

Saintbridge Allotment Gardens Association

**Five Year Development Plan
for the
Saintbridge Allotment site
2015 to 2020**

October 2015

Introduction

This report outlines proposals for development at the Saintbridge Allotment Site for the period 2015 to 2020. This document was circulated and updated with inputs and feedback from the Association's members and Gloucester City Council and signed off by the SAGA committee at the meeting of 2nd September 2015. The report will guide activities of the Association over the next five years following the indicative schedule of activities presented on page nine.

Site description

The Saintbridge Allotments are situated in between Painswick Road and Birch Avenue, with vehicle access via Cheney Close. The land is a public assist designated as Statutory Allotments and managed by Gloucester City Council. The total area of the site is 4.9 hectares of which; 3.44 hectares are allotment plots, 0.06 hectares are hazel coppice for bean pole production with the remaining 1.4 hectares comprising of hedgerows, wild flower meadow conservation margin, car parking and access roads & tracks. There are 10 water stand pipes, three of which have a water trough with float valve. The site has hard standing car parking for 13 vehicles and grass overflow parking for 15 vehicles. Bee hives are kept in the hazel coppice to aid pollination and produce honey. The plots at the site are currently divided to give a total of 237 allotment plots of various sizes. Five plots are set up to provide community gardens. This gives a place for people of all ages to come, enjoy pleasant surroundings, and get involved in activities that encourage health and well being.

Bordering the site are the Saintbridge balancing ponds, a wet pond covering 2.39 hectares and a dry overspill pond of 1.98 hectares. The allotment site and balancing pond areas provide a diverse range of wildlife habitats with hedgerows, wildflower meadow, amenity grassland, rough grassland, native woodland and wetland habitats.

Saintbridge Allotment Association

The Saintbridge Allotment Gardens Association was formed in 2009 with the objects and aims:

- i) To ensure that Saintbridge Allotment Gardens be made available to local residents who wish to follow the recreation of gardening to benefit their health and well-being.
- ii) To promote all interests of the members in their gardening activities and to take joint action for the benefit and protection of its members.
- iii) To maintain harmonious and productive relationships with our landowners [Gloucester City Council] and the local community.
- iv) To promote a sense of vibrant community: to be socially inclusive: to value sustainability: to have regard for environmental protection: to value biodiversity: to promote open communication.

The association carries out work on a voluntary basis with materials for activities sourced either through donations or proposals for grant funding. Some funds are raised through table sales of surplus produce and honey from the bees in the Hazel coppice.

Since its inception, the association has cleared and reinstated abandoned overgrown allotment plots, renewed the boundary fencing and gates, planted boundary hedgerows, extended the water supply system and installed hard standing car parks and access tracks.

Liaising with the Gloucester City Council Allotment Officer, the association keeps an updated database of all plotholders, clears and makes ready vacant plots to be re let and shows the vacant plots to prospective tenants. When plots are left abandoned and uncultivated, the Association informs the City Council Allotment Officer who then contacts the tenant to seek a resolution of the situation, or if necessary, terminate the tenancy.

Gloucester City Council are responsible for the overall management of the site and issue the tenancy agreements, collect the rent and manage the waiting list of prospective tenants.

Problems and issues

The main problems facing the site are overgrown abandoned plots, uncut pathways, build up of rubbish on some plots, limited access to water at certain times and occasional vandalism and theft.

Overgrown abandoned plots

This can result from a lack of knowledge of how to garden on an allotment scale, underestimating the amount of time and work required to keep an allotment or ill health and other unexpected family commitments. Possible interventions to address these issues include, the dissemination of information on appropriate gardening methods, promoting the use of green manure crops for weed control and fertility building, letting smaller plots and cutting down weeds to prevent seeding when a plot holder is unable to work a plot due to ill health or other unexpected family commitments. Should plots remain overgrown and abandoned the Association works with the City Council to seek a resolution which can lead to the eventual termination of the tenancy agreement. When vacant plots are badly infested with perennial weeds the Association carries out bare fallowing weed control to clean the plots before they are re let.

