

View Garden Centre Site Plan





T: 01268 761119

F: 01268 767636

E: info@viewgardencentre.co.uk

W: www.viewgardencentre.co.uk

Business Plan View Garden Centre

Mr Martin Collins

Old Chelmsford Road
Rayleigh
Wickford
Essex
SS11 8SJ

Tel: 01268 761119

Fax: 01268 761234

Email: martin@viewgardencentre.co.uk



T: 01268 761119

F: 01268 767636

E: info@viewgardencentre.co.uk

W: www.viewgardencentre.co.uk

Market Conditions

Over the last 10 years or so there has generally been a steady increase in demand for garden products, for a number of reasons:

- there was a lengthy period during which the housing market was buoyant, with many new properties being built
- gardening has become one of the most popular leisure activities and enjoys widespread coverage on TV, radio and in magazines and newspapers
- spending on garden items such as water features, patio heaters and lights, paving, decking, fencing, ornaments, planters and so on has grown significantly
- growing demand for 'green' and 'eco-friendly' products like water butts and composters
- the recent increase in interest in home-grown fruit and vegetables

This has benefited the garden centre sector but has also encouraged other retailers into the market making it more competitive. Although the specialist garden centre sector still consists of many small independents, there has been an increase in the number of large outlets run by big national garden centre chains.

These groups bought out the better located independent centres with potential for high turnover, or those with potential to develop the leisure side of the business. Of those independent operators that have survived, most compete by offering specialised gardening knowledge and services, together with high quality products for the gardening enthusiast.

Independent operators who are unable to raise the large capital sums necessary to develop their businesses or who are unable to expand the physical size of their business activity are increasingly being forced out by competition from the garden centre chains and the DIY superstores.

In the longer term the market for garden products is likely to remain strong, but smaller independent garden centres may find it difficult to compete in what is now a very competitive industry.



T: 01268 761119

F: 01268 767636

E: info@viewgardencentre.co.uk

W: www.viewgardencentre.co.uk

Garden centres have been affected by the recession as they trade in luxury or at best non-essential products; it is a sector which is very sensitive to changes in disposal income. Therefore turnover can be expected to have fallen back during the recent recession and to recover at a slower rate than other parts of the retail market. As well as the economic climate there are a wide range of influences on garden centre trade. Where garden centres are leisure orientated and open on a Sunday, high turnover depends on good promotion, ease of access and a high profile to passing trade from major roads as well as the ability to provide other leisure activities on the site. Location, weather, gardening trends, adequate space for presentation of product and displays are most important to the specialist garden centre trade.

Due to the need for stable income streams, customer demand and increased competition it is not unusual to see small independent garden centres diversifying their product range, allowing concessions to broaden their offer.

Business Description

View Garden Centre is a local, independent, family run business that provides a diverse range of high quality products to customers looking for plant, garden and ancillary supplies. To remain competitive we have expanded our product range to include:

- Plants, shrubs and small trees
- Terracotta pots
- Garden sundries
- Garden Furniture
- Landscaping products
- Quality unusual gifts & homewares
- Household furniture
- custom made kitchens

We have also developed an ancillary tea room which is very popular with our customers.

Additionally, we host other small ancillary concessions which at present include children's outdoor toys, leisure boats, conservatories and windows, hot tubs, arts and crafts and handmade ornate metalwork and gates.



T: 01268 761119

F: 01268 767636

E: info@viewgardencentre.co.uk

W: www.viewgardencentre.co.uk

Business Vision

View Garden Centre is a thriving independent, family run garden centre known for its personal touch but which remains competitive with the larger chain stores. It is used and valued by the local community for providing a happy, safe and caring environment for its customers. Our diverse product range is key to making our business different to other Garden Centres and thus an attractive proposition for customers to shop with us

Customers

Our customers are members of the public with a keen interest in their gardens or businesses such as gardeners or landscapers. We have worked very hard to improve our customer offer over the past 5 years, not least by establishing the tea rooms which many of our customers enjoy when they visit.

