

INNER WEST

Community Gardens Guidelines

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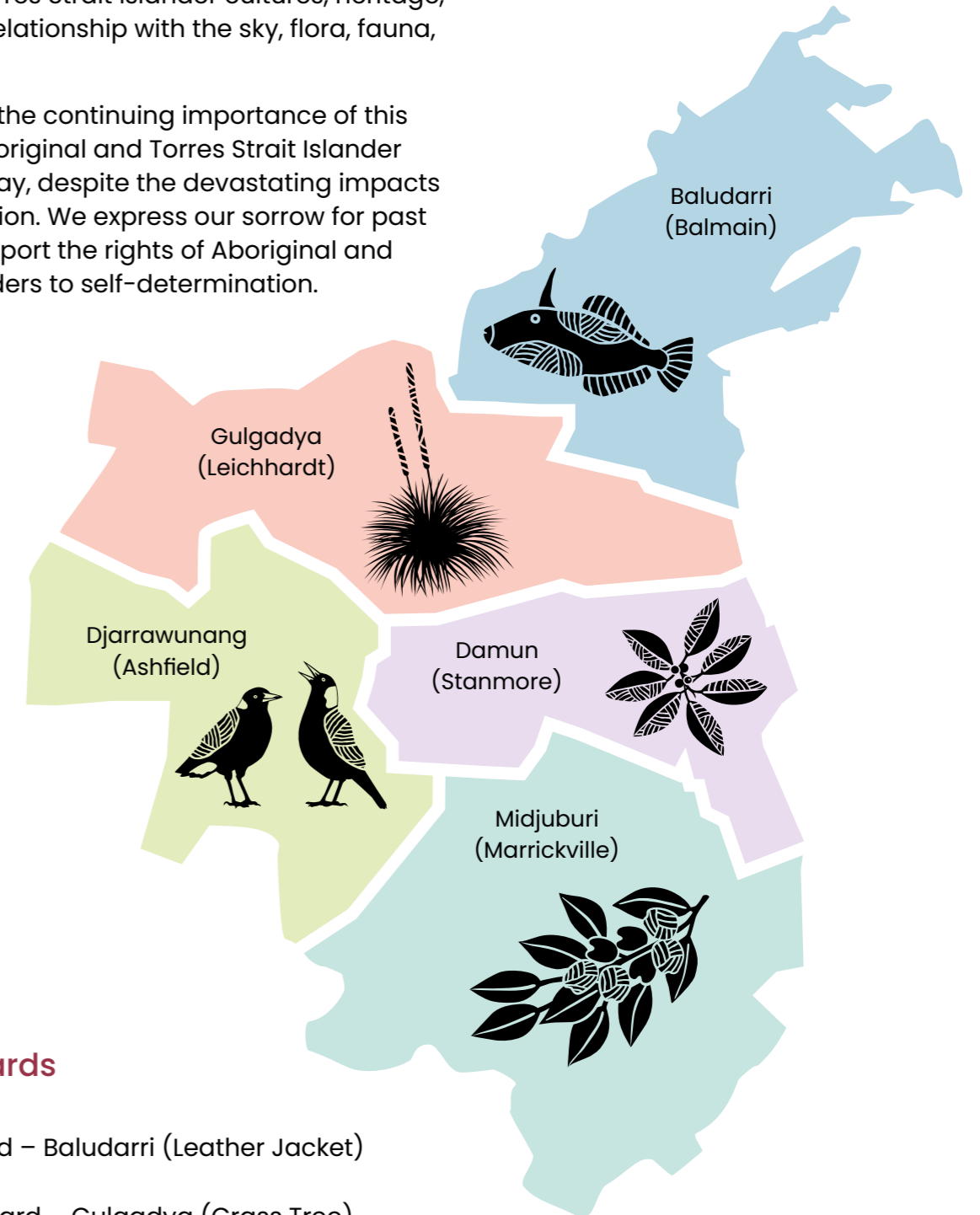
Title	Community Gardens Guidelines
Summary	These guidelines are to assist community members operating or seeking to establish community gardens on Inner West Council land, and council officers.
Document Type	Guideline These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the Community Gardens Policy.
Relevant Strategic Plan Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strategic Direction 1: An ecologically sustainable Inner West• Strategic Direction 2: Liveable, connected neighbourhoods and transport.• Strategic Direction 4: Healthy, resilient and caring communities
Legislative Reference	Local Government Act 1993
Related Council Documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grants and Fee Scale Policy• Inclusion Action Plan• Land and Property Policy• Living Streets Verge Garden and Adopt-a-Spot Policy and Guidelines• Parks Plans of Management
Version Control	See last page