Uncut pathways

Although it is a condition of the tenancy agreement, some plot holders are not cutting their grass paths, mainly because they do not have access to a petrol mower. The Association has a second hand donated mower but no system is in place to store the mower or maintain and manage its use by members.

Build up of rubbish on some plots

In the past the site was somewhat neglected with a culture of allowing rubbish and other household items to be brought to the site. Furthermore, most plot holders look to neighbouring plots to see what is and is not acceptable. Tackling this issue requires a long term intervention to change the culture and improve standards. Efforts to clear vacant plots of rubbish before they are re let will, over time, help to address this issue. Enforcement of the tenancy agreement by the City Council is also necessary in some cases.

Limited access to water

The water pressure drops at peak times of the day when all the taps are in use, making it difficult to fill watering cans. To address this, the Association identified the need to install water troughs with float valves at all the standpipes. This will provide a reservoir store of water to fill watering cans.

Vandalism and theft

As a generalisation, problems with vandalism seem to be an issue when the site looks derelict and uncared for, usually in January and February. Although the site suffered sustained vandalism in 2013, the local Police were very helpful in tackling this issue, they stepped up patrols, installed CCTV and recommended; i) a general site tidy up to improve its appearance and ii) engagement with the local youth inviting them to grow produce on community allotments. Currently the local Police are funding activities to engage young people on the community gardens through the Aston Project.

Five year development plan

Based on the assessment of the issues above and opportunities to improve wildlife habitat at the site the following activities are identified for development over the next five years to support the objects and aims of the Association.

Community gardens

Status, current activities are funded through the Aston Project, future development is unfunded.

The Association established five reclaimed plots to provide community gardens for people with disabilities and youth groups. It is our vision to create a vibrant, welcoming place for people of all ages to come, enjoy pleasant surroundings, and get involved in activities that encourage health and well-being.

The gardens will provide a space for elderly allotment gardeners to maintain connection with allotment culture even if they no longer manage a plot of their own. Passing on their skills to the next generation we hope gives them a sense of meaning, pride and ownership in their community. For young people, learning to grow food helps to develop confidence and

understanding of the world we live in. Gardening can bring joy and a sense of achievement for many people with physical disabilities, learning difficulties and those suffering from mental illness.

The gardens will provide facilities and features to accommodate the needs of people with varying types of disability and give opportunities for children and youth groups to get involved with gardening and the decision making to develop the site further. The main structural features of the gardens could include wide paths across the whole site, raised beds of different heights and tabletop planters, a sensory garden and pond, bench seating and standard flat beds for vegetable growing and archways supporting trained fruit trees.

The area already has a hard standing car park and grassed picnic area/overflow car park. This provides a venue for working parties and social get-togethers, if feasible, the Association would also like to provide toilet facilities with a composting toilet installed in the corner of the car park.

Water troughs

Status, voluntary working party activity with supply of materials already funded.

This activity involves installing five water troughs with float valves to provide a store of water to fill watering cans. This will improve the supply of water at peak times of the day when all taps are in use, facilitating more use of hand watering and help to reduce the reliance on hosepipes. This activity will use the funds remaining from the Coney Hill Neighbourhood Project.

Uniform plot markers

Status, voluntary working party activity funded with donated materials.

The Association sees the need for uniform plot markers to make it easier for people to find their way around the site and show vacant plots to new tenants. This activity will use donated 3" half-round posts painted white so they are easily visible.

Green manure crops

Status, self financing activity

The Association planted demonstration plots, produced information fact sheets and piloted a bulk-buying scheme for green manure seeds in 2014 & 15. This passed on huge savings to members and this scheme will be continued in the coming years if there is sufficient interest.

Conservation margin for shady hedgerow plants

Status, unfunded voluntary working party activity



Location of conservation margin for shady hedgerow plants

This activity will develop a conservation strip on the north facing side of a hedgerow planted in 2010. This area now has the microclimate to support a range of perennial wild flowers found along shady hedgerows. Once established this conservation margin will add to the diversity of habitats found around the site.

