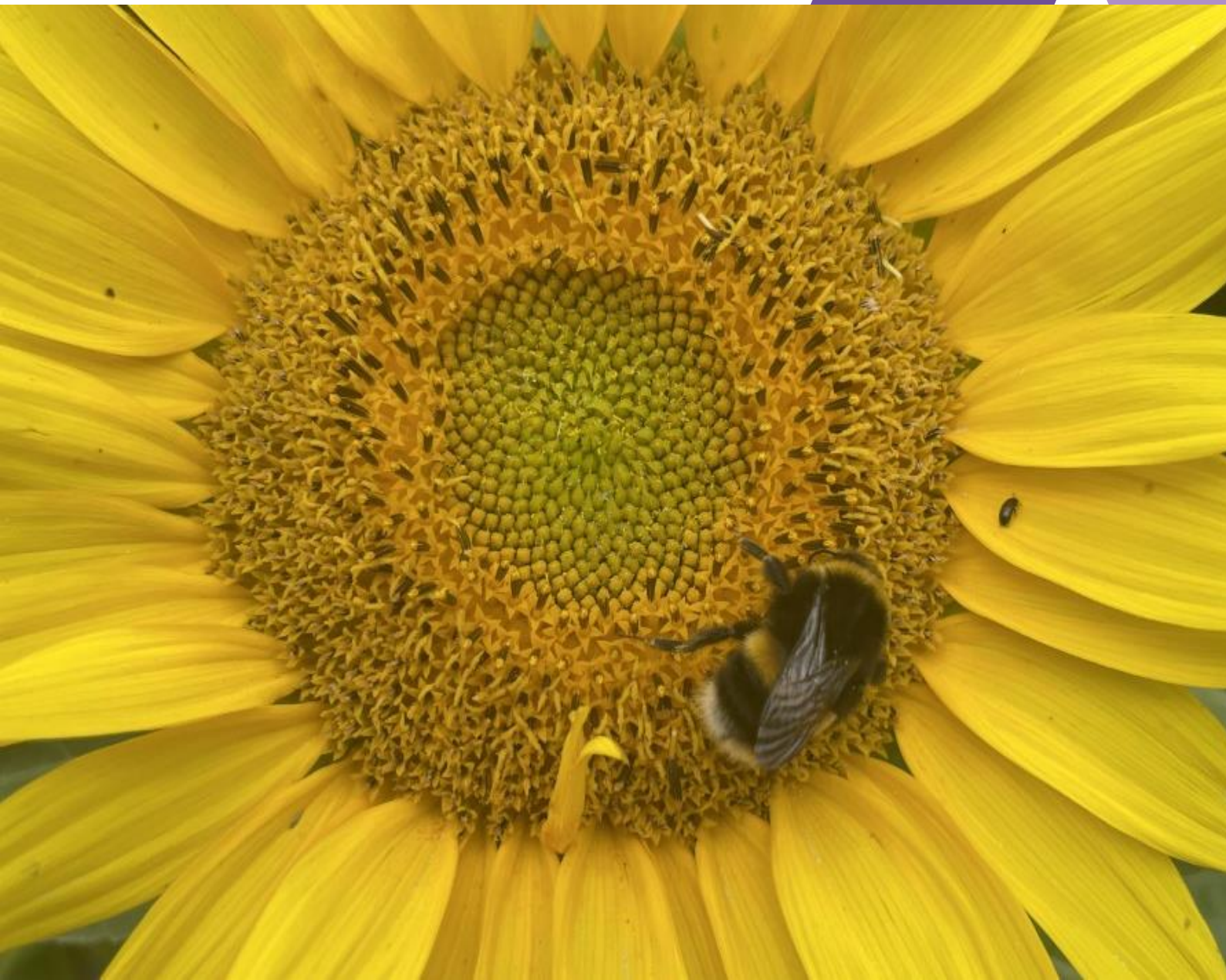


Kent Community Oasis Garden

Five Year Strategic Plan 2023/2024 - 2028/2029



Contents

The Kent Community Oasis Garden.....	3
Aims	3
Our Values	4
Governance	5
Sustainability	5
What we do	5
Our Impact.....	6
Strategic priorities for the next five years	9
Proposed Outline for the KentCOG site for the next 5 years.....	10
KentCOG’s evolving footprint	11
Year One Objectives.....	13
Outputs	13
Appendix 1: Garden development profiles.....	15
Pollinator/sensory garden.....	15
Edible Forest garden	15
Climate Action garden	15
Physic garden	16
Rewilding Habitat Lake and wetland garden	16

The Kent Community Oasis Garden

The Kent Community Oasis Garden project (KentCOG) is a multiuse, accessible, safe space that provides opportunities for students, staff and community members to engage with sustainable food, biodiversity, growing and habitat creation, community action and wellbeing activities.

