

South Stoke Wildlife and Conservation Group (SSWCG)

Proposal for a Community Garden in The Park

Purpose: South Stoke Parish Council has initiated a public consultation to determine the future use of The Park, a public space held by the Council on a 999-year lease. The consultation is planned to be completed by the end of 2021. This proposal is SSWCG's input to the consultation.

Proposal in summary: We propose that this public space be used for a community venture to improve the biodiversity of our environment, to promote the community's understanding and engagement with wildlife and nature, and to produce high quality organic food.

The approach would be to create a community garden with a minimal environmental impact, using sustainable products with low embodied carbon and with recycled materials wherever possible. This garden will be designed, built and operated by the community, using permaculture principles to maximise biodiversity, soil health and food production.

The site will be designed to encourage public access to communal areas to promote the enjoyment and understanding of the site's biodiversity, whilst maintaining security and integrity of food growing areas and standing crops.

We have devised a concept and outline design for The Park, which is included below at Page 3.

At the heart of our community

1. There are 13 plots in the design, of nominally 25m x 10m. These would be let out to local families, individuals, the school or groups and clubs. The mix will be adaptable to meet the changing needs of the community over time. Rents will be modest, and come with an obligation to contribute some time to maintaining our communal areas and to abide by organic principles. Depending on demand, it might be beneficial to rent some half plots.
2. Communal growing areas, including raised beds suitable for disabled access and a polytunnel, will be cultivated by the community and the produce shared in the community.
3. A communal covered area with seating and shed will provide a focal point for the gardening community and for the secure storage of tools, seeds and crops, as well as for shelter, training and administration.
4. An orchard area, hazel and willow coppice and a wildflower meadow will improve biodiversity, carbon storage and in time will provide top fruit crops, bean rods, pea sticks and basketry materials.

5. A wildlife pond stocked with appropriate local species and fed from the garden's sustainable drainage system will improve biodiversity and provide interest and pond-dipping opportunities.
6. Log piles and insect habitats/hotels, bird and bat boxes around the site will encourage a variety of wildlife into the area.
7. A fenced area of grassland has been allocated for use by the school, with a separate access. This will enable the engagement of all ages in the natural world, and the school will be encouraged to participate in other activity on the wider site.
8. A water tank, borehole and solar panels are included to deliver a sustainable water supply and shed lighting.
9. Communal compost, leaf, manure and wood chip bays (with controlled access for local tree surgeons) to provide a useful service to local people, and useful products to improve soil fertility on the site.
10. Composting toilet with clean water supply to promote site hygiene.
11. Disabled access and additional car parking, using the existing access to the village hall, to allow easy and safe access to help encourage less physically able people to participate.
12. A reinforced ground access track and turning circle to allow occasional deliveries of bulk materials
13. Footpath access connecting Ferry Lane with the Bier Path at the Village Hall to provide a new walking route for the community.
14. Plant/produce stall for sale/given free surplus produce, and an information noticeboard to promote forthcoming events, etc.



Sketch Notes

- Fenced area for school use
- Thirteen plots (c25x10m) for family/individual or group use, flexibly allocated to meet changing demands
- Raised beds and polytunnel for communal use
- Shed to provide storage, teaching and communal area
- Paved areas for socialising /learning and undercover seating
- Hazel and willow coppices cropped on rotation for bean rods, pea sticks and basket making
- Orchard of fruit trees with picnic benches
- Beehives, bee hotels and log piles for bugs
- Noticeboard for events and information
- Produce stall for sales/given free at entrance
- Communal compost bays accessed by hard-surfaced track
- Solar panels to supply off-grid shed lighting and bore hole pump
- Chippings bay for bulk deliveries, community leaf drop-off, etc.
- Optional composting toilet



Overall benefits

Environmental

The biodiversity of the site will be dramatically improved through careful selection and planting of trees, hedges and wildflowers, and the addition of a pond. There will be a significant increase in the carbon storage capacity. Gardeners will be encouraged to use techniques to maximise soil health, including compost-making, which will further improve the carbon storage capacity. The enterprise will be off-grid, generating its own power and using its own groundwater and collected rainwater, to avoid the use of Mains water for irrigation.

Community, wellbeing & mental health

This proposal will provide more opportunities for local people to meet, to create and manage the garden, exchange ideas, knowledge and produce in a very pleasant natural environment in the heart of our village.

Engagement of the community with nature

The benefits of close engagement with the natural environment are well known. This proposal will provide many opportunities to engage and improve understanding, including with expert-led guidance.

Learning opportunities

There is a lot of knowledge and many skills amongst our community, on environmental matters, horticulture, timber construction, renewable technology, food production, orchard management, cider making and bee keeping. This development will promote the sharing of this resource, presenting learning opportunities across the community.

Food

This proposal should result in the production of a large quantity of high-quality food. The health benefits of eating more fresh organic produce are well known, and locally produced food means reduced food miles and reduced packaging. There is potential for distribution of crop surpluses for charitable purposes, and possibly to provide supplies to our community shop.

Funding

SSWCG believes that grant funding can be arranged for the capital works, provided that a suitable long-term agreement with the Parish Council can be achieved. Some potential sources of funding have been identified.

Revenue costs for insurance and specialist maintenance will be serviced from modest rental fees for the cultivation plots.

This proposal is expected to be almost cost-neutral to the Parish Council.

Management and operation

SSWCG is researching best practice amongst various successful community gardens, with a view to forming a community garden management committee, should this proposal be accepted by the PC.

The management committee will finalise a design, apply for any necessary consents and grant funding, and manage the set-up and ongoing activity.

Whether or not this organisation needs to be a registered charity, and whether that would need to be a new charity is being considered.

Informal soundings around the village indicate that there will be sufficient demand for the plots and enough willing participants locally.

Timescale

We anticipate that, subject to the PC's consultation and early agreement, works could commence in March 2022 to enable the first crops to be produced in the 2022 season.

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