental footprint and to treat our people well. But our ambition is to be a catalyst for change throughout our supply chain. That's why we're working with suppliers, encouraging them to produce more sustainable products, and with customers, helping them to create more sustainable gardens.

This strategy builds on the strong foundations we've put in place on the key environmental issues facing our industry and as active members of our local communities.

For example, all of the timber in the products we sell is approved and certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

We were the first retailer to be invited to become a member of the Growing Media Initiative, which aims to help the horticultural industry in the UK meet Government targets for reduction in peat use.

Wherever possible, we involve our customers in our corporate responsibility activities. Our innovative Pot to Product recycling scheme, in partnership with Ashortwalk, encourages customers to return used plant pots to our garden centres, which are then recycled into new garden products. During the summer months, we also seek to influence how our customers use water by raising awareness of shortages and offering water-saving products.

We were the first major retailer in the UK to remove patio heaters from our shelves in 2007 – and other retailers quickly followed suit.

Alongside our customers, we raised £75,000 for the NSPCC in 2012 and we're aiming to raise a total of £300,000 by September 2013. We also raised £20,000 for our corporate charity, Alzheimer's Society, in 2012.

Finally, we recognise that our knowledgeable and dedicated employees are fundamental not only to a successful corporate responsibility strategy, but to our success as a company. Our new apprenticeship scheme means we're introducing a new generation of young people to the world of work, providing employment for those who might otherwise have found it difficult to secure a job in the current economic climate.

We believe that playing a leadership role in addressing social and environmental challenges will gain us competitive advantage, as well as provide a clear benefit for employees, customers, suppliers and the other people our business touches. That's why corporate responsibility is fast becoming an integral part of our business.



**Stephen Murphy**  
Chairman,  
The Garden Centre Group  
July 2013



## Our business case

As a good corporate citizen, we have a responsibility to address our environmental and social impacts. But we also believe that doing so will have a positive effect on our business, now and in the future.

- The environmental challenges of this century will have a significant impact on our core business. The weather in the UK is likely to become less predictable, and gardeners will have to deal with changing soil conditions and different pests and diseases. At the same time, water is likely to be less readily available. Our customers will expect us to help them enjoy their gardens despite these changes, by offering them products and advice that help them adapt
- We believe that our customers care about their communities and the environment, and will thank us for taking the lead on these issues. The growing interest in living more sustainable lifestyles means that consumers have an even greater reason to shop with us, as long as our products and garden centres reflect the gardeners they want to be
- There's a direct bottom-line benefit to many of the positive actions we're taking on the environment. When we use fewer materials and produce less waste, it saves us money as well as being better for the planet. For example, we've committed to invest up to £3 million in LED lighting across our sites, which is expected to pay for itself within four years
- When we engage with local communities, it not only benefits the community, but also contributes to our business priorities of attracting new customers to our garden centres and building loyalty with existing customers
- Finally, we know our employees are committed to the environment and their local communities. We believe our corporate responsibility activities attract new employees and promote loyalty among existing employees

To achieve our ambitions, it's crucial that our corporate responsibility strategy is embedded into our business. We've set up a Corporate Responsibility Committee to oversee these changes and drive our strategy, and we need the help of all our employees, suppliers and customers.



## Our ambition

Our ambition is to be a catalyst for change in the horticulture industry, making sure the UK's gardens become part of the solution to the environmental and social challenges we face.

To do so, we'll need to work closely with suppliers, encouraging them to produce more sustainable products, and with customers, helping them to create more sustainable gardens.

We aspire to be an active part of a more sustainable world. We have a long way to go, but our vision of the role we can play is clear.



## Environment

### Running our operations as efficiently as possible

We'll reduce our consumption of electricity, gas, fuel and water as much as possible, and reduce the amount of waste we produce.

That means we will:

- build in energy-saving systems where possible, so we use less by default. (See page 16 for details of our new light sensors.) Where we can't do this, we'll help our employees understand how to conserve resources
- use more sustainable sources of energy and water
- reduce waste in our operations by encouraging our employees to use paper, plastic and other resources sensibly
- reduce food waste from our restaurants by managing our stock more efficiently, so that we only buy as much as we need
- reduce the amount of waste we send to landfill by recycling as much as possible, and ensure the rest of our waste is disposed of properly

### Generating energy

Where it's economically viable, we'll generate some of our own energy from renewable sources such as wind and solar energy.

### Reducing pollution

We'll ensure that we only release good-quality effluent water back into the system.



## Marketplace

### Encouraging our customers to garden more sustainably

We'll help our customers to understand the benefits of gardens that work with nature, and encourage them to save water.

That means we will:

- hold promotions on water-saving products
- promote products that enable our customers to provide habitats for wildlife (see page 27 for details of some of these products)
- help customers grow their own food by selling seeds and plants, and giving advice on how to grow them (see page 31 for more details)

### Helping our customers buy eco-friendly products

We'll stock as many eco-friendly alternatives as possible, and make it easy for customers to buy them.

