



# Community Gardening Policy

July 2012

This policy will be reviewed biennially by: The Sustainability Team  
Next review date: July 2014



<b>Title:</b>	Community Gardening Policy
<b>Summary:</b>	This Policy outlines the ways in which Ashfield Council intends to support community gardening within the Ashfield Local Government Area.
<b>Record Number:</b>	
<b>Date of Issue:</b>	
<b>Approval:</b>	
<b>Version Control:</b>	Version 5 – Final July
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Sustainability Team
<b>Relevant References:</b>	The Australian City Farms & Community Garden Network
<b>Main Legislative or Regulatory References:</b>	NIL
<b>Applicable Delegation of Authority:</b>	Delegations Schedule Corporate and Community Services
<b>Related Ashfield Council Policy:</b>	Park Plans of Management, Community Strategic Plan, Pesticide Use Notification Plan
<b>Related Ashfield Council Procedure:</b>	Customer Service Standard



## 1. Policy Background

Ashfield Council supports the development of community gardening within the Ashfield Local Government Area and believes that appropriately designed and managed community gardens can provide a wide range of environmental, social and economic benefits to the Ashfield community.

For the purposes of this Policy, community gardens are:

*Not-for-profit, community managed spaces that provide an opportunity for food production and other gardening activities, for the benefit of members in the local community.*

Community gardens require substantial community involvement in planning, decision-making, garden management and day-to-day activities. It is envisaged that once established, community gardens within the Ashfield area will be self-sustaining and will require minimal management, support and intervention by Ashfield Council staff.

## 2. Policy Purpose

This Policy outlines how Ashfield Council intends to support community gardening activities within the Ashfield Local Government Area (LGA), including gardens established on both public and community owned land.

## 3. Policy Objectives

The objectives of this policy are to:

- Acknowledge the potential social and environmental benefits of community gardening
- Outline types and mechanisms of support Ashfield Council is committed to providing to community gardening groups
- Set out requirements for the establishment of community gardening on Council owned land
- Ensure that all community gardens are managed in an efficient manner and maintained to an acceptable standard

## 4. Implementation and access

This Policy has been developed in consultation with the Ashfield Community Gardeners, the gardening group who currently operate in the Eora Community Garden in Summer Hill. The Policy will also be subject to a wider community consultation period before being finalised.

A soft copy of the Policy will be available on Council's website and hard copies can be made available upon request via Council's Customer Service Centre.

Implementation of this Policy will be undertaken by members of the community interested in forming community garden groups and by members of Council's Sustainability Team.

## 5. Benefits of Community Garden

Community gardens can provide and facilitate a range of social and environmental benefits. They bring together people from different backgrounds, age and interest groups, and can help build stronger, more integrated and more resilient communities.

Some of the positive social interactions that occur in community garden spaces include: cooperating through working parties, sharing gardening tips, arranging social events and sharing produce.



Community gardens also function as educational resources, and allow for the promotion of environmental awareness and stewardship. They often provide demonstration sites for composting and worm farming; rain water harvesting and re-use; and organic and water-wise gardening principals.

In some circumstances community gardens can also contribute to increased food security and improved health and nutrition outcomes, and further benefits of community gardens are that they contribute to the diversity of open space use and recreation; can be sites for community outreach; and can provide valuable vocational experience.

Finally, access to community gardening spaces can be especially valuable to, and valued by, members of the community who have limited space to garden within their own properties. This is particularly relevant in the densely populated suburbs of the Ashfield LGA.

## 6. Types of Community Gardening

There are a number of different models of community gardens. The two types of community gardens that are supported through this Policy are:

- Community gardens that have a mixture of individual allotments and shared areas; and
- Communal gardens where the entire garden is managed collectively

These gardens may be located on public land, whether owned by Council or other Government agencies, or on community owned assets -such as Churches and schools.

Unless special exemption is requested and granted this policy will not support gardens in which the entire space is divided into allotments which are managed by individuals.

Note: For the purposes of this policy, public land includes all Council owned land and Crown Land under Council's care control and management.

