Stanmer Street Community Garden.

9th March 2021.

July 2020...then.

July 2021.....Now.

Aims. This design came about from a local community project asking for help to get them moving as they felt a bit stuck after an initial successful funding bid & then Lockdown. I have used SADIM as it is a good design framework for land design and the one I am most familiar with at the moment. Aims of design: A community garden, a safe place for children to meet, stop cars parking on grass, a pond, seating, water capture, Edible/ low maintenance/ wildlife friendly planting.

Survey

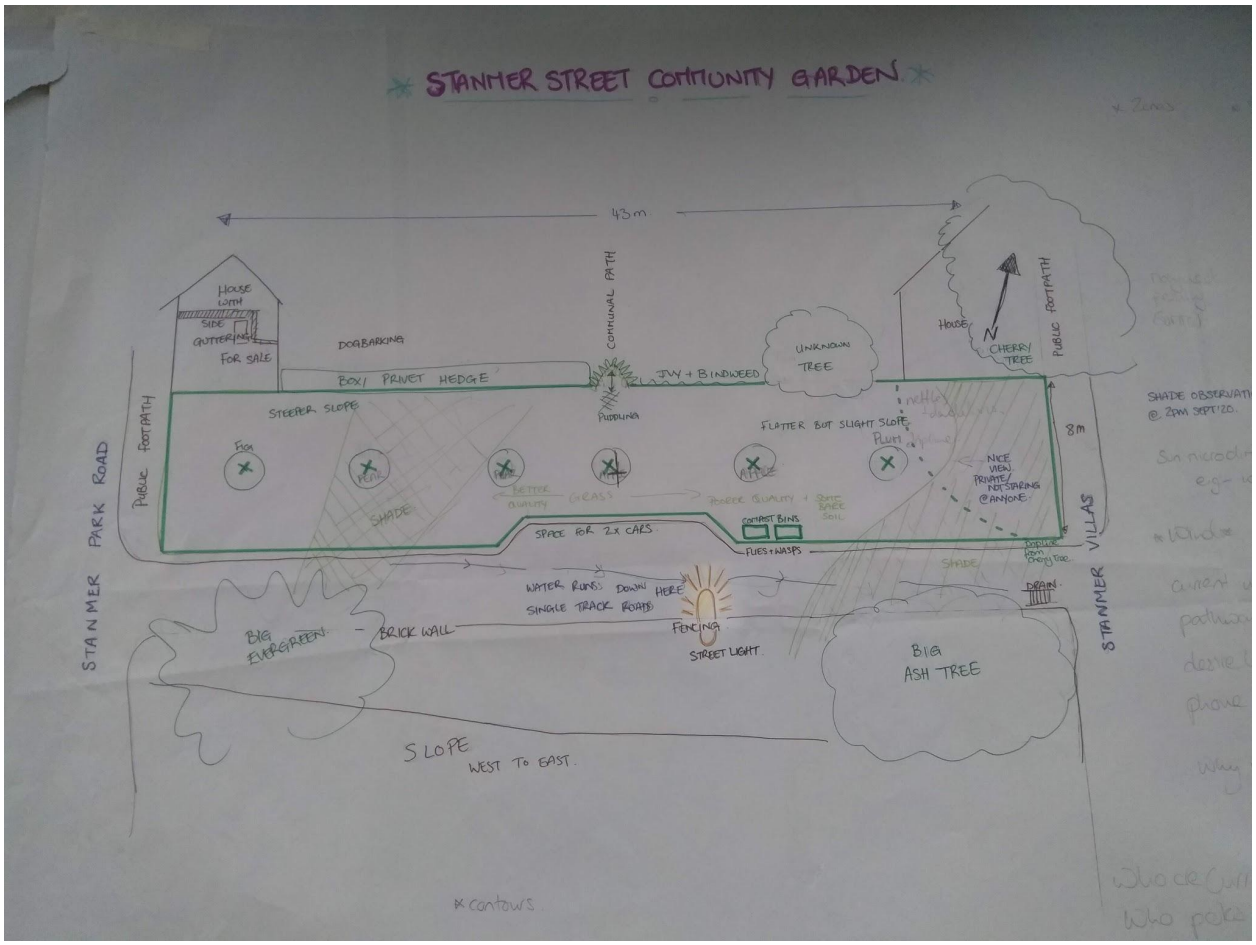
Client interview.