Acknowledgement of Country

Council acknowledges the Gadigal and Wangal peoples of the Sydney Basin, who are the Traditional Custodians of these lands. We celebrate the survival of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, heritage, beliefs and their relationship with the sky, flora, fauna, land and water.

We acknowledge the continuing importance of this relationship to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living today, despite the devastating impacts of European invasion. We express our sorrow for past injustices and support the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to self-determination.



Inner West Wards

- Balmain Ward – Baludarra (Leather Jacket)
- Leichhardt Ward – Gulgadya (Grass Tree)
- Ashfield Ward – Djarrawunang (Magpie)
- Stanmore Ward – Damun (Port Jackson Fig)
- Marrickville Ward – Midjuburi (Lillypilly)

Left: Fish Traps by Edwards Clarke, Bay Run
Above: Council Ward Artwork by Mumbulla Creative



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Published: March 2024

These guidelines are correct at the time of publishing and Inner West Council shall not be liable for technical or other errors or omissions contained herein. The guidelines support the Inner West Community Gardens Policy.

Purpose

These Guidelines are to support community gardening through the framework set out in Council's Community Gardens Policy. They are to assist community members seeking to establish or manage a community garden on Council land, and Council officers.

Scope

In scope

This policy applies to all community gardens on Council land in the Inner West local government area.

