

Bevendean Community Garden:

Future food solutions

Brighton – Summer 2008

Updated March 2010

Executive Summary:

Bevendean is an area in need of re-generation and community initiatives. In the past, Bevendean had many meeting places for local people including a pub, shops and a farmers' market. However, in recent years businesses have found it impossible to survive and have been forced to relocate. The result is a degradation of the community spirit. Bevendean Community Garden (BCG) is a group that seeks to recover this spirit and put local residents back in control of their local area.

In line with the pressing need to find permanent solutions to the food crisis, BCG would like to see a community run garden where local residents work together towards providing the community with an organic and local food alternative. The food grown can be sold in a local market or as a vegetable box scheme, donated to the local school or given as payment to volunteers.

BCG will also function as an educational garden. The opportunity will be given to local residents and children from the local school to either volunteer or participate in practical classes.

Finally, BCG recognise the needs to work with the active group 'Friends of Bevendean Down' to extend the work they already carry out. The hilled area around the proposed site of BCG is in need of cleaning. Among the problems identified are littering and fouling. The combination of BCG's presence in the area and focus on education is believed to be a good starting point for addressing these problems.

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Introduction

Bevendean is a small community with a long history of local collaborations and green awareness. At the bottom of a valley, surrounded by the South Downs, Bevendean has a unique position for the exploration of nature within the city (see Figure 1).

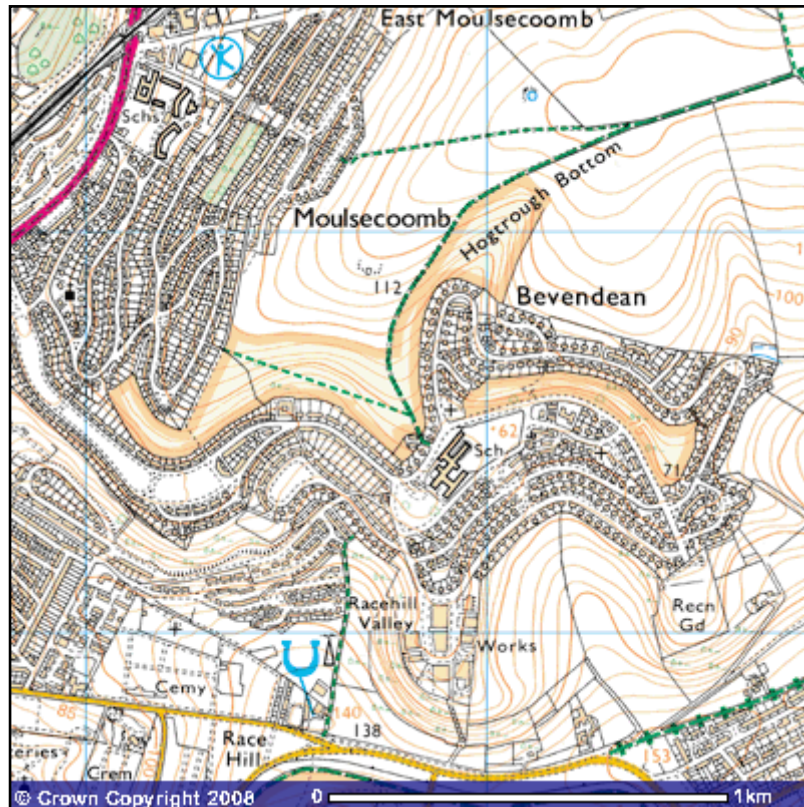


Figure 1: wider location map (Ordnance Survey).

Bevendean already has an active group called 'Friends of Bevendean Down' which aim is to conserve chalk grassland for the benefit of wildlife and people. The group welcomes people of all ages to join in for monthly conservation work in the area.

The local primary school has a wild garden which has received funding to extend its vegetable growing and is encouraging local experts to help and assist in this process.

In the past, Bevendean had a local 'farmers market' in the form of an old cow's shed where people brought surplus fruit and vegetables from their own gardens. The area was, and is still, perfectly set out for people to grow their own food since most houses have large gardens.