1st Meeting (July 2020).

Residents were interested in a permaculture design for a local green area that they have identified as a community space. So far they have liaised with Brighton &Hove Food Partnership to install 3 community composting bins & Brighton Permaculture Trust in planting 6 fruit trees through the middle of the site. The community felt a bit stuck and were hoping a design might help to focus their energy and get things moving towards being ready to plant & grow in spring 2021. The children were very keen to have a pond on site. There is also an aim to stop cars parking on the grass & claim it as a community space. It has been registered as a Community Garden with the council which allows the residents to make their own decisions about the space. At this first meeting I learnt that funding had already been sourced for planters, seating and a pond. I shared initial thoughts about planting an edible hedge & we discussed ideas for possible seating with a roof that could act as a water capture device.

At the moment decisions are made via face to face meetings on site & Whatsapp chats. There are currently about 12 core members - outreach is in progress to find more volunteers to support the development & widen local community connections.

Mapping.

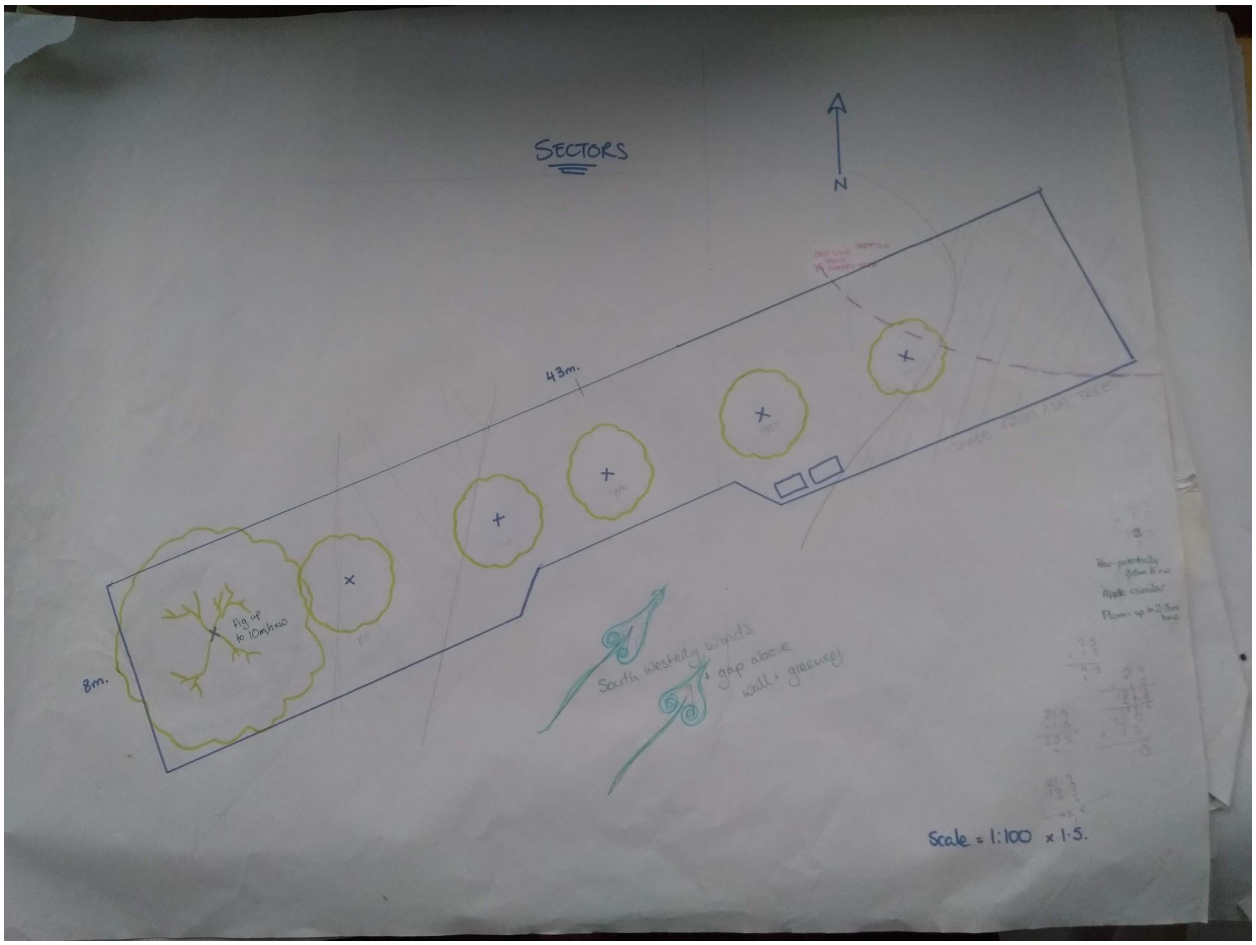


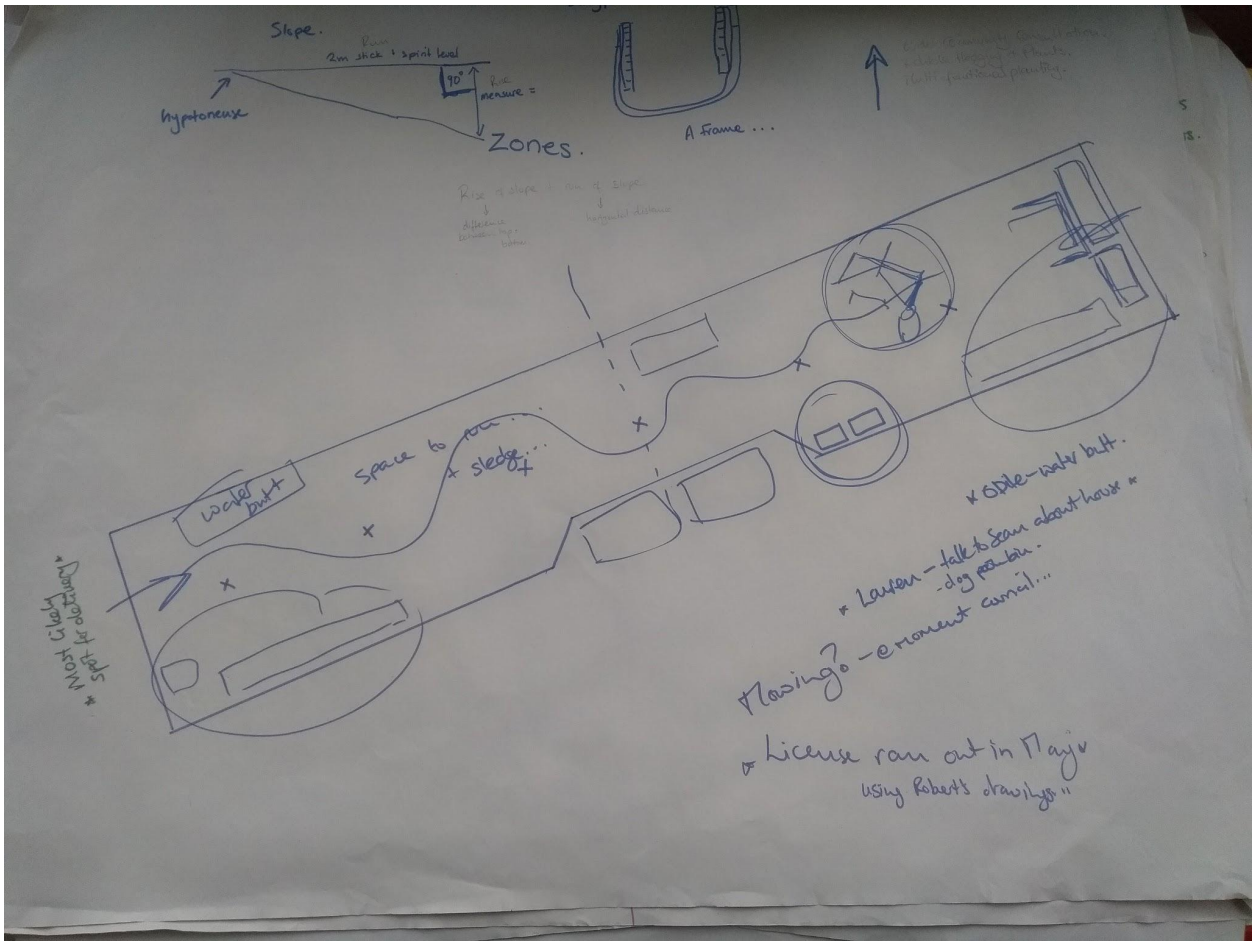
I returned to the site in September to take measurements and make observations. Initial observations showed that the site is a fairly shady spot that is, however, mainly south facing but surrounded by some tall trees, fences and walls. It is bordered on 2 sides by pavement & 1 road. There are south westerly winds moving through the space & a sloping gradient from west to east and slightly southwards. There is a lot of shade from a cherry tree at the eastern end of the space. The northern perimeter is mainly hedging. It may be