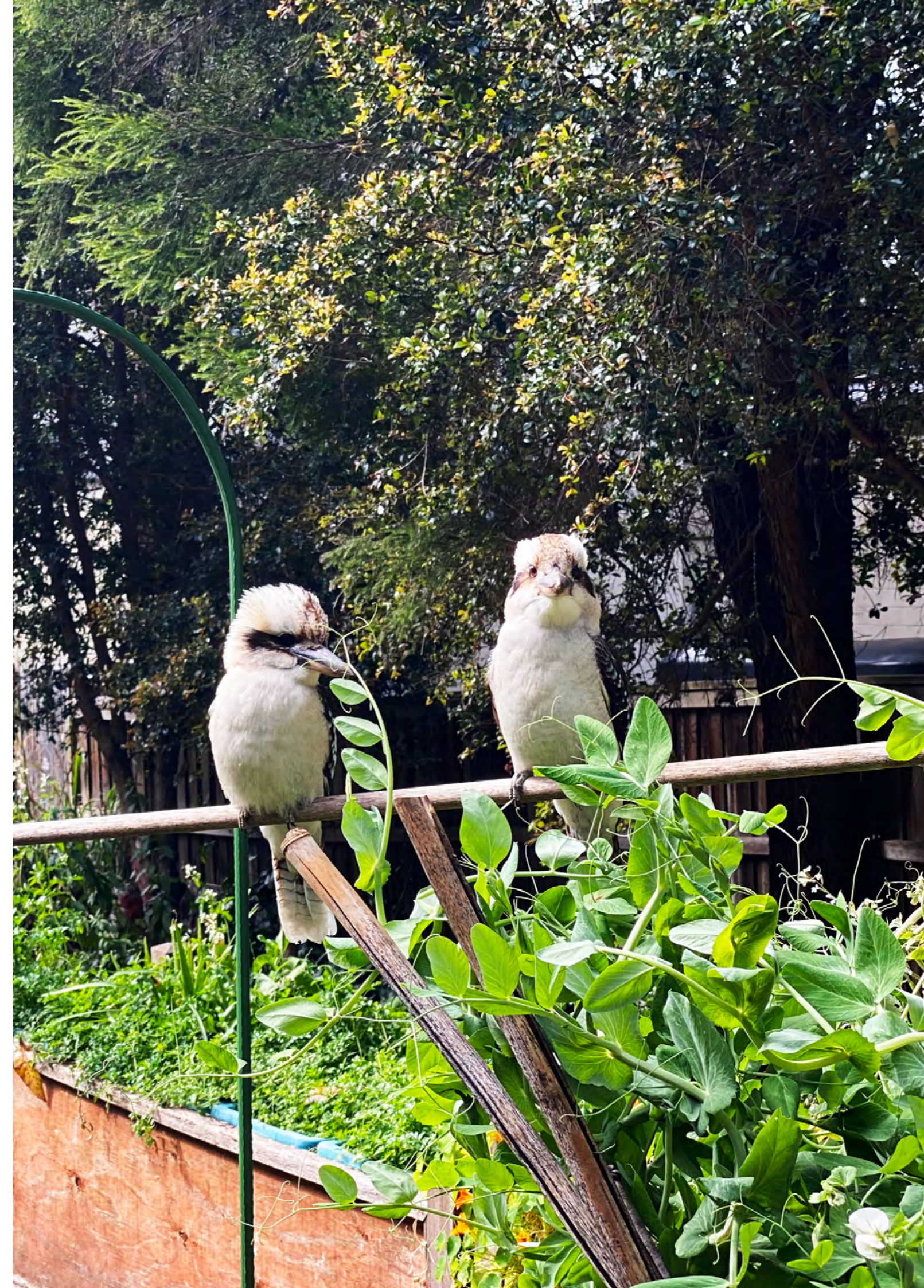
Out of scope

This policy does not apply to:

- Verges, laneways, and other areas of the road reserve
- Properties that are not owned or managed by Council for example privately owned land, and some Crown Land

Definitions

Community garden	Community-managed space for non-commercial food growing and other gardening activities, accessible to and for the benefit of the local community
Community garden group ("group")	Group managing, or seeking to establish, a community garden. For Council to form agreement with it, the group must as a minimum be incorporated and registered with NSW Fair Trading as an association
Council land	Land owned or under the care, control, and management of Inner West Council, which is both zoned as RE1 Public Recreation and allows for community gardening in its park Plan of Management



Right: Summer Hill Community Garden

Introduction

Council aims to enable and encourage community gardens that contribute to an ecologically sustainable Inner West, liveable, connected neighbourhoods, and healthy resilient and caring communities.

In the Inner West, community gardens are designed, built and maintained by community members. Community guardianship strengthens the longevity, sustainability, and success of community gardens.

Where to start

Establishing a community garden is a significant, long-term project that requires ongoing effort and involvement from community members – even before the garden exists.

Being aware of what's involved and setting realistic expectations of timeframes means your group is more likely to see the project through.

So before you get started, it's helpful to ask:

- Is there an existing community garden to join?
- Have you visited other community gardens to see how they work and understand what's involved with starting and maintaining a garden?
- Is there enough community interest – both in numbers, level of commitment and enthusiasm?
- Is there wider community support for the proposed community garden?

Forming a group

A key component of successful community gardens is a committed group of people who work together. Groups must be non-commercial and not-for-profit.

If you plan to establish a community garden on Council land, your group will need to demonstrate to Council that you have broad community support for the project and that you are capable of managing the garden long-term. Look for opportunities to form relationships and build community with local people.

