

Design 2 - Hollingdean Community Centre, Thompson Rd, Brighton.

Project Aims - 'Make our Community Centre Beautiful'

Budget £430

Funded through Healthy Neighbourhood Fund via my involvement with Growing Hollingdean.

Initial funding bid written in collaboration with the Chair of Growing Hollingdean.

Funds agreed in October 2020 and the project took 2 years to implement.

Design System used CEAP as defined in Jasmine Dale's book 'Permaculture Design Companion'.

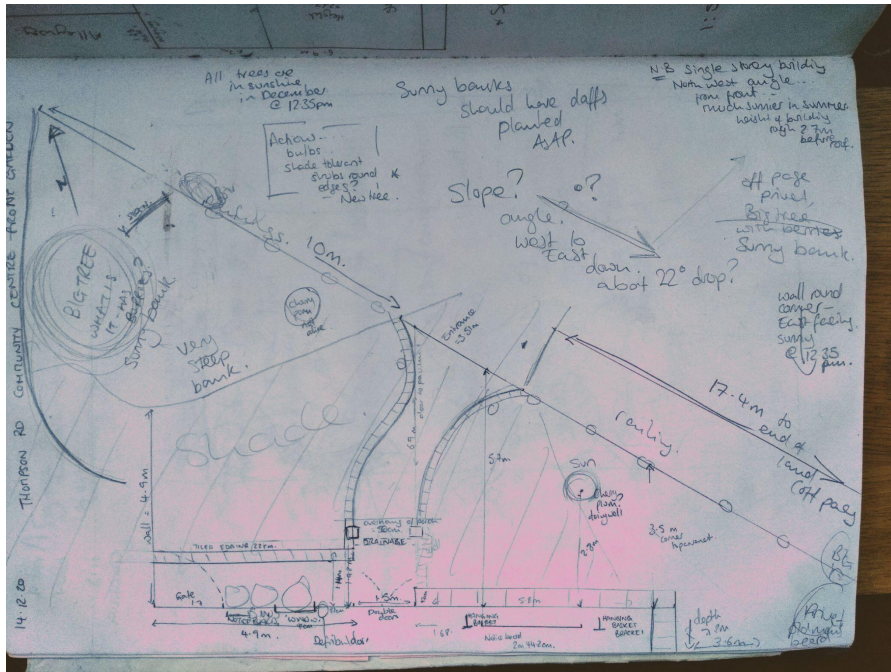
Due to the nature of this design - e.g lots of different groups impacting its process, there was a lot of 'Design in Action'. This meant that some of the decisions had to be made 'on the spot' and have been written up in the past tense. Whenever making a design decision I automatically think about closed loop systems and the 3 ethics.

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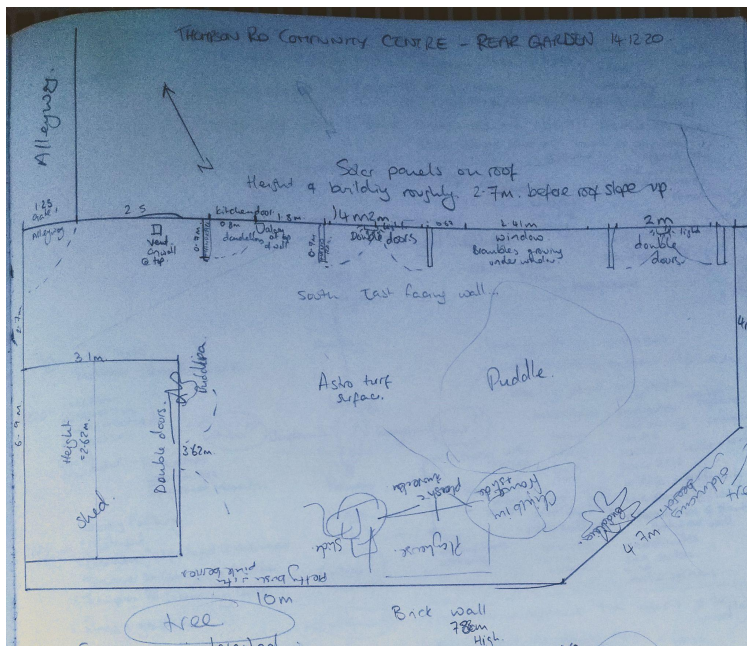
1. **Collect:** info about the place, yourself, funders, related projects, relevant paradigms etc.
2. **Evaluate:** relevance, priorities, suitability of ideas, their placement, sustainability over time etc.
3. **Apply Permaculture Principles:** see if you have met all the characteristics of resilient and efficient systems in your design.
4. **Plan:** timescales, budgets, out-sourcing jobs and roles; contingencies for possible challenges.
5. **Final Thoughts.**