possible to use the house at the top (western end) for water capture, however, at this moment in time it's for sale & also there are dogs who bark a lot in that garden, so it's not the best place for socialising at the moment, but this could change with new residents.

In the map below I have shown the size the trees can get to when fully mature, this was very interesting in visioning the site in the future & suggests it makes sense to treat it as an orchard / forest garden.

We discussed the possibility of introducing swathes of wildflowers through the centre of the orchard to increase biodiversity, pollination & added interest for play/relaxation...needs further investigation.





This map was discussed at my second meeting with local residents - I was trying to identify zones of use. At the moment the compost bins are accessed from the road and attract quite a lot of visitors, plus wasps & flies - another point worth considering in the design. We agreed that the eastern end of the site would be the best place for resources to be dropped off when needed. This would also be a good place for a mower to access if necessary.

The residents told me that the children love running up and down the strip of grass on the northern part of the land alongside the hedging & this was also good for sledging in the snow. I had been considering this area as a possible spot for a pond as it has less shade (advisable for ponds), so this means the pond needs more thinking & observation. There are also several H&S issues around ponds to consider. I've been thinking more on this and am wondering if a small butler sink pond may work in a raised bed and still be accessible to wildlife but less easy for children to fall into. (Kate Bradbury, a local celebrity wildlife gardener may be worth talking to about a pond).

Soil Profile.

I took a soil sample from the top of the site where it was deeper . This was also very interesting, due to extended dry weather, it was impossible to get a spade in more than half the depth of a spade (15cm). I discovered the soil was very poor quality & thin around the outer edges & at the bottom of the site. The sample I managed to take at the top showed it was mainly sandy, with a small amount of silt & lumps of chalk - around PH7.

Zones.

How the space is used....at the moment, running & freedom, access to compost bins, car parking, dog walking. Halloween parties & street play. This will change as the site is developed, so will take more observations.

Sectors.

Wind - south westerly.

Sun - quite dark in the autumn/winter - still to observe spring/summer.

Rain - Water would flow towards the edges/road and looks like it could pool in the bottom western corner. There is also puddling around the entrance to the twitten between the gardens - there is some tarmac here too...