KentCOG is run as a partnership between the University of Kent and East Kent Mind with additional partners and collaborators that use the site or surrounding area. This unique partnership allows us to provide a space that is centred around social and environmental sustainability building the relationship between people and planet, supporting good wellbeing and mental health whilst providing space for people to actively engage with climate and environmental positive solutions.

The full list of partners include:

- East Kent Mind (a charity promoting better mental health and wellbeing across East Kent including the Canterbury District and Thanet)
- UKC Professional Services staff from the Sustainability Team
- Commercial Services & Estates Department
- Student Support Services (Mental Health and Wellbeing, Employability, Colleges and Community Life)
- The Whitstable and Herne Bay Beekeepers
- The UKC School of Physical Sciences
- The School of Anthropology and Conservation

The partnership between the University and East Mind is the cornerstone of this project bringing a unique collaboration of education, community engagement, sustainability and mental health and wellbeing to one project. It is important that both partners are recognised when the project is written or spoken about and that we clearly communicate our aims and values. We have created guidance on this [available to read on our website](#).

Aims

The project aims to:

- create a lasting and mutually beneficial working partnership.
- create an accessible multiuse space.
- provide opportunities for skills building and training.
- provide work experience and volunteering opportunities.
- promote sustainable and healthy food.
- provide access to all to a growing space.
- create activities and quiet spaces for wellbeing and mental health programmes.
- enhance the student experience.
- promote social enterprise.
- improve social cohesion.
- provide opportunities for learning and teaching.
- provide opportunities for academic research/A Living Lab
- create a safe working environment within the University's processes and procedures.
- record and preserve history and impact of Kent COG

Our Values

- **Safeguarding - Persons:** We are committed to being a safe and secure location to minimise risk from harm, exploitation and abuse, ensuring all students, staff, community members, clients, visitors etc. are aware of their responsibilities, alert to any safeguarding concerns and confident how to respond.
- **Safeguarding – Environment:** We are committed to limiting our impact on the environment and undertaking beneficial practices to protect and enhance biodiversity. KentCOG will support the University’s ambitions set out in the Sustainability Strategy, our commitments to Net Zero, the Sustainable Development Goals, and People & Planet University League alongside East Kent Mind’s activities to promote sustainable environments for mental health.
- **Inclusiveness:** We listen to and are open to everyone, regardless of age, gender, gender reassignment, marital/civil partnership status, pregnancy/maternity status, race, religion/belief, disability or sexual orientation.
- **Empowerment:** Everyone involved with KentCOG – whether contributing to our work or benefiting from it – should feel empowered to participate in an “All involved” environment.
- **Decision making:** We are working to provide a user-centred service, where volunteers are very much involved in decision making about the activities they want in the garden.
- **Learning:** We are committed to be a place of learning ensuring best practise, actively encouraging all attendees and ensuring their development.
- **Accountability:** Through our outcome focused approach, we hold ourselves accountable in everything we do.



Governance

KentCOG is run by the KentCOG Coordinator (East Kent Mind) and supported by the Sustainability Coordinator (University of Kent). The progress of the project is monitored by the KentCOG Management Group which is made up of representatives from all partner organisations. The management group is responsible for setting the strategy for the project and ensuring that aims are met, values are upheld, and the project continues to grow.

Within the University, updates from the management group are reported to the Sustainability Steering Group annually under engagement reporting, and the Sustainable Food Steering Group quarterly as a standing item on the agenda. Other internal groups may request updates throughout the year when relevant.

As part of the University's Right to Food initiative, KentCOG will be supporting on delivery of mission 3: Tackling food insecurity, while promoting a healthy and sustainable food community at the University.

KentCOG is joint funded by The University and East Kent Mind. Any additional funding is sought through external bid writing.

Sustainability

Developing KentCOG as a sustainability hub creates opportunities across the university and other partners to embrace projects that meet their sustainability objectives. For example, the project encompasses opportunities for new and different social interactions, purposeful activity and the associated benefits, engagement with nature, physical outdoor activity, the development of skills and knowledge whilst building confidence and self-esteem, all linked to improving general wellbeing.

KentCOG is working to provide opportunities to address all 3 key levels of green care and health promotion identified by Natural England within our regular programme.