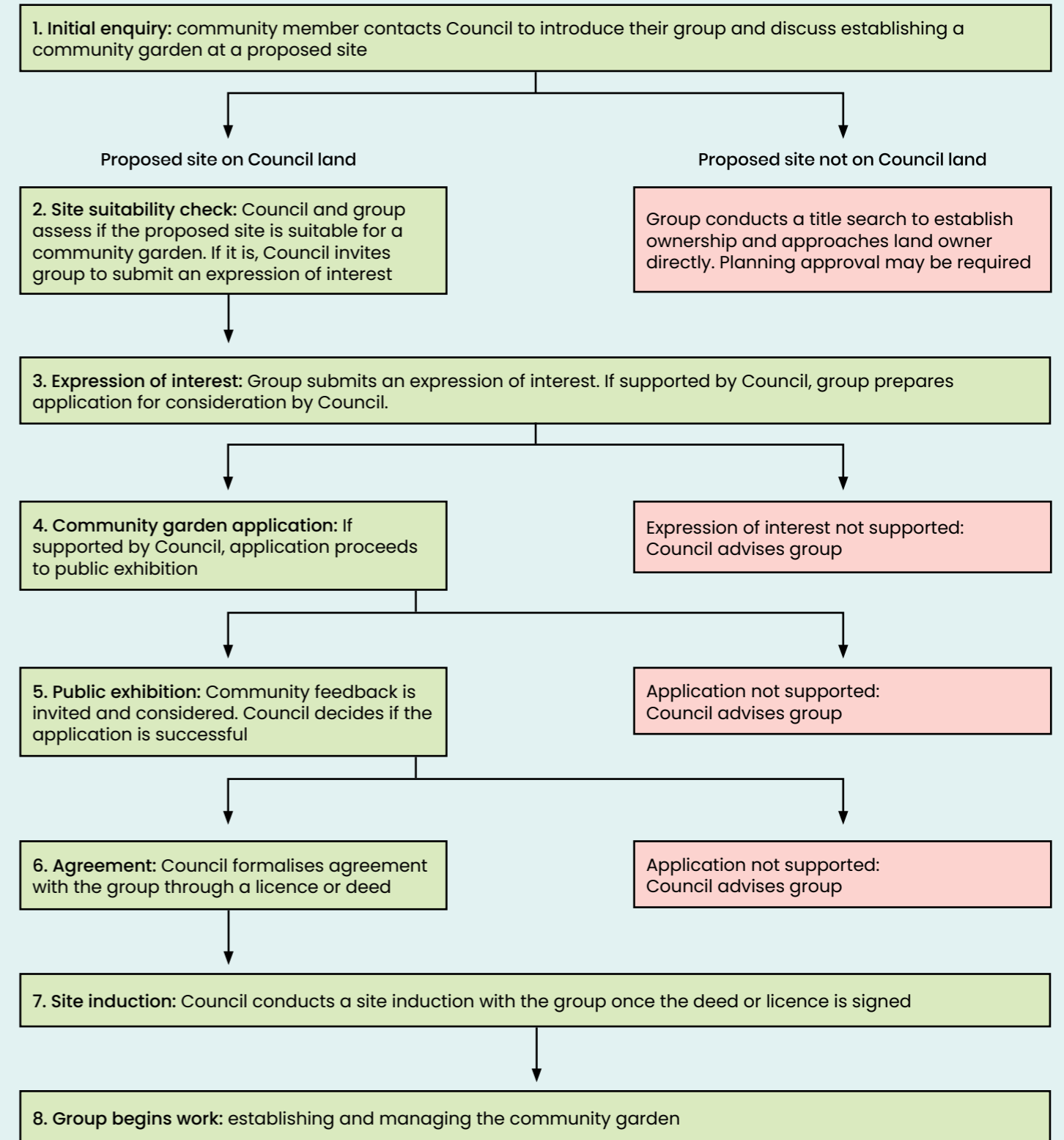
Many skills will be useful as you develop and maintain the community garden. People skills are invaluable including ability to work with diverse people, relationship building and volunteer management. Understanding of gardening, horticulture, land management, design and construction are helpful. You will also need people who can organise meetings, complete administration tasks, raise funds, engage people and communicate well.

It is essential you take time to build relationships so that group members can identify and make the most of everyone's skills and interests. Successful groups use their strengths and share the load.

Council agreement

The process for starting a community garden on Council land is stepped out in the flow chart. It relates to gardens on Council land but may be of assistance for community gardens on non-Council land. The process is designed to support the establishment of an independent and successful group, and a well-planned and well-resourced garden. If you are interested in setting up a community garden on land that is not owned or managed by Council (such as school or church land), your group must have permission from the relevant landowner or manager. Note that planning approval may be required from Council.