1. Collect site information.

Site survey and maps.



Front garden showing North direction.....the front garden is facing North East. You can see where I have identified shade.



Back garden showing North direction and measurements.

Sectors:

Sun - Front garden quite shady NE aspect in front of single storey building. Back garden very sunny and also quite sheltered SW aspect.

Wind - Mainly SW winds, however the rear garden is fairly sheltered as there are houses creating a windbreak beyond the car park. NE winds can be very intense as the front garden is facing this way and is on a fairly exposed hill.

Slope - the rear garden is flat. The front is on an extreme slope to the East.

Water - no water capture facilities at the moment. Puddles form on the safety surfacing in the back garden. Front garden will have water running down the hill. Outside taps in the alleyway.

Interviews and observations over time.

I interviewed the Centre manager & other users of the space to understand their needs and desires - there was frustration over the amount of recycling piling up and a general need for some direction in how to solve this problem and make the community centre look more inviting.

It became clear that there was a strong focus on food at the community centre both with Brightstore setting up an affordable social supermarket, and also the World Food Cafe and Real Junk Food project. This generates cardboard and vegetable waste.

I had regular meetings with the Centre Manager to explore her favourite plants and to discuss water capture possibilities and regular meetings with lead facilitators of different food projects to identify the most useful plants for planters.

The council are currently responsible for mowing the lawn and trimming the surrounding hedges, it seems to be very random when this happens.



Panoramic view of the front garden. This shows the problem with recycling and waste bins at the entrance.

Front garden north facing with fairly poor soil and on a steep slope at the top.
Good views across to the South Downs and towards the East of Brighton.
Heavy traffic of recycling bins emptied by contractors - issues around excess cardboard & litter.

Grass beside the path used to display vegetables by a local social supermarket.

A 2 year old Cherry Plum survives in the front garden.

Earth - poor quality at front but with some beautiful wild flowers during the summer.

Quite old safety surfacing in the back garden. Possibility of drainage being added at some point. No composting facilities.

2 mature Swedish white beams are planted at the far corners of the land.

Space identified for 1 water butt out the front.

Council contractors are responsible for mowing the grass and hedge trimming.

Potential volunteers available in the local community.

Trustees have confirmed that there is a budget to pay a gardener to maintain space but it needs to be low maintenance.

The Centre manager loves bright colours - peonies are her favourite flower.

Ideas for improving the building's physical appearance are developing and funds being sought - I am being kept up to date on this through regular meetings with the Centre manager.

South facing rear garden with run down safety surfacing, used for parties, gatherings and local cafe.

Quite sheltered by surrounding greenery & buildings, even though up high on a hill.

New shed & awning being installed and plans to use outdoor space for cafe tables.

Potential for 1 water butt to capture water from roof at back and an outdoor tap recently installed.

Surfacing potentially being renewed at some point in near future and quotes have been sourced.

As we move out of lockdown conditions from the pandemic there has been a big shift towards lots of food groups using the space.

Food groups are keen to grow herbs and develop composting schemes.

Potential volunteers from food groups to support development and maintenance.

The Treasurer from Growing Hollingdean has offered to make raised beds for the back garden.

Living Soil/Compost Tom and Brighton & Hove Food Partnership have held meetings with all the food groups and myself to discuss pros, cons and logistics for installing both a Compost Tumbler and Community Composting bins - all funded through BHFP.