As a Sustainability hub, KentCOG aims to demonstrate sustainability in action through both theory and practice. With this in mind, we have developed a specific sustainability strategy to provide a broad framework through which a lens can be applied to both have ambition for the future of KentCOG strategically but can also be used as a way to judge proposed activities taking place on the site.

The KentCOG Sustainability Strategy sets out our aims under 6 strategic goals and can be [read in full on our website](#).

What we do

We offer twice weekly sessions on Wednesdays and Fridays for participants to engage with general gardening activities. Individuals can just turn up and spend between 1 and 4 hours per session outdoors, working in a group setting, taking part in growing activities, interacting with nature, sharing knowledge and learning new skills. In addition, we offer regular sessions focused on developing and maintaining wellbeing for all and seasonal sessions, promoting sustainability and exploring our connection with the natural environment. A full timetable of our activities is published on our website at kent.ac.uk/sustainability/kentcog

Our Impact

The project allows Students access to an enriched curriculum in place for garden-based activities, which has been developed by staff members and facilitators, through a range of educational workshops and experiences based at the garden aimed at maintaining health, resilience and developing their skill sets through educational and non-directed opportunities. Sessions enhance learning, support wellbeing and encourage community understanding.

Signposting is also available to a full programme of East Kent Mind in person groups, online digital sessions, and to the Young Person's Peer mentoring project where students have the opportunity to become mentors or be mentored as part of the Mind mentoring programme. The site itself and the sessions facilitated on site also support and improve mental wellbeing amongst staff and community members which access it too.

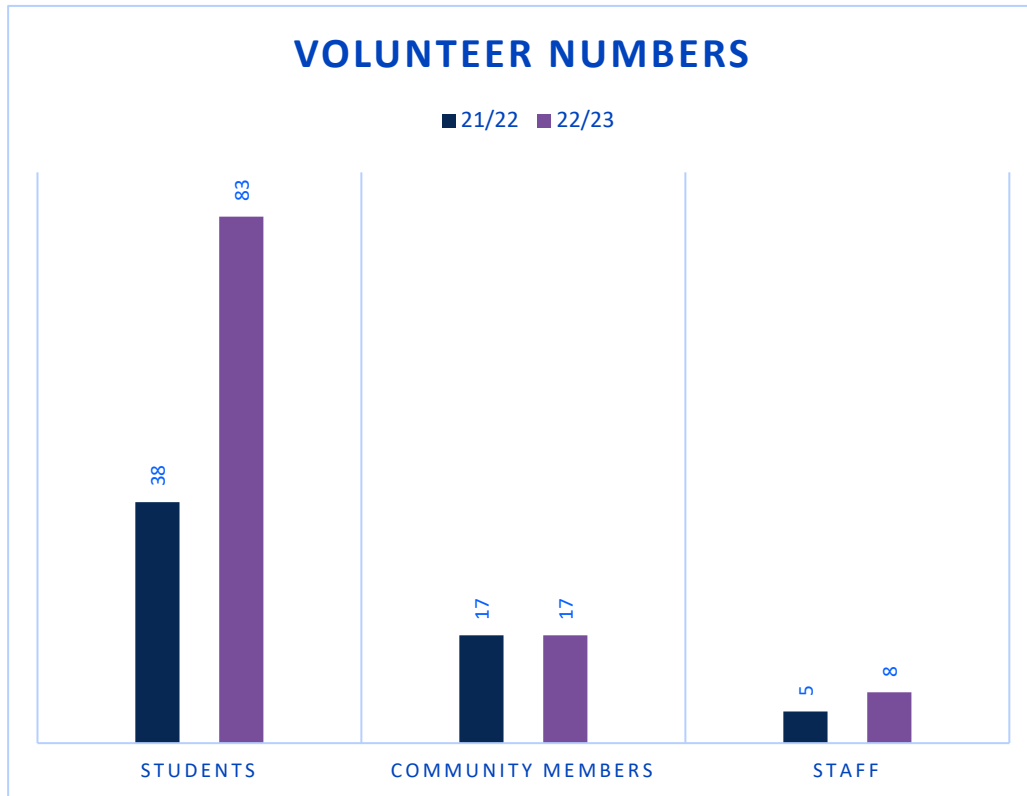
Staff are able to access the garden as a break from their day to day activities and engage in a project side by side with students and community members. Occupational health staff are reviewing how the garden can be used by staff to support their wellbeing. Alongside this, KentCOG features as a volunteering opportunity for staff encouraging them to use the volunteering hours they are entitled to whilst working at Kent.