We currently also lease space to other small businesses - referred to in this document as "concessions". These concessions are deemed relevant to our customer's interests and needs as they help to increase our product offer whilst providing an all-year round income for the business.

There is room to develop business to business sales – outlined in The Future section of this plan.

Staff

As we pride ourselves on a professional and friendly service, staff are one of our biggest assets. Our customers often want to speak with friendly knowledgeable staff and so we make sure they are all adequately trained and offer a service that is in line with our overall business objective.



T: 01268 761119
F: 01268 767636
E: info@viewgardencentre.co.uk
W: www.viewgardencentre.co.uk

The Garden Centre currently employs 25 members of staff. If current issues are overcome and the Garden Centre continues to grow this will increase by at least another 6 more members of staff in the short term future.

Competitors

We have two main competitors, both located along the A127 in the district of Basildon. In the last five years both businesses have carried out major extensions, refurbishment and improvements including increasing significantly the size of their retail operation and in consequence their product offering.

Their major strengths are that because of their size customers perceive them as a one-stop shop for everything they could possibly require and we find ourselves in danger of being overlooked as a worthwhile retailer if we do not act quickly.

However these competitors have acquired a reputation for being expensive and impersonal places to shop not dissimilar to some of the large chain retailers.

View Gardens could never and does not want to compete on size but needs to be able to make the changes outlined in this document to allow it to improve its depth of range in all product departments. We need to do this to maintain and exceed our customers' expectations

Marketing

We currently promote the Garden Centre in a combination of ways. We utilise newspaper and radio advertising along with targeted leaflet drops in the local area. In addition throughout the spring and summer months we host family fun days. Each of the days having a different theme for the kids be it Easter Bunny or Pirates.

We also pride ourselves on being one of the first Garden Centre retailers to offer a Customer Loyalty scheme, awarding points for each purchase made, the points are then translated into vouchers for customers to use in store. This also gives our loyalty customers priority to events and promotions that we run throughout the year.



T: 01268 761119

F: 01268 767636

E: info@viewgardencentre.co.uk

W: www.viewgardencentre.co.uk

Background

The Garden Centre was purchased in 2004 as a retirement sale. At the time of this sale the site was in a state of disrepair and needed a substantial investment to bring the businesses to an acceptable standard. Unbeknown to us the boundaries being used as retail on the site were not in line with the existing planning permission. We thought that there was huge potential to develop the business and an opportunity to create a highly competitive independent, family run garden centre.

The Current Situation

A significant amount of financial investment has been ploughed into the business since it changed hands in 2004. In 2008 the business started to stabilise and we were confident that with time and development we could achieve our business vision.

We stabilised the business by improving the site, bringing in new and a more diverse range of products and renting space to concessions. These concessions are now instrumental to the centre's business model as rental income is raised throughout the year, not just in peak season, steadying our bottom line. Their product offers are different to ours and so also help us in our aims to provide a more diverse retail offer.

Since purchasing the site and investing in its development we have increased the garden centre's employees to 25. At the time of the sale from the previous owner the Garden centre employed just 6 staff

Once the business had started to stabilise we turned our attention to opportunities to grow the business and make it more competitive and profitable. This is when we started to look at how we could better utilise the existing space on the site.

Some site access issues remain with big deliveries taking place in the main customer car park which has raised some health and safety concerns with the Local Authority.

The nature of the business is that most products are bulky and so make the room needed for each department very space hungry, these include the sale of plant pots, sheds, log cabins, greenhouses, compost, aggregates and paving,

This is when we started to look at how we could better utilise the existing space on the site. We looked at all of the areas within what we understood to be the operating



T: 01268 761119

F: 01268 767636

E: info@viewgardencentre.co.uk

W: www.viewgardencentre.co.uk

boundary and carried out a massive tidying up exercise removing heaps of rubbish, hardcore dilapidated hard standing areas and heaps of mud mixed with hardcore. This was then replaced with level clean usable hardstandings.