That means:

- it won't cost customers any more to buy an eco-friendly product (such as peat-free compost, see page 24) than to buy its closest alternative
- in many cases, we'll only stock the eco-friendly version. For example, we only use timber certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) in our products (see page 23 for details)
- if a particular type of product doesn't fit with our commitment to the environment, we won't stock it at all (see page 26 for details of why we made this decision for patio heaters)

## Sourcing our products ethically

We don't want our customers to choose whether or not to buy an ethically sourced product – they should be confident that everything they buy from us is ethical.

That means we will:

- work with suppliers to confirm that they adhere to child labour and human rights standards

### Using packaging as efficiently as possible

Packaging is important for protection, and reduces the number of products wasted on the journey to the garden centre. However, we'll always look for innovative ways to reduce the amount we need.

That means we will:

- cut down on the amount of packaging material we use, and use recycled materials where we can
- make sure our packaging can be recycled by customers when they've finished using it. If our most popular packaging (like plant pots, see page 25) can't be recycled at home, we'll try to find a way for customers to bring it back to us for recycling
- encourage our customers to only use additional packaging (such as carrier bags, see page 25) when they need it



## Community

### Promoting wellbeing

Gardening supports the wellbeing of people and communities, so we'll help novice gardeners to understand the basics, and work with children to instil a love of gardening from an early age.

### Supporting thriving local communities

We'll be a good neighbour by providing local jobs and space for community groups to meet, contributing to charities that matter to our employees and customers, and involving everyone in fundraising.

## Workplace

### Being a great place to work

We'll treat our employees fairly and ethically, and we'll make sure that our sites are healthy and safe places to work.

That means we will:

- provide career development opportunities for our employees at all levels, from new starters to experienced managers
- celebrate the diversity of our workforce by providing work experience, training and apprenticeships, and encouraging employees to stay working for us after their official retirement age

### Offering support to our employees when they need us

We'll understand that sometimes things aren't going well, and support our employees where we can.

That means we will:

- provide flexible working hours for employees who need them, and independent advice and support
- encourage our employees to talk to us – openly or confidentially – if they feel we're not living up to our high standards

### Involving our employees in corporate responsibility

Our employees are vital to the delivery of our corporate responsibility strategy and we'll implement our activities in partnership with them.



## This year's priorities

2012 was a year of change for The Garden Centre Group, as it was acquired by Terra Firma Capital Partners III L.P. in April, and subsequently experienced changes in the composition of the Board.

Our focus since the acquisition has been on developing our new business strategy and strengthening our existing corporate responsibility activities. We've already made significant progress on energy and water reduction, peat and timber sourcing, charitable giving and employee development.

During 2013, we'll be establishing baselines for many of our metrics (including energy, water, diversity and employee engagement) and laying the foundations for an integrated corporate responsibility strategy that we will build on over the next few years.

We'll also be piloting a raft of environmental initiatives in our garden centres, improving our community strategy, making progress on sustainable sourcing and recycling, and expanding our employee training schemes.



## Section two

### Environment



## Introduction

Reducing the environmental impact of our operations is a priority for us. We have greatest control over this area of our impact, and many of the actions cut costs as well as helping the planet.

Just as importantly, if we're going to ask suppliers and customers to join us in tackling major environmental challenges, we need to demonstrate that we're leading the way.

During 2013, we'll launch an in-depth environmental audit to identify the 'hotspots' – the biggest opportunities for improvement across our sites.

In this section, we're looking at how we are reducing the environmental impact of our own operations. To find out more about how we're helping our suppliers and customers to do the same, see the Marketplace section on page 21.





## Energy

We're exploring several ways to reduce our energy use and cut our carbon footprint.

When we acquire new garden centres or make major alterations to existing sites, we will ensure they are insulated to at least current standards (building regulations Part L).

Because our garden centres are often in non-residential areas, many of them have not been connected to the national gas grid and have had gas canisters delivered by lorry. This year we're connecting our garden centres to the grid where it's economically viable, reducing gas deliveries and carbon emissions from fuel.

### Saving energy through LED

In early 2013, we replaced our fluorescent tube lighting with LED lights across all our sites. The LED bulbs use up to 75% less energy than the old fluorescent tubes.

They also last up to six times longer, reducing waste from discarded fluorescent tubes, and they contain fewer heavy metals (like mercury), reducing their environmental impact at the end of their lives.

We've committed to invest up to £3 million in this project, and expect it to reduce our electricity consumption by more than 15%. That means our investment will pay for itself within four years.

We've also installed sensors in all our garden centres which switch off the lights when there's enough natural light in the room.

We're piloting a series of energy-saving initiatives in 2013. For example, we're currently trialling a new energy system that will regulate heating according to the season, weather and time of day. The system could lead to energy savings of up to 40%.

We're also trialling renewable energy on site. In the future, a combination of solar and wind energy could mean that some of our garden centres could generate all their own electricity, and even feed surplus energy into the national grid.



## Water

Our garden centres require a lot of water, and most of it is used to water the plants we sell. In 2012, our total water bill came to over £1 million. During periods of summer drought, our demand for water can also impact on local water networks, affecting our neighbours' water supply.

