



Growing Together - RHSI Strategic Plan

2026-2030



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RHSI: An Introduction History & Standing

Founded in 1816, the **Royal Horticultural Society of Ireland** (RHSI) has always been at the heart of Irish gardening. The timeline of its 200-year history shows many challenges & successes, that echo Ireland's own history during this period.

The RHSI has always been about people, plants, and passion. Today, we are a vibrant all-island community of gardeners united in a love of gardens and a passion for sharing of our knowledge, skills and heritage.



RHSI Timeline

1816 – The Beginning

Francis Hetherington, gardener to Lord Charlemont, calls a meeting at the Rose Tavern in Donnybrook, founding the Horticultural Society of Ireland to 'protect and promote the science of gardening...' led by professional gardeners with 'landed gentlemen' as patrons

1838 – Renamed RHSI

Reformed as an amateur society, it becomes known as the RHSI under the Royal patronage of Queen Victoria. In 1922 it continues without chartered status.

Early 1900s Annual Shows

Popular annual shows in Spring, Summer and Autumn, often jointly held with RDS are a feature of the social calendar, attended by 1000's in the Rotunda, Stephens Green and Ballsbridge centres.

1980 – Marking 150 Years

RHSI publishes Irish Gardening and Horticulture, a landmark volume celebrating 150 years as an amateur society (from 1830). The publication honours both the Society's heritage and Ireland's rich garden culture.

1922 – Daffodils

Celebrated breeder J. Lionel Richardson issues his first daffodil catalogue. A long-time RHSI member, he exemplifies Ireland's contributions to ornamental horticulture, even in turbulent times.

1916 – Easter Rising

Easter Rising occurs disrupting the centenary Spring Show, with prominent members on both sides of the conflict.

2016 – Bicentenary

RHSI celebrates its 200th anniversary with a summer Garden Party and a Gala at the RDS. Star speakers like Monty Don, Roy Lancaster, and Dan Hinkley join the festivities, marking a proud moment in RHSI history.

2011 – RHSI Russborough

After nearly two centuries, RHSI secures a license for the walled garden at Russborough, Co. Wicklow. Volunteers begin the work of restoration – laying paths, planting espaliers, and creating a living classroom.

2020 – Pandemic Pivot

COVID-19 halts in-person events overnight. The RHSI adapts swiftly, moving lectures to Zoom, expanding the digital bulletin, and staying connected through new channels. Public interest in gardening surges, and membership grows significantly.

2021 – RHSI Bellefield

The late Angela Jupe, acclaimed architect and garden designer, bequeaths Bellefield House and Gardens to RHSI. This extraordinary gift includes a 2-acre walled garden, rare plants, woodland, bog habitat, and native trees.

Our Community



Our 1,700 strong membership is a thriving community, with enthusiastic gardeners from all four provinces of Ireland.



Volunteers are the backbone of the RHSI, bringing its gardens & initiatives to life.



The RHSI Board are all volunteers, led by the President & Chair.



This community is supported by a small Staff: Operations Manager, Head Gardener & Bookkeeper (part-time).



Our Activities

Zoom Lectures

Popular winter talks drawing speakers and audiences from far and wide

Tour & visits

Organized guided tours and garden visits across Ireland and abroad

Education

Workshops, seminars, and events – sharing skills, ideas, and horticultural heritage

Community

Host festive and seasonal gatherings, plant sales, shows and xmas lunch

RHSI Gardens

Manage and develop the RHSI Gardens at Bellefield & Russborough





Our Initiatives

In 2011, the Society decided to restore the 3.5 acre walled garden at **Russborough Estate in Co Wicklow**, an initiative that is now self-financing, run solely by volunteers & open to the public 4 days a week.

In 2021, the renowned gardener and horticulturalist, Angela Jupe, bequeathed her 28-acre estate at **Bellefield in Co Offaly** to the RHSI to become a centre for horticultural exchanges. Bellefield aims to become a place for Irish gardeners to gather as a community for educational workshops & lectures, supporting volunteering & student placements in the skills, craft and science of gardening.