Hazel coppice understory¹⁰²⁰

Status, funded with a donation from the GL4together community show, voluntary working party activity

The understory of the Hazel coppice planted in 2010 could be developed further by planting a range of native woodland bulbs. This will provide an attractive feature that diversifies the habitat and gives early season nectar for pollinators. A detailed proposal for this project is included in appendix I.

Hazel coppice harvesting

Status, income generating voluntary working party activity

The first plantings of Hazel should be ready for coppicing on a rotational basis in the winter of 2018/19. The bean poles produced will be offered for sale at a competitive price to Association members.

Hedgerow management

Status, voluntary working party activity

In the coming years, aftercare management of the recently planted hedgerows will include weeding and shape pruning. Once fully established the hedgerows will be cut on a two-year rotation to allow flowering and fruiting to support wildlife. The hedges will be cut to maintain an A shape with a wide base to give maximum cover for wildlife. During the summer months, brambles growing out of the hedgerow will be cut to keep them in check.

Newsletters

Status, voluntary activity

This activity is intended to provide some basic practical advice and tips for new plot holders. The newsletters will provide a guide to allotment scale gardening tailored to site conditions at Saintbridge.

Replacing 50 meters of chain link fencing

Status, voluntary working party activity funded through donated materials



Section of chain link fencing to be replaced

This activity will make good 50 meters of dilapidated chain link fencing along the boundary between the Cheney Close side of the site and the local corner shop. Feedback from the Association's members requested a pedestrian gate be included in this project to give access and prevent stray dogs entering the site.

Clearing plots and bare fallow weed control

Status, voluntary working party activity with cost of skips, petrol for rotovator and herbicide funded by Gloucester City Council



An example of reinstated plots sown with mustard to control weeds

As plots become vacant, the Association hopes to clear them of any rubbish and where necessary carry out bare fallow weed control to make them ready for re let. This work also includes levelling and reinstating the grass paths if required.

Maintenance of grass paths

Status, unfunded, potentially income generating activity

Access to a petrol mower is a problem for many plot holders making it difficult for them to maintain the grass pathways. There is a need to set up an operating system to manage and maintain several mowers for use by members at a reasonable hire charge. This is a long term activity with implementation dependant on there being enough volunteers to run the service. Some of the points to consider in setting up such a service are outlined below.

Type of mower, this should have a rear roller (not wheels) to prevent the mower slipping off the paths that have border edges cut into them. A new mower of this type would cost £340 to £360.

Number of mowers and service delivery, the mowers should be made available rather like a bus service schedule, available Saturday and Sunday and possibly one evening in the week. The Association does not have the manpower to operate it like a taxi service available every day at all hours of the day. There should be enough mowers to mow the whole site in one weekend. In practice, this would rarely happen but it gives the flexibility to accommodate demand and overcome any breakdowns. Based on this assessment the site requires three mowers.

Storage of mowers is a problem, the Association has had three mowers stolen and one lost to arson. One possible solution is the construction of purpose built storage for mowers disguised as raised beds. They would be planted with herbs and have wall mounted basket planters added to the sides, one of which hides the padlock to the door. These structures (one for each mower and not much bigger than a wheel barrow) could be located around the site, along with a number of solar powered LED floodlights and dummy CCTV cameras for added security.

Some of the paths are dangerous to walk on and unsafe to mow, particularly on the Cheney Close side of the site. They require rubbish removal, relocating in the correct place, levelling and reseeding.

Contract mowing by the City Council: Amey currently mow the grass vehicle tracks on the Cheney Close side of the site. Mowing the wide perimeter paths and overflow car parking areas on the balancing pond side should also be contracted out to Amey.

Removing rubbish and planting a section of perimeter hedgerow

Status, unfunded voluntary working party activity



Location of rubbish piled against garage walls

A 30 meter section of the perimeter on the Cheney Close side of the site borders a row of garages. Over the years soil and rubbish has been thrown against the garage walls creating problems with rising damp. Investigation of the site shows the fence wire is buried amongst the soil and rubbish making it impossible to remove by hand. To address this, the Association proposes to hire a JCB 3CX to clear the rubbish and fence posts. A mixed native species hedgerow will then be planted along the fence line to delineate the boundary and create wildlife habitat.