2. Evaluate

How will sectors & observations influence the design?

The back garden has good potential for growing food and herbs because it is south facing and sheltered - there seems to be a lot of support and interest in this going ahead. This will need to be in planters due to the safety surfacing.

The front garden needs to be attractive, low maintenance and allow for random maintenance by council contractors so any planting will need to be in very clearly marked areas that won't obstruct mowers/strimmers.

The poor quality of soil means that we will need to buy in compost at the beginning of the project to enhance growing possibilities.

The paths need to be clear of obstruction and a clear access maintained to the fire escape.

There needs to be flowers that people and pollinators can enjoy and create a welcoming atmosphere.

We need to add water harvesting and composting schemes to create a more circular system and offer educational opportunities to the local residents.

We decided that the best place for the composting bins was out the front to advertise the wonders of composting and reducing food waste. The Centre Manager agreed that we could have the compost bins under the sign and the Tumblr needed to go on a hill to make emptying into the 'holding bay' much easier.

Support available - Centre Manager, Real Junk Food Project, Brightstore - potential volunteers through Growing Hollingdean & local community.

Ongoing maintenance options - One volunteer in Real Junk Food Project has shown enthusiasm for planting herbs and maintenance. Future volunteers and support to be sourced.

Limiting factors.

Budget - £430.

Other group's needs - Space for parties and outdoor eating.

Shade/Slope - North east facing garden on quite extreme easterly downward slope.

Safety surfacing in the back garden - at some point this might be replaced.



View of front garden up hill from building.

PNI using desired elements.

Element	Positive	Negative	Interesting
Raised beds	A defined space offering good soil for growing. Herbs, strawberries, fennel and cavalo nero are all growing really well	Will need watering during hot weather	Potential to put these on castors and move them around the back yard to create zones / benefit from shade. Different groups could get involved with maintenance and planting.
No dig beds	Uses excess cardboard created by Brightstore (Social Supermarket). Easy to create. Uses compost created by the Tumblr and community compost bins. Will add a welcoming feel as people approach the community centre Good for pollinators and biodiversity	Keeping weed free and watered during summer.	Potentially stops rubbish blowing into the front garden. Exploring shade tolerant perennials and self seeding plants. Donations from local community being gratefully received.
Hanging baskets	Instant beauty by entrance to community centre	Watering and upkeep	Explore perennial options Opportunity for local residents to take on as a project
Vegetables	Food security Seasonal food awareness Free food for people on low incomes	Watering /volunteers	Opportunities for people to get involved growing food they are interested in.

Herbs	Great for the Chef's that use the community centre. Low maintenance	Watering / volunteers	Individual input and interest
Perennial flowers	Low maintenance Good root systems and structure Longer seasonal interest. Low cost over the long term.	Takes time to establish and fill space	Introducing unusual and interesting colour, structure & wildlife

3. Apply Permaculture Principles

Ethics.

Earth Care - space needs litter pick and soil regeneration plus an increase in biodiversity is needed. Locally sourced plants and compost being used. Resilient water capture systems being developed.

People Care - Centre Manager is excited about support in making the community centre look beautiful. Local community and wider user group will all benefit. Resilient systems are being developed to support all who use the space, such as how we communicate and invite volunteers to be involved.

Fair Shares - all stakeholders have been consulted and are invited to be involved at all stages of the design, implementation and maintenance process. Food grown in planters available for all to harvest. Pollinator plants being added for our 'more than human' friends.

Principles - (Holmgren's)

Observe & Interact - regular visits over 1.5yrs. Interviews with different users of space. Becoming a regular user of space myself. Time spent in both areas as a paid gardener and also supporting the community composting scheme.

Catch & Store Energy - developing positive relationships with volunteers from different groups and local community. Exploring water capture and developing good composting systems. Being grateful for donations of plants made by the local community. Being open to other people's suggestions/ideas/offers of help - building these into the design. Welcoming volunteers and offering opportunities to get involved. Asking for help. Gratefully accepting the offer of someone building planters. Creating composting & hopefully water harvesting opportunities. Growing Hollingdean Tree Guardians replaced

a dead tree at the front with an American Hawthorn to mirror the Cherry Plum in front garden.

