



Community Growing Spaces - Site Options Appraisal

Community Ownership Support Service sample document

Anytown Community Development Trust (ACDT) conducted an appraisal of the potential of five sites for the development of community growing spaces. In identifying sites for inclusion in the appraisal, a screening exercise was undertaken first to identify those that are in a central location within Anytown. The following factors were then considered:

1. Size (footprint) of site
2. Access and security (being separate but linked issues)
3. Visibility / privacy (either may be desirable depending on project aims)
4. Existing growing resources on site
5. Amount of work / cost involved in preparing the site
6. Sunlight / shading
7. Soil quality
8. Availability of water and power
9. Planning status
10. Where relevant, an informal view from planning authority on likelihood of planning permission for polytunnels, fencing, sheds or other structures
11. Contact with current owner to-date and tenure on offer

Site One

This is a vacant plot to the rear of shops on Anytown High Street. It is the most promising of the five sites for community growing. It is sheltered, enjoys considerably privacy, is south facing with no overshadowing buildings until late afternoon/early evening and useful heat retaining walls on its north side. The vegetation covering the site is mostly perennial nettles, some willowherb, creeping thistle and grass. These indicate a relatively fertile soil (the nettles in particular being an indicator of higher-than-average phosphate and nitrogen). Without being able to see the site cleared it is hard to assess if there is much rubble or other rubbish just beneath the turf, though the ground appears to be reasonably level suggesting it is largely problem free. The surrounding walls are ideal for training espaliered fruit trees, and in fact most kinds of fruit and vegetable could be grown here successfully.

Some drawbacks include no outside water tap (though it would in any case be desirable to harvest rainwater). A mature sycamore tree on the east side, hard up against the garden wall casts shade over a good portion of the garden in the mornings while the roots dominate a similarly large area. It is also tangling in phone lines. The east side of the garden appears to have the remains of a foundation as there is a brick edge retaining a low, level area of rubble. Vegetation growing through this suggests there may be soil not far beneath. Ideally the sycamore tree should be removed professionally, and logs from this could be used for mushroom growing. Chipped bark and branches could be very useful as mulch on site. Lower crowned fruit trees could be planted to compensate for the loss of this tree.

The two owners of the site approached Anytown Community Development Trust regarding the site being improved as a community growing space and positive meetings have been held with them. They are happy to sign a 'meanwhile use' agreement on receipt of a satisfactory site plan. Although within Anytown Conservation Area, an initial informal view from the planning authority is that permission for polytunnels and a shed may be possible as the site is not visible from a main road.

Site Two

This site has limited potential as it is shaded both by mature broadleaved trees (mainly sycamore) along its entire length and by tenement flats to the south. It's most likely potential would be as a site to grow woodland fruit such as blackcurrants and blueberries, though the shade and therefore coolness of this site would make investing money, energy, plants and materials a low priority. On the plus side, the site is adjacent to a footpath that provides access to the main supermarket in Anytown and is therefore passed by the majority of local residents on a weekly if not daily basis, providing good potential for raising the profile of sustainable food issues/community food growing and ACDT. No approach has yet been made to the owner.

Site Three

Although over shadowed by tenement gables to the north and south, this could be a quite useful community gardening site. Open to the east and west, there is clearly enough light to allow the dense cover of buddleia, willows *etc.* to thrive. There would be a lot of manual work involved in clearing the site of scrub growth and litter *etc.*, and it is likely that the 'soil' is rubble filled. However, there is no reason why raised beds containing locally made compost could not be constructed to grow a variety of fruit, vegetables *etc.*

The site may be relatively vulnerable to intruders though, and as it is awaiting re-development (with planning permission for flats) it would be hard to justify investing in fencing, gates, *etc.* Indeed it's planning status means it would be unwise to plan for anything other than temporary use here. Furthermore, as it is within Anytown Conservation Area and visible from a main road, there is a risk that planning permission for polytunnels would not be granted. Also, it has no access to water, which would have to be collected on site, perhaps from an adjacent shed roof if possible.

Site Four

This is a very small area measuring about 3m x 7m, surrounded on the north, east and south by 2m high brick walls. The site has no real soil, but in its favour it is sheltered, relatively obscure and unlikely to attract casual vandalism, and is light enough to allow plant growth. Also it would receive good direct later afternoon sunshine being open to the west. Immediately to the south of this 'yard' is a bowling green, so there is an open space without tall buildings, which would otherwise absorb warmth and light. The Council's Community Service Team have already made a series of wooden raised beds at the far end of the yard, though these have not yet been filled or planted. The site could probably get water from the immediately adjacent Community Centre, and in any case a small amount would suffice for such a small garden. Raised beds *e.g.* in stacks of tyres or larger grow bags would give vegetables extra height and therefore light, as well as soil. The walls could be used to support climbing plants such as beans, peas, cucumbers, tomatoes *etc.*

Being part of the Youth Base at the Community Centre, it clearly lends itself to being a youth growing project, and indeed that is the wish of the Community Centre Management Committee. However the Committee have stated they are unable to enter into any kind of lease (including meanwhile use agreement) as their lease with the Council prevents any

form of sub-letting (beyond casual hire of the centre). Any arrangement would therefore have to be unwritten and purely on a trust basis.

Site Five

The owner has offered four herbaceous borders for a community growing project within the grounds of St John's church. These each measure approximately 6 m² and are stone-built raised beds, some with rockery stones. These would readily be converted into vegetable patches with some certainty of success (i.e. being sufficiently out of the way to avoid vandalism). Perhaps one or 2 growers could take on each bed, and this could be a good opportunity for growing course. Water should be available from the church and tools could be stored safely on the premises. There is some shade problem on the east side due to large trees immediately to the south of the beds, but there should be sufficient later afternoon sunshine to make vegetable or fruit growing possible.