Sadly, this project was forced to come to an end with the introduction of the poll tax of 1989 as it ceased to be financially viable. Older residents have expressed the enormous sorrow they felt and the detrimental effect this had on the community. As a place to meet was taken away, the sense of community began to disintegrate.

The project proposed by Bevendean Community Garden (BCG), takes this positive history of Bevendean into consideration in an attempt to revive the community around a positive agricultural project. A dialogue has been initiated with older residents of Bevendean in order to understand what could be done to assist this process.

The project – a community garden – has two main objectives. The first one is to provide an alternative to supermarket food as the garden would grow organic food using sustainable methods and distribute it within the community.

The second objective is to provide education in food growing. Since most residents have access to their own gardens this is a good opportunity to help people towards growing their own food.

Not only adults but also children would be able to receive education. The local primary school has easy access to the proposed site and has expressed interest in part-taking by sending groups of children for educational visits.

The group

Bevendean Community Garden is a group of local residents who have come together because of shared desire to start a local food growing scheme. The group has a wide ranging array of skills, many directly related to gardening techniques and education.

Jeanette Thyrsson

Jeanette has been a resident of Bevendean since 2004. She has two children, one of whom attends Bevendean Primary School. She has a strong interest in community work and gardening.

Jeanette has been growing her own food for a number of years and has taken a diploma in Permaculture with Brighton Permaculture Trust. Jeanette is passionate about using Permaculture design in BCG and intends to take the extended Permaculture Design course.

Jeanette is currently working as a teacher for Varndean College.

Liz Artur Johnson

Liz has been a local resident of Bevendean for three years. She has a daughter in Bevendean Primary School and is interested in community work.

Liz is a professional photographer whose work focuses on youth culture and urban life. She also works as a visiting lecturer at the South London College. She will have an important role in involving the local youth in the project but also in documenting and raising awareness of it.

Liz grows her own vegetables and is hopeful to learn more by meeting other people with a shared interest.

Kizzy Bramley

Kizzy has been a resident of Bevendean for four and a half years. She has three children, one of whom attends Falmer High School. She has a particularly strong interest in creating a community space where local residents can socialise and learn from each other.

Kizzy is a trained yoga teacher and as such works with local residents at Bevendean Primary School.

Having lived on a farm in Henfield for many years Kizzy has invaluable experience in growing fruit and vegetables.

Mmedo Duffort

Mmedo has been a resident of Bevendean since 2004. He has two children, attending Bevendean Primary School. Mmedo is passionate about ethical issues concerning the environment and wants to work with his local community.

Mmedo has an MSC in Environmental Assessment and Management and works as an Environmental Consultant.

Having studied social and environmental impact assessment he will have an influential role in assessing the impact of BCG on our community. His focus will be on minimising

the impact on the natural environment while optimising the impact on the social life in Bevendean.

Jane Glenzinska

Jane has been a local resident of Bevendean for four years. She has two boys who both attend Bevendean Primary School and, as a Community Governor, is already known by the community.

Jane studied at Plumpton Agricultural College where she gained a qualification in horticulture. She has been running her own business – as a gardener and tree surgeon – for twelve years and is a newly qualified Domestic Energy Assessor.

Jane’s expertise as a gardener and tree surgeon is an invaluable experience for BCG and she will have a vital role in setting up the garden.

The Project

Aim and purpose

Bevendean Community Garden (BCG) has come together because of the shared interest in growing organic food. There are also other shared interests that were influential for the design of the project. Among these other interests are: community work, sharing knowledge, creating a place to socialise with other residents, education and taking care of the local environment.

The ultimate purpose of BCG is to grow organic food locally using sustainable methods. BCG will be run differently to the way allotments are run because the project aims at working in unity with the local community. As a non-profit organisation the food produced will be available to everyone within the community.