Obtain a Yield - herbs and green leaves already being produced in the rear garden. Also lots of compost being generated by both schemes. Centre Manager obviously happy that the environment is much better. Massive learning opportunity as there are so many different groups to liaise and work with.

I haven't rushed into buying any plants and a diverse selection of plants have been sourced locally & for free which has helped people to feel part of the project.

Apply Self Regulation & Accept Feedback - being open to problem solving with others, awareness of issues over community composting, accepting help when problems arise. Looking back at photos, observations and notes over time to reflect & evaluate. Being open to constructive criticism and aware of stressful flashpoints (flies in compost & watering).

Use & Value Renewable Resources - developing composting schemes, bringing in perennial & self-seeding plants to the design for the No Dig bed, exploring water capture options. Use of excess cardboard for No Dig Bed. Using compost from tumbler for the No Dig bed and as mulch in the planters.

Produce No Waste - Composting, Water Capture, use of recycled materials, building in circular systems and exploring perennial /self seeding plants. Being realistic in aims and resources needed.

Design from Patterns to Details - Surveying sectors and users of space to inform final design. Seasonal interest (colourful plants / pollinator attractors / available food / relevant volunteer days) needs to be very much part of design and planning.

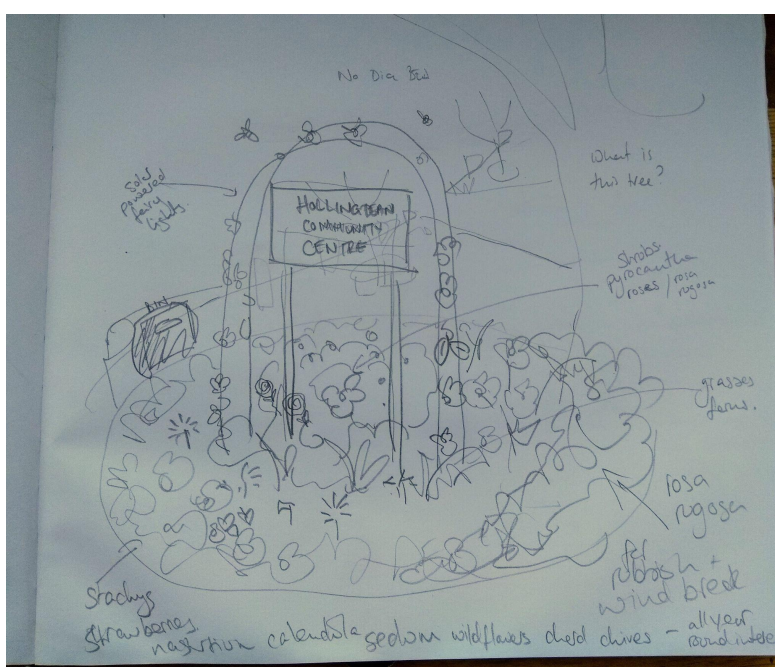
Integrate rather than Segregate - working with a variety of different groups and making sure everyone is aware of opportunities to get involved. Recently joined Hollingdean Hive meetings which is a local network of groups - very useful. Using both locally sourced and garden centre plants.

Use Small & Slow solutions - taking time to observe and keeping an open mind. Gently adding elements one at a time and observing responses to these. E.g - planters were made first, the Trustees loved them so much they paid for them and volunteers came forward to maintain them, and grow plants for them, composters were added next which informed how the space was being used and identified the positioning & resources for the No Dig Bed. This has also allowed the local community to find out about the design and get involved.

Use & Value Diversity - involving as many different groups and members of the community as possible in all levels of the survey, design and implementation stages. Joining local networking groups and varying times/days that volunteering opportunities happen.

Use & Value Edges & the Marginal - Deliberately focussing on a project in an area of extreme poverty & hard to reach community. Being flexible and open to new ideas & volunteers.