Procedure: Starting a community garden on Council land



Step 1: Contact Council staff

Contact Council staff to introduce yourself and others involved, your project idea and identify the proposed site. You can find current staff contact details at innerwest.nsw.gov.au/communitygardens

Staff will investigate:

- The land tenure (whether the proposed garden location is on Council land)
- The land use category and what it allows or restricts
- Whether the relevant park Plan of Management authorises community gardening
- The site's capacity to accommodate a community garden - there are many competing demands on public open space in the Inner West
- Whether there is demonstrated interest from the community (eg number in your group and their commitment/interest)
- Potential benefits to the community.



Step 2: Attend a site suitability check

Council staff will visit the site with your group. When considering if the site is suitable for a community garden they will take into account:

- **Location and community context:** Is the proposed community garden in keeping with Council's Plan of Management for the site; how will the proposed garden affect the open space values of the park; has the site been identified for wildlife protection; what is the potential for connection or conflict with park users and neighbours; is there benefit in having a garden here?
- **Safety:** Are there safety or health concerns; can these be addressed; is there good passive surveillance (eg can the proposed garden be seen from the road, nearby houses or retail areas); what is the potential for community activation?
- **Access:** Can people get there and access the site eg does it have accessible footpaths and facilities, is it close to public transport, accessible parking, and is there access for deliveries?
- **Solar aspect:** Is the site suitable for growing food, ie does it receive full sunlight for at least five to six hours per day?
- **Terrain:** Is the site appropriate for the activities that your group wants to undertake eg is it relatively flat, protected from wind, sheltered?
- **Size:** Is the site appropriate for the project and likely size of your group?
- **Water:** Is there access to a water supply or possibility of harvesting rainwater from buildings?

Left: Ashfield Park Community Garden



Step 3: Express your interest in writing

If the site is suitable, Council will invite your group to submit a simple expression of interest that outlines:

- The exact location and size of the proposed garden.
- Your group's shared vision for the proposed garden and its benefits to the community.
- Contact details for your group. Your group may not have a formal structure at this stage but includes several community members committed to developing the project. This organising group will eventually prepare the application.
- The size of the organising group and longer term proposed size of your group's membership.
- Interest from the broader community and any wider support for a community garden at the proposed location.

If your expression of interest is supported by Council, staff will meet with you explain what is required for the full application, and what Council needs in order to agree to your group's use of the land as a community garden.

Step 4: Apply to Council

Once your group is functioning well, has good community support and has planned out resources (volunteer time, skills and expertise, materials, funding) and processes required to establish and maintain the garden, you are ready to prepare your application.

Groups that take the time to plan and design their project together are more likely to be successful.

Council will provide advice and support to your group and step you through the application process. You will submit the application online, including key documents like the site plan and your group's operational plan.

Some design elements and activities may require planning approval, which is a separate process to the community garden application.

Site plan

The site plan forms part of your agreement with Council. It is an aerial photo or diagram that shows physical boundaries and the layout of the proposed garden within the park. It shows existing and planned layout and any planned structures (e.g. garden beds, compost systems, water tank, tool storage). It should identify group and Council assets.

Community garden operational plan

Your group's operational plan defines the overall vision and objectives for the garden, describes the roles and responsibilities of the group members, and how the group will work together. It forms part of your agreement with Council and covers:

- **Governance:** eg code of conduct, decision-making and conflict resolution processes, membership and management structure
- **Garden and group management:** eg induction process, planned activities, use of space, risk management plan, gardening approach, resourcing plan, and communication
- **Access and inclusion:** eg how your group will invite and include members, visitors and the wider community to participate in activities and benefit from the garden

It should show that your group will comply with the law and Council's Community Gardens Policy by describing how the group will:

- Work safely and manage risks
- Protect the environment
- Ensure the public can visit the community garden at all times
- Maintain a pleasant, safe and welcoming environment
- Establish and follow a clear code of conduct and conflict resolution process
- Maintain a register of members and volunteers, and a record of activities, and share information proactively with Council staff
- Comply with conditions of your deed or licence
- Establish and maintain a contact person for the group, and advise council as soon as practical if the contact person changes
- Support use of the community garden for education and demonstration purposes



Harvesting Madagascar beans



Access and Inclusion: site access

Community gardens must be open at all times for the public to visit.

