

The Transition Network has a growing section on 'ensuring land access'. Examples and further ideas can be found here on this website. One example from the chapter follows:

Environmental Change Makers is a voluntary group in the USA. They began by working with a local church who were keen for them to dig up their lawn and make a food garden and now work widely within the community. They offer the following tips from their work so far.

- Land access that depends on a single decision maker (church priest, school principal) is much easier to move forward.
- It doesn't matter if the groups align perfectly on why they want a garden. For instance, the church members aren't fully on-board with our peak oil concerns, but they have other reasons for wanting a garden in that space. If you can structure a "win/win" situation, you have the potential for a great partnership.
- When you can, get a shovel in the dirt early, even in a small way. It invigorates the whole team, enthusiasm builds, everyone gets a taste of the possibilities, and things get moving a whole lot faster.
- Land access that is tied up in large-scale politics is very challenging to obtain. Despite high visibility, it is probably not the best place to start because it takes so long to show results
- Using resources (community connections, know-how, materials sources, etc) from one small project to build another small project helps spread impact quickly and very visually. Environmental Change Makers brought the community connections they had made via the church garden to bear on a school garden and that helped the groundbreaking happen much sooner.
- Capitalising on an existing trend — like the Jamie Oliver movement for school dinners — really helps move things along quickly.
- Projects don't have to be big to be very successful, and to get lots of publicity and

attention. The church garden isn't a lot of square footage, but it sure gains media attention, has built community familiarity, and has won neighbourhood affection.

- Starting small allows you to take care of and maintain the land well. There is a huge learning curve — how to take care of the land, how to build the soil back to fertility, how to achieve/maintain high levels of productivity. You don't need criticism for under-maintained or abandoned-looking land to add to your burden while you're just starting.
- Design things so that the garden is highly visually attractive. Our first garden was built on a front lawn in an area where (we later learned) the homeowners association prohibited front-yard vegetables. Yet those same people featured our garden on the neighborhood Garden Tour in spring 2009! If you make it aesthetically beautiful, it wins people over.

www.transitionnetwork.org/patterns/ongoing-deepening/ensuring-land-access



home grown - community owned information sheet



finding land



Check for suitable sites locally

- Look around and see if you can find unused land in walking or cycling distance from your area.
- The best way of finding who the local landowners are is often by talking to neighbours or long-term locals.
- Look on google maps using the satellite option(www.maps.google.co.uk).

HogCO can:

- Help you to find representatives from your local council
- Deliver a 'Local Food Roadshow' that highlights the importance of local food and gives examples of projects around Devon.
- Approach landowners on your group's behalf However, it can be more effective if a representative from your local group makes the initial contact - you will talk the same language with regard to local conditions and you know the needs of your group best and what you can commit to.
- Assist in further negotiations regarding leases/licence for land.
- Fund professional legal advice, where appropriate.

Council Owned Land

Parish / Town Council

Your local government representatives will often know of efforts in the past to set up community projects (such as allotments), possible land that may be available, landowners who may be open to your approaches and other ideas. Make sure you read your Parish Plan and find out what mention (if any) there is about community growing, allotments, community activities, environmental considerations, health and well-being commitments or climate change measures. All of these could be relevant to your growing project.

Village hall

Your village or town will have a range of community buildings, including a community hall. There may be areas for planting somewhere adjacent to the building - or how about climbers or trees up a sunny wall? Community buildings may also own other land in the area - maybe you just have to ask. To find out more, talk to a member of the village hall committee. Contact details are posted on the hall notice board or ask your parish clerk for details.

Playing fields

Have you considered the land surrounding local playing fields? There could be verges or land that is not used for sports and you could save the playing fields association money on mowing and maintenance. Try to think about something that may fit in with their priorities of exercise and outdoor play - a green gym, sensory garden, 'digging for victory'? There will either be a playing fields association that will have contact details on the local changing rooms or notice boards, or they may be managed by the parish council or village hall association.



Schools

Many schools now have growing projects within their grounds, and may have difficulty maintaining them over holidays and weekends. There is great scope for partnership with schools who are keen on furthering their 'green agenda'. There are also obligations for schools to be open to the wider community, so get in touch!

Railways

Are there any verges that are unused around local transport facilities? Growing projects including orchards could be ideal for strips of under-used land.

