

Chaplin Community Garden An intimate street corner



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Preface

Understanding the context of our place...

The City of Bristol is one of the most historic cities in England. Founded in about 1000AD the city has always been a place of change, economic growth and innovation.

Until the First World War the fabric of the city was essentially a medieval structure centred on the cross roads of High Street, Corn Street, Broad Street and Wine Street. Even the outer structure of the city, now the inner suburbs such as St Pauls and Kingsdown, was based on medieval routes or field patterns.

Despite centuries of urban growth and densification this structure remained unchanged while building forms adapted to new uses and new architectural styles.

During the twentieth century Bristol has seen its most dramatic changes with the depopulation of the central core, bombing during the Second World War and the dominance of private motor car use. Although this period has continued the process of urban renewal and the replacement of built form, it is the Post War highway infrastructure projects that have eroded the physical fabric of the city on a scale unlike any other period.

Within this broad context, Bristol's character is defined by a variety of individual neighbourhoods with a distinctive character informed by their topography, landscape, views, layout, land use, social development, architectural style and materials.

An Our Place document is intended to help explain how a specific area has arrived at its current state from its origins, and highlight the key features that define the area as it exists today.

This understanding provides the basis from which appropriate changes to the area can be achieved, which will enable it to grow and succeed whilst still respecting its historic legacy and unique sense of place. Ultimately it will help to deliver local plan policies particularly around issues concerning local character and distinctiveness.

The Our Place process encourages greater participation by communities in defining the character of their neighbourhood and planning for the future of their place.

Our Place character mapping is an important stage in defining the identity of a place that informs the Spirit of Place process that follows a co-creative place evaluation approach as defined by the National Trust (<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/our-conservation-principles>).

Understanding Our Spirit of Place...

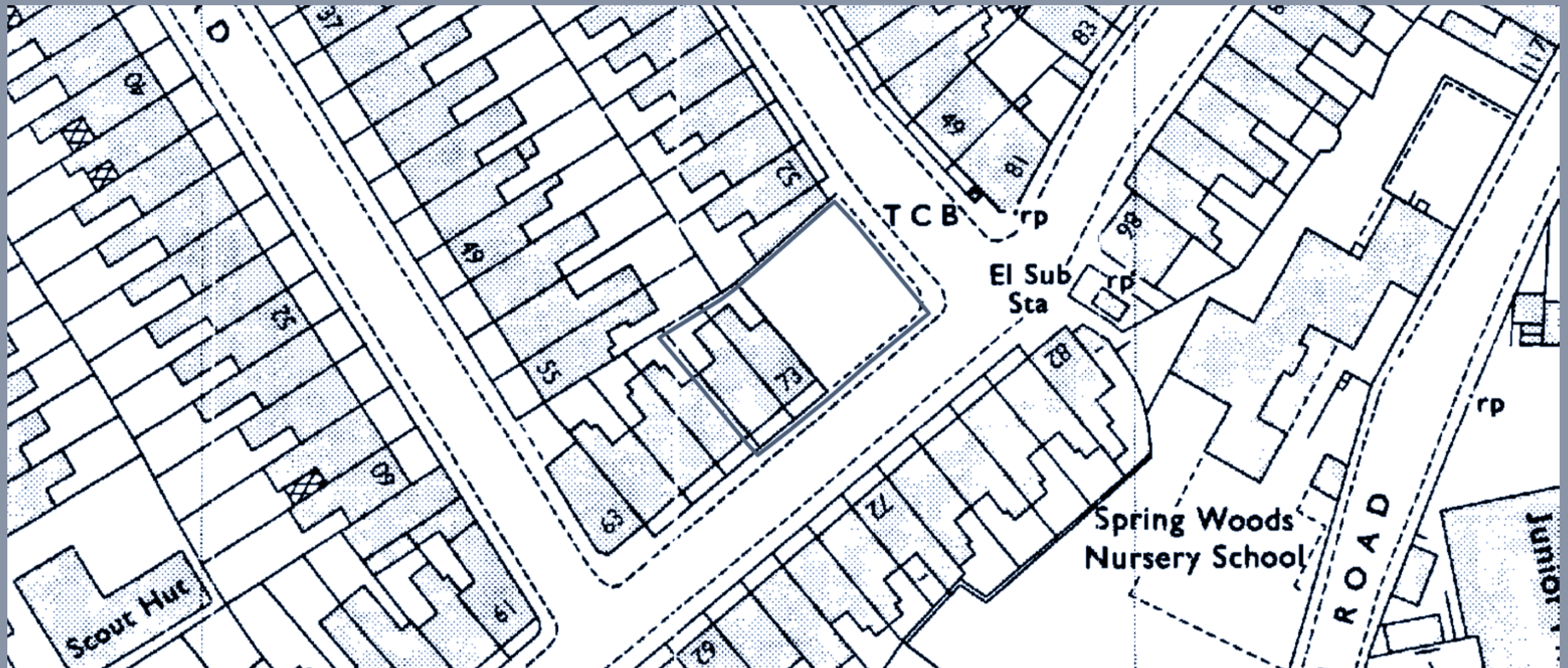
Spirit of Place brings together key stakeholders to unpick and identify what makes a place distinctive and unique. This understanding is built from the emotional reactions people have to the physical elements such as scenery and buildings, cultural aspects, heritage, and a sites aesthetic qualities.

Bristol City Council have adopted this approach as a way of understanding what their parks and green spaces mean to the people that use them. Through a series of workshops run at each site BCC will work with park users and managers to create a set of guiding principals that will act as a touchstone for future management of that place.

The finished Spirit of Place documents will be publicly accessible and will be published alongside the Bristol Future Parks Expression of Interest pilot. This aims to identify new sustainable income opportunities and community activities whilst also respecting the natural and cultural heritage within our parks and green spaces. The themes and principals identified in the Spirit of Place document will form part of the decision-making process.