Membership Benefits

The Society provides many benefits to its members, including:

- Free/reduced entry to 60+ partner gardens across Ireland
- A fortnightly Bulletin & twice-yearly Journal (print & digital)
- Free access to all Zoom talks and an online library of past talks
- Discounts for events at RHSI Russborough and RHSI Bellefield
- Free entry to the RHSI Bellefield Open Days





The Lay of the Land

On Needing a Strategy

In the last 200 years, the RHSI has always responded positively to challenges & change...

Our expanding membership has asked the RHSI to adapt to the World in which we now live...

Since our 2019 plan, we have witnessed a pandemic, emerging climate disruption, and major threats to biodiversity.

Hence, a new Strategic Plan was needed for the next 5 years.

STRATEGY PROCESS TIMELINE



Vision Setting

We began by looking at the bigger picture – what inspires us, and where we want RHSI to go



Responding to Growth & Change

With our membership growing, the board agreed it was time to plan for the future.



Taking Stock

We paused to review where we are now – our strengths, our challenges, and what makes RHSI special.



Listening & Learning

We reached out through surveys, conversations, and industry insights, so that every voice could help shape the plan.



Shaping the Future

Through four facilitated board workshops, we pulled it all together – with the final strategy to be shared at the end of 2025.

STEP 01

STEP 02

STEP 03

STEP 04

STEP 05





Looking Beyond Our Shores



The Board studied other international societies as guides, though we were struck by the distinctive historical and cultural context of the RHSI.



In Germany, the Deutsche Gartenbau-Gesellschaft (DGG), founded in 1822, supports over 1 million allotment holders, as few have private gardens.

>> **DGG is notable for its advocacy on sustainability**

>> **it represents its members to public bodies**



In Britain, the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) has over 609,000 members and plays a scientific role; whereas

the National Trust handles the heritage brief.

>> **RHS is notable for its scientific emphasis**

>> **extensive educational programmes and publications**

>> **the use of RHS Gardens as platforms for activities**

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- Reputation & history
- Engaged members
- Excellent volunteers
- Supportive staff
- Bellefield base
- Communications

Opportunities

- Environment
- Health & welfare
- Partnerships
- RHSI Gardens
- Using expertise
- Attracting youth



Weaknesses

- Bellefield under-developed
- Perception of elitism
- Uneven marketing
- Membership age profile
- Volunteer database

Threats

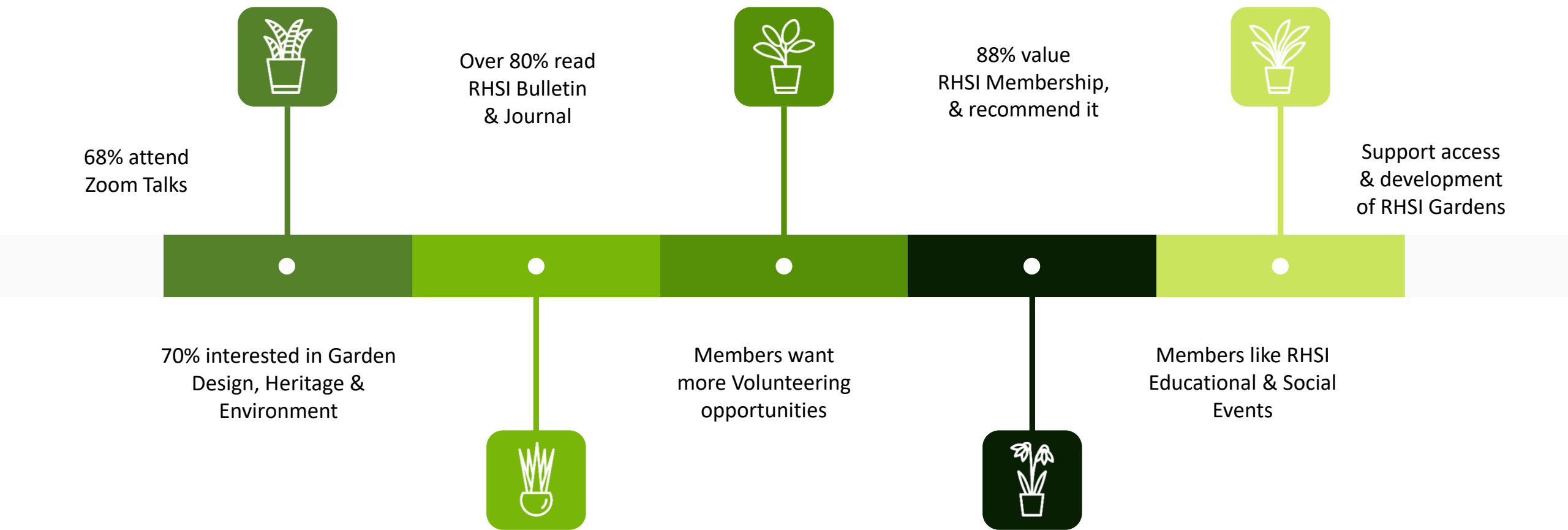
- Poor funding
- Profile with public bodies
- Economic uncertainty
- Missing partnerships
- Local clubs compete