Community members form the backbone of the garden workforce, volunteering throughout university holiday periods. Community members come from a diverse range of backgrounds and particularly age groups. The garden provides space for them to share and build skills, engage with young adult breaking that student/community barrier and create new friendships.



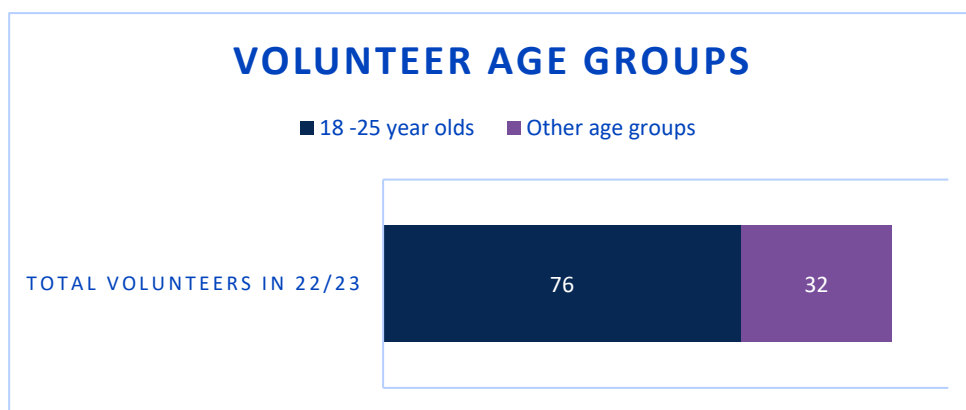
The garden has been through a period of restoration since the lockdowns and the restoration of the space has coincided with the growing number of students seeking activities that support their wellbeing and allow them to meet new people after an extremely isolating period.

Our baseline data from academic years 21/22 and 22/23 demonstrate this below:



Student numbers have risen dramatically with community and staff numbers staying relatively the stable. Overall volunteering hours have increased from 1401 to 1760 hours.

Of the total number of volunteers for the academic year 22/23 over 70% of our volunteers were in the 18-25 age group, which is traditionally underserved in these kinds of growing, community and wellbeing projects.



Our impact goes beyond just the number of people that engage with the project, but more importantly what those individuals get out of the project.

We use a combination of qualitative and quantitative surveying to capture how the project impacts on the people that volunteer at and visit KentCOG.

In 22/23, using the Likert scale, we found that 79 % of respondents reported their wellbeing at the maximum of the Likert wellbeing scale (point 5) after a session and 18% of respondents reported their wellbeing at position 4 of the 5 point scale. We will continue to monitor this each year.

We also collect testimonials and statements from our volunteers to express how they feel in their own words:

“This is the first place since coming to Uni that I have felt happy and like I belong” (Student Oct 2022)

“I don’t know where else I could mix with, you know, all these different people” (Student May 2022)

“It is healthy to get away from a computer” (Student November 2022)

“It’s fun, clears your mind, allows you to move your body while feeling useful. The people are really nice, the activities/stuff to do is adaptable to your mood/physical abilities. Overall genuinely my favourite part of every week.” (Student Feb 2023)



Strategic priorities for the next five years

- Actively educating and inspiring sustainability objectives including good health and wellbeing through project engagement.
- Building capacity on site
- Increasing both engagement and ‘community organisation’
- Offering distinct wellbeing opportunities.

There is now compelling evidence to show that contact with nature and the outdoors improves physical health and mental wellbeing. Evidence shows that a thriving, wildlife-rich environment benefits both physical and mental health. People with easily accessible nature on their doorstep are more active, mentally resilient and have better all-round health.

Garden volunteers at KentCOG talk about the boost they gain from the sessions to both mental and physical health in terms of mood and muscles. We know from experience that gardens and gardening within nature make us feel better so that KentCOG can provide wellbeing opportunities through access to it as a green space with added value beyond those who work as a garden volunteers within the space.



Proposed Outline for the KentCOG site for the next 5 years

This strategy document sets out a 5-year plan for KentCOG, to be reviewed at the end of each year and operationalised accordingly through the management group. For more information of the different types of garden areas proposed, you can read the garden development profiles at the end of this document in Appendix 1.

