

URBAN COMMUNITY GARDEN SUPPORTS BIODIVERSITY AND LOCAL WELFARE ON SITE PROVIDED BY CHURCH



N.B. This case study considers only one possible approach, which will not be suitable for every church. Always seek professional advice.

Key Points

- **A community garden** in a field owned by, and adjacent to, St Chad's, in the outskirts of Sheffield.
- The space is intended to provide access to greenery and support for the whole community, with plans incorporating an array of **social and environmental benefits**, within the urban landscape.
- Both the church (saving maintenance costs) and the garden committee (having a location) benefit from the project.



1 A lot of preparation work went into making the site appropriate for a community garden. Safety and accessibility were important considerations.

2 Plants, such as echinops, were chosen specifically to support local insect and bee populations.

3 Social and reflective spaces are both incorporated in the design of the garden. Here a willow dome is being constructed.

The context

Early in 2020, a group of residents from the S8 postal area had first come together with the idea for a garden that would provide a haven for anyone in the community. With backgrounds in a range of fields, those involved in the inception of the garden had ideas about different functions of the space, including for **health and well-being, leisure, education, and supporting biodiversity**.

Subsequently, in October 2021, the garden was officially set up on a 1,420m² site adjacent to St Chad's church.

The need for change

St Chad's were facing regular costs for the mowing and maintenance of a little-used field to the south-east of the church building.

The originators of the garden, also involved at the church, had come up with the idea for it, and were looking for a suitable piece of land.

What were the options?

- Environmentally, incorporating elements of **organic gardening**, such as avoiding pesticides and using green manure, as well as supporting a **biodiverse** selection of flora and fauna, were the two major objectives.
- Economically, it is expected that **self sufficiency** will be the ongoing management model, with donation-based and commercial income streams.

- By providing space for anyone in the community, it is hoped that the garden will be used by a significant sample of the **diverse local population**.

What was done?

- After local community members came up with the idea for the garden, they established a committee to oversee its creation and sought a suitable plot.
- Once the St Chad's location was chosen, an **informal agreement** was made with the church to use it, and a community bank account opened.
- The site required **levelling, weeding and plenty of general clearing** before it could be developed effectively.
- A **wildflower meadow** was created in the upper garden, featuring hollyhock, poppy, cosmos, marguerite and wild pea.
- A **bug hotel** was constructed in the garden, to protect a diverse population of invertebrate species.
- Suitable plants, including apple trees, geums, roses, echinops, sedums, and dahlias were introduced to support that population, alongside the wildflowers.
- Other notable features of the garden are composting facilities, seating areas and a willow dome.

How well does it work?

Like all gardens, Woodseats is constantly evolving. It is regularly used for its intended purpose of providing a place for different people and groups, but the committee still have **ambitious plans for forthcoming additions**. These include a wildlife pond, infrastructure for rainwater collection and additional bee-friendly plants including lavender.

The church also benefits from permission to use the site, its community groups continuing to do so.

Given the relative infancy of this project, it is hard to assess its overall success, but the **team have set the parameters by which they intend to evaluate it**. These are; increased engagement within the community, visible progress in the garden, improved financial position and uptake of social prescribing by GPs.

Generally, it is felt that the project is going to plan, and things are slightly further ahead than was anticipated for this stage.

How much did it cost?

- The garden has been funded through a mixture of plant, equipment and monetary donations.
- Volunteers cover the labour costs of working the land, with a range of 12-30 locals turning out each weekend, on average.
- The overall amount that has gone into the garden is difficult to calculate, as donations have been made in different forms. In terms of cash, approximately £450 has been given and used towards materials.
- The garden is also signed up for the Co-op community fund, which is expected to provide an extra £1,000 in Autumn 2023, as well as allowing locals with a Co-op card to opt into 1% donations when using it.

“It is an absolute joy seeing people come to the garden and getting stuck in, or just stopping and relaxing for a moment to enjoy the space. The garden is transformative. Its boosted local wildlife and formed friendships. Me and my family love coming, the kids play, build, garden and explore and each time we come you see the garden develop and change. The key to the garden's success has been in the partnership that has formed between the community and the church. The PCC still have to agree significant changes to the grounds which maintains an ongoing approval process.”

Nathan Edwards, Co-Founder of The Woodseats Garden