Canvassing Our Members

We sought our members' views on our current standing and future :

- A 40-question survey was distributed to members, asking about themselves, society activities and future wishes
- High response rate: 409 (~24%) members actively responded
- Ratings on questions showed clear and positive preferences
- Open-text answers reflected the informed voice of members
- There was a clear depth of expertise in the membership
- Many concerned about the environment & mental wellbeing

Positives



Concerns

60% have never been on RHSI Trip

36%-49% have never visited one of RHSI's Gardens

83% of Members are aged over 55

Many want more Events outside Dublin

Zooms need to be more frequent, diverse & International

Call for more Advocacy by RHSI on the Environment





Members Wishes

(Ranked)

1. MORE WORKSHOPS, COURSES, SKILLS TALKS

2. EXPANDED RHSI GARDEN INITIATIVES

3. HIGHER PUBLIC PROFILE & MORE ADVOCACY

4. MORE INCLUSION ON GEOGRAPHY & PEOPLE

5. MORE SOCIAL EVENTS FOR MEMBERS

6. IMPROVED ORGANIZATIONAL DELIVERY



Strategic Plan: Vision, Values & Goals

RHSI Vision

Our **Vision** conveys the long-term ambition we have for our Society...

It is what we want the RHSI to achieve in the coming years...

Our **Strategic** Plan will take the steps needed to realise this vision.

A community with a shared passion for gardening and its heritage, committed to building healthy, resilient lives for a sustainable world.

