

# ABINGDON TOWN COUNCIL

Report to	Environment & Amenities Committee
Meeting date	20 <sup>th</sup> February 2024
Report author	Tim Badcock
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## Cemeteries and Outdoor Services Manager's report Proposed community garden

### 1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 To inform members of a request to change the use of council land at Austin Place.

### 2. Summary

2.1 A resident has contacted the council with a proposal to use part of the town council's land at Austin Place as a community garden.

### 3. Action required

3.1 Members are requested to consider this report and instruct officers accordingly.

### 4. Link to strategic plan and objectives

4.1 A community garden on Town Council land would support the council's 4 key objectives.

### 5. Background

5.1 The town council's land at Austin Place is open space with little amenity value. It is used for exercising dogs and the occasional group of children congregate there. There is a footpath across the centre of the land which once served the now closed pre-school. Access is via footpath only either directly from Austin place or the short alleyway from Farm Road.

### 6. Key information and options

6.1 The proposal can be seen in the email below.

7. **Climate change/green implications**

7.1 The creation of a community garden has the potential to support the council's climate/green ambitions.

8. **Financial/budget implications**

8.1 None.

9. **HR implications**

9.1 This project will be overseen by the Cemeteries and Outdoor Services Manager.

10. **Supporting papers and appendices**

10.1 Letter and photos from resident below.

**Enquiry from resident, 17 January 2024**

Hello

I wonder if you could help. I am a resident of Austin Place in Abingdon and would like some advice on who to contact regarding my query. There is some land, of which is just grassed and has a sign of no ball playing and for under 11's, which is in front of Dunmore Pre-school. The area isn't used and the pre-school closed at the end of last year, so is now empty and derelict grounds. My query is (1) if there are plans to use the grassed land and (2) if not, if there is a possibility of looking into creating a community garden within it? A resident recently passed away, who was involved in arranging a street party I organised and I thought it might be a nice idea to have an area where people can reflect, join together and enjoy using as a community, and we all help create a garden and seating area.

If this is something that we can do, please could you let me know what is needed to start this process and I will put it forward to my neighbours.

Thank you in advance for your help.

**Response from Cemeteries and Outdoor Services Manager**

The land in question is owned by Abingdon Town Council.

I could present this proposal to the Environment & Amenities Committee meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2024. Initially to see if this is something that Abingdon Town Council would be happy to facilitate. If they are, more detailed plans of course would be required.

I would be grateful if I could have a little more detail i.e. area to be used, what is the vision (pathways, seating, raised beds, community vegetable growing, gated/ un-gated, future maintenance etc) including who would be carrying out the works and any other detail so I can write a report to present to the committee for discussion.

I would require this information by the 6<sup>th</sup> February 2024 ideally so I will have time to put it into a report before the agenda for the meeting is sent out.

To confirm, I'm not asking for a full proposal, just a little more information so the committee can discuss it fully at the meeting as any queries would then have to wait for another meeting and they tend to be 2 or 3 months apart.

**Reply from resident, 2 February 2024**

I have spoken to a group of my neighbours who have joined me in helping to get this started. Tonight we had a video meeting with Joanne Milton of Community Action Groups (CAG) Oxfordshire to gain further input and so I am now able to send my reply having gained more information.

As Tim Badcock requested, I'm listing below the ideas and vision we have for a

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community garden. Please could you pass this information/email on to him. I can also call him if this was preferred.

- raised beds with herbs
- fruit tree(s)
- approx 2 benches and seating areas
- small fence (such as wired, not wooden for visibility and safety) and swing gate to protect the area, ie if dogs got in
- wildlife boxes - bats, birds, insects, frogs and hedgehogs - we would like to attract wildlife to the garden
- possible covered area to protect from all weathers
- solar lighting
- flowers that attract insects - ie. lavender which can also be used for other purposes
- mix of perennial and annual flowers
- should we be successful in obtaining land, in the future could also grow veg/salad for an edible garden
- compost bin
- approx. 40ft square - there's a large area split in two by the path leading to the old pre-school (now closed). It is the larger side to the right that we are looking to use, as the smaller size has a large tree and allows for expansion in the future if allowed. We are aware of the house running alongside, so plan to create it at a reasonable distance away from the fence

This is just a rough idea, hopefully it gives an outline to the vision we have - to create a tranquil and friendly environment for all residents. We are looking into suggestions whereby it can be kept local and controlled, but at the same time available for all who would like to use it in a respectful way - to bring the community together.

Joanne advised that there are various grants that can be applied for and we would look into fundraising/donations to create the garden and any insurance necessary (it was suggested that at times some councils have it already in place and can be provided in this way also). I have been made aware of other community groups in Abingdon which I have been invited to join, so we can gain more insight into creating and organising a garden. Joanne gave lots of advice and information and I will be in contact with her again, in particular should we be successful to use the land and start the work.

As some background, I was part of Abingdon Community Response during lockdown and arranged a VE celebration with a few of my neighbours. As this was successful and most neighbours I asked joined in, I then organised a Jubilee street party inviting all residents of Austin Place. It was a great day, even the Deputy Mayor, Cllr Gabby Barody visited and judged our cake competition. The same neighbours who helped organise the party have now shown interest in the community garden. My neighbour who organised all the bunting recently died over Christmas and I suggested doing something in his memory. One of my thoughts was to plant a fruit tree, which in turn gave me the idea of the community garden. If we are successful to use the land, as soon as I know, I will be arranging leaflets to be posted through the doors of all the residents of Austin Place (as I did with the street party) and to gain more interest, volunteers and awareness of the plans. The residents/volunteers who have shown interest will create and maintain the garden, with support from Joanne and the relevant groups.

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I am attaching some photos of the grassed area we are asking to use. There are two sides with a public footpath leading towards the old pre-school grounds. As you will see they are empty, unused areas of land and looks neglected. I have spoken with Abingdon Learning Trust (having emailed Fitzharry's school) and they have said that as long as the access to the pre-school isn't affected, they have no objections to us using any part of the grass. I'm also attaching a selection of photos of the street party giving an idea of our street and just some of the neighbours who joined in and what we can achieve as a community. There are a number of retired (couple/single) residents who I'm sure would be happy to have somewhere to visit, be part of creating and bring people together to help with any loneliness. There are also young families, so it will be educational and fun for the younger residents too.

I hope this information is useful and look forward to hearing from you and/or Tom. Should you need anything further, please let me know.

Thank you for your help.

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**Photos**