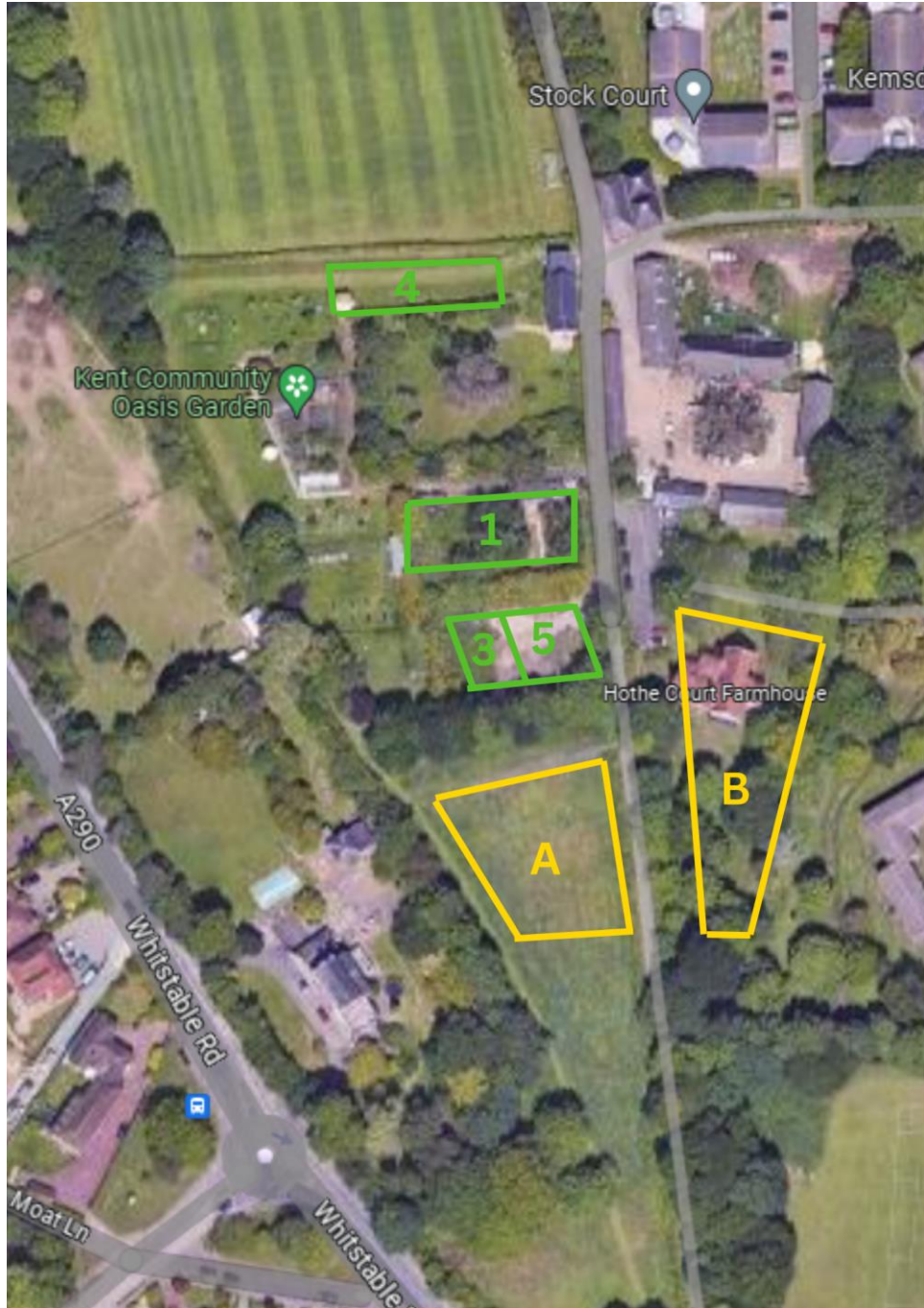
Year	Main Objectives	Target Outcome
1 – 2023/24	<p>Continue to develop the Pollinator sensory garden.</p> <p>Introduce green prescribing type sessions for students on site through SSW referrals.</p> <p>Co-Create an Edible Forest Garden</p> <p>Develop and implement a Social Therapeutic Horticulture programme on site for different groups.</p> <p>Identify funding to support development of Hoathe Court Farm to be new operating base for Kent COG. (Section B map below)</p> <p>Set up temporary growing spaces in sections 3/5 (see map below) to create flexibility in our growing output.</p>	<p>Space fully kitted out and planted by autumn term 2023.</p> <p>Build partnership with SSW through the management group by winter 2023 for Spring term trial in 2024.</p> <p>Consultation and planning, trial growing and maintenance plan drawn up.</p> <p>Programme in place in addition to existing gardening sessions.</p> <p>Research into possible other funding streams. Bids completed.</p> <p>Work to begin in autumn 2023.</p>
2 – 2024-25	<p>Develop House Plant Hospital and propagation to a full part of what COG delivers.</p> <p>Fully utilise and manage heated polytunnel to balance space needed for seeding crops vs houseplants.</p> <p>Run a series of events during the year with a plant sale/giveaway in September and plant donation/summer camp in May/June.</p>	<p>Project proposal developed in 23/24 and agreed by management group.</p> <p>Planting/propagation plan completed in autumn 2024.</p> <p>A minimum of 4 events run throughout the academic year.</p>