Temperature/Frost - still to be observed.

PASTE.

Plants - Fruit trees - fig, pear, apple, plum. Dandelions, nettles, plantain, grass. (another ground cover weed).

Animals - dogs, cats, birds, foxes, worms....(nothing else observed yet).

Structures - compost bins.

Tools - community owned - this needs to be explored further.

Events - Street play & Halloween parties, community work days - more will happen as the space evolves - possible nature mandala workshops.

Climate/Micro climates.

Temperate - micro climates will develop with applied features.

Budget.

Currently £1.5k for raised beds, seating & pond. Local HNF Fund has been applied for, to cover the cost of edible/medicinal hedging/windbreaks.

Timescale / Future Community

The community is keen to get started with projects that reclaim the space for the community as opposed to a car park. There are lots of young families local to the area who are likely to be there for a good period of time.

Current Use.

Car parking, orchard, dog walking, sledging, running, playing, community composting, outdoor meeting space.

Historical Use.

Known as The Green -used for football...historically lots of dog poo & rubbish.

Limiting Factors.

Soil - very shallow/ poor quality.

Parked cars & their owners.

Mowing grass - traditionally council but with new design it can be maintained by the community.

Community garden licence - needs renewing annually.

Budget, time available, seasons, volunteers, dog pooh, street safety.

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Analysis.

	Positive	Negative	Interesting
Water Capture	Limited resources, be good to have some capture on site, rainwater better for plants than tap water. Good way to share community garden ideas with the new owner of the house?	Best house for water capture currently for sale.	Technicalities of water capture. Screening the water butt.
Raised beds	Fast way to stop cars parking. Less digging than straight into ground. Adds organic matter to poor soil. Could double up as seating.	Cost of timber & building? Digging holes for corner supports.	Best wood to use/ Ask Stanford Ave community garden.
Edible Hedging	More permanent than raised beds once established & good windbreak.	Needs maintenance & regular pruning.Will take time to establish.	Variety available – Woodland Trust, Special Branch, Child friendly –

	Beneficial for wildlife, food security, medicinal/increased biodiversity – shrubs are also good for carbon capture.		non-toxic, no spikes.
Pond	Children are very keen. Adds biodiversity. Visual feature.	H&S considerations. Cost / maintenance. Lack of appropriate space?	Could add to events & interest. Butler sinks in a raised bed? Fenced off area?
Seating	Encourages relaxation in space. Could act as an opportunity for water capture.	Unwanted visitors?	Finding the best site...or using edges of raised beds.
Parked Cars	Potential users of space or volunteers?	Ruining space & parking on grass between trees. Forcing children to ride bikes on the road when parked on the pavement.	How to communicate /open dialogue with car owners.

Permaculture Ethics & Principles.

Permaculture is a design process that seeks to build resilient systems for land, community & lifestyle choice. Its three guiding ethics are Earth Care, People Care & Fair Shares or Future Care.

The Ethics guide this particular design in the following ways:

Earth Care

Regenerating a piece of unloved land being used as a car park & dog toilet.

Turning it into a local nature hotspot using no dig beds and some locally produced compost.

People Care

A space for the local community to meet and hold events.

Low maintenance; suitable & realistic for the time people are able to give.

Improving local space visually to lift spirits.

Fair Shares.

A space for humans and wildlife to forage for food all year round.

Improve biodiversity and open up outreach opportunities to the wider community.

Principles.

So far, I have used David Holmgren's principles (see below) as a guide and checklist to ensure nothing got missed in considering the best use of the space and therefore the most effective design.

Another set are Bill Mollison's - 3 examples would be 'Beneficial Relationships, Relative Location & Each Element Performs Many Functions - these are key in permaculture design.

1.Observe & Interact.

Survey, mapping, meetings, photos, regular visits as I live nearby. Observations from residents. Observations gathered from future volunteer sessions.

