

## Information about the GreenHouse Project

### Overview of the GreenHouse Project

The overarching vision behind the GreenHouse Project is that Johannesburg becomes a 'Green' city, because the people of Johannesburg are empowered to create and recreate the city in ecologically, socially and economically sustainable ways.

The GreenHouse Project (GHP) aims to achieve this through the GreenHouse People's Environmental Centre (GPEC), which is being developed in the Johannesburg inner city, Joubert Park, as an environmental demonstration and training centre from which a range of catalytic development, regeneration and education interventions take place in the greater Johannesburg urban environment.

The urban environment in greater Johannesburg is plagued by a number of developmental, socio-economic and environmental challenges. Despite political will, the quality of life of many communities has not adequately improved. People still long for decent housing, better services, access to nutritious food and a healthy and stimulating environment. Poverty exacerbates the ability of people to access a decent living as well as exposure to pollutants. Many of these problems have arisen through colonialism and apartheid. However, problems of pollution, crime, lack of food, services and housing are common to many urban residents the world over.

The GreenHouse Project was established to collaborate in addressing these common urban challenges by providing information and physical examples of sustainable building, servicing and landscaping that persuade people to pursue a more sustainable development path.

### The GreenHouse Project Objectives

The GreenHouse Project is tackling urban environmental problems head on, through the following main objectives:

- ✿ Demonstrating Green alternatives by showing working examples of how to organise, plan, build, landscape, grow food and cycle resources (such as money, materials, energy and water) in a way that gives life to both people and our environment.
  
- ✿ Supporting civil society organisations, particularly community based organisations, to be active in improving the environment and quality of life of people at community level. The GreenHouse Project does this by providing:
  - information and capacity building,
  - a nurturing 'home' where activists can network, learn and be mutually supportive.
  
- ✿ Development and dissemination of sustainable living and development information that will enable individuals in all sectors of our society to improve the quality of life in their community in a sustainable manner. In particular this focuses on:
  - community environmental problems and solutions where information is distributed through face to face participatory processes and factsheets

- sustainable living and development issues where information on challenges and appropriate alternatives is shared through factsheets, workshops with a variety of people in the sector, and a free information resource called the Green Living & Development or GLAD Files.
- ❁ Inspiring individuals to take responsibility by showing each person who visits the Centre that they have the ability to improve their own quality of life while also creating a socially just, healthy, and sustainable world for all – no matter how small the first steps they take are.

### **What does the GreenHouse Project do?**

The mission of the project is: To build an environmental centre within the Greater Johannesburg urban environment which:

- ❖ provides a working demonstration and a platform of Green and most appropriate technologies, ideas and practices;
- ❖ supports organisations working to improve our urban environment, particularly community based organisations;
- ❖ disseminates information that will enable individuals in all sectors of our society to improve the quality of life in their community in a sustainable manner.
- ❖ Provides a place of inspiration towards a Green ideal which shows that everyone can do something;
- ❖ Is catalyst and support base that provides the glue at the centre of a network of individuals, communities and organisations.

The outreach, information and practical demonstrations are provided for each of the five core programmes of the GreenHouse Project, namely:

- ❖ Sustainable Energy;
- ❖ Sustainable Water and Sanitation Management;
- ❖ Zero Waste;
- ❖ Organic Food, Medicinal Plants and Landscaping, and
- ❖ Green Building.

Through these programmes the GreenHouse aims to empower people to alleviate poverty by developing environmentally-based entrepreneurial skills.

### **Unique positioning of the GreenHouse Project**

The GreenHouse Project is uniquely positioned as the only African environmental demonstration centre located in a dense inner city environment. No other environmental demonstration and education project tackles an area where extremes of urban environmental challenges are so starkly represented and where there is such need for urban regeneration. Joubert Park is in the heart of Johannesburg's inner city, sandwiched between crowded residential areas (including famed Hillbrow), taxi and train transport hubs and the central business district. The area is densely populated and poverty is rife. A history of slum lording and then landlord abdication, coupled to poverty has led to a rapid decline in the urban fabric, and collapse of services.