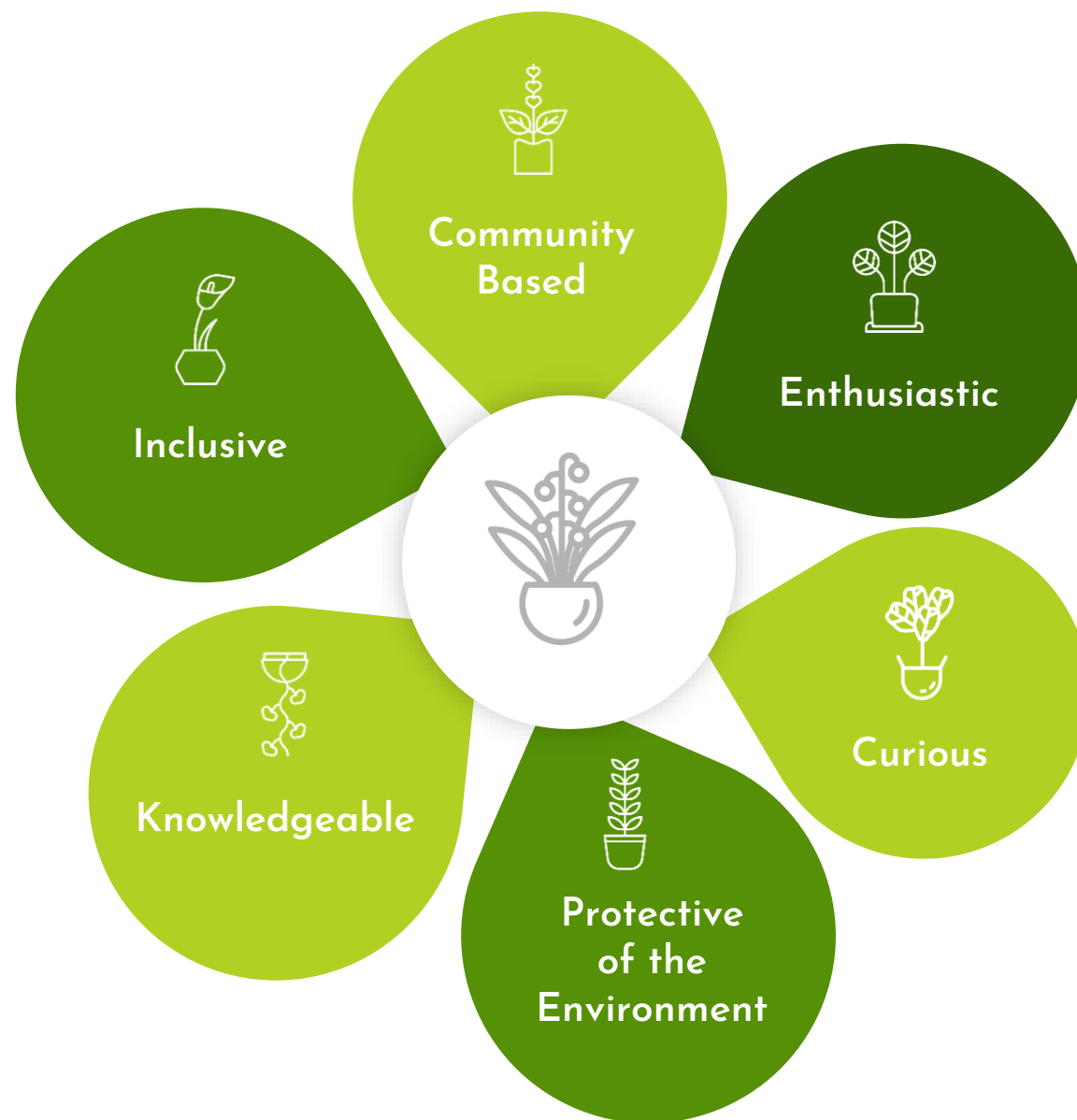


Our **Values** bind the RHSI community together.

They guide how we behave and make decisions.

They are the wellspring of our culture & behaviour.

They shape our interactions with others, both within and outside the Society.





RHSI Values

The RHSI strives to be:

- **Inclusive** - by appealing to everyone across the island, with an interest in gardening, from beginner to expert
- **Community-Based** - by respecting our volunteers, members and employees as a community sharing its gardening knowledge
- **Enthusiastic** - by actively fostering the benefits of gardening for the mind, body and spirit in our membership
- **Curiosity Driven** - by valuing inquisitiveness in the pursuit of knowledge
- **Knowledgeable** - a trusted and reliable source for horticultural best-practice and recent scientific advances
- **Protective of the Environment** - by passionately promoting changes for a better environment and a more sustainable world

Strategic Plan

Our Strategic Plan has four main goals, that are the RHSI's priorities for the next 5 years.
At its core, this plan will GROW the RHSI's structures, funding & activities.



GROW RHSI



BUILD
Gardening Community



EDUCATE
Gardeners



LEAD Nationally



Strategic Goals

2026 -2030



GROW

To create an active resilient society
for its members, volunteers & staff



EDUCATE

To pass on horticultural best practice
& hands-on skills, informed by science



BUILD

To bring the pleasure of gardening
to the widest possible audience



LEAD

To become a national leader in gardening
and sustainable horticulture



Goal 1: Grow

To create an active resilient society,
for its members, volunteers & staff.



- Redesign Board & Subcommittees
- Develop a funding strategy
- Develop Bellefield & Russborough Gardens
- Campaign to raise awareness of RHSI
- Enhance staff training and provision



Goal 2: Educate

To pass on horticultural best-practice & hands-on skills, informed by science.



- Host a series of authoritative talks & workshops
- Organise more garden visits and tours
- Produce and promote new RHSI publications
- Engage horticulture students with RHSI Gardens
- Run sustainability awareness campaigns



Goal 3: Build

To bring the pleasure of gardening to the widest possible audience.