2. Catch & Store Energy.

Compost bins, water capture options, Resident & community energy, my need to do designs for a diploma, fruit from trees, flowers & veg to be grown. Seed saving. Working with peoples' skill sets.

3. Obtain a Yield.

Annual crops for familiarity & seasonal interest, Perennial crops - long term, future care, low maintenance, Community bonding & good for mental health, wildlife benefits, nature connection, propagation.

4. Apply Self Regulation & Apply Feedback.

Aim to be self reliant, observe & seek feedback - tweak design where needed. Identify support & energy available in the community & use it. Observations on what works best in the space, be flexible.

5. Use & Value Renewable Resources & Services.

What's available for free? Skills/experience/energy/ideas. Rainwater/Compost/Plants/seed saving/ cuttings.

6. Produce No Waste.

Compost, careful design & planning, being aware of limits, mulching for water retention.

7.Design from Patterns to Details.

How elements travel/use space, work with awareness of soil, survey feeds into planning, patterns of use, seasonal action plans.

8.Integrate rather than Segregate.

How different components affect each other, 'Many hands make light work' - use of community skills, valuing different ideas/input, inclusivity - inviting volunteer input & support. Polyculture planting not mono cropping/diversity.

9. Use small & slow solutions.

Little by little , evaluating progress & tweaking, smallest change for greatest effect, keeping it local, water capture - what's easiest? Discuss with the community - low beds, edible/low maintenance hedging. Realistic action plans.

10. Use & Value Diversity.

A mix of beds & hedging, a mix of veg & edible flowers, perennial food, polycultures, skill mix, sharing ideas, biodiversity....explore options for vertical growing - fencing.

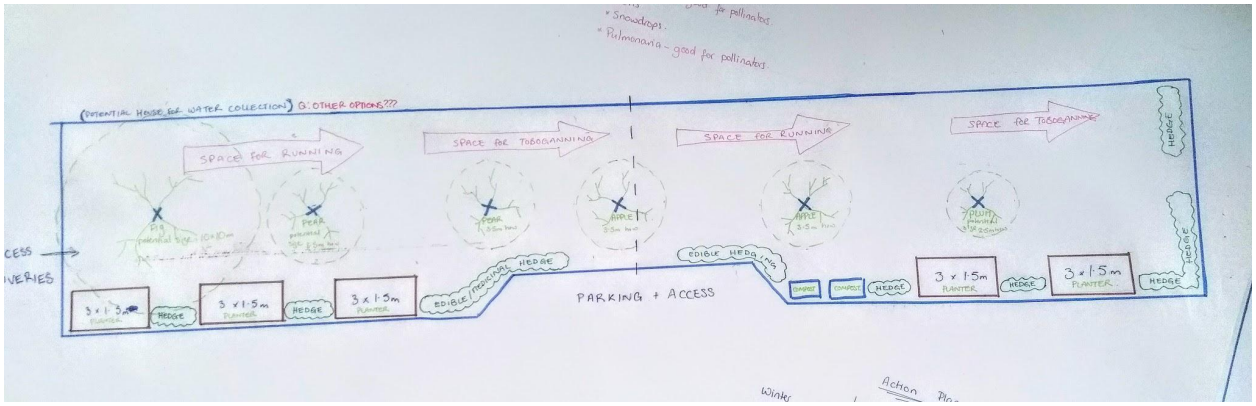
11. Use edges & Value the Marginal.

Intergenerational skills, experience, ideas, energy. Celebrate & use different experiences/opinions. Problems = solutions - notice boards / educational opportunities.

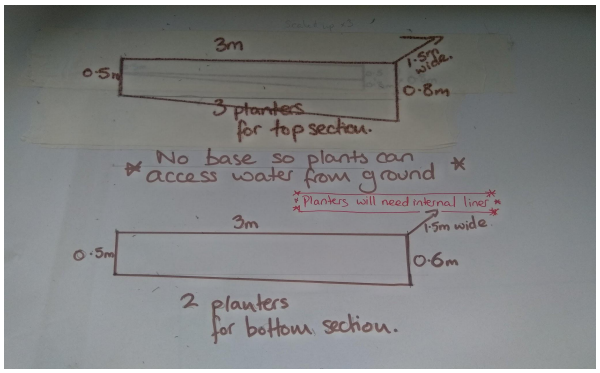
12. Creatively Use & Respond to Change.