There's no real need for us to use drinking water to irrigate our plants – after all, we wouldn't use bottled water – so we're looking at ways to change the source of our irrigation water.

We've researched the potential for borehole water supplies in some of our garden centres, and found some sites for which boreholes could supply 100% of our water needs. This would reduce the pressure on local water networks and cut our carbon footprint: water from boreholes has a carbon footprint around 61% lower than that of mains water.

Several of our garden centres harvest rainwater for plant irrigation and use in garden centre operations. We're assessing the potential for expanding rainwater harvesting across more of our garden centres.

In 2013, we're piloting real-time water metering, including electronic water meters that allow garden centre employees to monitor water use remotely.

We're also working to increase the quality of the effluent water leaving our garden centres. We've installed grease management systems in many of our restaurants so that fats, oils and greases produced during cooking are removed at source.





## Waste and recycling

In 2012, our total waste footprint was 8,174 tonnes. 35% of this waste was recycled, up from 29% in 2011.

In some of our garden centres, we're working with waste contractor Biffa to help our employees understand how to reduce the amount of waste we send to landfill. Through this, we have identified several examples of best practice in waste reduction in our garden centres, and will work to roll this out across more of our garden centres.

We're also looking at how we can reduce consumption of the products we don't sell (such as napkins and stationery), recycle our uniforms and reduce waste from point-of-sale materials.

### Reducing the environmental impact of forklifts

This year we installed a new management system into all our forklifts. The new technology detects when a driver is seated and automatically switches off the engine when it's not needed.

Not only will this system save fuel, but it makes working with forklifts safer because they're only running when a driver is present.



## Employee engagement

In our offices and garden centres, we're launching a new campaign to encourage employees to reduce energy use.

This year, we will pilot an Environment Champions programme in some of our garden centres. Champions are tasked with engaging employees in environmental issues and encouraging them to recycle and save energy.



## Targets

### 2013

- Establish baselines for electricity, gas and water use
- Launch an in-depth environmental audit to identify ‘hotspots’ – the biggest opportunities for improvement across our sites
- Analyse the findings of our project with Biffa and identify opportunities to increase recycling and reduce landfill
- Introduce real-time water metering
- Pilot an employee Environment Champions programme

### 2014 and beyond

- Use our environmental audit and baselines to set annual reduction targets for electricity, gas, water and the amount of waste we send to landfill, and targets for increasing recycling
- If the Environment Champions pilot is successful, introduce champions in all garden centres and work out the best way to measure their impact
- Review the impact of our energy-saving pilots, and roll out the successful initiatives to as many garden centres as possible
- Roll out half-hour electricity meters to garden centres where it’s economically viable

## Section three

### Marketplace





## Introduction

Tackling our own environmental impact is important, but it's only part of the story. Our ambition is to act as a catalyst for change throughout our industry, working with suppliers and customers on key environmental and social issues. By doing this, we can make a much bigger difference.

We're committed to sourcing sustainable products, and believe that everyone in the Group's supply chain should be better off for making and supplying our products. This means working in partnership with suppliers to understand where our products come from, identifying difficult issues, and tackling them fairly and transparently.

We also endeavour to help our customers garden more sustainably, by providing eco-friendly products, helping them save water, and inspiring them to grow their own food.





## Sustainable sourcing

We stock over 57,000 products sourced from all over the world. In 2012, 90% of our plants were grown in the UK, supporting our economy and local communities.

### Timber

Deforestation is one of the world's most critical environmental issues. Trees act as a carbon store, preventing it from entering the atmosphere in the form of carbon dioxide and contributing to climate change.

According to WWF, some 46-58 million square miles of forest are lost each year – that's the equivalent of 36 football fields every minute. It is estimated that 15% of all greenhouse gas emissions are the result of deforestation. Not only that, deforestation also damages biodiversity and causes harm to the estimated 1.6 billion people who rely on forests for food, water and shelter.<sup>1</sup>

In some areas of the world, deforestation is driven by demand for timber. We can help bring it to a halt by supporting sustainable forest management.

100% of the timber products we sell are Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) approved and certified, so we can be confident that the timber comes from forests that are sustainably managed.

Likewise, we are committed to buying FSC-certified timber for our own use – for example, when we're doing major refurbishments or replacing store fittings.



<sup>1</sup> WWF International website: [worldwildlife.org/threats/deforestation](http://worldwildlife.org/threats/deforestation)

## Peat

Like forests, peat bogs store carbon and keep it out of the atmosphere. In fact, even though peat bogs cover just 3% of the Earth's surface, they store twice as much carbon as all the world's forests combined.

The biggest threat to peat bogs is commercial peat extraction, which is driven by demand for peat from gardeners. 69% of the peat used in the UK is used by amateur gardeners as growing media – mainly compost – so we can help by making it easy for our customers to choose peat-free products.

The UK Government has set a target for all amateur growing media to be 100% peat-free by 2020. We're confident we'll achieve this ahead of the 2020 deadline.

We were the first retailer invited to join the Growing Media Initiative (GMI), which aims to help the horticultural industry in the UK meet Government targets for reduction in peat use.

