

Distington Community Garden

Design and access statement

October 2024

Introduction

Groundwork North East and Cumbria was engaged by site owners, Distington Community Trust, to develop proposals to convert the former British Legion site in the centre of Distington, into a community garden that would provide allotment plots for individuals and growing areas for groups to adopt. The Trust wishes to retain and refurbish the car park for the use by residents and visitors to the village.

Distington Community Trust, established through BIG Local, a National Lottery funded project, has identified creation of this community space as one of its main targets. The site has laid derelict and neglected for over 10 years. Giving it a new purpose will remove a blighted area and provide a much-needed amenity, where there is a waiting list for allotment gardens in the local area.

Vision

Distington Community Trust envisage the following outcomes from the project:

Increased community connectivity – the project will bring people together in a collective endeavour. These spaces are particularly valued by older people often living on their own, people with disabilities and families with young children. Therefore, there is an intergenerational aspect to this project.

Physical health – The growing of fresh fruit and vegetables encourages healthy eating. Visits from schools can include tasting sessions encouraging young children to try things they may never have eaten at home. In addition, gardening can be both gentle and strenuous exercise – a healthy activity in beautiful surrounding.

Wellbeing/ mental health – Gardening and any outside activity of this type can be therapeutic for people and many community organisations and social enterprises actually provide gardening to support positive mental health – both through the meditative qualities which gardening has but also the opportunity for mutual support from others.

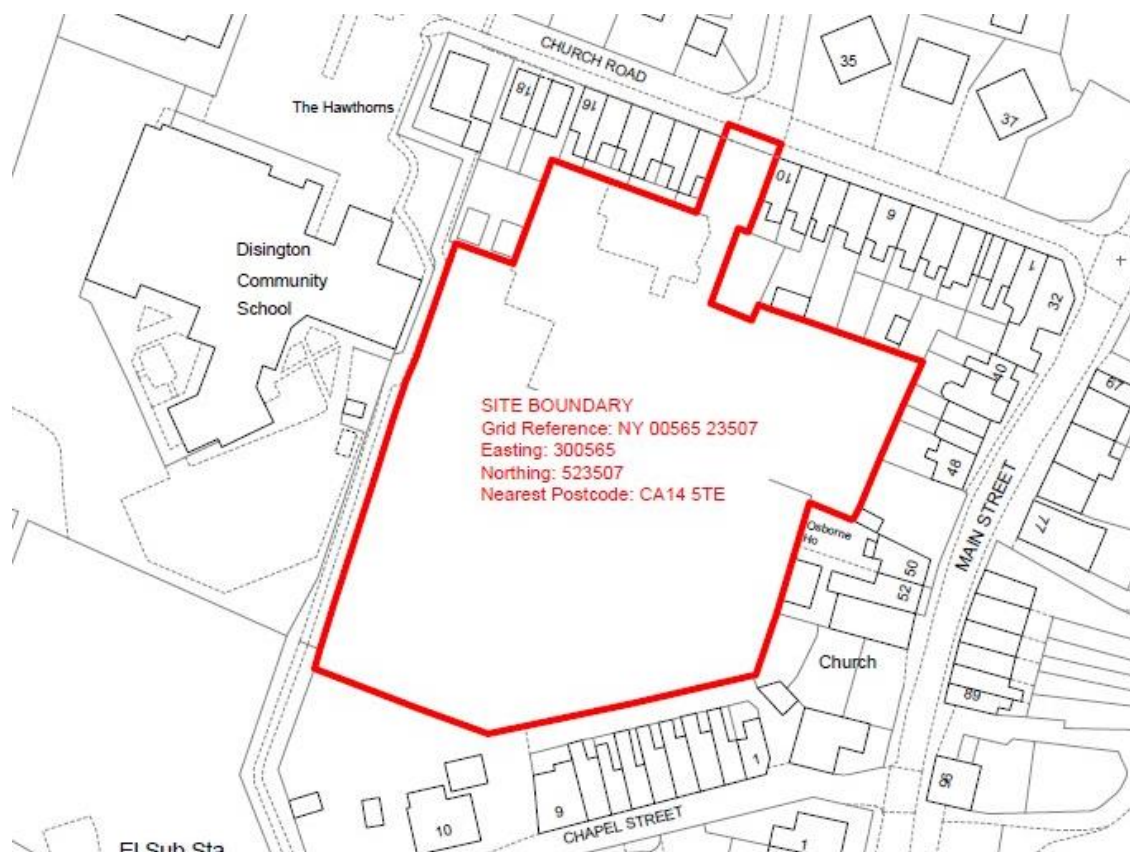
Skills development – For young people particularly gardening and forms of environmental stewardship can be the beginning of a pathway to a career in horticulture. It's also an opportunity for people who are not employment and whose confidence has struggled to achieve and learn.