	Produce plans to be reviewed for possible extension into the Archery Field. (Section A, map below)	Collate feedback from users and limitations of the site from Estates. Develop a proposal.
3- 2025-26	Develop Climate Action Garden Potential development of the Archery Field subject to proposal being accepted. (Section A, map below)	Planning process to be completed by Autumn 2024 and groundworks finished for spring 2025. Resources secured and groundworks planned for autumn 2024.
4- 2026-27	Establish Physic Garden	Planning process to be completed by Autumn 2025 and groundworks finished for spring 2026.
5 – 2027 - 28	Freshwater Rewilding Garden	Planning process to be completed by Autumn 2026 and groundworks finished for spring 2027.

KentCOG's evolving footprint

Numerical sections in green show areas that are planned for development within the existing KentCOG boundaries. Profiles for each type of planned garden area are available in appendix 3 for further information.

Alphabetical sections in yellow show potential expansion opportunities subject to planning, permissions, covenants and funding.



Alongside the main objectives described in the table above we have set out several secondary objectives and key outcomes for the coming year. Updates and progress against these will be annually reported. Secondary objectives and outcomes will be produced each year for the coming year.

Year One Objectives

SO1: Continue utilising the space offered in the current fenced garden and increase production of produce for consumption by volunteers, community and hospitality.

SO2: Establish Tool Library.

SO3: Establish programme of Climate Cafés and Eco-Anxiety workshops.

SO4 Consultation and agreement for Forest garden.

SO5 Interpretation in place.

SO6: Increase use and engagement of the site through EKM, CCL and SSW e.g. Mindfulness and talking therapies.

SO7: Ensure the funding needed for the security of the project.

Year 1 Outcomes

- Evidence of Wellbeing scale improvements (trial measuring wellbeing improvement over time using the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale)
- Oral history and qualitative interviews providing evidence of project benefits.
- Increase in student participation (numbers recorded).
- Increase in staff participation (numbers recorded).
- Evidence of cross stakeholder collaborative participation - student, staff and community members.
- Increase in produce (volumes/yield recorded).
- Increase in weekly sessions and attendance at activities (numbers recorded).
- Increase in partnerships and funded projects (number of partner organisations, number of funded schemes/projects).

Outputs

These activities will be our continuous outputs that we will hold ourselves to, monitor and provide updates on quarterly at the KentCOG Management Group meetings, and annually publicly on our website.

- Twice weekly gardening sessions
- Management of garden produce
- Programme of activities:
 - o Wellbeing sessions
 - o On-site workshops and activities
 - o Access to information about the East Kent Mind in person groups and courses, digital timetable and the Young Person's Project Peer mentoring for 17-25-year olds
- Referral to East Kent Mind for one to one mental health support where appropriate
- Regularly updated publicity on range of platforms
- Involvement with research projects as appropriate
- Bid writing
- Site is run safely with Accidents and Incidents recorded and risk assessments completed
- Site is increasingly accessible as new elements are added
- Recording of details of those attending
- Evaluation of activities and services offered
- Quarterly reports produced for the University, Mind and the management committee
- Effective use of KentCOG by student wellbeing projects (reviewed by the student wellbeing team representative)

- Overall project aims and annual plan aims are in progress and met (Reviewed by the Management Group)

This is a working document to set out the strategic priorities for the KentCOG project over the next 5 years. This builds upon the KentCOG vision created by the KentCOG Management Group and Mark Lane Landscape Architect, reflecting how the project, partnerships, priorities, and space have developed and changed over last few years.

This strategy is reviewed annually by the KentCOG Management group.



Appendix 1: Garden development profiles

Pollinator/sensory garden

In simple terms, a pollinator garden is one that attracts bees, butterflies, moths, beetles or other beneficial creatures that transfer pollen from flower to flower, or in some cases, within flowers. A sensory garden can be defined as an outdoor garden environment specially designed to help stimulate a person's senses which can be important for wellbeing.

To maximise the potential of the garden, this area is being developed with these dual intentions in mind. It will be divided into 5 areas, each planted with plants intended to stimulate one of our senses, whilst making sure the plants selected are pollinator friendly.