Being aware & welcoming to future communities, flexible to changing plans if needed, designs should factor in resilience to extreme weather/climate change & pandemic.

Design.



I propose the above design as a start. I have provided measurements for raised beds below - this seems to make the most sense in order to prevent cars parking & to address the poor quality of soil. If raised beds are made from sleepers, this could double up as seating (multiple functions). The planters will have no base to make the most of any water available from the ground. Edible hedging can be planted between planters and will be protected while growing from small whips.



I believe that further observation/investigation is needed to consider the reality of the pond.

The same goes for wildflowers.

Planting plans can be agreed with residents, using what is available within the community, referencing Plants For A Future for unusual perennial edibles. These need to be fairly shade tolerant & low maintenance.

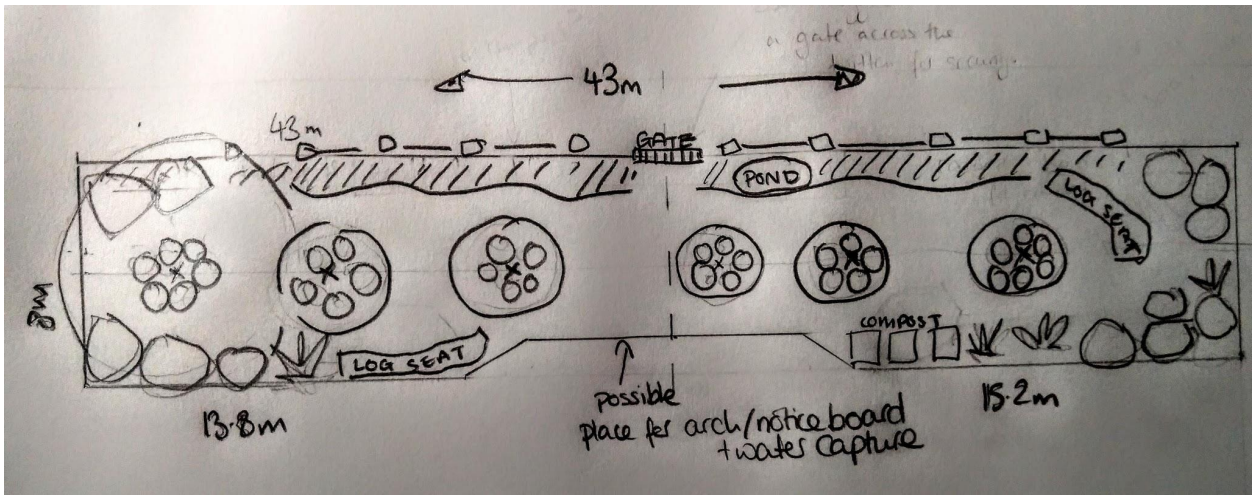
Evaluate & tweak - update 9.3.21

Three interesting events occurred which prompted me to look again at the possibilities of the space. 2 local residents practised some morris dancing in the road and caused a flutter of excitement. I also had a meeting with a local herbalist and consequently bumped into a few other local residents which gave me an opportunity to discuss design ideas. Finally, I learnt about tree guilds from a member in my diploma guild.

The main things that came from this were:

1. The road needs to be part of the design to allow for larger community events.
2. The space needs to feel open for community safety.
3. The edge of the garden is not a suitable space for food growing, this needs to occur in the sunnier part on the north boundary.

New design.