In 2012, 63% of the growing media we sold was peat-free, up from 49% in 2011.

Peat-free growing media is traditionally more expensive than its peat alternative. This year, we equalised the price of peat and peat-free compost to encourage customers to make the switch.

While we are working towards our target of being 100% peat-free, our Peat Policy states that any peat that is supplied to us must come from legal and sustainable sources.

## Empowering employees to change perceptions

Many gardeners have always used peat compost and believe that plants simply won't thrive without it. We pride ourselves on stocking only the best quality products, and our peat-free compost, New Horizon, is as good as (if not better than) the peat alternative. It's also 100% natural and contains no artificial chemicals.

But if we want to phase out peat in our growing media, we'll need to convince our customers that peat-free compost can meet their gardening needs.

We've trained over 1,500 of our garden centre employees on the benefits of peat-free compost so that they have the right knowledge to change customers' perceptions and help them select the right growing media for their gardens.

## Labour standards and ethical trade

From 2014, we will work with suppliers to confirm that they adhere to child labour and human rights standards.

This year, we're introducing some fair trade products into our garden centres so that customers can show their support for better prices, decent working conditions and fair terms of trade for farmers and workers in the developing world.

## Waste and recycling

Good packaging is an important part of reducing waste – without it, we'd generate far more waste because many of our products wouldn't survive the trip to the garden centre.

We're working to make sure that our packaging is as sustainable as possible. This means making sure products are not over-packaged, and using recycled (and recyclable) materials for packaging wherever possible.

In 2007, we helped to develop a 100% recycled plastic tray for bedding plants to replace the polystyrene trays used widely within the industry. Over the past six years, we've reduced our use of polystyrene by 33% by adopting the new trays.

We're also working with suppliers to phase out polystyrene plant pots. All new contracts for bedding plants specify that we'll only accept recycled plastic pots. We'll track our reduction of polystyrene bedding cases each year.



## Pot to Product

Plant pots are notoriously difficult to recycle because they're made of a mixture of low-grade quality plastics. To tackle this, in 2013 we are working with Ashortwalk to launch Pot to Product, an innovative and much-needed plant pot recycling programme.

The scheme is a UK first where our customers are actively involved in the closed loop recycling process. Customers bring their old plant pots into one of our garden centres. They're then sent for recycling, and the recycled plastic is used to create brand new products for the garden, including sundials, clocks and plant labels.

Pot to Product is a trial scheme in 49 of our garden centres – but if it's successful, we'll roll it out across the business.

To reduce unnecessary plastic bag usage, we started charging for plastic carrier bags in early 2013, and we've already seen a significant reduction in bag usage.

## Transport

We've reassessed delivery routes to see where we can reduce the miles our suppliers travel to bring their products to our garden centres. Once the changes are implemented later this year, we estimate we'll be able to reduce miles travelled by 20% compared to 2012.

## Sustainable gardening

### Leading the way on patio heaters

In 2007, we were the first major retailer in the UK to remove patio heaters from our range, because they didn't fit with our commitment to the environment.

Since then, other retailers have followed suit – and even the Chelsea Flower Show has banned patio heaters from its exhibits.

### Saving water

Gardening is the major cause of peak demand for water during the hot summer months.

Drinking water is treated to a high standard, a process that uses energy. But plants don't need highly-treated water – they can just as easily be watered with untreated water from other sources.

We can help by encouraging customers to use less water, and by making it easy for them to use water from more sustainable sources. We stock a wide range of water-saving products, including water butts and micro-irrigation products that use less water.

Over the past few years we've actively encouraged customers to save water during the summer months through point-of-sale materials.

For details of how we're reducing water in our own operations, see page 17.

### Grow Your Own

We want to help both novice and experienced gardeners to grow their own fruit and vegetables so that they can put delicious food on the table.

WRAP (Waste & Resources Action Programme) estimates that up to a third of food bought in the UK ends up as waste before it's even opened.<sup>2</sup> We believe that encouraging customers to grow their own food helps them to appreciate its value and will lead them to waste less of it – and for the food waste they do generate, we sell compost bins and activators so that it can be recycled back into the garden.

Sales of our Grow Your Own range have increased from £5.4 million in 2008 to £7.9 million in 2013. We've continually expanded our range of fruit and vegetables in the form of seeds, plug plants and mature plants. In 2012 we introduced 166 new varieties, bringing the total number of fruit and vegetable varieties we offer to over 1,100.

We've also introduced chicken coops and feed in several garden centres to encourage customers to rear chickens in their gardens.

We stock a wide range of organic products, including flowers, fruit and vegetables, and lawn food.

<sup>2</sup> *Understanding Food Waste*, March 2007, WRAP (Waste & Resources Action Plan) [http://www.wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/FoodWasteResearchSummaryFINALADP29\\_3\\_07.pdf](http://www.wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/FoodWasteResearchSummaryFINALADP29_3_07.pdf)

## Encouraging wildlife

Gardens are potentially valuable habitats for the UK's wildlife. We stock 20 varieties of bird seed and nuts to attract individual species such as blue tits, song-thrushes and finches.