Creatively Use & Respond to Change - The final design is completely different to how I imagined it being when we applied for the funding. E.g - the planters were originally made to go against a south facing wall but then one of the groups applied to have an awning and use outdoor space for cafe seating so they needed to be moved. It has become a huge project compared to the original idea with composting schemes as well as just making the place look pretty. This has made it very exciting and also challenging at times. The composting scheme has been a huge learning curve but a good & useful one.



A design for the No Dig bed sketched while chatting with the centre manager. Some ideas for plants are noted at the bottom.

Design Tools.

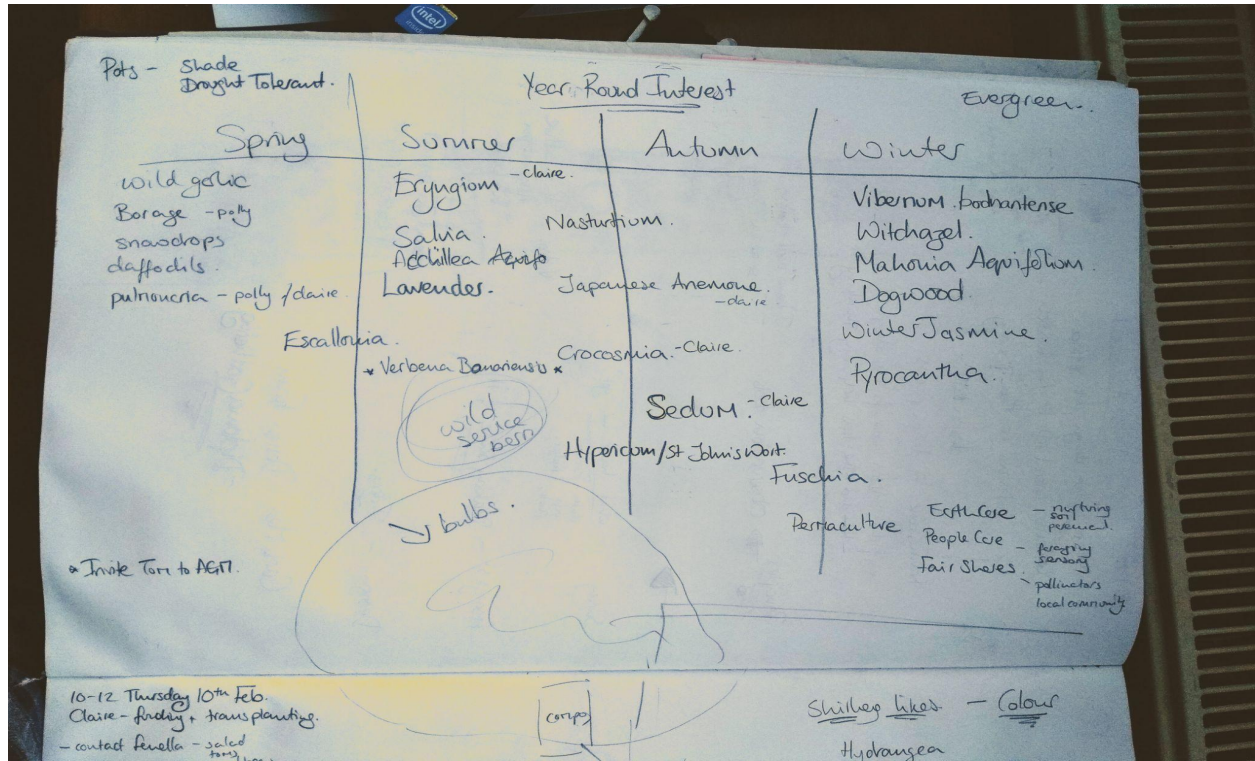
Zones - raised beds needed to be near the kitchen area, however the compost tumbler ended up being in the front garden due to suitability of site and away from cafe seating.

Relative location.

