

COMMUNITY WELLBEING AND HOUSING COMMITTEE

13 June 2023



Title	Community Garden Project - West Wing
Purpose of the report	To make a Key Decision
Report Author	Stephen Mortimer-Cleevely, Jilly Mowbray & Jeanette Kemp
Ward(s) Affected	All Wards
Exempt	No
Exemption Reason	N/A
Corporate Priority	Community, Environment and Service Delivery
Recommendations	Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• approve the establishment of a small community garden project adjacent to the council building at West Wing Knowle Green.
Reason for Recommendation	The aim of the community garden project is to provide a space for local residents and staff to grow their own flowers, plants and food, increase social cohesion, and promote sustainable living practices. Using volunteers from Willmott Dixon and SBC and accessing funding from a sustainability initiative.

1. Summary of the report

- 1.1 Committee is asked to approve the establishment of a small community garden project residents and staff to grow their own flowers, plants and food, increase social cohesion, and promote sustainable living practices. Using volunteers from Willmott Dixon and SBC and accessing funding from a sustainability initiative.
- 1.2 This project is cross cutting, led by Community Wellbeing but supported by the sustainability team.
- 1.3 Once approved by the Committee the residents of Knowle Green West Wing will be approached to see if this a project they would like to see go ahead.

2. Key issues

- 2.1 Affordable housing settings face numerous challenges such as providing access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food for residents while addressing carbon footprint and enhancing social value. A community garden can provide a solution to these challenges. This report outlines the advantages of a community garden in our own affordable housing setting, covering the benefits from a climate change and sustainability perspective, and social value principles while also highlighting

the importance of volunteers. Images below show the suggested area at the West Wing:



- 2.2 A community garden in an affordable housing setting can significantly reduce carbon emissions. Growing food locally reduces the need for transportation, which is a significant source of carbon emissions. Additionally, a community garden provides an opportunity for residents to compost food waste, reducing the amount of waste sent to landfills, which also produces methane, a potent greenhouse gas. A community garden can also increase biodiversity in the area, providing habitat for pollinators, which are critical to the reproduction of many plants and the overall health of ecosystems.
- 2.3 A community garden can help create a more sustainable environment in an affordable housing setting. By growing food locally, residents can reduce their reliance on food produced in distant locations, which requires significant amounts of resources, including energy, water, and land. Food produced overseas produces large amounts of carbon emissions during transportation, much of which

is airfreighted. A community garden also provides an opportunity for residents to learn about sustainable growing practices, such as composting and using natural pest control methods. These practices can be applied to other areas of life, further reducing the environmental impact of the community.

- 2.4 A community garden can provide numerous social benefits to an affordable housing community. A community garden can provide a sense of community and help build relationships between residents who may not have otherwise interacted. It can also provide an opportunity for residents to learn about different cultures and cuisines, as well as to share their own. A community garden can also provide access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food, which is particularly important for low-income families.
- 2.5 Volunteers play an essential role in community gardens in affordable housing settings. Volunteers can help with planting, weeding, watering, and harvesting, which can be particularly important for residents who may have limited mobility or other health concerns. Additionally, volunteers can help with the maintenance of the garden, ensuring that it remains a healthy and productive space for the community. Volunteer opportunities can also help build skills, provide opportunities for social interaction, and enhance the sense of community within the affordable housing setting. These would be sourced from Willmott Dixon, staff, and tenants. Due to the location of the garden at Knowle Green, staff have the opportunity to use and tend to the garden. The benefits of gardening have been proven to improve mental health and wellbeing. The British Psychological Society recently noted that gardening for just a couple of hours provides instantaneous reductions in depression and anxiety symptoms.
- 2.6 The project has been presented to the Knowle Green Estate board who were supportive. The project team will be liaising with residential property manager of the West Wing to consult the residents of the West Wing about the project.
- 2.7 There are numerous examples of small community gardens in the UK. These are few examples:-

Incredible Edible Todmorden: This community garden was started in 2008 in Todmorden, West Yorkshire. The garden is a network of public herb and vegetable gardens throughout the town, and anyone is free to take the produce. The initiative has gained international recognition for its innovative approach to urban agriculture and has inspired similar projects across the UK and beyond. Today, there are 120 official Incredible Edible groups in the UK and over 700 worldwide. It aims to create kind, confident and connected communities through the power of food

New Cross Gate Trust Garden: This community garden was established in 2010 in the New Cross area of South London. The garden is located on a former landfill site and has been transformed into a thriving green space that provides a range of benefits to the local community. The garden is used for events, workshops, and community gatherings and has helped to bring people together in the area.

The Skip Garden: This community garden is located in the King's Cross area of London. The garden was established in 2009 and is run by Global Generation, a charity that works to connect young people with nature and sustainability. The garden is built on a series of repurposed skips and shipping containers and is

used for educational workshops, community events, and as a space for growing food and flowers.

3. Options analysis and proposal

3.1 The options considered within this report are: -

- **Option 1 – Approve the community garden and consultation with residents (recommended)**

- The Council adopt the approach of approving a well-planned and managed community garden scheme providing a range of benefits to participants and the wider community. By following these recommendations, the committee can ensure the success and sustainability of the project:
- Conduct a Site Assessment: Before proceeding with the community garden scheme, it is important to conduct a site assessment to determine the suitability of the site for a garden. This should include a soil test to ensure that the soil is safe for growing food, as well as an assessment of the availability of water, sunlight, and other resources.
- Develop a Clear Plan: develop a clear plan for the community garden scheme that outlines the goals, objectives, and activities of the project. This should include details on the types of crops to be grown, the allocation of the roles and responsibilities of participants.
- Establish Guidelines for Participation: Clear guidelines for participation should be established to ensure that the community garden scheme is inclusive, accessible, and welcoming to individuals from all backgrounds. This should include guidelines for participation, how to contribute to the garden, and how to resolve conflicts.
- Secure Funding and Resources: The community garden scheme will require some financial investment, such as the cost of seeds, spades, trowels and storage, water butts and maintenance. It is important to secure funding and resources to support the garden, including grant funding, donations, and in-kind contributions from participants.