Bees are vital to garden cultivation, and to growing crops across the globe. This year, we removed two products from our shelves following evidence that the chemical compounds known as neonicotinoids are linked to declining bee populations. We also launched a campaign to encourage customers to buy bee-attracting plants.





## Targets

### 2013

- Train more employees on the benefits of peat-free compost and encourage customers to make the switch
- Analyse the results of the Pot to Product trial, and roll out to more garden centres if it's successful
- Reduce the miles travelled by our suppliers delivering our products by 20% compared to 2012

### 2014 and beyond

- Monitor our supply of timber to ensure it remains 100% FSC-certified, and use FSC-certified timber for all major refurbishments and fittings
- Work with industry partners to change customer perceptions and demonstrate that peat-free compost is good for plants. Report annually on the percentage of our growing media sales that are peat free, working towards our goal of being 100% peat free
- Target our largest suppliers and encourage them to reduce the amount of packaging they use
- Work with suppliers to continue to reduce the number of miles travelled when they deliver our products
- Work with suppliers to confirm they adhere to child labour and human rights standards
- Find innovative ways of encouraging our customers to save water

## Section four Community



## Introduction

Our garden centres are a vital part of their local communities, providing jobs, local investment and a place to meet, as well as being somewhere to gather tools and knowledge for gardening. This isn't just good for the communities involved; it also helps us to identify and engage with potential new customers.

We recognise that our business has responsibilities in the local communities it serves, including the provision of skills-generating work experience in conjunction with local schools and colleges. We participate in local education projects and student research on the garden centre industry, employment practices, and the application of school subjects in the workplace.

We also work closely with partner organisations to assist those facing individual challenges into employment, providing support, ongoing training, placements and permanent opportunities.



## Promoting wellbeing through gardening

We want our customers to get as much as possible out of their gardens – whether that’s fun, relaxation or food for their plates.

There’s plenty of evidence that gardening is good for lowering stress levels. For example, a recent study in The Netherlands showed that gardening helped people recover from a stressful task faster than reading, and that the gardeners had lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol.<sup>3</sup>

Our Gardening Club has over 2.5 million members and allows our customers to access specialist advice through our online Gardening Handbook, as well as discounts on our products. This year, we’re developing online sustainable gardening modules for members of our Gardening Club.

We hold events to share our knowledge of plants and, in May 2013, we held free Daily Demonstrations on topics such as ‘gardening basics’, ‘super soil’ and ‘grow your own Sunday veg’.



<sup>3</sup> Van Den Berg, A.E., Custers, M.H.G (2011) *Gardening Promotes Neuroendocrine and Affective Restoration from Stress*, Journal of Health Psychology, January 2011, vol. 16 no. 1 3-11  
<http://hpq.sagepub.com/content/16/1/3.abstract>



## Supporting national charities

We have a strong record of supporting national and local charities that are important to our customers and employees.

### Alzheimer's Society

With an ageing population in the UK, the number of people affected by dementia is increasing. There are 800,000 people with dementia in the UK, with numbers set to rise to over one million by 2021.<sup>4</sup> This cause is relevant to many of our customers and employees, so we selected Alzheimer's Society as our corporate charity for 2012/13.

In December 2012, we ran a Memory Tree campaign, asking customers to write a memory of a friend or family member, attach it to a tree in one of our garden centres, and make a donation. Through this campaign and a series of local events, we raised £20,000 for Alzheimer's Society in 2012.

### NSPCC

We charge customers for the use of the soft play areas in some of our restaurants to help cover the costs of maintenance and cleaning. We donate a third of the money we collect from this scheme to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). They campaign to change the law, provide ChildLine and the NSPCC helpline service, and offer advice for adults.

Between October and December 2012, we donated over £75,000 to the NSPCC, and we're aiming to raise a total of £300,000 by September 2013.

### Greenfingers

We also support the charity Greenfingers through collection tins at our checkouts. In 2012, we raised over £16,000 to build special gardens in children's hospices. The gardens enable families to spend time together in a beautiful setting, taking time out from the day-to-day concerns of having a child in a hospice.

### Macmillan Cancer Support

For the last three years, many of our garden centres have participated in 'the world's biggest coffee morning', raising money to make sure everyone with cancer has a Macmillan team in their corner from diagnosis, through treatment, and afterwards.

In 2012, 115,000 people across the country signed up to a coffee morning, raising a record £15 million. At The Garden Centre Group, we raised £21,000 for the charity and gave away over 5,000 cups of tea and coffee.



<sup>4</sup> Alzheimer's Society website: [http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/documents\\_info.php?documentID=535&pageNumber=2](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/documents_info.php?documentID=535&pageNumber=2)

## Supporting local charities

In addition to supporting national charities, our garden centres raise thousands of pounds for local charities every year. They run events year-round, from Christmas grottos and tombolas to coffee mornings and quiz nights. They also support local projects through donations and volunteering, and by providing space for local events.

