

GROWING HEALTH NANTWICH - Nantwich Community Health and Therapy Garden

1: Introduction

1.1 The Covid crisis and the lock-down has seen a growing consciousness in the community of the vital role that gardening, and particularly allotment gardening, in fostering good mental and physical health. This has bolstered a recognition by the health professionals of the value of outdoor and green prescribing in managing the mental and physical health of patients.

1.2 Members of the community at Brookfield Allotments in Nantwich have come together to develop a proposal which would see two plots on the site dedicated to providing an purpose designed and managed "Therapy Garden". The concept has attracted a very positive initial reception from professionals working in the NHS, Cheshire East Council and Nantwich Town Council at a Virtual Meeting on 12th August. Other community organisations working in this space have also expressed an interest in exploring synergies.

1.3: This document aims to outline the proposals, the steps and mechanisms needed to get the project off the ground, and identify funding and management needs to establish a viable long term operating model.

2: Growing Health Nantwich - Vision and Values

2.1 Growing Health Nantwich will be a community driven allotment project based on two allotments on Brookfield Allotments offering a purpose designed garden where people will be able to enjoy the therapeutic benefits of horticulture, gentle outside exercise and fresh air and environmental connectivity.

2.2: GHN will also provide opportunities for volunteering, linking up complementary areas of community activity and organisations in a common space - mental and physical health and horticulture, wildlife and environmental action.

2.3: The project will act as a gateway for participants to further opportunities to develop further friendships, skills and enthusiasms. It will grow opportunities for a healthier future - it will provide a seedbed for personal development and community engagement.

3: Health and Social Prescribing

3.1 The involvement of the NHS is central to this project. The referral of NHS patients by Medical Practitioners gives structure and direction to the project - ensuring that it delivers real benefits to individuals and communities.3:2: Volunteers from the allotments and from partner organisations will be able to develop and maintain the garden environment - but the medical expertise and delivery must be delivered and managed by health professionals. The role of the project is to provide the space and environment for therapy to take place.

3.3: A productive partnership with the NHS will also help ensure that the garden project maintains a core focus on delivering health outcomes, and that the appropriate funding mechanisms are in place to manage the project.

4: Community Garden and Partnerships

4.1: The Garden will also provide opportunities for the wider community to enjoy a structured engagement with gardening, the outdoors and the natural world.

4.2: The garden will offer opportunities for specific and targeted educational activities and volunteering for other organisations and institutions - including wildlife and environment groups, schools and youth organisations, gardening organisations and groups working with the elderly and disabled.

5: Establishing the Project

5.1: While the allotment community is keen to host and actively participate in the project, the delivery of health therapy in a garden context has a host of health and safety, safeguarding and protection issues which will need very careful management.

5.2: The project will need expertise and engagement from a wide range of partners each with different areas of expertise. The skills needed will include:

- 1 - Community organisational governance
- 2 - Partnership development
- 3 - Health Service Social Prescribing Processes
- 4 - Health and Safety and Safeguarding needs
- 5 - Funding expertise and financial management
- 6 - Horticultural design and management
- 7 - Volunteer training and management.

6. Current position

6.1 The project is still very much at the earliest stages of development with a number of parties engaged.

6.2 Cheshire East Community Engagement Officer Deb Lindop is keen to support the project and has already identified opportunities for community funding - and is positive that it will gain enthusiastic support. She has set up links for materials for the construction of the garden with the Household Waste teams and is investigating more formal representation from Cheshire East Council in the development of the Governance of the project.

6.3: The NHS is represented on the group by Michael Willcocks of the Audlem Medical Practice. He is looking at developing a clearer understanding of how social prescribing works, how the project would key into the NHS processes, how this might provide some level of funding to ensure project viability, and what NHS representation is needed in the Governance of the project.

6.4: Brookfield Allotments are owned and operated by Nantwich Town Council. Town Clerk Samantha Roberts has already indicated that she will take a paper to the Town Council to gain formal support for the project, establish permission to use the two identified plots, and identify representation at councillor level in the future Governance structure.

6.5: Brookfield Allotments Association has given its formal approval to the project at a Committee meeting on Thursday 20 August. It will help with representation in Governance, volunteering and expertise in the construction and management of the garden.

6.6: Other parties who have expressed an interest and are awaiting a formal approach (this report) for consideration include: The Cheshire Wildlife Trust, Nantwich in Bloom RSPCA Wildlife Hospital - Stapeley.

7: Next Steps

7.1 Developing the project will require the establishment of a formal organisational structure as a first step.

7.2 The project will require a thorough understanding of the legal and technical challenges and hurdles, a strategic plan to identify the resources and skills required, the financial needs for construction and long-term management, potential funding sources and structures, and plans for management of construction, volunteers and administration through the different stages of development and operational management. This is no small undertaking.

8: Recommendations

8.1 That a body is established with representation from each of the above bodies, to oversee the establishment of the project. This Steering Group could be expanded as needed as the project moves forward to Charitable Status.

8.2: That Nantwich Town Council approve the allocation of two allotments (no79 and 80) for the project and agree councillor/officer representation on the Steering Group.

8.3: That representatives from the above organisations are invited to join the Steering Group with the first meeting to take place in early October 2020.

8.4: That the Steering Group makes an application for funding to the Cheshire East Community Fund (as recommended by Deb Lindop) to a maximum of £5,000 to fund the initial establishment of the project partnership, the development project structure and Governance, financial and business modelling, and the delivery of a clear project plan and timeline.

8.5: A professional project manager be employed to managed and co-ordinate this efficiently, effectively and to timetable. The Steering Group oversee this process.

8.6: On the ground the Allotment Association work on developing the plans, designs and specifications for the physical garden working with the partners and the project manager.

8.7: All of the above is done with the objective of ensuring the physical garden takes shape over the winter 2020/1 and the organisational structure and it operational strategy, and funding mechanisms, are identified and established by the Spring of 2021.