

Sandgate Community Garden

Enbrook Park, Sandgate, CT20 3SE



SSEIB - It's Your Neighbourhood Entry 2021- Supporting Statement

Background

Sandgate Community Garden is a relatively new project started in Spring 2019. The garden is sited on land within Enbrook Park, owned by Saga plc, and is run entirely by volunteers from the local community. The Sandgate Society have oversight of the project and manage/account for donations and expenditure.

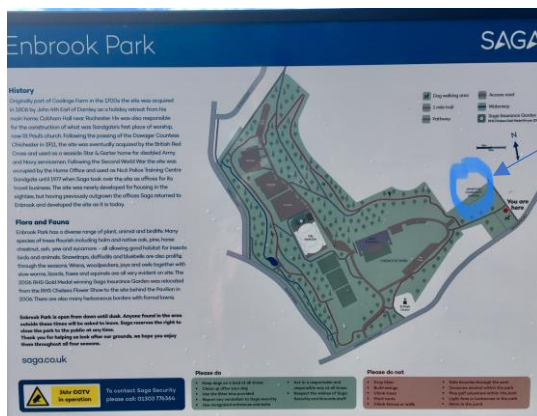
Saga's Head Gardener was able to grant our request for more space and the garden has grown from the initial footprint. Just as the garden was being established Covid arrived and 2020/21 has been a challenging year for all of us putting a hold on further expansion. However, in accordance with social distancing, gardening continued throughout, proving to be an important outdoor activity for the volunteers and providing a focus for social connection (through the weekly newsletter, social media and WhatsApp group) in the local community.

During the last year, and particularly lockdown when people were encouraged to stay at home, it felt vital to bring the principles and benefits of the garden even closer to the community. These activities have been an important development over the last 9 months.

The following is a flavour of what has been achieved so far.

Community participation activities:

- The community garden, although surrounded by a low picket type fence, is always open.



The location of the garden appears on signage throughout Enbrook Park.

- We advertise that gardening sessions take place on Wednesday and Saturday mornings and encourage anyone interested to come along.
- There are currently 20 volunteers across the project.

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- Links have been forged with other local groups such as Cheriton Community Network who are establishing a local Incredible Edible movement.
- We are into the second year of membership of the Hythe Hops Project (part of the Hythe Environmental Community Group) and contributed our first harvest in September 2020. The hops are collected and brewed into a pale ale locally.



- The children from a local nursery visit the garden regularly to explore and taste what is being grown in addition to bringing their fruit peelings to add to the garden compost. Since Covid they only visit when no volunteers are present, however Leonie, who leads on the garden, has provided support and direction for the nursery to grow edibles in their playground.
- A home-schooling family attends one of the weekly gardening sessions and recently enquiries have been received from other parents wishing to join.
- We have enrolled in the social prescribing scheme.
- A weekly e-newsletter is emailed to a circulation list of over 350. The newsletter is shared on fb and saved into the Sandgate Parish Archives on their website under the community section. It is also included in the local parish newsletter 'The Sentinel'. **(See appendix 1 for a recent example)**
- The garden has its own Facebook and Instagram page – currently with almost 600 followers.
- Signs have been introduced throughout the garden giving information such as what is being grown, who to contact etc.
- Financial support/donations have been received from:
 - Sandgate Parish Council
 - The Sandgate Society
 - Charles Dowding bursary
 - Kent County Council Combined Member Grant Scheme from Cllr Rory Love
 - The sale of seedlings and plants (donations requested) both at the garden and local community events (for e.g. Incredible Edible Cheriton Seed Swap and plant sale, April 17th 2021, raised over £302)
- Donations have been received from:
 - Individuals within the local community. These have ranged from seeds, plants, fruit trees and gardening equipment to compost.