For example, in 2012:

- Harlestone Heath Garden Centre, near Northampton, carried out fundraising activities throughout the year and donated several thousand pounds to Macmillan, Barn Owl Conservation, Air Ambulance, CLIC Sargent, Help for Heroes, British Red Cross and Marie Curie
- Ramsgate Garden Centre sold merchandise at checkouts and held events in aid of Guide Dogs for the Blind, the Lions Club and Demelza, a local hospice
- Findern Garden Centre in South Derbyshire raised money for the Royal National Institute of Blind People, Global Cancer Care, RSPCA, Derby Lions and Sight Support Derbyshire through a Christmas grotto, events and collection tins at checkouts

We know from listening to our employees that our garden centres up and down the country are taking part in hundreds of fundraising and volunteering activities. At the moment, we don't measure and record these activities accurately. In 2013, we'll begin to capture this information so that we can see the difference we're making to our local communities.

### Raising money in Swansea

Wyevale Garden Centre in Swansea raised more money for our 2012/13 corporate charity, Alzheimer's Society, than any other garden centre in the Group.

The team also raises significant funds for organisations in the community, such as Ty Olwen, a local hospice.

Most of their fundraising takes place at Christmas, where they offer their customers breakfast and tea with Santa. They have a long-term arrangement with Santa, who has been taking part in these special meals for 18 years.

Fundraisers at the garden centre have found that collection tins at checkouts are one of the best ways to raise money because they give staff the opportunity to speak to customers about the charity and its work.

Steve Gallivan, Garden Centre Manager, says that engaged employees are key to his fundraising success. "There are one or two employees who take responsibility for making sure everyone raises money. They're very proactive about speaking to their colleagues if they don't ask every single customer for a contribution! But all of the employees get behind the charities with a vengeance. I'm very proud of them."

## Championing the community in our garden centres

We also provide challenging, skills-focused work experience for local schools and colleges, and participate in local education projects and student research where we can.

In 2013, we will pilot Charity Champions in our garden centres. These volunteer Champions will engage with local charities and support their colleagues with fundraising and volunteering activities. If it's successful, the programme will be rolled out to all our garden centres during 2014.

We will also pilot a separate Community Champions programme in our largest garden centres. Unlike the voluntary Charity Champions, the role of Community Champion will be full-time, allowing Champions to engage with local communities, encourage employee volunteering and arrange local community events.



### Our community strategy

Our employees are doing a fantastic job fundraising for local charities and our corporate charity – but we want to make sure that we're making the greatest positive impact we can in our local communities, and on society at large.

This year, we'll be developing a comprehensive community strategy, looking at how we can link our corporate giving to our core business and use our gardening expertise to give time as well as money to our causes.

Our new community strategy will focus on 'growing communities'.

- We're planning to develop a longer-term relationship with a national charity partner, selected by employees, and to create a policy for employee volunteering and fundraising for local charities
- We're also looking to develop cause-related marketing initiatives, which will benefit both the charity and our business
- We'll work with the NSPCC to maximise the impact of our partnership to help children across the country
- We'll develop a 'charity toolkit' that will help our garden centre employees make the biggest difference possible when working with local charities, and drive employee engagement in volunteering and fundraising by sharing the most inspiring stories
- In the future, we'd like to establish awards that recognise the contribution of individual employees and garden centres to our community strategy

We'll also monitor and measure our contribution, so that we can evaluate and increase the impact we're making.

## Targets

### 2013

- Increase the number of online sustainable gardening modules for members of our Gardening Club
- Donate a total of £300,000 to the NSPCC
- Pilot Community Champions in our largest garden centres
- Pilot Charity Champions and roll out to all garden centres if the pilot is successful
- Endeavour to provide more of our space for local community events and groups
- Develop a new community strategy to focus our fundraising efforts around a central theme and provide best-practice guidelines to all our garden centres
- Monitor and measure our fundraising and volunteering contribution

### 2014 and beyond

- Build on our new community strategy to ensure we're making the biggest impact we can for the causes we support, including:
  - Developing and roll out a charity toolkit for our garden centres
  - Sharing success stories with all our employees
  - Creating awards to recognise fundraising at a local level
- Find ways to recognise and reward our Community Champions



## Section five

### Workplace



## Introduction

We have a diverse and talented workforce of 5,088<sup>5</sup> employees and we are committed to treating our employees in a way that is fair, supportive and ethical.

We believe in developing our employees to ensure they're equipped with the right knowledge to help our customers and to support their own career goals. Above all else, we value a love of gardening and commitment to customer service.

We're planning to conduct our first employee engagement survey, which will allow us to benchmark measures such as diversity, turnover and employee satisfaction.



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5 As of July 2013; varies seasonally

## Training and development

We offer management training for current managers, department heads and aspiring managers. We have over 250 managers and deliver their training in one- or three-day courses at regional venues across the country.

### E-Learning

In 2010, we were the first in our industry to launch an E-Learning programme for employees. Our Learning Path E-Learning system ensures that all employees receive consistent, high-quality training on the company, customer service and Health & Safety.