Gardens in public spaces can be subject to theft or damage including those that have high fences and locked gates. Fostering an inclusive, regularly used space that is valued by the community can be a positive way to reduce this risk.

Access and Inclusion: accessibility

Community gardens should be designed and operated to be as accessible as possible so that people with diverse experiences, abilities and needs are able to participate.

To make the garden accessible groups should consider physical garden layout and structures, garden and task design, training, and communication. Groups are expected to make any reasonable adjustment sought to enable any person to participate in the community garden.

**Access and Inclusion: social inclusion**

Community gardens should be welcoming and inclusive places. Inclusive practices should be encouraged and demonstrated by groups. Consider how to create resources and opportunities that mean others in the community can learn, connect, work and have a voice, for example:

- Foster positive relationships with park visitors and the broader community
- Create an accepting and welcoming group culture
- Offer a range of ways to be involved
- Communicate clearly and simply in plain English or community languages about community garden group activities and a range of ways to get involved
- Enable sharing of culturally diverse gardening practices
- Grow culturally relevant foods
- Recognise and celebrate everyone's contributions

For many cultures, food is the central focus in connecting with land, culture, language and sharing with family, friends and communities. Community gardens can be an important example of connecting culturally diverse groups and growing culturally diverse foods, by allowing participants to share culture and create socially cohesive communities. Examples are cross-cultural exchanges of gardening, foods grown and nutrition, and knowledge sharing by members around cultural traditions, food and recipes.

Resourcing

Community garden groups are expected to achieve long-term financial sustainability and self-sufficiency.

Your operational plan will cover how you will fund or resource development and maintenance of the garden which usually includes:

- Public liability insurance and incorporated association fees
- Volunteers
- Communications (eg promotional material, mail-outs)
- Installation and maintenance of any new assets eg garden beds, compost systems, rainwater irrigation, tool storage
- Sourcing and maintaining materials like tools, mulch, soil and plants
- Tradespeople or professionals, if needed
- Administration and reporting

Many groups raise funds through annual membership fees, which can be a consistent income stream as well as applying for grants from other bodies, and sourcing donations from community members and businesses.

Your application is an opportunity to demonstrate to Council that your group will establish and manage a successful community garden that will benefit the Inner West community. Once this is clear, Council will invite feedback from the wider community.

Managing risks and working safely

All community garden groups working on Council land must satisfactorily complete a risk management process as part of the application. It is essential for groups to identify and manage risks associated with undertaking a publicly accessible community garden project, which must be safe for the public to visit. Groups must maintain a register of members and volunteers, and a record of activities. Council and groups have a duty of care to maintain a safe environment for the community who access community gardens.



Denison Road Community Garden at Dulwich Hill Fair

Why raised garden beds?

There is widespread soil contamination in the Inner West. New garden beds must be raised with a barrier to the soil, such as geotech fabric.

They should be at least 450mm tall, or tall enough to accommodate plants' root systems.

Any soil or compost brought onsite must meet relevant Australian Standards.

This precautionary approach has been adopted because of the high likelihood that soil testing will confirm contamination. The certified, comprehensive soil testing required is expensive, complex, and could create a burden for groups.

Step 5: Public exhibition

Your group's application, site plan, and community garden operational plan will be put on public exhibition for 28 days so the wider community can give feedback on the proposal. All feedback will be considered by Council in making a decision.

Step 6: Formalise agreement with Council

By this stage, your group must have a clear and identified legal structure so it can enter a deed or licence with Council to use the land.

If your group does not have a formal structure, you must register as an incorporated association with NSW Fair Trading (fairtrading.nsw.gov.au).

Becoming an Incorporated Association provides groups 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.

Incorporated associations must have a minimum number of members and establish a management committee with annually elected office bearers. Having an elected committee helps support transparency, decision making and sharing responsibility and workload.

You must supply your group's certificate of registration as an Incorporated Association to Council before the licence or deed is developed.

Council determines specific conditions for each agreement by considering the context of the community garden including the physical site and nature of the group. Some activities that are allowed may require development approval which is a separate process.

Length of agreements, revocations and renewals

The initial licence or deed will be for two years with an option for an additional three-year agreement after this period.