We believe that these unsightly deposits had arisen over many years from the time when the previous owner had occupied the site and so we were only remedying an inherited situation.

As we were in the final stages of completing this work, the Planning Authority raised a number of issues regarding the work taking place and as a consequence of this process highlighted that the garden centre had been in part operating outside the recognised retail boundary of the site.

This now raises significant concerns because if we have to comply with the requests of the Planning Authority we will have to contract substantially the business including losing one of our key concessions and the rental income that comes with this. We will also have to cease selling compost, all landscaping products, timber sheds as we will simply have no space to display these products. We believe that this would be catastrophic to our business turnover.

Additionally, significant funds will be needed to comply with all of the outstanding planning enforcement issues. At present, it is not clear if the business can stand these costs, the associated contraction of the business and continue to stay afloat. Even if it is possible, it is unlikely that we will be able to keep the business stable. There will be no room spatially or financially to secure the future of the site by remaining competitive and maintaining a diverse product range.

We feel certain that as soon as we lose one concessions we will see a snowball effect and very quickly they will all leave putting the business under further stress.

At the moment we are seeing the reverse of this we are steadily attracting more concessions as they can see that we have a positive future.

In a bid to keep the business afloat we have submitted a planning application asking for planning permission for an extended retail boundary, a "goods in/out" area at the rear of the site and to keep our storage containers.



T: 01268 761119

F: 01268 767636

E: info@viewgardencentre.co.uk

W: www.viewgardencentre.co.uk

Put simply, the final outcome of the planning application will determine the future of View Garden Centre as a viable business venture. If planning permission is not granted to extend the retail boundary of the site then the future of this business is bleak.

It is fair to say that the unclear future has ground the business and various activities to a halt. We are unable to invest in many things we need at the moment as we do not know what the outcome of our planning application will be.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Small independent, family run businesses offering a friendly, personal service.</p> <p>In conjunction with our concessions we offer a diverse product range unique to any other Garden Centre in the area.</p> <p>We are located in a prime location with excellent passing traffic and close to the local communities of Rawreth, Rayleigh, and Wickford.</p> <p>Our pricing policy means that like for like products are nearly always cheaper than our competitors.</p> <p>Over 72% of our customers live in the Rochford District. We are their local garden centre. We believe that our customers would not by choice want to drive out of the district to shop elsewhere.</p>	<p>Health & safety issues with regards to deliveries taking place in customer car park</p> <p>Industry is one of more highly exposed in a recession</p> <p>Seasonal trade</p> <p>Require significant amounts of space to display sufficient products to make a viable business.</p> <p>Security of the site</p> <p>Storage of products</p>
Opportunities	Threats
<p>If planning issues are resolved the business can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> start to progress plans to develop the business as detailed in this plan improve health & safety by having a separate goods in/out area 	<p>To conform with planning enforcement issues we would have to contract the business leading to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> loss in rental income from concessions loss of product range and offer to



T: 01268 761119

F: 01268 767636

E: info@viewgardencentre.co.uk

W: www.viewgardencentre.co.uk

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use retail area currently being disputed providing greater product range • increase rental income and local employment. • Environmental responsibilities and resource efficiency – help to make us more efficient and competitive • Expand our customer base to include B2B (local handy-people, landscape gardeners and builders) to shop with us. | <p>customer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • loss of income to develop and remain competitive • Staff redundancies • Possible business closure |
|--|---|

The Future

This section is based on the understanding that the planning permissions we have applied for is granted. If it is not and action to comply with the enforcement happens, we will have to lay out a plan of action to contract the business. Once a true picture of the impact has been gained we will carry out a forecast to see if the business is still viable and can continue.

To survive and thrive as an independent, family run garden centre in the current market we will have to:

1. ensure we offer a wide and diverse range of products to ensure we remain unique in our product offer.
2. ensure we are able to implement an efficient goods in/out system to enable the business to operate efficiently. The result of this is that it will help the business to remain competitive.
3. create added value by having some sort of leisure/social provision;
4. have a welcoming, visually pleasing and safe customer carpark.
5. have professional, trained and knowledgeable staff.