- Attract more diverse community of members
- Attract younger members
- Engage and support volunteers
- Enhance relations with Partner gardens
- Build stronger relations with affiliated societies
- Build links with existing horticulture groups
- Reach out to wider public to enhance profile



Goal 4: Lead

To become a national leader in gardening and sustainable horticulture



- Partner with 1-2 organisations that have national campaigns on gardening, sustainability, the environment
- Work with existing media outlets to contribute RHSI content & expertise
- Present the gardening experience to influence government policy
- Develop a panel of gardening experts to contribute to national conversations on gardening topics and to advise RHSI



Strategic Supports

To deliver the actions in this strategic plan, RHSI needs a number of organisation-wide supports. These supports are not part of any single strategic goal, they underpin all four goals and must be developed across the Society.



Governance & Oversight

Clear roles, reporting structures, and decision pathways to monitor progress and ensure accountability.



Volunteer Capacity & Coordination

Systems for recruiting, onboarding, training, and supporting volunteers across Bellefield, Russborough and wider RHSI activities.



Operational Resourcing

Staff capacity, budget planning, and sustainable funding streams to support delivery.



Systems, Data & Digital Tools

Fit-for-purpose CRM, website, communications platforms, volunteer database and reporting tools.



Communications Infrastructure

Consistent messaging, internal communication flow, and external visibility to support engagement across the island.



Partnerships & External Relationships

Collaborations and partnerships that enhance learning, outreach, advocacy and impact.

Please...

Join us and help us:

EXPAND our activities in nurturing Irish horticulture.

ENGAGE with our volunteers in these initiatives.

GROW together to create an active and inclusive community.

SHARE in our enthusiasm creating resources, education
& training for all.

Thank You!



Appendix:

Action Plan (2026-2027)

The Strategic Plan will be implemented immediately in the Action Plan (2026-27).

This Action Plan has clear roles, activities, tasks and timings for the first 2 years.

Beyond 2027, we will assess progress and identify more actions up to 2030.



Goal 1: Grow the RHSI

To create an active resilient society, for its members, volunteers & staff.

Activities	Key tasks	Responsibility	Start date	End date
1. Build the Board and committee structures to ensure RHSI has the skills and resilience needed to maintain current activities and achieve future goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review Board skills in light of strategy and incoming Board members, and recruit new board and committee members needed Review and confirm Company Secretary role to ensure compliance and board is informed and trained Establish the new committees needed to implement the strategy – Membership & Communications Committee, Education Committee, External Relations Committee, Funding and Development Committee, RHSI Gardens Committee. Governance training for all board members Induction process for new board members 	Succession Team, Chair and Board	Spring 2026	Ongoing
2. Develop a funding strategy for RHSI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a Development Committee/Team to develop and implement the funding strategy Develop a Funding Strategy for RHSI covering Philanthropic giving, legacies and bequests, Membership fees, Activities and grants 	Funding & Development Committee (new) Funding & Development Committee (including volunteers with knowledge of fundraising)	Spring 2026 Spring 2026	Ongoing Winter 2026
3. Develop Bellefield and Russborough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement Just Transition project in Bellefield Produce a Development plan for Bellefield (facilities and resources) Review activities and develop a plan for expanding RHSI activities at Russborough Assess need for additional staff / volunteers at Bellefield and Russborough 	RHSI Gardens Committee - Bellefield Management & Development Team RHSI Gardens Committee - Bellefield Management & Development Team - and RHSI Funding Development committee RHSI Gardens Committee - Russborough Team Bellefield Team	Spring 2026 Autumn/ Winter 2026 Autumn 2026 End 2026	Summer 2026 (by end Aug)
4. Raise awareness of RHSI through marketing and promotion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand use and content of social media platforms. Coordinate and strengthen links with other related societies and groups by running joint activities, sharing information etc - <i>See Goal 1, Activities 5 and 6</i> 	Membership & Comms Committee External Relations & Education Committees	Spring 2026 Spring/ Autumn 2026	Ongoing Ongoing
5. Develop the staff team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop staff with training Employ extra staff - for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housekeeper and estate manager (part time) at Bellefield More gardening staff at Bellefield Office staff to reflect extra activities and growth in membership (e.g. membership officer, volunteer coordinator) Decide location/role of RHSI offices 	Chair, Treasurer, Board	Starting in Spring 2026	Ongoing



Goal 2: Educate Gardeners

To pass on horticultural best-practice & hands-on skills, informed by science.