Hospitals and Surgeries

Some doctors are now prescribing 'x hours of gardening per week' instead of prescriptions, as the therapeutic benefits of horticulture become more widely recognised. Formal partnerships are now in place between some surgeries and local growing projects. Your group may offer just what the managers of the hospital or surgery are looking for. Occupational therapy units, people with different needs, children and more could benefit from a community garden nearby.

Church

Some churches own significant amounts of land and may be sympathetic to your community project. The Church's regional and national

networks may have wider environmental commitments, and your project may help them meet their own aims. You may also help them save money, such as mowing and maintenance costs, by taking responsibility for a site .

Housing Associations

Many housing developments may have under-used areas, and again you may save them money and time, and help them meet their 'community engagement' targets.

National Trust

The National Trust have helped three HogCO groups so far and have a great 'local food' campaign. If there is National Trust land near you, get in touch with them.



Other options

- **Advertise or write an article** for your local newsletter, newspaper, shop notice board or website. Go on local radio with your idea.
- **Look on the Landshare website:** (www.landshare.net) When you join (for free) you can post a 'land wanted' request.
- **Have a public meeting** and invite local landowners and the community. This can help generate enthusiasm for the project and convince landowners that the group has the skills and commitment to take the project forward. You may choose to combine the meeting with HogCo's Roadshow, a seed swap, or short film.
- **Contact local environment groups** - is there a transition initiative in your area? Food groups are often very active and you may have shared interests. Check at www.transitionnetwork.org projects.
- **Public Footpaths** - is there a site that is not currently accessible by foot but would be a great community garden? Your community could seek to create a new footpath - see Devon County Council's Rights of Way web page at www.devon.gov.uk/rowip

Be prepared

Before talking to the council or going to a parish council meeting, clarify for yourself:

- what area and type of land you are looking for
- how many people will be part of your group
- how long you would like the site for
- your group's aims and aspirations
- what you want to plant/grow.

It is a good idea to have a written proposal to present to the council, so they can take it away and think about it. Ideally this would include a site design.

You can find details of your local councillors on local notice boards, website or in newsletters.

When talking to land-owners

No matter who you are talking to, it always helps to highlight the benefits to the landowner, as well as to your group.

The landowner's interests may include:

Financial considerations

The landowner may currently only receive a minimal 'grass keep' for agricultural land. This can be as low as £30 an acre annually. If your group has 10 members and can offer £20 a year as rent, that is £200 an acre annually - a significant improvement on the current arrangement. However, they may also receive a 'single farm payment' for which they would need to re-negotiate if the parcel of land they are using for stock changes. It is good practice to offer to cover whatever loss this may entail (this could be around £30 pounds, depending on the parcel of land you are looking to lease).

Flexibility

The landowner will want to know under what legal arrangement your group will use the land. HogCO has produced a legal toolkit that covers many key issues. It's key to emphasise that conditions/ clauses can be written into any agreement that protect the landowners rights, including putting the land back into the condition it was prior to leasing, no glass on site, only formal group members to access site etc. All HogCO groups have one copy of this toolkit (and 2 further toolkits addressing planning and access issues). More copies can be requested or downloaded from our website: www.hogco-devonrcc.org.uk



No hassle

Landowners may be put off if the group appears disorganised or unclear about their project. Delegate one or two people to contact the landowner, and make it clear what you are interested in, and what you can offer.

Being a good neighbour

You can emphasise the importance of the land for the wider community - make sure you have evidence of how important the project is (is it part of the Parish Plan; talk about how many people came to a public meeting and expressed interest; is there an allotments waiting list; what partners are interested (i.e. school, local college, retirement home).

Corporate social responsibility - Land held by Charitable Trust, National Park or large estates may have internal targets to meet, including greater numbers of the community accessing their land, commitment to sourcing local produce or to implement measures to reduce their environmental impact. Your group may help them achieve their own goals - benefits all round!

Positive examples

Remember to give examples of case studies where successful partnerships exist - information about all the HogCO groups are on our website, where there are groups working on land owned by village halls, playing fields, local councils, private landowners, housing associations, prison land and private and public trust land. Talk to us if you can't find an example that meets your particular case and we'll hunt for one!

