

Burgess Hill Urban Garden Project

Let's get creative with this empty site

The vacant Martlets Hall and Library land now



Skip Garden, Kings Cross, London

Pop up Street garden, Bath



Minnesota urban garden

Sacramento urban agriculture farm



Burgess Hill Urban Garden Project

Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of the Burgess Hill Urban Garden project will be wholly charitable and includes:

- (1) The promotion of horticulture and create and maintain, for the benefit of the residents of Burgess Hill and neighbouring areas, the Burgess Hill Urban Garden.
- (2) To promote the use and enjoyment of the Burgess Hill Urban Garden for public recreation, health and well-being including through the provision of activities and events which effectively advance the objects.
- (3) To maintain and develop biodiversity by creating an urban landscape that supports native plant species and encourages wildlife.

Proposed location

The former site of the Martlets Hall and Library, The Martlets, Burgess Hill, RH15 9NN. Critical to the creation of the urban garden will be an agreement with Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC) which is the owner of the freehold.

Design intention

The land identified for the Burgess Hill Urban Garden is earmarked for development at an unspecified date in the future. Accordingly, the urban garden will be designed in such a way that it could be relocated to a new site.

The Background

The Martlets Shopping Centre, in Burgess Hill has been earmarked for redevelopment for over two decades but the plans brought forward over this period have stalled due either to the failure of the development company (Thornfield in 2008) or the changing face of retail and leisure (New River in 2016). The current plan (New River in 2020) has been delayed due to covid19 and the economic fall-out from the pandemic.

Whilst there has been activity to re-open empty retail units, which is showing early signs of success, there is a part of the redevelopment area that is a drag on the appearance of the town centre which is the former Martlets Hall and Library site.

The land where the Martlets Hall and Library stood (or in the case of the Library where it currently stands) is owned by MSDC. Work on the demolition of the Martlets Hall and Library stopped in March 2020 but it is expected that work will restart and be completed by the end of 2020/early 2021.

Once cleared this site will be given a hard surface that could have a variety of uses including a temporary car park. There is, however, sufficient off street-parking provision in the town centre at present (as confirmed by recent parking studies). Additional parking provision of any scale will only be required when the planned redevelopment takes place and the date for that it not known. Redevelopment will be undertaken by New River which will take a headlease from MSDC. New River has indicated that it is broadly supportive of this initiative.

This means that there will be a sizable area of land which has no aesthetic appeal and is likely to remain unused without creative input from the community. MSDC has indicated that it will

consider temporary uses for the land though has not been specific about what those temporary uses could be. The land provides an ideal space for an urban garden

In an area of the town centre, that has been neglected for many years, the creation of the **Burgess Hill Urban Garden** would provide a space for residents to enjoy, it would lift a key part of the town centre and give back some life and vitality, would be a space where residents can reflect on the town's history, and may act as a place for remembering the recent impact of covid19.

Horticultural references

Burgess Hill has a strong horticultural tradition.

The first reference to a horticultural club dates from 1884 and the present organisation, the **Burgess Hill Horticultural Society**, was founded in 1964.

The town has an annual garden safari run by **Burgess Hill in Bloom**, an organisation that has been established for twenty years. It has an active allotment community with a waiting list for plots.

Possibly less well known is that Burgess Hill was also the birthplace of the co-founder of the national Tree Register (patron HRH Prince of Wales). **Vicky Schilling** died on 23rd November 2019 at the age of 67 years. She was born Victoria Hallett, the fourth generation of her family to be born in the town. Her grandfather was gamekeeper at the nearby Heaselands Estate (owned by the Kleinwort Family). It would be a fitting tribute to dedicate the Burgess Hill Urban Garden to her environmental work.

Given Burgess Hill's brick and tile making history it would be important to use some of these local materials as part of the project.

Covid19

We should also not forget the traumatic events of 2020.

Covid19 has had a profound effect on the life of the town. A creative project that engages the community and then leads to an attractive space which resident can freely enjoy will be an aid to wellbeing and improved mental health.

It will also provide a place where people can reflect on the events of this traumatic year and think about family and friends that struggled through this period.

Garden design

The Burgess Hill Urban Garden Project is a community project, and the project members will be key contributors to the design and the planting. Volunteers will be support for the creation of the urban garden and its continued maintenance.

Funding

Donations will be sought from private individuals and businesses. Applications for grants will be made to grant making bodies including charities, trust funds and local authorities. Income will be generated from hiring out space in the urban garden.

Next steps

1. Establish support for the Burgess Hill Urban Garden project from (a) members of the community; (b) Burgess Hill Town Council; and (c) voluntary groups in Burgess Hill.
2. Form either a voluntary association; charity or CIC to oversee the project.
3. Cost the creation of the urban garden and identify running costs.
4. Identify sources of funding and approach providers for funds.
5. Present the proposal to MSDC and seek support and, if obtained, agree terms of a lease or licence of the land.
6. Approve urban garden design.
7. If required apply for and obtain any planning consents.
8. Prepare project plan to implement the creation of the urban garden.

Robert Eggleston (Cllr)

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