Edible Forest garden

A Forest Garden system based on trees, shrubs and perennial plants. These are mixed in such a way as to mimic the structure of a natural forest – the most stable and sustainable type of ecosystem in this climate. The primary aims for the system are:

- To be biologically sustainable, able to cope with disturbances such as climate change
- To be productive, yielding a number (often large) of different products
- To require low maintenance.

The crops which are produced will often include fruits, nuts and edible leaves. They are usually organised in up to seven 'layers'. The layers consist of Canopy Trees, Small trees and large shrubs, Shrubs, Herbaceous perennials, Ground covers, Climbers and vines, Rhizosphere (including beneficial fungi).

Forest gardens have been used for millennia in tropical regions but in temperate regions, they are a more recent innovation, over the last 30 years. A major limiting factor for temperate forest gardens is the amount of sunlight available to the lower layers of the garden: in tropical regions, the strong light conditions allow even understorey layers to receive substantial light, whereas in temperate regions this is not usually the case. To compensate for this, understorey layers in temperate forest gardens must be chosen very carefully.

There are plenty of plant crops which tolerate shady conditions, but many are not well known. Many of the more common shrub or perennial crops need bright conditions, and it may be necessary to design in more open clearings or glades for such species.

The key features which contribute to the stability and self-sustaining nature of this system are:

- The large number of species used, giving great diversity.
- The careful inclusion of plants which increase fertility, such as nitrogen fixers (e.g. Alders [*Alnus* spp], Broom [*Cytisus scoparius*], *Elaeagnus* spp, and shrub lupins [*Lupinus arboreus*]).
- The use of dynamic accumulators – deep rooting plants which can tap mineral sources deep in the subsoil and raise them into the topsoil layer where they become available to other plants, e.g. Coltsfoot [*Petasites* spp], Comfrets [*Symphytum* spp], Liquorice [*Glycyrrhiza* spp], Sorrel (and docks!) [*Rumex* spp].
- The use of plants specially chosen for their ability to attract predators of common pests, e.g. umbellifers like tansy.
- The use, where possible, of pest and disease resistant varieties, e.g. apples.
- The increasing role of tree cover and leaf litter which improve nutrient cycling and drought resistance.

The benefits of an edible forest garden are that once established it is a long-term biologically sustainable system for growing food and is low maintenance but the initial work to establish this will be significant.

Climate Action garden

Perennial crops are robust; they protect soil from erosion and improve soil structure. They increase ecosystem nutrient retention, carbon sequestration, and water infiltration, and can contribute to climate change adaptation

and mitigation. Overall, they help ensure food and water security over the long term.

Many fruits, forage and some vegetable crops, including fruit trees, alfalfa, grapes, and olive trees, are perennials that have been grown for thousands of years. Commonly grown perennial vegetables include asparagus, rhubarb, yams (*Dioscorea* species) and Jerusalem artichoke. Many kitchen herbs are perennials, including oregano, bay, mints, wild garlic and chives. Several vegetables grown as annuals are also perennial in the right conditions e.g. brassicas (cabbage, kale), some beans and potatoes.

We can also grow drought tolerant plants in this area too.

Physic garden

Therapeutic Herb and flower garden an exciting area we are developing. It is going to be divided into 4 sections: medicinal herbs, culinary herbs, tea herbs and cocktail or mocktail herbs. The aim is that there will be descriptions of the benefits and properties of each herb and links via QR codes to recipes.

There are of course lots of herbs to choose from so we are trying to choose to grow herbs that have the dual benefits of being good for us and the pollinators. Herbs will also be a mix of perennial herbs such as Thyme (immunity booster and cognitive aid), Sage (used in anxiety, nervous disorders, as astringent, in abdominal disorders, anti-inflammatory) or Oregano (a powerful antibiotic), which are vigorous and will survive being buried under frost and annuals like Basil (powerful antispasmodic, antiviral, anti-infectious, antibacterial, soothes the stomach), and sometimes Echinacea (boosts white blood cell production, immune system support, anti-inflammatory and antiviral properties, good for colds, flu, and infection), which are better grown indoors or annually.