Permaculture

BCG is dedicated to using sustainable methods. These methods will be based on our experience of organic gardening and Permaculture. Permaculture design creates sustainable human habitats by following nature's patterns. The three core values of Permaculture are:

- **Earthcare** – recognising that the Earth is the source of all life and that we recognise and respect that the Earth is our valuable home and we are a part of the Earth, not apart from it.
- **Peoplecare** – supporting and helping each other to change to ways of living that are not harming ourselves or the planet, and to develop healthy societies.
- **Fairshare** - (or placing limits on consumption) - ensuring that the Earth's limited resources are utilised in ways that are equitable and wise.

In Permaculture the design process is essential. Before starting to grow, the site needs to be monitored and observed in order to understand the relationship between existing key elements. Once this process is complete the work of designing the garden starts taking the observations made into consideration.

When it comes to deciding what to grow, care is taken to use companion planting to encourage beneficial relationships between plants. The surrounding nature will also play a role in this eco-system; trees are used to shade some plants, as support for others and dead leaves can be used to make mulch.

Another aspect of Permaculture is to create the maximum outcome with the minimum of human input. To do this it is necessary to create a garden that is, to some extent, self-sufficient. Permaculturists do this by applying their knowledge of plants and eco systems that copies nature's own way.

Education

One of the positive effects of a garden that has been created using the knowledge of a whole community is that of education. BCG will be actively involved in providing education for adults and children alike.

Courses will be run where small groups of children come up, accompanied by their teacher, from Bevendean Primary School. Children will learn about vegetable and fruit growing in a hands-on manner and also be able to take some food home with them. When finances allow, and health and safety regulations are in place, some of the food

grown will be cooked on site. It is important to show children how vegetables are cooked and will promote healthy eating.

If the proposed site is granted BCG would like the educational scheme to also stretch to caring for the surrounding South Downs. The hills around Bevendean are heavily used by residents. This in itself is a very positive prospect for BCG and the hope is that the site will be visited and seen by many. However, there are problems with littering and fouling in the area which is an unpleasant aspect of this otherwise beautiful natural resource.

A curriculum on 'caring for the downs' addressed to local children would go a long way to change children's perception of their natural environment. Children should be encouraged to use the Downs as much as possible since it is a great open space for recreation and play but should be discouraged from activities that are damaging to this area of outstanding beauty.

BCG is also hoping that children will receive education in foraging for individual use since the hill is home to apples, plums, blackberries, elderflower and elderberries. Knowing how to prepare these foods will be of a great resource to the community and will discourage people from mistreating trees and shrubs.

Benefits to the community

The benefits to the local community of Bevendean go beyond healthy food. Many local residents have expressed the need for more meeting places in Bevendean. BCG will be a wonderful meeting place. As no high fences will be used people can walk in to have a look, chat or help out. All ages will be welcome and the hope is to connect young and old.

BCG will help to promote physical health and mental health. Gardening is a great way to clear the mind and to reduce stress levels. Forming new friendships within one's local area also helps to improve the mental health of a community.

Perhaps, one of the greatest benefits to the community is that the knowledge of growing our own food can be shared. Residents of Bevendean will learn from each other. This way, important expertise will develop that will be both area specific and will begin to rub off onto the younger generation.

Finally, BCG will promote new solutions to waste management by setting up communal composting systems.

Funding

Initial funding has been granted by Novas Scarman to go to buying tools, seeds, compost and planning application for shed and green house.

Funding has also been granted by Brighton and Hove Food Partnership to go towards public liability insurance, water costs, shed and water butts.

The group will also seek to get other local funding, possibly from EB4U or from the local school for classes run by BCG.

BCG also recognises that survival might depend on a certain amount of social enterprise. Schemes of this nature could be selling the products we grow in a market, vegetable box scheme, charge for classes for adults or expand into other areas than vegetable growing. There are skills among the members of BCG that would suit this purpose. However, any project taken on by the group would remain in the spirit of sustainability and community and any social enterprise BCG embarks on would only be for the purpose of its survival.