Activities	Key tasks	Responsibility	Start date	End date
1. Develop a series of talks and workshops (aimed at beginners to experts)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Create a series of Masterclasses (a branded series) including International experts● Create a series of Beginner classes for new/novice Gardeners	Education Committee (new)	Spring 2026	Spring 2027
2. Organise garden visits and tours	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Continue current “long distance “programmes (e.g. UK garden tours)● Develop a series of new local, low cost visits (around the country)	Education Committee	Summer 2026	Ongoing
3. Produce and promote RHSI publications	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Produce the Journal● Issue the bi-weekly Bulletin● Produce new RHSI Notes of Educational Activities - in an ‘education hub’ on the website	Education Committee	Ongoing Autumn 2026	Ongoing
4 Facilitate visits by horticulture students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Facilitate visits to Bellefield and partner/member gardens by horticulture student groups● Explore potential for student placements at RHSI (as this is more complex, it needs to be planned)	Education committee	Spring 2026	Ongoing
5. Run awareness campaigns (Bio-diversity, carbon footprint, climate impact etc)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Help gardeners to compute their carbon footprint● Set up a <i>1,000 garden initiative</i> on bio-diversity● Develop guidance/ definitions for bronze/silver/ gold categories of Gardens● Link in with primary schools (Green Schools initiative) - <i>See Goal 3, Activity 1</i>	Education Committee	Spring 2027	Ongoing

Goal 3: Build a Gardening Community

To bring the pleasure of gardening to the widest number of people.

Activities	Key tasks	Responsibility	Start date	End date
1. Attract members from all parts of the Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Segment our membership base, identify 3-4 target groups for membership, develop different member personas Identify target groups and paths to access members who are 50 plus - using direct contact, via members, partner gardens, etc Agree offer and message Engage with groups 	Membership & Communications Committee (new) - to include a board member and volunteers	Spring 2026	Ongoing
2. Attract younger members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design and offer a discounted digital membership for younger members (targeted at under 30s and what they are interested in) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measure impact/ metrics Create a message and an offer that resonates with their current needs Identify social media platforms for under 30s Engage with schools - <i>See Goal 3, Activity 1</i> 	<p>Membership and Communications Committee</p> <p>Gardening ambassador (younger influencer) & RHSI Office</p>	Spring 2027	Winter 2027
3. Engage and support Volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create one Volunteer database for RHSI Create standardised volunteer training, procedure pack and onsite training. Identify ways of accessing new volunteers (eg. through Ivoll) Recognise volunteers – value, thanks Identify new areas for volunteering with RHSI (e.g. social media, photography) 	Membership & Communications Committee. (Volunteer coordinator) and a member from each volunteer group	Spring 2026	Winter 2027
4. Develop the Partner gardens / RHSI relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and encourage new gardens as partner gardens Improve communications with garden managers Use the bulletin for communication with partner gardens - include a feature on a partner garden in each bulletin Identify/promote partner gardens offering Accomodation Regular visits by RHSI Board members to existing partner gardens Create and maintain regional guides for partner gardens and include on RHSI website 	<p>External Relations Committee and RHSI Office</p> <p>- Renew the Partner Gardens team</p>	Spring 2026	Winter 2027



Goal 3: Build a Gardening Community

To bring the pleasure of gardening to the widest number of people.

