

## Designing and Planning a Community Garden

Having a vision for your community garden is important when designing a new space. The vision might not be practical when it comes to the size or location of the garden but think big to start with and remember plans can always be changed and adapted. This resource offers some advice on the areas you need to consider when planning and designing a community garden.

As a first step, find out what the land was previously used for. The soil might be contaminated, and you will only be able to grow in planters. It may be covered in rubble and invasive weeds, so this will need to be cleared before you start planting. The soil in the Birmingham area is often heavy clay and this will need improving before you can grow effectively in it.

### Community needs

When deciding on setting up a community garden, you will need to speak to your local community to see what their needs might be and how you can accommodate them. Finding out their needs and expectations should be done early on; your findings will also be useful when applying for funding.

For example, you might be planning on working with groups with special needs and the garden will need to be designed in a way that is functional for someone with a physical disability. If you decide that you want to use the space for therapeutic gardening, then you might need to create zones in the garden especially for this purpose. Working with families or children will mean that you have to create not just an informative play area for children such as a forest school, but also construct low growing beds so they can access them. Always consider the garden users before planning your layout.

### Creating a project management plan

Being organised and tracking your progress is key to getting everything in place for setting up your community garden, but also for making sure that you are doing everything you said you were going to do for the funding that you have received.

A project management plan works as a kind of timeline for when things need to happen, by when and by who. You can fill it with important tasks, keep track of your budget and keep on top of your plans.

### Managing a community garden

The overall management of a community garden depends on the group or organisation that is overseeing the project. This could be a volunteer led group, for example, a Friends of Group, or it could be a long running organisation with charity status and who already have staff in place who can oversee the project.

A community garden will need to have a structure in place to oversee or manage the project on a day-to-day basis. A person in charge of the project will need to be aware of any policies that must be in place and adhered to; this can include risk assessments, health & safety policies, and safeguarding policies. Additionally, they will need to be able to manage and supervise volunteers, looking after their needs, as well as have a DBS and be trained in first aid.

Other things to consider are:

- Insurance to cover structures and tools/equipment
- Employers' liability insurance
- Public liability insurance

- Volunteer policy
- Expenses claim forms
- Equal opportunities policy
- Emergency contact forms
- Media consent forms

If funding allows, then it is good to include in the budget some staff costs. This could be a member of staff on a contract or a freelancer/sessional worker. Some pros to having a designated member of staff include:

- Collating attendance and monitoring data
- Looking after volunteers welfare
- Managing plans for the garden
- Making sure everything runs smoothly
- Organising events and managing any sessions

Projects can also be managed successfully by volunteers, if there is an appropriate structure in place.

## **Layout and Practicalities**

The garden layout will need to work *for* the service users, but also work *with* the lay of the land. This will include sunny and shaded areas, land gradients, existing vegetation (large trees) and neighbouring use of land. What will your garden need once it is in use? Make sure you consider things like, a water supply, electricity, toilet/handwashing facilities, vehicle and people access and shelter.

### **Water and electricity**

Water is important for growing plants and water butts can be set up to collect rainwater from all the structures that you build within the garden or from an existing building. An electricity supply is only required if you plan on using power tools, but you can purchase tools with battery packs and pre-charge them.

### **Composting**

The ability to compost waste vegetation is a necessity. You will be able to create your own good quality compost for potting on and filling planters, plus you will not have the issue of having to dispose of green waste.

### **Welfare facilities**

Having welfare facilities is important if you will be having volunteers or hosting growing sessions at the garden. Compost toilets are a good alternative if there are none close to the garden site. Refreshments for volunteers can be provided by using a camping cooker to heat water or by using flasks. Handwashing facilities are also important, again you can set-up a washing station by using a camping cooker to heat water or take a large flask of hot water.

Some form of shelter within the garden is a good idea too so that people can shelter from the sun and from bad weather. It also gives them a place to gather at breaktimes so they can enjoy socialising with others.

### **Accessibility**

You must consider how your site will be accessed; you might need large equipment delivered when you first start which can prove difficult if the nearest vehicle access is too far away. On the other hand, you may need to consider installing fencing around your community garden to avoid vandalism.

Volunteers or service users may struggle with travelling to the garden, think about public transport routes or other means of travel. What is the ground of the garden like underfoot, is it suitable for wheelchair or pushchair access? Do you have the means to make it suitable? Is the garden easy for people to move around, especially if they have any special needs?

Other structures to consider are, polytunnels, greenhouses and tool storage containers.

## **Marketing**

You will want to market the community garden so that you attract volunteers and gain publicity. You can do this by setting up social media channels, building a website, putting up posters in key locations, leaflets through doors or advertising with other community minded groups.