



# Secret Garden Project

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St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

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# Rationale

St Joseph's has a piece of wasteland which is currently unused but has secure fencing around it. The land had been created in 2015 by Northumbrian Water as part of the flood alleviation process through Fellgate. The pond at the North of the land supports the flood alleviation, with a swale snaking around into the pond.

Currently, the area is not utilised by staff or pupils, and this is a significant area that could support our curriculum, as well as the social and emotional benefits to outdoor learning.

We also identified the opportunities for including our local community in the project, including the Church and care home.

We were keen to utilise this space and recognised the need for a carefully planned, safe and accessible area to be created, not just for school but for our community.

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# Research and Enquiry

A meeting was held with our neighbouring care home which provides accommodation and care for many dementia sufferers and other adults with learning difficulties, along with St Joseph's Community Centre, which hosts activities for groups ranging in age from 3 years old to 80+ years old. Both parties were extremely receptive to the idea and, following research, mutual benefits and needs of the project were discussed:

- Gardens can bring people together and empower everyone to feel good about themselves in a natural and gentle way.
- For those with dementia, gardens can provide a powerful avenue for reminiscence.
- The positive effects of working with our children could also be significant; planting and maintaining the garden with disabled and elderly people.



# Research and Enquiry

Further mutual benefits of the project included:

- Intergenerational programming allows adults with dementia to share knowledge and memories with the children, providing them with meaningful activity.
- Gardening can reduce depression, anxiety and stress-related symptoms.
- Working in a garden can increase the ability to concentrate and engage.
- Reduced social isolation for many members of the community
- Interaction with older adults has shown benefits for the children involved, including fewer behavioural challenges and improved social development.
- Children learn about many different disabilities and gain an understanding of the world through the eyes of others.





# Design and Development

We have established excellent relationships with the local business sector through working with our Volunteer Centre in Newcastle. This includes with Waterman Aspen, a company specialising in design, drawing and project management, who came in to develop our overgrown raised beds into a more manageable plant area.



We have secured the support of Waterman Aspen, [VOA.gov.uk](http://VOA.gov.uk), Sir Robert McAlpine and Lloyds Bank Wealth Management in the form of teams to create the garden, along with many members of the school and community.



# Design and Development

We approached Waterhouse Aspen for assistance with professional planning of our garden. Following this, architect David Barratt worked with our team to create a plan. This included the following features:

- Secure gate and fencing
- Paths - circulation loops with destination points and no dead ends, varying route lengths, landmarks and memory triggers.
- Benches, shelter, rest areas with hand rails, to some parts, sensor lighting.
- Outdoor classroom containing:
  - reclaimed wood tables/stools
  - Fire-pit
  - Storytellers chair
- Orienteering posts in the area
- Solar lighting throughout





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# Design and Development

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- Pond with a raised viewing platform
- Willow tunnelling
- Sculptures - memory triggers, local history, learning triggers
- Shed/storage space
- Insect/bug hotels
  - Vegetable plots, flower and fruit beds.
  - Easels for sketching and drawing plants and wildlife
  - Sensory area
  - Seating also suitable for elderly visitors



The following design was agreed upon.

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# Next Steps

## Pond

- Liaise with Washington Wetland Centre to identify any potential issues with pond life (PGA)
- Agree date with McAlpine for clearance of pond and surrounding area (PGA)
- Identify contractor to complete new platforms, bridge and bird hide (PCR/TFI)

## Information boards

- Work alongside NEDesign on boards, including involvement of pupils (KBE)

## Raised allotment plots/bird houses/hedgehog house/bee house/bird feeder/bat box

- Contact local community for volunteers to make and install (PCR)

## Security

- Identify contractor to complete gate and fencing work (PCR/TFI)

## Resource Shed

- Source and purchase resource shed, including resources (KBE)
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# Next Steps

## Willow Tunnel

- Identify potential craftsperson to create tunnel along with pupils (PGA)
- Begin construction of tunnel

## Picnic Tables/Benches

- Source and purchase tables and benches (KBE)

Other areas identified e.g. sculptures, solar lighting to be focus of Stage 2 development

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