The new design takes on a food forest / nature reserve style with more emphasis on perennial plants with foraging opportunities. Instead of large planters we are trying to source some old trunks with hollow centres as planters that will hopefully stop cars and provide a home for large shrubs like Mahonia, Guelder rose and Rosa rugosa as well as

shade tolerant herbs & pollinator attracting plants. There will be tree guilds under the fruit trees. The tree guilds will consist of apple mint under the apple trees, strawberries, comfrey, borage, wild garlic, plantain. We will plant phormium (New Zealand Flax) around the edges as a useful and architectural feature - providing string on site for gardening / craft activities.

We will hopefully be able to get the local arboreal team to deliver two large tree trunks to lie on their side and provide seating.

We will also be able to install a wildlife pond with a removable grill for H&S reasons.

We will develop wood chip paths as the site begins to develop and let the grass grow longer in parts, eliminating the need for council strimmers and mowers.

We have made contact with one of the tenants who live right next to the garden who planted the large cherry tree - she is working with us to develop water catchment from a roof that will come off her fence to harvest water into an IBC container.

There will be vertical growth around the IBC container and also as a screen to the compost bins.

There has been talk of a pizza van being able to visit when Covid restrictions allow and local street play events.

Implementation.

We had our first socially distanced gardening session on Saturday 6th march 2021!

We emptied the first compost bin ready - created by the local community over 2 years and made a no dig bed with found logs & cardboard. We used some funds to buy 2 jostaberries, 6 currants, red, white, pink & black plus 10 rosa rugosa and some strawberries to get us started.

One neighbour donated forget me knots and bitter cress and another neighbour came and planted some wild flower pellets.

We have sourced a selection of tree trunks for planters that are lining the top edge by the road. In Autumn 2020 the residents gathered a selection of planters and used them to edge the lower part of the garden which successfully stopped cars parking. Various people got involved with planting bulbs into the planters and around the base of trees for springtime colour.

Reflection & Evaluation.

It is now November 2021 and the community garden is a ‘go to’ place.

We added a picnic table which has made visitors feel welcome to enjoy the space. It has also created a litter issue but residents are trying to source a litter bin from the council.

A new table and chairs were donated recently.

People have noticed frogs & dragonflies.

The fruit trees are thriving.

The rainbow chard is thriving and being harvested by the local community as well as rosehips for cough syrup.

We have regular donations of wood chips from a local tree surgeon.

There are regular community work days and an active WhatsApp group for decision making and watering rotas.

It looks like there is now enough compost being generated by the community composting bins for use by the local community and also for mulching beds in the garden.

Perennial pollinator plants were added for late summer colour - rudbeckia, helenium, verbena bonariensis and looked beautiful well into the start of autumn.

A second person has been found to complete the water capture structure.

More funding has been found for outreach, public liability and more infrastructure.

A Halloween event with local storytellers happened and was very well attended by local families with younger children.

What went well?

I really enjoyed this process as it gave me a great opportunity to apply my Permaculture Learning to a local community space. It gives me and the local community great pleasure when passing to see an inviting space with a real diversity of plants instead of a muddy car park. The community has been very trusting and appreciative. I realised how important it is to consider human systems within the design, particularly as we were aiming for low maintenance.

What was challenging?

For a while I got very stuck with the idea of raised beds as the only solution for stopping the cars, however, I had an epiphanic moment when the Morris dancing happened and also

when meeting with the local herbalist that made me realise the design needed to be open for community safety and to include the road for events. This created a big shift in my thinking. It made me realise how important thorough, unthemed observation is in reading and understanding a site and to keep an open mind while surveying and analysing observations.

What is the long term aim?

The community have now held their AGM and become a constituted group with identified roles. I am involved with their WhatsApp group for volunteer sessions which means I can continue to assist in identifying useful plants for the space and continue to observe and evaluate how the design is working. It certainly helped the community to move on from the 'stuck' phase they were in.

Next steps.

Continue to monitor, observe and interact as this is 5 mins from where I live.

Use the learning from this design to inform future design practice.

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