- **Option 2 – Create a community garden in another location**

- If the residents do not want to community garden outside West Wing offer to create a community garden in another location such as an allotment or Staines Park, however the location outside the West Wing accommodation provides a unique opportunity for residents to become involved in a garden which is accessible to them, as well as Council staff. However, there are risks that if the community garden is out of sight of residents and not in easy reach of residents it may not be used and maintained.

- **Option 3 – Create a slow growing yew hedgerow**

- Create a yew hedge that will improve biodiversity, will be low maintenance and will create a physical separation between the West Wing and Council Offices.

- **Option 4 – do nothing** (not recommended)

3.2 Option 1 is the preferred option.

4. Financial implications

- 4.1 The majority of funding for this project would be sought from Willmott Dixon from the social value. If additional funding required there is some funding available from the Urban Food Growing project from the Shared Prosperity Fund. Depending on what materials can be provided from Willmott Dixon we don't estimate the project costings more than £1000.

5. Risk considerations

- 5.1 Environmental Risks: Community gardens can pose environmental risks, such as the potential for soil contamination from pollutants or toxins in the soil. It is important to conduct a soil test before starting a garden to ensure that the soil is safe for growing food.
- 5.2 Community gardens can be vulnerable to pests and diseases, which can damage crops and threaten the sustainability of the garden. It is important to implement effective pest and disease control measures to minimize the risk of damage to crops.
- 5.3 Community gardens can sometimes be the source of conflicts or disputes between participants, particularly if there are disagreements over the use of space or resources. It is important to establish clear rules and guidelines for participation to minimize the risk of conflict. It will be important to protect the gardens from vandalism from unhappy council customers and other antisocial behaviour.
- 5.4 Community gardens can require some financial investment, such as the cost of seeds, tools, and maintenance. It is important to ensure that there is sufficient funding in place to support the garden and that participants are aware of any financial obligations associated with participation.
- 5.5 Community gardens require ongoing maintenance and support to ensure their sustainability over the long term. It is important to ensure that there is a clear plan for ongoing maintenance and support, and that participants are committed to contributing to the ongoing success of the garden. The location of the gardens provides opportunities of staff to also volunteer in the gardens.
- 5.6 In conclusion, while there are some risks associated with setting up a small community garden, these can be mitigated through careful planning, clear guidelines for participation, and ongoing maintenance and support. By taking these steps, community gardens can provide a range of benefits to participants and the wider community.

6. Procurement considerations

- 6.1 Willmott Dixon have committed to provide a contracted level of social value as part of their tender proposal for the leisure centre build contract. To date, they are struggling to find projects to support across Spelthorne, and this type of project would ordinarily provide the right type of community engagement. Procurement have concerns that Willmott Dixon will see this project as letting them off the hook on their social value obligations from the Leisure Centre.

7. Legal considerations

- 7.1 Legal will need to be consulted on this project.

8. Other considerations

9. Equality and Diversity

- 9.1 We have requested a higher raised bed in the area outside the West Wing order for the residents in the West Wing with a disability to be able to access the beds.
- 9.2 Improved Access to Fresh and Healthy Food: A community garden can provide a source of fresh and healthy food for residents, particularly those who may have limited access to affordable and nutritious food. This can have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of the community, particularly for individuals from low-income or marginalized backgrounds.
- 9.3 Community Building and Social Cohesion: Community gardens can help to bring together people from diverse backgrounds and create a sense of community and belonging. This can be particularly important for individuals who may feel socially isolated or excluded from mainstream society.
- 9.4 Learning and Skill Development: Community gardens can provide opportunities for residents to learn new skills, such as gardening, composting, and food preservation. This can be particularly important for individuals who may have limited access to educational or training opportunities.
- 9.5 Cultural Barriers: Community gardens may inadvertently exclude individuals from certain cultural backgrounds who may have different gardening practices or preferences. It is important to ensure that the community garden is inclusive and welcoming to individuals from all cultural backgrounds.
- 9.6 Cost Barriers: Depending on the resources and funding available, a community garden may require some financial investment from participants. This may be challenging for individuals from low-income or marginalized backgrounds who may not have the resources to contribute financially.

10. Sustainability/Climate Change Implications

- 10.1 A community garden can help create a more sustainable environment and reduce residents' impact on climate change in an affordable housing setting. Growing your own food is known to reduce a person's carbon emissions significantly as food produced locally produces a large amount of carbon emissions through the transportation of the food, much of which is airfreighted. By growing food locally, residents can reduce their reliance on food produced abroad and requires significant resources, including energy, water, and land. A community garden also provides an opportunity for residents to learn about eating seasonally and sustainable growing practices, such as composting and using natural pest control methods. These practices can be applied to other areas of life, further reducing the environmental impact of the impact of the community.

11. Timetable for implementation

- 11.1 We are looking to make to headway in the June planting season.

12. Contact

- 12.1 Stephen Mortimer-Cleavelly, Jilly Mowbray, Jeanette Kemp

Background papers: There are none

Appendices: To Follow

Appendix 1 Suggested Location

Appendix 2 Suggested planting

Appendix 3 Suggested planting – food