The inner city challenges described also create enormous potential for demonstrating urban regeneration strategies and spreading successful ideas in the Southern African region. In addition

to the dense local population, the city's main taxi and train transport hubs are located in the area. Hundreds of thousands of commuters use the central Johannesburg train station, which is only a block away, and 20 000 people walk through Joubert Park on a daily basis. Long distance taxis to neighbouring countries rank in the area. The planned Gautrain rapid rail system will also have a station located a block away. The GreenHouse Centre is positioned to share learning that addresses the commonality of urban environmental problems, and empower communities struggling with similar challenges across the region.

The GHP is now recognised as an established and important contributor to inner city regeneration and the sustainable development agenda in Johannesburg. A recycling centre, supported through the DEAT Poverty Alleviation Fund, was recently completed and is up and running and has given impetus to the GHP's 'zero waste' programme. The National Lottery Trust is supporting the renovation of the Victorian Conservatory, which is a listed heritage building. This fronts Joubert Park and will be the public entrance to the GPEC. A double storey building that will showcase a variety of earth building technologies is in construction alongside the potting shed office.

### **The GreenHouse Project Way-forward**

The GHP has been in a frenzy of donor relationships and infrastructure development that includes the construction of a double-storey Earth Conference Centre and the renovation of the Conservatory in the last 5 years, and still hopeful for consolidation, greater financial sustainability and tangible progress towards sustainable development in the urban environment of greater Johannesburg.

The GHP has also been making progress in fulfilling our objectives to inspire individuals, demonstrate Green living and building and share information on this through information materials and training.

We are hopeful that the conclusion of current building projects will free up existing structures on site for other uses and allow greater use of the grounds for demonstration. The GHP has also shifted its focus to engaging more fully in drawing people to the Centre for tours and capacity building on environmental issues as well as facilitating outreach projects in the wider Greater Johannesburg community including Soweto, Alexandra, the Vaal Triangle, and several surrounding.

The GHP has also established partnerships with a number of like-minded organisations like Planact (a social housing organisation), Reproductive Health Research Unit, COPAC, Gauteng Department of Agriculture, Khanya Africa, through providing training and project facilitation.

The Earth Building Conference Centre has been planned to provide one large and 2 smaller training spaces that will enable the GHP to offer training for up to 80 people at a time (as well as

being a venue for conference hire as a contribution to financial sustainability). A key component to this conference facility will be to build the capacity and knowledge of CBO members by providing them with opportunities to interact with the experts involved in conferences and seminars. There is, however, an area in which we would like to expand activities and thus better fulfil one of our main objectives: that is to provide a home and support to individuals and organisations from civil society to enable them to be more active in improving the environment and quality of life of people at community level.

The GHP will be equipped with the space, skills and partnerships with specialist organisations to offer capacity building to CBOs on a wide range of environmental and organisational development issues, with living demonstrations of sustainable alternatives on hand at the Centre. When current building operations are completed, space in a small building in the corner of the Centre will be available for conversion to a CBO support hub. We envisage that this will provide access to computers, information & communication technology as well as a small amount of locker space for member CBOs. Community activists will also be able to research issues at the project library. The GHP is ideally situated in proximity to main Johannesburg train and taxi transport stations to be accessible to people from all over greater Johannesburg.

### **The GreenHouse Project Target Community**

The GHP believes that capacity building of interested individuals in civil society on sustainable development issues is essential to ensure that:

- civil society engages with government and private developers concerning policies and developments that effect the well-being of communities and the environment on which we depend;
- leaders of the future have the capacity and knowledge to implement more sustainable urban development. (This is evidenced by the fact that many current leaders in government, NGOs and even business have grown from community-based environmental organisations.)

As a result, the GHP operates at many levels and therefore targets a number of different groupings through its work:

- At a local level we target the community of greater Johannesburg and other community development organisations in the area and beyond, by relating environmental issues to the priorities they face on a day to day basis.
- Civil society, especially CBOs and environmental activists are directly supported through the sharing of information and skills training.