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- Folkestone and Hythe District Council supplied free compost and wood chippings
- Morrisons 'Seeds of Hope' campaign provided sunflower seeds, perennials and annuals in support of 'Kent's Plan Bee'.
- Seed swaps
- The community garden was offered a free stall at the Sandgate 'Festival of the Sea' in August 2019 to raise awareness of the community garden. The festival was cancelled in 2020 but we are excited to take part again in 2021.
- Visits have been made and are planned to other community gardens to find out and share ideas. One example is a recent visit (by invitation) to Godington House and Gardens. As a result, their apprentice is planning to visit SCG to inform his studies into community gardens, and we received a generous donation of plants.
- Lead gardener Leonie Wootton received a KALC Community Award in recognition of her significant contribution to the local community through the development of the garden, weekly newsletter and outreach gardening projects.
- The outreach made possible by using Sandgate Community Garden as a springboard (sharing equipment, plants, reputation, volunteers), has led to the renovation of planters and the establishment of growing space in harder to reach areas (within 10 minutes' walk) from the main garden. We understand that these cannot be part of the judging as physical areas but would like them to be considered as an important part of the community activities (see appendix 2).

Environmental Responsibility

- The garden is spray and chemical free.
- We are taking action in line with 'Kent's Plan Bee'. We are establishing a new wildflower area in part of the garden conducive to providing foraging and shelter for pollinators. Our ambition is to have something in flower all year round.
- The 2 beehives installed on site by a local resident beekeeper are doing well.



The bees have been of great educational benefit as well as providing pollination for the crops and flowers

- All green waste is composted on site and then used back on the garden. During the last year the compost area has been significantly developed and now includes 3 large composting boxes and an area for compost ready to use and woodchips.

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A local brewing business bring their spent hops to add to the compost and a local café brings coffee grounds.



The compost produced on site is key to improving the poor soil. This area has been developed significantly over the recent months.

- Watering is very targeted and compost/woodchip mulching supports water retention as Sandgate has a dry microclimate where the rain passes over. We monitor rainfall.
- A wildlife pond has been added. It was challenging to fill it initially due to the lack of rain and then it suffered from some leaking. Repairs have been made and water insects and dragonfly nymphs are now populating the water.
- An advisor from the White Cliffs Countryside Partnership has visited, providing advice to ensure that the garden is developed sympathetically to attract and support wildlife.
- Bird boxes have been added and an area has been left 'messy' for insects and wildlife.

Gardening Achievement

The garden is set within a park open to the public, so we are aware of keeping a visually pleasing and safe, tidy site. The site has a marvellous brick wall which is being used to grow hops and kiwi fruit amongst other things. However, the site is challenging as strong salty winds sweep across it from the sea and the soil is sandy and poor. The approach is to use the site sympathetically and sustainably. The following actions have been taken to achieve this:

- A wind break forager hedge has been carefully selected for the site, including elder, wild cherry, crab apple, sloe and sea buckthorn.
- **Significant** effort has been made to improve the soil. The production of our own compost and leaf mould has been a priority (see above) and the compost area is at the heart of the garden.
- Compost has also been donated and collected from local people and businesses and has been used across the site. Improvements are starting to be noticed.
- Vegetables are being grown using the 'no dig' method as promoted by Charles Dowding. This preserves the integrity of the soil and helps to conserve water. Charles has asked for a short video showing what is being grown.

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- As the growing space has been significantly improved and more crops are being grown in succession we are weighing and recording everything that is being harvested.



- Fleece and mesh are used to protect crops from wind, certain insects, birds and mammals.
- Crops are carefully researched and selected to succeed in the site. When a local resident offered to donate 2 apple trees advice was sought from the Brogdale Collection, Faversham, on suitable varieties for the site.
- Volunteers have benefited immensely from the project. In addition to the social and physical benefits, photos and recipes of meals made with produce from garden are shared. Volunteers are also gaining confidence and using what is learned to grow more produce at home.
- Planning to open the garden with the National Garden Scheme.