Maintaining a wildflower meadow habitat and planting flowers for pollinators

Status , voluntary working party activity



South facing conservation margin with perennial wildflowers

This is a routine activity to provide habitat and food sources for bees and other beneficial insects. Management of the wildflower meadow involves scything the meadow and removing the vegetation to keep its fertility low. Corn field annuals and other flowers are also sown around the allotment site to give an attractive feature and support beneficial insects.

Indicative Schedule Of Activities 2015 to 2020

Activity	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Community gardens					
Activities implemented by the Aston Project	#####	#####	#####	#####	#####
Future activities					
Identify partner organisation(s)	#	#			
Prepare proposal(s) & seek funding		###			
Implement activities			#####	#####	#####
Installation of water troughs	#	#	#		
Planting native flowers for a shady hedgerow					
Prepare proposal & seek funding		#####			
Implement project			#####	#####	
Planting bulbs in hazel coppice understory					
Prepare proposal & seek funding	##				
Plant seed stock		#			
Divide & multiply seed stock					##
Install plot markers	#	#	#	#	#
Bulk buying scheme for green manure crops	#	#	#	#	#
Hedgerow maintenance					
Cutting hedgerows		#	#	#	#
Keeping brambles in check	##	##	##	##	##
Newsletters	#####	#####	#####	#####	#####
Clearing plots & bare fallowing	##	##	##	##	##
Coppicing hazel and selling bean poles				#	#
Replacing dilapidated chain link fencing		#			
Improved maintenance of grass paths					
Identify mower storage options	#				
Prepare proposal & seek funding	##				
Deliver mower hire services to members		###	###	###	###
Remove rubbish & plant 30m of perimeter hedgerow					
Prepare proposal & seek funding		#			
Clear the site		#			
Plant hedgerow			#		
Aftercare weeding and shape pruning				####	####
Maintenance of wildflower conservation margins					
Scything the meadow and removing the cut vegetation	#	#	#	#	#
Planting & aftercare management of corn field annuals	###	###	###	###	###

Appendices

- I. Proposal for bulb planting in the hazel coppice
- II. Site map
- III. SAGA Consitution

Appendix I

Proposal for Bulb Planting in the Hazel Coppice Understory

The Saintbridge Allotment Gardens Association is developing and diversifying wildlife habitats around the allotment site. An area unsuitable for allotment plots was planted to hazel coppice to provide a woodland habitat and produce bean poles for the allotments. A total of 800 square metres of hazel was planted during the period 2010 to 2015. One of the activities identified in the Association's five year plan "2015 to 2020" is to plant a range of native woodland bulbs (Common Snow Drop, Native English Blue Bell and Wild Garlic – see species listed below) in the understory of this hazel coppice. This will provide an attractive feature, give a source of nectar for pollinators and support the City Council's application for Green Flag status for the area.



Area of hazel coppice and bee hives, top right shows hazel planted in 2010, top left and foreground shows later plantings.

The bulbs will be planted during voluntary working parties of the Association in January/February 2016. The bulbs are to be planted in isolated drifts through the first hazel plantings made in 2010 which covers an area of approximately 350 square metres. Once established, this will provide a seed source to colonise the rest of the area as the later plantings of hazel grow to give a woodland environment. This will be done by collecting seed to propagate in a greenhouse and dividing the clumps of bulbs as they get established.



Forest floor conditions in the understory of hazel planted in 2010

The harvesting of hazel for bean poles will be carried out on a rotation. This further diversifies the habitat because the harvesting will increase light levels giving a woodland glade situation for a period of time before the hazel regrows. Other aftercare management will include regular cutting of any Spanish Blue Bells growing in and around the allotment site to prevent their cross pollination with Native English Blue Bells.

To implement this project the Association is seeking funding to purchase the following bulbs for delivery in January 2016. The bulbs will be supplied by Naturescape.co.uk and dispatched freshly lifted, when they are in active growth.