## 7. Council's Role in Community Gardening

Ashfield Council will apply a community development approach to community gardens, in which gardening groups manage the gardens themselves with the support of the Council and other partnering organisations. This approach leads to increased community ownership which can assist in the ongoing sustainability and success of a community garden.

## 8. Council Support and Assistance for Community Garden Groups

Council can provide the following services and assistance to community garden groups:

### 8.1 A Council Point of Contact

Council will provide a point of contact for garden group coordinators and committee members. This person will coordinate Council's assessment of new garden proposals and, the provision of advice on design and maintenance of garden spaces and plans of management (including examples). This person may also provide advice and limited assistance in obtaining grants to support community gardening activities.

### 8.2 Materials and Equipment

Council may, at its discretion and subject to budgetary constraints, be able to provide the following materials:

- raised garden bed structures – for the establishment of a new garden
- recycling, worm farming and composting facilities and associated infrastructure



- soil, compost & mulch – during the initial establishment of a new garden
- public signage and educational materials for the community garden.

### 8.3 Education and Training

Council will provide relevant workshops and training opportunities for community garden volunteers. For example TAFE Courses for Community Gardening, worm farming and composting, organic gardening principles and water-wise gardening.

Council will also endeavour to source and provide shared educational resources (e.g books and DVDs) to community gardeners through the Ashfield and Haberfield Libraries.

### 8.4 Communication and Promotion

Council can assist in connecting community gardens and gardeners to one another, in order to help build relationships and encourage the sharing of information and experiences. Council will also promote community gardening and gardens through Council's website, publications and events, and will link interested community members to existing gardening groups.

### 8.5 What Council Cannot Provide

Council is not in a position to provide the following services of resources:

- administrative support (e.g. photocopying)
- the holding of any monies on behalf of community garden groups
- the provision of large infrastructure (e.g. sheds, rainwater tanks, sun shelters)
- the ongoing provision of plants, seeds, soil or mulch
- the provision of tools or other equipment
- the repair or replacement of damaged, lost or stolen infrastructure and equipment
- public liability insurance
- the development or hosting of any internet based platforms for group communications and promotion, e.g. websites, blogs, wikis
- ongoing financial support

## 9. Responsibilities of Community Gardeners

Community gardeners are responsible for maintaining the garden so that the health and safety of the surrounding community and other gardeners are not adversely impacted upon. All community garden groups operating within Council lands must have an established and agreed Plan of Management prior to undertaking works and be an incorporated group within 12 months of the use of land being granted. Appendix 2 contains an outline of the topics a Plan of Management should include.

In particular, gardeners are responsible for ensuring that:

- They have an operating Code of Conduct
- They cooperate and communicate with the Council, residents of the surrounding neighbourhood, partnering organisations and other gardeners;
- They do not discriminate against one another due to differences in race, culture, age or sexuality;
- Decision making is democratic, transparent and inclusive;
- Any water leaving the garden is not contaminated by sediment, fertiliser, manure or excessive organic matter that might pollute waterways;
- Noise levels within the garden are maintained at a level that is not disturbing to neighbours;
- Compost, worm farming systems and fertilisers are maintained so as not to attract vermin or produce unpleasant odours;
- Any rainwater harvesting systems are maintained to ensure water is of a high quality;
- Lawn areas are regularly mowed and garden beds kept tidy;



- Any materials delivered to or stored at the garden are maintained so as not to create an unpleasant environment for other residents in the community;
- Visitors are welcomed to the garden;
- Where gardens are established on Council land, members of the general public can access the garden during daylight hours, i.e. non-members cannot be excluded from Council lands
- They have appropriate Workplace Health and Safety Plans and Systems in place
- They have a nominated person to act as a liaison with Council.

## 9.1 Rights of Community Gardeners

Community gardeners have the right to:

- Develop their own internal policies, organisational procedures and plan of management providing they liaise with and get support from Council;
- Be consulted with regard to any decision that may affect the garden and to be advised by Council in a timely manner of any policy changes that may impact them;
- Be treated with respect by other gardeners and partnering organisations; and,
- Negotiate a secure and reasonable agreement with Council.