Activities	Key tasks	Responsibility	Start date	End date
5. Build strong relationships with and between RHSI affiliated societies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Open conversations with affiliated societies● Develop ideas for collaborating with affiliated societies (sharing ideas, resources etc)● Update information on RHSI website	External Relations Committee Nominated board member and volunteer (looking after affiliated societies)	Spring 2026	Ongoing
6. Link with existing horticulture groups - including OPW Heritage Gardens, IGPS, GLDA, National Biodiversity Data Centre, Coillte, National Parks and Wildlife, Irish Garden Magazine	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Identify existing horticulture groups with which RHSI should build stronger links● Collaborate and build two-way relationships● Include link to the other horticulture groups on RHSI website● Build local networks of gardeners/clubs for biodiversity and sustainability efforts	External Relations Committee Nominated Board member and Board Chair	Autumn 2026	
7. Reach out to the wider public to raise awareness of the RHSI	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Identify an influencer(s) / ambassador(s) for RHSI● Have a travelling pop-up stand for use at festivals/ garden shows (Bloom and others)● Source PR expertise for RHSI (volunteer role)● Advertise RHSI more widely to raise awareness of RHSI	Membership and Communications Committee Membership and Communications Committee	Spring 2026	Winter 2027



Goal 4: Lead Nationally

Provide national leadership on gardening and sustainable horticulture.

Activities	Key tasks	Responsibility	Start date	End date
1. Build a partnership with one/two organisations who have national campaigns on gardening/ sustainability/ environment	<p>Explore the potential for partnership with the following initiatives (make contact and identify potential initiatives):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Engage with the <i>Green Schools Programme</i> to agree how we can support and advocate for it ● Identify and participate in a <i>Citizen Science project</i> ● Explore the <i>Pocket Forest initiative</i> and seek to support and collaborate with them 	External Relations Committee	Winter 2026	Winter 2027
2. Share knowledge - Work with existing media outlets/ programmes to contribute RHSI content and expertise to these programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prepare short plan to identify 2/3 media outlets to promote work of RHSI ● Target 'Nationwide ' and get cover for work in Bellefield / Russborough ● Target 'Ear to the Ground' for promotion ● Target 'Gardeners Corner' for targeted promotion 	Education Committee	Spring 2026	End 2027
3. Influence policy and policy implementation at national and local level so that Gardening experience is represented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify a national body where RHSI can influence policy (e.g. Bord Bia, Climate Change Advisory Body) ● Lobby relevant body/ committees to gain membership ● Identify a RHSI policy and work with Local Authorities (DLRCC/ Wicklow/ Offaly) to support its implementation (e.g. peat alternatives/ water conservation/ recycling) 	<p>Education Committee</p> <p>Volunteer/ local people who have interest and capacity</p>	Spring 2027	Winter 2027
4. Provide a voice for gardeners - Develop a panel of gardening experts who will contribute to national conversations on gardening topics and advise on plans for Bellefield, Russborough and the RHSI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Build an RHSI Expert Panel - Invite and recruit members to participate on a RHSI Expert Panel ● Provide some advice and training for panel members ● Develop and publicise offer available to outlets ● Develop new topical areas of expertise as they arise 	Education Committee	Summer 2026	Winter 2027

Strategic Goals & Activities 2026/27

Build

- Attract members from all parts of the community
- Attract younger members
- Engage & support volunteers
- Develop the partner gardens/RHSI relationship
- Build strong relationships with/ between RHSI affiliated societies
- Link with existing horticulture groups

To bring the pleasure of gardening to the widest possible audience

Educate

- Develop a series of talks & workshops
- Organise garden visits and tours
- Produce and promote RHSI publications
- Facilitate visits by horticulture students
- Run awareness campaigns (bio-diversity, carbon footprint, climate impact etc)

To pass on horticultural best practice & hands-on skills, informed by science

Grow

- Partner with 1-2 organisations who have national campaigns on gardening, sustainability, the environment
- Work with existing media outlets/ programmes to contribute RHSI content & expertise
- Influence policy & policy implementation so that gardening experience is represented
- Develop a panel of gardening experts to contribute to national conversations on gardening topics and advise RHSI

To create an active resilient society for its members, volunteers & staff

Lead

- Build the RHSI Board and committee structures
- Develop a funding strategy for RHSI
- Develop Bellefield and Russborough
- Raise awareness of RHSI through marketing and promotion
- Develop the staff team

Provide national leadership on gardening and sustainable horticulture





Thank you!