I decided that the best place to add a 'show' of flowers would be under the sign for the community centre as it's the first thing you see as you come down the hill to the community centre. The plants in this bed would need to be shade tolerant. This also places the No dig bed right next to the Tumblr compost and community compost for

easing creation and maintained mulching. The flowers will invite pollinators into the area for good pollination of trees.

Seasonal plant list.



4. Plan

Planters were the easiest place to start and there was a lot of enthusiasm and energy for these.





Compost was bought from a local company KPS and compost Tom sold us some of his 'compost gold' with high mycelium content to give the plants the best start. Plug plants of chard, lettuce and cavolo nero were supplied for free by a local resident and allotment site rep. Strawberries were sourced at a seed/plant swap hosted by Growing Hollingdean at the Community Centre.

Workdays were agreed for creating the site for the Composter Tumbler. Training on how to use this was provided for everyone who would be using it.



The first community composting bin was installed, worms provided and training given to the households who signed up for the scheme.



A sociable volunteer day was held to create the No Dig Beds.



2 x Plant/seed swaps were organised which brought plants donated by the local community for the No Dig Bed.

The No Dig Bed was planted up at the second one of these events.



Birds helping themselves to wool lining in hanging baskets for their nests, bunting in the sunshine for Growing Hollingdean's seed swap event and AGM.



Caroline Lucas planting a small bay tree cutting in one of the raised beds & with The Growing Hollingdean Collective at our AGM on April 2022.



Abundant raised planters with cavolo nero, strawberries and herbs.



People from the local community with freshly harvested veg & helping with a bit of weeding.



Surplus green tomatoes that were weeded out of the No Dig bed from the compost tumbler, these were shared with RJFP & spare strawberry plants from one of the planters offered to the local community.



The compost bins were moved by BHFP to just across the road as there was an issue with flies near the entrance in the summer. A collapsed planter was emptied, moved to the front garden and planted up with lots of pollinator attracting bulbs.

5. Final Thoughts.

As a local resident and visitor to the Community Centre, I am exploring outreach opportunities through RJFP to find a few regular visitors to their cafe who would enjoy looking after the raised beds, hanging baskets and No dig bed at the front. So far I have recruited 3 regular visitors to the centre who have offered to help. I have also worked with the Centre Manager to update the hanging baskets and plant them up with rosemary & creeping jenny (perennials), calendula (grown from seed by me) and petunias (chosen by the Centre Manager). All long lasting and low maintenance.



This design has taken a lot longer than I originally thought it would. The original idea was a quick fix to make the community centre beautiful. During regular meetings with different users of the space it became clear that a lot of change was afoot and this needed to be part of the overall design. Thankfully the Community Centre is near where I live and also provided a wonderful learning opportunity for me in terms of urban greening/ food growing and community cohesion which are what get me excited. The final design is much more dynamic, resilient & regenerative than just looking beautiful.

I have only done sketchy maps and notes as it's been a slowly evolving process with lots of observation. The idea for the positioning of the No Dig bed finally came to me when standing out front one day and realising how eye-catching it would be under the sign as well as being out of the way of council contract mowers. The sign also allows for some climbers and height to the final design.

We've had some perennial plants donated by local residents that have been planted. We have found some wonderful big worms in the No Dig bed and the soil is looking in great health.

The one leak in the system is green waste as this can't be put in the composters, also quite seedy (russian vine) and LOTS of it as the council are pretty rubbish at keeping hedges and the alleyway cut back. I am going to ask the Centre Manager if we could make a couple of green waste compost areas up the side of the building, so that eventually this can become useful compost.

I have left the installation of water butts and wheel castors for the raised beds with the Centre Manager.

This design has been successful in creating a beautiful space for people to relax in the garden, get involved and have access to fresh food (People Care), soil health and biodiversity have been improved as well as creating good composting opportunities and reducing food waste (Earth Care & Fair Shares).

It has been a wonderful opportunity to develop my Permaculture design skills while working in collaboration with Hollingdean Development Trust, Brightstore, World Food Project, Real Junk Food Project & Growing Hollingdean and the local community.

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