## 9.2 Conflict Resolution and Complaints Procedure

Community Gardens should aim to promote an environment that is respectful and considerate. However, it is possible that conflict may sometimes arise, either within the garden group or with external stakeholders such as local residents or the Council. In the event of a conflict arising, steps should be taken immediately to work towards its resolution, including communicating respectfully with those involved; and engaging the assistance of a mediator where appropriate.

Council requires that community gardeners develop a management plan which includes a gardener's agreement that all members agree to follow. The agreement should provide information on the expectations of behaviour on site, the management of shared garden areas and plots; and a conflict resolution process.

## 10. Insurance and Risk Management

It is essential that garden groups are aware of the risks associated with undertaking a publicly accessible community garden project. Each garden group has a duty of care to the community who access the garden areas. To ensure funds are available to meet that duty, a minimum of \$10,000,000 of public liability insurance policy is required to be held.

## 11. Incorporation of the Garden Group

Ashfield Council encourages community garden groups to have a clear and identified legal structure. Garden groups utilising Council owned land are required to apply to the NSW Office of Fair Trading to become Incorporated Associations within 12 months of use of land being granted. This arrangement provides the group with flexibility in the management of funds and enables them to open a bank account, obtain public liability insurance cover and apply for government grants.

Incorporation as an association requires groups to establish a management committee with annually elected office bearers and to commit to regular meetings. This can be beneficial for the project as it maintains a structure that can address management issues. Having a committee also helps share the tasks of garden management and avoids excessive responsibility being placed on a few people or the garden management becoming dominated by one person.

## 12. User Agreement

A licence for use agreement must be signed between Ashfield Council and the organisation for



the purpose of developing and maintaining a community garden. The licence agreement would also contain conditions for the use of the site.

At the initial set up of a new garden, a license will be granted for 12 months with an option for a 3 year agreement after this period. All community gardens will operate on a not-for-profit basis

A licence or other agreement with the group could be revoked or not renewed if:

- the group disbands or ceases to function
- the garden is not maintained or becomes unsafe for public access; and,
- appropriate insurance cover is not maintained

The group will be required to report annually to Council on the function of the garden and how they are meeting Council objectives

### **13. Ashfield Council Use of the Garden as a Demonstration Site**

Council's vision is to promote the development of community gardens as demonstration sites for sustainable living, that can be utilised for educational and community activities.

In demonstrating sustainability best practice, community garden groups are strongly encouraged to include outdoor learning and meeting spaces; interpretative signage; and to use recycled materials and practice water-efficient and organic gardening.

Where community gardens are established on land owned by Ashfield Council, Council retains the right to use the garden as a demonstration site for community education activities such as tours and workshops. Council will communicate with the garden users to ensure that organised activities do not conflict inappropriately with other garden uses, such as regular working bees.

### **14. Establishment of Community Gardens on Community Owned/Managed Land**

Open space is limited within the Ashfield LGA and Council therefore supports the establishment of community gardens on community lands such as church grounds, schools, and retirement villages. Community gardens on community owned lands will be supported by Council as outlined in this policy provided they meet the conditions described herein.

### **15. Establishment of Community Gardens on Council Land**

Ashfield Council encourages resident groups to work in partnership with Council in the establishment of new community gardens on Council land. Establishing a community garden can be a complex process requiring consultation with a broad range of stakeholders and there are a number of issues that need to be considered before a community garden is initiated.

Ashfield Local Government Area is a highly urbanised municipality with limited open space available for community use. Community gardening is one of many activities, including active and passive recreation, which Council land zoned for Open Space can be used for.

Council supports the equitable allocation of land for community use. Assessment of proposed new sites will take into consideration the following:

- availability of other open space nearby for active and passive recreation;
- local population density (including ratio of multi-unit dwellings vs. single dwellings with private gardens);
- proximity to existing community gardens; and
- existing land use



In order for Council to consider supporting the development of new community gardens on Council-owned or controlled land, applicants will need to submit a completed Application Form (Appendix 1) to Council. Addressing the site selection criteria outlined in the box 1 below and following the process for starting a new community garden. The first steps in this procedure include establishing a community garden group, conducting a site assessment of potential sites and discussing their proposal with Council to identify any possible issues. Once a preferred site has been established, applicants will need to submit a completed application form to the Council. If the application is supported, the Council will organise community consultation with local residents and work with the community garden group to address any concerns.