Council reserves the right to revoke or not renew a licence or deed if:

- the group disbands or ceases to function
- the site becomes unsafe
- the group has breached the conditions of its licence or deed
- requirements of the Community Gardens Policy are not met
- appropriate insurance cover is not maintained

Step 7: Site induction

Council will conduct a site induction with your group when the licence or deed is executed. Groups must be covered by public liability insurance before any work or activities begin on the site.

Insurance

Council requires community garden groups working on Council land to hold appropriate insurances. Council provides personal accident insurance cover for individual group members and registered volunteers undertaking approved community garden activities. However, community garden groups must ensure they take out public liability insurance cover to the value of \$20,000,000 for any third-party claims.

Any claim made against Council's insurance policy for an individual will be subject to an assessment by Council's insurer to determine whether the claim meets the requirements of the policy, whether there is a record of activities undertaken and by whom and whether appropriate risk management and safety practices have been adhered to by the individual.



Right: Mort Bay community garden

Step 8: Group begins work, establishing and managing the garden

Once the deed or licence is signed, you can get on with creating and maintaining a successful community garden, to be enjoyed by garden members and the broader community.

Council will liaise with your group and support your success through:

- Advice and support
- Site visits
- Inner West Community Garden Network meetings and updates
- Information sharing
- Listing for your garden and group on Council's community gardens webpage
- Promotion of community gardens through Council channels

Breaches of Community Gardens Policy or Guidelines

Breaches of the Community Gardens Policy or Guidelines may result in an investigation of the alleged breach in line with other relevant Council policies including the Code of Conduct.

Any alleged criminal offence or allegation of corrupt conduct will be referred to the relevant external agency.



Watering at Denison Road Community Garden

Assistance available to all community garden groups

Many community gardens are on land that is not managed by Council, including gardens on church and school land.

Council support is available to all groups running community gardens in the Inner West eg:

- Access to contestable grant funding for the establishment or development of community garden projects, in line with Council's Grants and Fee Scale Policy and Grant Program Guidelines
- Promotion on Council's website and communications channels such as event listings and publications
- In-kind support where resources are available (e.g., native seedlings and mulch)
- Free participation in the local community garden network to support peer-to-peer learning and development
- Free or reduced cost access to community venues, in line with the Grants and Fee Scale Policy

Council looks forward to working with you and seeing your group and garden grow.

To find out more about community gardens and urban food growing, visit:

- Local community gardens, see innerwest.nsw.gov.au/communitygardens
- Community Gardens Australia communitygarden.org.au
- Sustain Australia sustain.org.au

Right: Ashfield harvest



Administrative Changes

From time-to-time circumstances may change leading to the need for minor administrative changes to this document. Where an update does not materially alter this document, such a change may be made including branding, Council Officer titles or department changes and legislative name or title changes are considered minor in nature and not required to be formally endorsed.