Our employees can also choose to complete additional modules on specialist areas – for example, caring for roses, British indigenous plants, or Christmas trees. Several modules are related to the environment, and cover peat-free compost, Grow Your Own, and attracting wildlife into gardens.

Our E-Learning programme won the ‘Commitment to Training/Education’ award at the Garden Retail Awards 2010.

To date, our employees have completed over 340,000 modules and assessments, and the programme has proved very popular:

*“The system is easy to use and easy to manage. The modules are packed full of information and the assessments are challenging. You always know that employees are excited and interested in the system when it’s the hot topic of conversation around the centre!”*

**Bryony Jones**

HR Assistant

Heighley Gate Garden Centre

We’ll continue to update the E-Learning system throughout 2013, and bolster it with post-training experience and recognition for those who complete it.





## Employee volunteering

Many of our employees give their time as volunteers, usually by teaching community groups – such as charities and schools – about gardening, both within our garden centres and in the local community.

Like our fundraising (see page 33), we don't have a systematic way of capturing the number of hours our employees have volunteered, or its impact on the local community. So in 2013, we'll begin to capture this information so that we can see the difference we're making.

In 2014, we're planning to pilot a structured employee volunteering programme, in which every employee will be entitled to paid time to volunteer with a charity. If it's successful, we'll look to roll this out across all our sites and increase the number of hours our employees volunteer in the community.





## Employee support

In 2012, we reviewed and relaunched our Employee Handbook. It was praised by Garden Centre Managers and employees for being clearer, more detailed and more relevant to our day-to-day operations.

We offer flexible working and remote working to our employees in times of change or personal difficulty. We know that personal or work-related stress can have a big effect on our employees' wellbeing, and we work to empower all our employees to discuss their circumstances and concerns with our management team.

We're about to launch an Employee Assistance Programme which provides advice to employees, allowing them to remain anonymous. Services include debt, retirement and legal advice, and short-term counselling.

We also run a confidential employee hotline so that our employees can raise concerns quickly and efficiently.



## Diversity

We believe that having a diverse and talented workforce enables us to better meet the needs of our customers, and helps us build our business.

In the current economic climate, with high levels of youth unemployment, we recognise that job-seeking is particularly challenging for those at the beginning of their careers. We want to support younger people in developing the skills they need for employment – and to

ensure we're developing our managers and supervisors of the future.

In 2012, over 25% of our employees were under 21 years of age, and more than 10% were over 60 years of age.

We don't currently have baselines for ethnic diversity or employee turnover within the Group. We're planning to measure these for the first time in early 2014.

### Apprenticeships

In 2013, we launched two industry-leading apprenticeship programmes, in Garden Centre Operations and Horticulture (with the Pershore College of Horticulture) and Cookery (with Westminster Kingsway College).

The programmes are available across the UK, taught by local partner colleges. Apprentices gain a work-based City & Guilds diploma, along with practical skills and work experience.

The scheme offers young people a credible alternative to university: the opportunity to start as a school leaver and make it to management, gaining recognised qualifications along the way.

The first 11 apprentices are about to graduate, and by the end of 2013 we expect to have recruited 200 people into the scheme.

Even though the apprenticeship programme is new, it's already having a major impact:

*"Working at the garden centre has been an amazing opportunity! I have gained a lot of knowledge and can't wait to learn more. I love the hands-on approach – and helping customers feels so rewarding."*

**Danielle Shipway**

Braintree Garden Centre

*"I've found the whole course very rewarding. Every day is different. The contrast of working in the plant area and being at college is the perfect way of learning."*

**Ben Mansfield**

Rayleigh Garden Centre

There are also benefits for the business. Recent research shows that apprentices tend to be loyal and productive employees.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Productivity Matters: The Impact of Apprenticeships on the UK Economy, Centre for Economics and Business Research, March 2013  
<http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk/About-Us/~media/Documents/Productivity-Matters-Report-FINAL-March-2013.ashx>

## Health and Safety

We are committed to providing a safe retail environment for employees and customers at all our garden centres. Our safety management systems comply with – and exceed – UK Health and Safety legislation, and we seek to continuously improve our reporting and compliance standards.

Implementing the Health and Safety Policy is the responsibility of the Group Chief Executive Officer, supported by the Senior Executive Directors and senior management team, who are responsible for Health and Safety within their line management.

Health and Safety audits are undertaken at least once a year at every garden centre to identify possible risks. Each Garden Centre Manager produces an action plan to implement the findings of the audit.

In the last year, we've improved Health and Safety reporting within the Group. We now have a Dashboard Incident Reporting system so that we can see our Health and Safety data at a glance, and can measure how well our policies are being implemented.