Local Support

The group currently has four active members who have the titles Chair, Treasurer, Secretary and Vice Chair. Many locals have registered their interest by phone or by talking to us after hearing of the project. Once we have passed the initial stages of the project, there is nothing to prevent others from joining BCG and as much local involvement as possible will be encouraged.

As for now, BCG is working towards the public consultation meeting by getting materials ready to present. We have received help with this process from Brighton and Hove Food Partnership. All involved staff at the council and local councillors have also been invited. We have advertised the event in local papers, cafes and on web sites.

The Argus is supporting us and will feature a news story about the set up of the garden.

We have good links with Moulsecoomb Forest Garden and will receive a visit from one of their members for advice on setting up.

Early on in the project advice was given by the Food Partnership to visit as many other projects as possible to reap the benefits of their experience. They also advised BCG to focus all efforts on getting a site and gave the contact number to Crispin Cook who was responsible for the allotment service in Brighton and Hove. Crispin then left after which there was a standstill for a while. With help from the Food Partnership who put pressure on the council things got back on track. Matt Hewes and Francesca Iliffe at the council have been involved since and helped us find the final site for the project.

We have contacted and/or visited Stanmer Organics, Moulsecoomb Forest Garden and Whitehawk Food Project and are assured to have their full support. Out of these visits BCG established important contacts that will become essential once the garden is to be set up. Other useful advice was given regarding funding, maintenance and the daily running of the project. Whitehawk Food project has a similar focus on education to the one BCG would want and has partnerships with two local schools.

The Deputy Head, Miss Marshall, of Bevendean Primary School has also been spoken to by BCG's parent governor in an exclusive meeting between the two. Miss Marshall is a keen vegetable grower and showed a strong interest in BCG. She has given her full support and is hopeful of a future collaboration.

A local café, Lecca, has just opened in Bevendean and the owners have expressed an interest in future produce.

It is evident that the amount of support available is enough to get through the setting up and maintaining of a project of this nature.

Site Location

A site meeting all the criteria for a community based food growing scheme has been identified (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: aerial view of the site (*Multimap*).

The site would be ideal for a number of reasons. Firstly, it fits the purpose of vegetable growing. It is on a south-westerly slope and is sheltered with trees around it but is open enough to provide sun. The soil type is acceptable for the purpose (Ph 7.5) but since we intend to use mostly raised beds this is of lesser importance.

Secondly, the location of the site is ideal. It is close to the school from which it can be accessed by crossing a single zebra crossing and then walking across the hill. Its location is ideal for linking two communities; Bevendean and Moulsecomb. It is accessible to residents either from Lower or Upper Bevendean. Buss number 49 runs passed it and the buss stop is nearby (see Figure 3).

Thirdly, it has a direct link with the hill which is the access route to lovely walks on the South Downs. The hill is used by residents daily for recreation, dog walking or play. Unfortunately, it is also the home of inappropriate activity like litter dumping and fouling. We believe that our presence could help to avert some of this activity by education and positive action.



Figure 3: Ordnance survey map of the site.

Conclusion

Having received so much positive feedback from the local community Bevendean Community Garden is now dedicated to getting started on the site. The group is confident that the strength needed exists in abundance.

There are no doubts that the project would benefit the extended community of Bevendean as a whole.

The benefits will be seen in residents of all ages. Children will receive education in food growing, healthy eating, how to enjoy their natural environment in a responsible manner and, in the importance of community work.

Adults will have gained a meeting place where they can socialise, learn about growing their own food and share their expertise. New friendships will form and the community will grow stronger.

Older residents will have easy access to the site and will be received by happy members of BCG. There is no need to cross any roads for residents at the Heath Hill residential Home which has easy access to the site via the pavement along Heath Hill Avenue.

BCG has come a long way in two years with all members being pro-active. The next step now is to clear the brambles and to hold the public meeting. In the meanwhile, more residents are spoken to and more advice is gained from neighbouring projects of similar nature.

Jeanette Thyrrson

Chair of Bevendean Community Garden

Brighton, January 2010