This translates to the following actions in the short, medium and long term.

Short term

- As it is an overriding priority the “goods in/out” area will be constructed and all deliveries will be drawn away from the main customer car park. This will improve health and safety. staff parking will also be moved to the rear of the site to give



T: 01268 761119

F: 01268 767636

E: info@viewgardencentre.co.uk

W: www.viewgardencentre.co.uk

maximum space to our customers to park during peak season.

- Once the lorries making deliveries have been re-routed the car park will be resurfaced to be more customer friendly and improve our image.
- Using space provided through the re-defined boundary we will be able to extend our retail offer resulting in increased turnover. At present due to space limitations we have a very small display of Log cabins and so would like to increase this display to satisfy the requests we regularly receive from potential customers looking to purchase this type of product.
- finish security fencing around the site to mitigate loss of earnings through theft.
- Until now inadequate office space has been available within the main building to operate and control the business from. The business currently operates from an office only 8ft x 6ft which is not capable of accommodating any more than 1 member of staff. There is scope to utilise a building used many years ago by the previous owner as an office/store. This building is located to the rear of the site, and has fallen into disrepair. Our intention would be to re-utilise the building in part to provide a satisfactory work space for staff to operate from and a point of supervision for goods in/out.
- As the business grows more staff will be needed and we anticipate this will include 6 new posts as detailed below.
 - 1 full time assistant manager post
 - 1 full time administrator/bookkeeper
 - 1 full time till operators
 - 1 full time stock controller
 - 1 full time customer service adviser
 - 1 part time marketing manager
- As required by the Planning Authority the land to the rear of the site (beyond the line of fencing) would be returned to arable/meadow land. Once this has been carried out we would look to make the space available to our customers (subject to agreement from the planning department) as an outdoor recreational area allowing them to enjoy the District's countryside.



T: 01268 761119

F: 01268 767636

E:info@viewgardencentre.co.uk

W:www.viewgardencentre.co.uk

Medium term

- We would look to construct the two building extensions for which planning permission has been granted. This will increase and improve the retail offer further resulting in increased turnover
- The additional space will enable us to establish a waste and recycling area to meet our environmental responsibilities. In turn, we will be able to become more resource efficient improving our "bottom line"
- New employment opportunities will arise from these changes to include two permanent and one seasonal product sales carers.

Long term – the next 5 years

- Business 2 Business sales (B2B) - At the moment we do not track or monitor the number of local businesses we sell to. We think there is opportunity to expand into B2B and increase overall sales. A project is being run locally called Shop at My Local and building on that theme we are keen to offer other local businesses

such as landscape gardens, builders etc, and preferential rates when they buy from us. This is good for both businesses and the local economy.

- E-commerce - We have a website at present which we use to raise the profile of the business. It gives information on our product range, services and location. Once the existing business and site has reached its full potential we will consider how we can use e-commerce to boost revenue streams.
- Increased staff to work on new products and services mentioned.

Conclusion

The future of the Garden centre is at risk. We need to make the changes outlined in this document to -

- Make safe and efficient the method of receiving and storing goods.



T: 01268 761119

F: 01268 767636

E: info@viewgardencentre.co.uk

W: www.viewgardencentre.co.uk

- Secure the existing retail space currently being used
- Obtain permission to increase the open retail space
- Make secure all existing jobs
- Create new employment opportunities
- Make the business secure and viable for the future

If we obtain the planning permission that we seek the council have the reassurance of knowing that as the site is landlocked we can not extend the site any further. To enable the business to achieve its objectives we need this improved operating area. If planning permission is not granted then the business will contract and possibly fail.

View Garden Centre is a business that has evolved and grown over the last 25 years. As with all small businesses it has continued to improve its operation to remain competitive and attractive to customers. It is essential that planning permission is granted to ensure that View Garden Centre can remain competitive and ensure that it continues to support the local community as a worthwhile retailer for the next 25 years.