Environmental enhancement - There are multiple environmental benefits to this type of enterprise. Food miles are reduced through local food being grown on a community's doorstep. Well-managed growing spaces can be extremely attractive and like in Distington often involve the development of brownfield sites and scrub land with little environmental value. In addition many growing spaces

incorporate wildlife areas including UK species wildflower planting, new trees, insect, bird and mammal habitat creation, fungi farms, and others.

Existing Site:

The site is situated in the village centre to the south of Church Street, as shown below:



View of site entrance from Church Street



View from entrance

The Proposals

The design aims to provide the basic layout for a community garden that will serve the local community and bring an unused semi-derelict site back into active, productive use, with benefits to biodiversity as well as the character and appearance of the village .

Allotment gardens will be fenced with timber picket style fencing. The plans include two standpipes to supply mains water; communal growing spaces with raised timber planters for groups to access, two metal lockable storage containers (for tools and maintenance equipment) and composting bays for communal use. Gravel surfaced paths will provide access to the gardens. Management of the allotments will be undertaken by the Community Trust, with lease agreements set up for allotment holders.

An area of mown grass with picnic benches and a covered pergola / gazebo is provided for general community use. Orchard trees and fruit bushes are also planned to be a joint community venture

A strip of mown grass margin around site perimeter will be maintained to deter dumping of rubbish and garden waste.

Existing habitat: hedges and bramble scrub will be retained, and new habitat created to enhance the biodiversity of the whole site, including: 42 native trees, native hedges and wildflower meadow. These will be established and maintained in accordance with the accompanying Small Sites Metric (BNG) and Habitat Maintenance and Management Plan.

Drainage will be into the existing soft ground

No street lighting is currently proposed as the intended use will be in daylight hours.

The chainlink fence along the western boundary will be repaired.



Access

Parking will be discouraged in the main entranceway by placing large planting boxes towards the boundary, arranged with vehicle turning and visibility considerations. Neighbouring property boundaries will be respected with a 1.2m strip protected through placing planting boxes.

The repaired and resurfaced car park will provide parking for site users and local residents on a managed basis. It will include marked bays for 5no accessible parking, 35no standard bays, and 5no larger bays for vans and motorhomes. The larger parking bays have been included to allow for overnight parking for motor homes and caravans. This will be closely managed by the Trust, and may become an important source of revenue to support maintenance of the site. The vehicle gates will be lockable to control access to the site.

A lockable vehicle gate, will be managed by the Trust with a code for the combination lock keypad issued to registered users. This can be changed at intervals as necessary.

A new footpath path will provide pedestrian access through the site with a newly formed entrance at the south-western end. This will link onto the public footpath running along the parallel to the western boundary. Paths to be surfaced with compacted gravel to provide local residents with a useful shortcut and access to the site. The pedestrian gates can be

locked to allow access only during daylight hours, however the intention is to monitor how the site is used and only introduce this measure if necessary to deter anti-social activities

Consultation

The community growing concept

The group undertook a project planning session at Distington Community Centre on 8th June 2023. The discussion involved a consideration of whether the project was an allotment site or a community growing area. Allotments tend to involve much more independent site use with limited sharing of responsibilities for the whole site. Community growing spaces still allow for independent use but also involve the members (also the users) having collective responsibility for site maintenance and therefore more reliant upon willing volunteers.

The committees of community growing areas also tend to have more sharing of resources (so tools for example) and exercise more control over the site development to ensure it remains visually appealing and easy to manage. These spaces also tend to have more communal growing – so free to pick orchards, berries and herbs, honesty books in produce taken from communal polytunnels. They are also more likely to integrate environmental principles including developing wildlife areas. Community growing areas are often key locations for community organisations and can be regularly visited by schools, disability support groups, and children's groups.

The group considered a wide range of design and management issues including: entry points and access, plots and raised beds, allotments, polytunnels, storage, orchards and fruit trees and forest school area. Many, but not all, of these ideas have been incorporated into the final design.