

De Montford Road Green Space—what do you think of it?



Dear Resident

I am contacting you because the property you live in backs onto the garden space highlighted in green on the map above.

As you may know, this space - owned by the City Council - has been unused and left to grow wild for many years, having formerly been an allotment and smallholding site in the last century.

It has been left unused, partly because it is a difficult site to access and partly due to a campaign which followed a planning application in the 1980's to build on the site which established its value as a green space and place for nature.

Early last year, a group of local residents approached the council requesting that the site should be opened for public access as a community garden, growing or recreation space and I have been working with this group and speaking with residents, relevant council offices and those with helpful expert advice to understand what this site is and how it may be used.

Comments overleaf summarise the options which are being explored and describe the current preferred option for the site with some questions and space for your thoughts.

Although I have had many conversations about the site, this is the first structured attempt at engagement and aimed only at those living on properties which boundary the site, as I feel that your views are critical in guiding next steps in exploring the potential of this space.

I am grateful for your time in responding to it.

Simon Bannister

Brighton & Hove City Council Community Engagement Team

Please return your completed survey in the envelope provided. If you would prefer an online version of the survey is available at <https://hanoverandelmgrove.net/community-projects/nursesgarden/>

De Montford Road Green Space - About the site

The summary below comes from a site visit by the council Biodiversity Officer September 2023

The contained area (c.1000 m² / 0.1 ha) comprises of a mix of trees and shrubs, including predominantly sycamore, elder, hawthorn, holly, yew, horse chestnut and some ornamental garden species such as bamboo etc. There is also some young elm regrowth.

It is used to some extent by the residents, whose properties directly back on, with cleared areas of more garden-type planting, seating (around a fire pit) and pathways mostly at the eastern end. Some more natural bramble scrub and common nettle patches are present towards the western end, with ground flora comprising of ivy, dock sp, garlic mustard, forget-me-not, avens, comfrey etc.

Brash piles (from the cleared eastern end areas and paths) and some areas of fly-tipping are present towards the peripheries. There is also a very small mini pond (<0.3m²) which has some water present. It is located in an entirely shaded location with lots of ivy ground cover present.

The access is currently limited to the properties that directly look on, and a restricted council owned passage through a property on De Montford Road, and this limits to some extent the amount of disturbance to the habitats.

The habitats present offer potential to support invertebrates, herptiles (amphibians & reptiles), mammals such as bats, and birds. A hoverfly, robin, magpie, jay, and fox were recorded while on site. A resident anecdotally confirmed nesting dunnock (within the brash piles), blue tit and badger using the habitats on site also.

Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre data confirms the following species to have been recorded in close proximity around the site in the last c.10-15 years, and which have the potential to use the habitats on / above site:

Bats - Common pipistrelle;

Birds - Swift, Starling and House sparrow;

Herptile - Slow Worm, Common Toad & Common Frog.

The habitat is located in a very urban area off Elm Grove with Woodvale, Extra-mural & Downs Cemeteries, Local Wildlife Site (LWS) designated as a Habitat mosaic of broadleaved woodland, dense scrub, rough grassland, relict chalk grassland and pond with wildlife and recreational value, is located c.500m northeast. The habitats on the site are in-keeping to some extent with the LWS.

Due to nature of the habitat present, it would not be suitable for use as an allotment site, as this would require clearance of the trees and shrubs and existing vegetation etc.

The site is a small and a contained established habitat patch in a very urban location. It would be beneficial to write a simple management plan focused on measures to enhance it for the local wildlife / priority species known to be present on site and within the local area, in-keeping with our declared Climate and Biodiversity Emergency and the Corporate Plan notably to 'Protect and enhance the city's natural environment - Conserve and manage habitats and spaces where plants and animals can thrive, and biodiversity is restored'.

The main areas for management would centre on clearing the fly-tipping (at the suitable times of year i.e. outside bird nesting and hibernation seasons due to risk of use), and light touch habitat management works such as some targeted shade management through removal of less beneficial ornamental species such as bamboo etc, and the potential to create a larger, less shaded pond (in line with health and safety) etc.

De Montford Road Green Space - Issues and options

1. Access and activities:

Based on comments in the site report “***The access is currently limited to the properties that directly look on, and a restricted council owned passage through a property on De Montford Road, and this limits to some extent the amount of disturbance to the habitats***” and “***Due to nature of the habitat present, it would not be suitable for use as an allotment site, as this would require clearance of the trees and shrubs and existing vegetation etc***” the current recommendation is that:

Any changes to use and activities should not permit unrestricted access, and that any greenspace or planting activities should be centred around enhancing and protecting the space as a place for nature rather than more formal growing or other leisure activities.

Do you agree with this recommendation? Do you have any comments?

2. Community involvement and participation

Bearing in mind the above statement, the site is a council owned greenspace in an area with limited public access to nature including for nearby schools which have little on-site green space, and the council would like to ensure that such spaces are best used to respond to local need, that access to resources is fairly offered and use of resources meets council strategic priorities to “Protect and enhance the city’s natural environment - Conserve and manage habitats and spaces where plants and animals can thrive, and biodiversity is restored’ and to ensure that all schools have access to nature.

The second recommendation therefore is that consideration is given to two types of user accessing the site:

1. A formal conservation volunteer group be formed able to carry out regular nature enhancement, monitoring and site management activities in line with an environmental management plan for the site and restricted to planned and organised workdays.
2. A schools partnership be explored to enable local schools who lack access to nature to make use of the space for outdoor learning, conservation activities, monitoring and nature enhancement in line with an environmental management plan and in partnership with the conservation volunteer group described above

Do you agree with these recommendations? Do you have any comments?

De Montford Road Green Space - Issues and options (Cont)

3. Boundaries and neighbours

The site currently has a mix of boundary treatments, with some areas of fencing maintained to varying quality and some properties with no marked boundary at all between their rear gardens and the site.

To enable better management of the site and enable a safe and secure space for children, it is likely that works will need to take place to better define and strengthen boundaries.

The third recommendation is that consideration is given to strengthening existing site boundaries where necessary and establishing a suitable boundary where none currently exists. It is not yet clear what the standard boundary treatment may be or how/by whom this aspect may be resourced.

Do you agree with these recommendations? Do you have any comments?

4. Other views, opinions or perspectives

The recommendations above are based on information currently available and conversations with those who have so far been involved - they may not represent the full picture and may not be including all relevant considerations.

Do you have any other relevant information, thoughts or perspectives which you would like to share?

De Montford Road Green Space - What happens next?

Regardless of the recommendations being explored in this document, no decision has yet been taken on any aspect of this work and we would like to build the conversation with local stakeholders and continue to learn about the site, its constraints and its potential before making any commitment to a particular course of action.

The results of this survey will be supplemented by further survey and community engagement work, and this will include some on-site activity which may initially involve groups of local people being introduced to the site and carrying out some biodiversity and species audit and mapping work. If this goes ahead it is likely to be over one or two days in the spring.

Do you agree with these initial outcomes? Do you have any comments?

Future resourcing and funding

Although the site is owned by the council, there is no identified budget to support any activities outside of the bare management functions carried out currently. Any additional activities or actions which are sought would need sufficient resource identified to move them forward.

Any activities or investments are likely to be dependent upon external fundraising, and another early outcome may be the formation of an independent steering group made up of local residents and relevant expertise from conservation and education to help explore future options

Would you like to participate in such a group?

About you

Name..... Address

I am happy to be contacted further about this initiative Yes / No

Email Phone

I am interested in participating in a local steering group for the site Yes / No

Thank you for your participation

Please return this form to XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

For further information, please contact

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