Appendix 1 - Example of weekly e-newsletter:

Sunday 16th May

We have started to catch up with ourselves this week and it was touch and go if the Saturday session would happen due to heavy rain, but several gardeners put on a brave face and got on with it. We got wet, but there were a couple of breaks in the cloud and the garden is looking so green and lush, with plenty of new growth, that it made it all worthwhile. We took off the fleece covers this week as the night time temperatures have improved but have had to replace some of them with netting or enviromesh to protect them from either flea beetles, pigeons, squirrels, foxes or maybe even badgers, depending on what they are currently looking for to eat. A strange start to the growing season, where the planting of tender annuals, tomatoes, courgettes and squashes have been delayed,

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however we did decide to be bold and plant out the tomatoes, mostly up against the wall which will give a little extra protection – let us hope it was the right decision. This rain has been just perfect for the garden, prolonged and heavy enough to penetrate right down into the soil. All too often it can just wet the surface and run off; not reaching those roots at all. With all the beds given a good mulch of compost, we are more confident that it will retain more moisture which we have noticed this year after the long dry spell in April.

It was mentioned last week about the 14 weeks wait for our new toolbox – it suddenly arrived Tuesday evening and the next day was assembled and put into place. It is a smart green metal box, large enough to accommodate our longer hoes and rakes which we had to leave out before. We are now just waiting on two more cold frames to be finished and delivered and then we will be up to date with new purchases from our Community Grant with the Kent County Council.

The supermarket, Morrisons in Folkestone, very kindly gave us two dozen petunia plants which we have put into several planters in the Enbrook garden as well as two of the planters at Golden Valley.

A couple of us finally made it to visit another Community Garden based in East Malling, called Communigrow. A trip we had been trying to make before the onset of Covid. This garden is more than two acres, and has salaried full and part time members of staff, but it was interesting to see what they are doing, and they were interested in how we have spread out to other areas in our locality to reach out to different people. Their head gardener was just starting an experiment with dig and no dig beds as they had a student keen to study the similarities and differences. We are certainly happy with our no dig methods, and the guru Charles Dowding asked us to make a short video of our garden at Enbrook to show our progress so far and to perhaps be included in one of his YouTube videos. He currently has 400,000 subscribers to his video channel, so no pressure there!

Typically, the plentiful rain accelerated the growth of the weeds too, but they are quite easy to hoe and remove by hand, again because of the depth of compost. Apart from looking neat and tidy for the filming, we are also expecting a visit from the RHS in June or July to give us advice on how we could improve and move forward. Exciting times!

What's next?

- Put enviromesh over the carrot bed
- Continue planting out the flowering annuals in the other Sandgate gardens and planters.
- Weed the strip of ground along the outside wall
- Start to turn the compost bins at Enbrook
- More potting up of seedlings
- Sow more spring onions and celery
- Weed Fremantle areas

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- Keep picking the salads, herbs and spinach
- Plant out the kale

Photos below



1. Off with the fleece and on with the enviromesh
2. Our smart new toolbox in situ
3. Two dozen petunias from Morrisons
4. Communigrow visit

Appendix 2 – Bringing Sandgate Community Garden to the community:

Examples of additional areas used to develop community spirit as satellite (doorstep) spaces:

- Fremantle Park garden, Fremantle Road, Sandgate - (started this February). Currently a small community garden with three herb planters, five small family plots for growing vegetables, and a shared area of fruit trees, fruit bushes and three Hythe hop plants (we are part of the Hythe hops scheme). To the far end of the park we have also been given another space where we have planted some fruit trees, and are planning this year just to make a flower border until such time as we have had a chance to think about how it can be further developed.



- Golden Valley shopping area planters - During 2020, these planters started to look dreadful, full of weeds and rubbish and looked generally unloved. We have planted some fruit trees, vegetables and herbs there, but as a shopping area, the shopkeepers and the new public house landlords were keen for the planters to be

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very colourful with flowers, which as it happens also goes with our commitment to Kent's Plan Bee, and so we are happy to oblige.

- Alleyway running between Chichester Road and Meadowbrook Sandgate. It was full of brambles, sedge grass and years of rubbish. We cleared it and planted it with herbs and fruit bushes. As the fruit bushes are currently so small, we will also plant some seasonal flowers there.
- Planter outside the Ship, Sandgate High Street - We needed a space right in the centre of Sandgate to let it be known we exist. The Sandgate Society had one there which they let us use. It has vegetables and herbs planted.



Thank you for your visit to Sandgate Community Garden today. We hope that you enjoyed your tour and that all your questions have been answered. Please do get in touch if you require any further information.