Common Snow drop, *Galanthus nivalis*, 500 bulbs £43.85

Native English Blue Bell, *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, 500 bulbs £ 84.00

Wild Garlic, *Allium ursinum*, 200 bulbs £ 40.50

Postage & packaging £ 3.50

Total £ 167.85

Appendix II

Site plan of Saintbridge Allotments

Saintbridge Allotment site plan (October 2015)



Appendix III

Saintbridge Allotment Gardens Association

Constitution

Saintbridge Allotment Gardens Association

Constitution

Name

The name of the Association shall be the Saintbridge Allotment Gardens Association.

Administration

The Association shall be administered and managed in accordance with this Constitution by the Officers and the other members of the Committee as appropriate.

Objects and Aims

- A] To ensure that Saintbridge Allotment Gardens be made available to local residents who wish to follow the recreation of gardening to benefit their health and well-being.
- B] To promote all interests of the members in their gardening activities and to take joint action for the benefit and protection of its members.
- C] To maintain harmonious and productive relationships with our landowners [Gloucester City Council] and the local community.
- D] To promote a sense of vibrant community: to be socially inclusive: to value sustainability: to have regard for environmental protection: to value biodiversity: to promote open communication.

Powers

To raise funds to regenerate and rehabilitate Saintbridge Allotment Gardens and to keep them in good order.

Membership

Membership shall be open to all allotment holders and [subject to the approval of the Committee] persons who are not allotment holders but who are interested in promoting the future of Saintbridge Allotment Gardens. Members who are not allotment holders shall not be entitled to vote at any General Meetings of the Association.

Limitation as to Management Responsibilities

Neither the Association or any Officer or other Committee member will be responsible for any omissions by or actions or activities undertaken by a Member whether on his or her own Allotment or elsewhere. The Officers of the Association will arrange and pay for from the Association's funds an appropriate Insurance Policy to provide cover for the potential liabilities of the Association.

Structure

A Committee of not more than fifteen Members [including the officers as described below] shall be elected by the Members at an Annual General Meeting. All Committee Members shall retire at each Annual General Meeting, but shall be eligible for re-election.

Not less than two Meetings of the Committee shall be held each year. One third of the Members of the Committee will be a quorum for a Committee Meeting.

Such officers as are required to conduct the administration of the Saintbridge Allotment Gardens shall be elected at the Annual General Meeting. These will include Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary and if it is deemed appropriate an Agricultural Consultant.. Officers shall retire at each Annual General Meeting, but shall be eligible for re-election. The Committee may appoint replacement officers in the event that any Officer is unable for whatever reason to continue in that post until the next Annual General Meeting.

An Annual General Meeting shall be held each year, not longer than fifteen months following the previous Annual General Meeting. Ten Members will be a quorum for an Annual General Meeting.

The business of all Committee Meetings and General Meetings shall be limited to matters which are relevant to the Objects and Aims set out in this Constitution. All Committee and all General Meetings shall be minuted. A Member may request to see the minutes of any meeting at a time which is mutually agreeable to the Member and the Secretary at the time.

Finance

All monies belonging to the Association shall be deposited at a local bank in an account in the name of the Association. Two signatories will be required to authorise spending of funds.

Accounts shall be kept by the Treasurer and approved at the Annual General Meeting. The Association's financial year shall run from 1st April in one year to 31st March in the next year, and the accounts presented to the Annual General Meeting will be calculated as at 31st March.

Constitution

The Constitution may be altered by a resolution passed by not less than two thirds of the Members present and voting at a General Meeting. The notice of a General Meeting must include notice of the resolution setting out the terms of the alteration proposed.

Dissolution

If the Association shall, by a decision of at least two thirds of its Members present and voting at an Extraordinary General Meeting cease to exist, all assets shall pass to Gloucester City Council, to be used for the upkeep of the Saintbridge Allotment Gardens.

Date 9th October 2011

Signed [Signature] [Name] Chair

Signed [Signature] [Name] Secretary

This amended Constitution was adopted by the Association at a Meeting of Members held at 27th on September 2011.