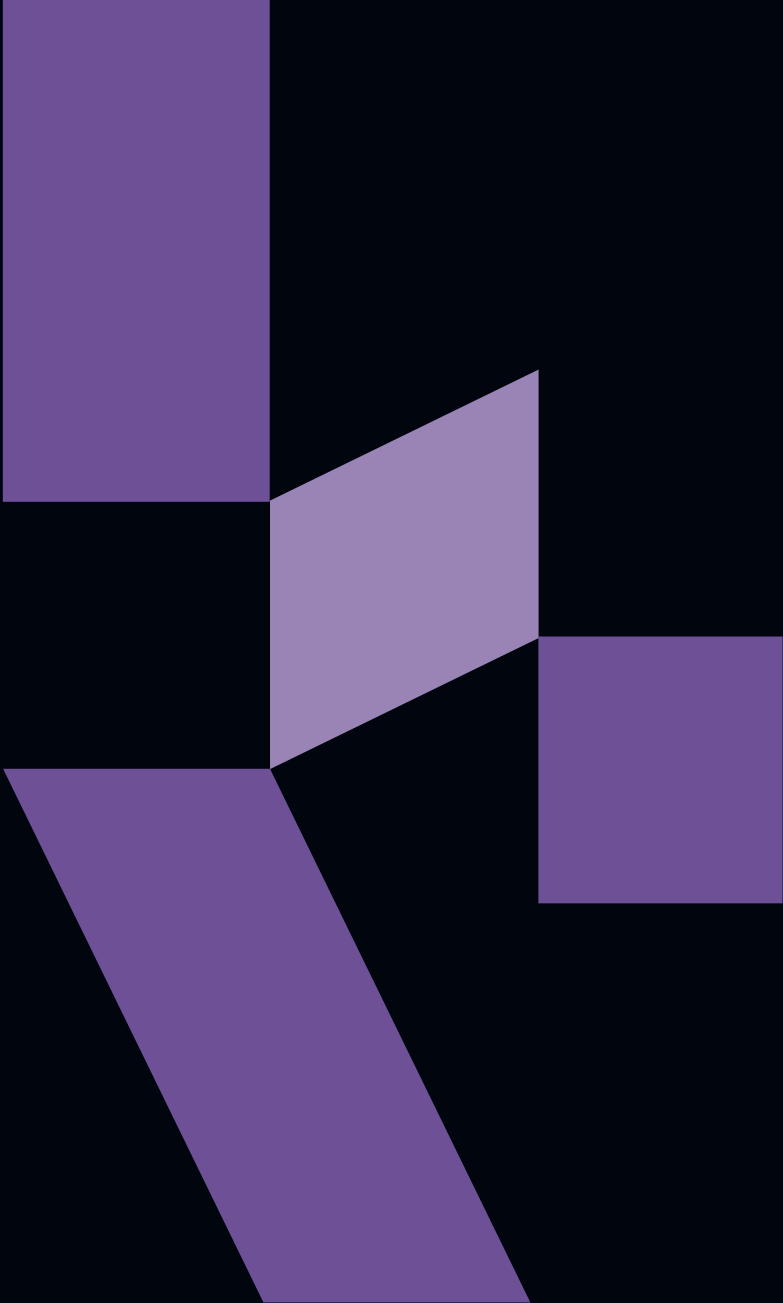
Rewilding Habitat Lake and wetland garden

Throughout the garden we are working to improve habitats for wildlife and making spaces for nature to improve our biodiversity on site to ensure that KentCOG is a sustainable haven for surrounding wildlife. We aim to create and maintain habitats on site that cater to native and local plants, birds, amphibians, reptiles, insects and mammals. This will allow parts of the garden to be similar to intact wild areas nearby allowing natural systems to interact and establish an equilibrium, ultimately minimising the need for gardener maintenance and intervention. Biodiversity pockets can also play an essential role in biological pest control, in addition to promoting biodiversity and generally benefitting the wider environment.

Small water bodies are vital for freshwater biodiversity but remain largely overlooked and widely excluded from policies that might protect them. Small standing waters (ponds and small lakes) are particularly important compared to other freshwaters. In all landscapes so far investigated – including different parts of Europe and multiple UK landscapes – ponds surprisingly support a larger proportion of freshwater biodiversity than lakes or rivers – and are especially important for uncommon freshwater species.

Therefore collectively, at the landscape scale, small standing waters are critical to maintaining freshwater biodiversity. The targeted protection, management and creation of small standing waters to restore freshwater landscapes is particularly important for populations of threatened species

Making clean new ponds is one of the simplest and most effective ways to protect freshwater wildlife. New clean water ponds can quickly become exceptionally rich habitats, supporting sensitive plants and animals. Ponds are easy and cheap to make, and in the face of widespread pollution and climate change, pond creation is one of the quickest, simplest and most affordable things we can do to benefit freshwater wildlife



Department, Building,
University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent CT2 ???

kent.ac.uk

University of
Kent