Version Control – Guidelines History

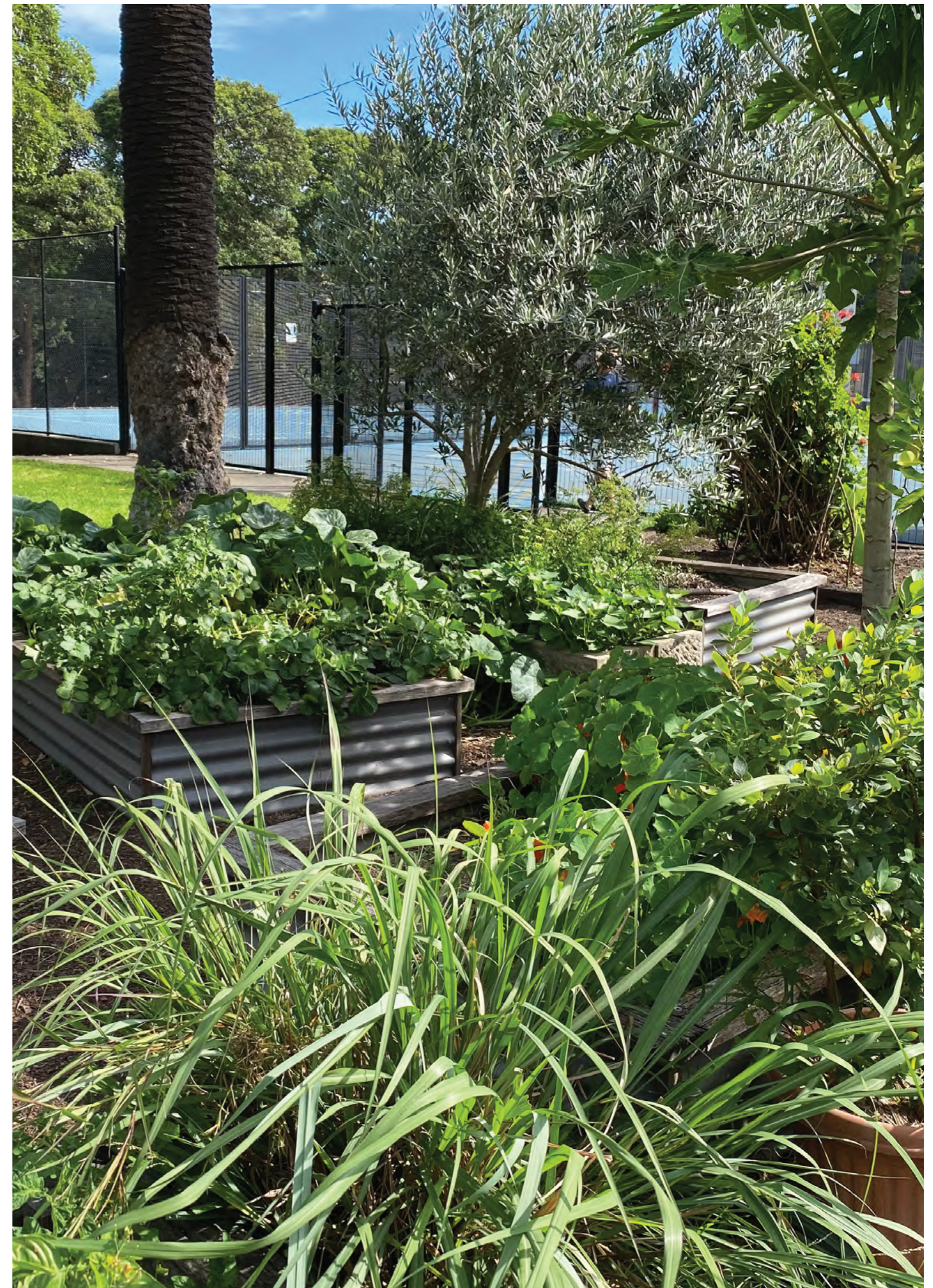
These Guidelines will be formally reviewed every three years, from the date of approval or as required, in conjunction with the overarching Policy.

Governance use only:

Document	Community Gardens Guidelines	<i>Uncontrolled Copy When Printed</i>	
Custodian	Urban Sustainability Manager	Version #	Version 2
Approved By	Director Planning	ECM Document #	26973471
Next Review Date	2027		

The below history of the document must be updated and must be accurate, all owners of Policies are to ensure that all previously approved versions of the Guidelines are included in the below table and that all previous versions have been appropriately removed from circulation to ensure staff are utilising the right document.

Amended by	Changes made	Date Adopted
Environment and Sustainability	Minor edits and structural changes for clarity and to align with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Strategic Plan • Other Council policies • Council delegations and responsibilities 	March 2024
Environment and Sustainability, Community	Access and inclusion content expanded and restructured	
Environment and Sustainability, Governance	Risk and Insurance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requirement for groups to register with NSW Fair Trading as incorporated associations at minimum made clearer • Edits to align with Council's insurer's requirements 	
Environment and Sustainability, Infrastructure	Updates to reflect responsibilities for assets	
Environment and Sustainability	New Guideline Replacing the Neighbourhood Food Gardening Guidelines	Feb 2021



Right: Punch Park Community Garden

For further information about
community gardens in the Inner West,
visit innerwest.nsw.gov.au/communitygardens