## **16. Water supply on Council land**

Where water is made available by Council to community garden groups, use will be closely monitored to ensure water is used responsibly. Council actively encourages water conservation within the community, and this will also apply to community gardens on Council land.





## Site Selection Criteria for New Community Gardens on Council Owned Land

**1. Location:** Sites zoned as Open Space under the Local Government Act may be appropriate. These sites are usually established for community use such as park lands, open spaces and community centres that have outside areas. Priority will be given to sites located in high density areas

**2. Safety:** Sites should have no major safety or health concerns; and have good passive surveillance (for example, can be easily seen from nearby houses or retail areas).

**3. Accessibility:** Sites should be accessible for a range of user groups. Sites should be located close to public transport, allow access for people with disabilities, have vehicle access (e.g. for delivery of mulch and soil) and accommodate groups wanting to visit the garden.

**4. Solar access:** Sites need to be suitable for growing vegetables and receive full sunlight - ideally for at least 5 -6 hours per day.

**5. Size:** Sites which are large enough to accommodate garden beds (including communal beds) composting systems and seating areas.

**6. Water:** Sites with easy access to a water supply or buildings nearby from which rainwater can be collected.

**7. Soil Contamination:** Sites will need to be checked for soil contamination. If contamination exists then advice will need to be sought from experts on whether it is suitable for growing food.

**8. Multiple Use:** Sites where a community garden can be integrated without conflicting adversely with other land uses and where the community garden can still be used by non gardeners for passive recreation and educational workshops.

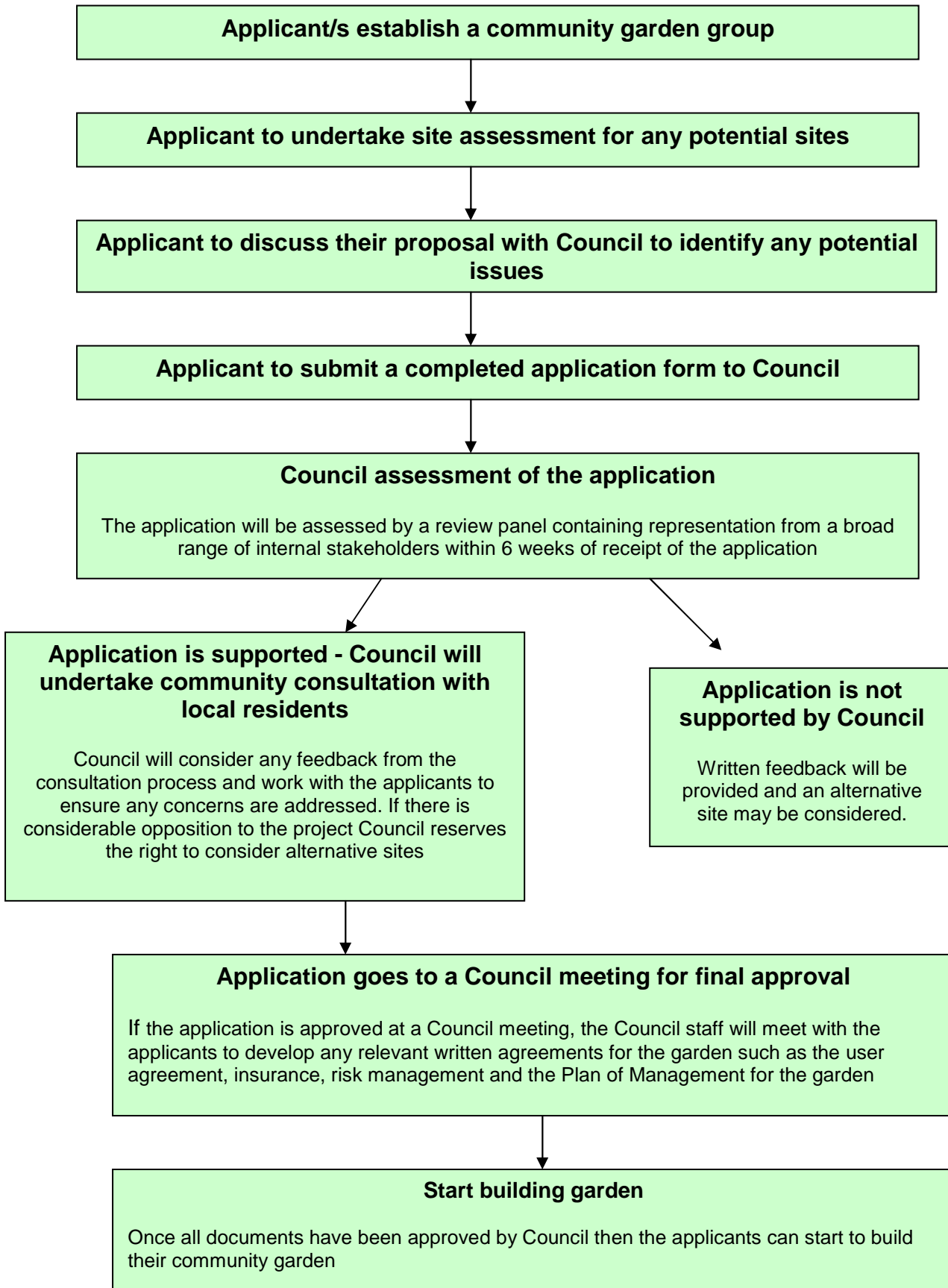
**9. Interest Levels:** Sites will require a minimum of 8 interested gardeners, in order to ensure that the garden is sustainable and will be maintained to an appropriate standard.