## Targets

### 2013

- Bolster our E-Learning programme with post-training experience and recognition
- Pilot a structured employee volunteering programme
- Launch the Employee Assistance Programme and communicate its benefits to employees
- Recruit 200 young people into our apprenticeship programmes, review the scheme and design any improvements needed
- Establish a baseline for reported Health and Safety incidents

### 2014 and beyond

- Launch our first employee engagement survey and establish baselines for employee diversity, satisfaction and turnover. Use these baselines to set targets and continue to monitor these measures
- Add new modules to our E-Learning system, increase the number of modules that employees complete, and increase the quality of the training, as measured by positive employee feedback
- If the pilot is successful, roll out the employee volunteering programme
- Increase the number of people who graduate from our apprenticeship programmes, and incorporate a nationally recognised qualification
- Set annual targets for reduction in Health and Safety incidents



## Section six

### 2013 at a glance



## 2013 at a glance

The table below shows our targets for 2013

### Environment

- Establish baselines for electricity, gas and water use
- Launch an in-depth environmental audit to identify 'hotspots' – the biggest opportunities for improvement across our sites
- Analyse the findings of our project with Biffa and identify opportunities to increase recycling and reduce landfill
- Introduce real-time water metering
- Pilot an employee Environment Champions programme

For more information on our Environment activities, see page 14

### Marketplace

- Train more employees on the benefits of peat-free compost and encourage customers to make the switch
- Analyse the results of the Pot to Product trial, and roll out to more garden centres if it's successful
- Reduce the miles travelled by our suppliers delivering our products by 20% compared to 2012

For more information on our Marketplace activities, see page 21

### Community

- Increase the number of online sustainable gardening modules for members of our Gardening Club
- Donate a total of £300,000 to the NSPCC
- Pilot Community Champions in our largest garden centres
- Pilot Charity Champions and roll out to all garden centres if the pilot is successful
- Endeavour to provide more of our space for local community events and groups
- Develop a new community strategy to focus our fundraising efforts and provide best-practice guidelines to all our garden centres
- Monitor and measure our fundraising and volunteering contribution

For more information on our Community activities, see page 29

### Workplace

- Bolster our E-Learning programme with post-training experience and recognition
- Pilot a structured employee volunteering programme
- Launch the Employee Assistance Programme and communicate its benefits to employees
- Recruit 200 young people into our apprenticeship programmes, review the scheme and design any improvements needed
- Establish a baseline for reported Health and Safety incidents

For more information on our Workplace activities, see page 36

## Talk to us

We're on a corporate responsibility journey. Our ambition is to be a catalyst for change in the horticulture industry, making sure that the UK's gardens become part of the solution to the environmental and social challenges of the 21st century.

We're developing targets for the first steps of this journey – but we know there's a lot to learn on the way. We're ready to evaluate our impact, adapt our approach, and tackle new issues as they arise.

We value feedback from our employees, customers, suppliers and anyone else who can help us to spot new opportunities and face the challenges we uncover.

If you've got something to say, email us:  
[corporateresponsibility@thegardencentregroup.co.uk](mailto:corporateresponsibility@thegardencentregroup.co.uk)

July 2013



## *The* GARDEN CENTRE GROUP

Albrighton	Country Gardens Ongar	Hitchin	Stockton
Alfold	Country Gardens Playhatch	Hungerford	Stratford upon Avon
Altrincham	Country Gardens Rake	Jack's Patch	Sudbury
Andover	Country Gardens Royston	Keston	Swindon
Beaconsfield	Country Gardens Salisbury	Keynsham	Syon Park
Bicester Avenue	Country Gardens Seven Hills	Leicester Rowena	Tarporley
Blooms of Bressingham	Country Gardens Upminster	Lewes	Taunton
Blooms Cardiff	Country Gardens Wellingborough	Leyland	Thatcham
Blooms Cheltenham	Country Gardens Winnersh	Louth	Tring
Blooms Gloucester	Coventry	Lower Dicker	Tunbridge Wells
Blooms Rugby	Crawley	Lower Morden	Westonbirt Plant Centre
Blooms Solihull	Crowland	Marlow	Weybridge
Blooms Swindon	Croydon Purley Way	Marple	Willesborough
Blooms Worcester	Dorking	Nailsworth	Wimborne
Bold Heath	Dummer	Northampton	Windlesham
Bolton	Elm Court	Old Barn	Windsor
Bournville	Enfield	Osterley	Woking
Braintree	Fair Oak	Oxford	Wolseley Bridge
Bridgemere	Farnham Royal	Paddock Wood	Woodlands
Brighton	Findern	Par	World's End
Brockworth	Findon	Poppleton	World of Pets & Leisure
Bury St Edmunds	Folkestone	Potters Bar	Worthing Ferring
Canterbury Chartham	Galton	Pulborough	Wyevale Binfield
Carmarthen	Gosforth	Ramsgate	Wyevale Hare Hatch
Carr Gate	Hamstreet	Rayleigh	Wyevale Hereford
Chichester	Harlestone Heath	Sanders	Wyevale Lelant
Chilton	Harrow	Shenstone	Wyevale Swansea
Chipperfield	Hastings	Sherfield on Loddon	Wyevale Telford
Codicote	Havant	Shirley	Wyevale Thornbury
Coley	Heathlands	Springfield	Wyevale Woburn Sands
Country Gardens Aldridge	Heighley Gate	Sprowston	Wyevale Woodbridge
Country Gardens Handcross	Hemel Hempstead	Stanway	
Country Gardens Hereford	Hillingdon	Stevenage	