Note: It may not always be possible to find a site that meets all of the above criteria. Council will prioritise the sites that can meet as many of the requirements as possible.

### Box 1 – Site Selection Criteria



## Process for Starting a New Garden





# Appendix 1 – Community Garden Application Form

## Part 1 Applicant Details

Community Garden Group Name		
Contact Person Name		
Postal Address	Street Address:	
	Suburb	Postcode
Phone Numbers	BH	AH
Email Address		
Applicant Signature		Date

## Part 2 Group Details

Number of Members	Current:	Maximum Number
Is the Group Incorporated	Yes	Incorporation Number
	No - Please provide details on the aims and objectives of the group?	
How is the Group Structured? Included brief details on roles, meetings and decision-making		
Have any of the members had experience in Community Garden Groups previously?		
Who will benefit directly from the project?		
Other Comments		



### Part 3 Proposed Site Details

Proposed Project Site Address	Street Address:	
	Suburb	Postcode

### Part 4 Proposed Site Assessment

What is the land currently used for, e.g. passive recreation, sporting groups, playground, et?	
Are there any existing structures or services on the site?	
Does the site have good visibility from nearby houses or businesses?	
How far is the site from public transport, bicycle tracks and footpaths?	
Is the site accessible for a range of user groups, including disabled access if required by registered participants?	
Is the site of adequate land size to accommodate the project? Consider the size of the proposed garden beds, composting systems etc	



Does the site have sunlight for at least 5-6 hours per day?	
Is there access to water?	



## Appendix 2 – Topics to Include in a Plan of Management

The plan of management should include the following:

- Statement of purpose
- Aims and objectives, including the long term vision for the garden
- Proposed management structure
- Proposed induction process for volunteers
- Proposed risk management framework and completed risk assessment
- Proposed management of pests and weeds (chemical spraying?)
- Provision for public liability insurance
- Proposed decision-making framework and conflict resolution processes
- Proposed policy regarding sustainable land management including management of soil water, energy, organic and non-organic waste, biodiversity and building materials
- Proposed policy regarding access, equity and membership
- Proposed policy for the allocation and management of plot gardens
- Proposed funding model, e.g. membership fees, fundraising, grants
- Proposed policy regarding drugs and alcohol, including smoking onsite
- Any potential partnerships the group envisages, e.g. with local schools
- Contact details for project coordinators
- Considerations of accessibility including proximity to public transport