Introduction

1



Purpose, scope and status

Policy Context

A local area is largely defined by its physical character and distinctiveness. Understanding and defining this local character significantly contributes to conserving an area’s identity. For this reason local character and distinctiveness is a material consideration of any planning proposal.

The over-arching planning policy is the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which sets out the Government’s planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied at a local level. Of specific relevance is Section 12: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

The Core Strategy (June 2011) is the overall approach for planning in Bristol, guiding development and setting out key elements of the planning framework up to 2026 and beyond. Our Place documents form part of a suite of guidance documents referred to in Policy BCS21 of the Core Strategy and the Local Character and Distinctiveness policy in the Development Management Policy document.

Purpose and scope

This document provides an understanding of why Chaplin Community Garden is special and articulates which elements contribute to or detract from its identity.

To achieve this understanding, the document identifies the physical characteristics of the park defined by the local:

- Topography
- Views and vantage points (into, out of and within each area)
- Landmarks (positive landmarks and other notable features)
- Significant green infrastructure
- Routes
- Spaces and boundaries

Combining an Our Place process that considers physical character and significance to a Spirit of Place process that draws in wider communal aspects, enables a rich understanding of the identity of an area.

This understanding is intended to form the basis of care for places like Chaplin Community Garden and ensure that all users of the park can contribute to its positive future.

Our Spirit of Place Chaplin Community Garden

In July 2021, the community met with officers at the park to undertake an Our Place character mapping exercise and begin the Spirit of Place process.

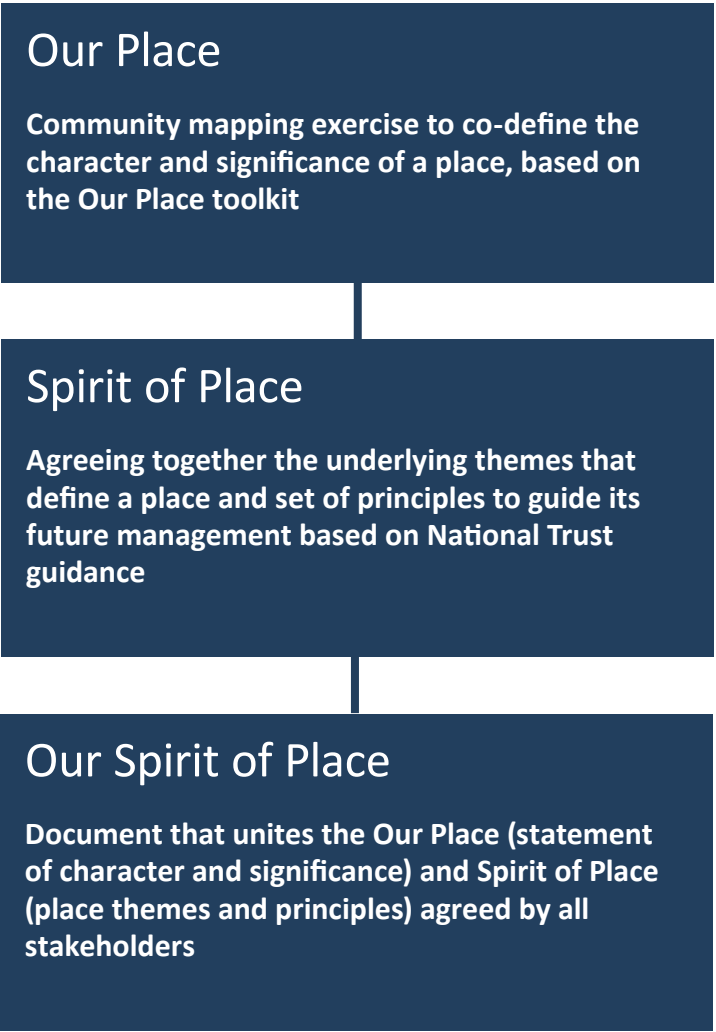
Participants were invited to complete an online survey to help define what was special and distinctive about the place and whether there were any negative aspects to the site.

Two online Spirit of Place workshops followed the Our Place mapping event. These community and officer collaborative sessions used a Flinga online white board tool to draw out themes about the place, based on the survey responses and discussions.

The Our Place character mapping and identified place themes have been combined in this document to form a co-created vision for Chaplin Community Garden that should inform the future use and management of the site.

For further information about the Our Place project visit <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/239165/Our+Place+report-revised.pdf/bcbfffe3-58a4-2297-26be-98a8ba32d8a3>

The Our Spirit of Place Process



Language of the document

Character/context

The main visual characteristics of an area resulting from the influence of geology, topography, urban layout, plot form, land use, and predominant building ages, types, form and materials.

Topography

The physical form of an area defined by natural features of relief and geographic elements such as rivers.

Views

Within the scope of this document views are discussed in terms of locations from which a view to a specific landmark, or series of features (natural or built) is possible.

Landmarks

Are defined as features that make a positive contribution to a view (long distant or local). The description of each character area refers to positive landmarks as well as 'other features within the area'. This latter type are not necessarily visible in a specific view but are of historic interest or make a positive contribution to the local character.



Introduction

Location

Location


Chaplin Community Garden is a small pocket park that lies at the corner of Chaplin Road and Nicholas Road in the Bristol suburb of Easton.

The green space is bordered by railings on the pavement edge and neighbouring residential properties. A small part of the north boundary backs on to the rear of a neighbouring rear garden of a Heron Road property.

The site contains three trees of varying ages, a grassed area and two benches around a stone focal point that is reported to have once been the base of a sundial.



Fig 1
Our Spirit of Place Community Garden
study area

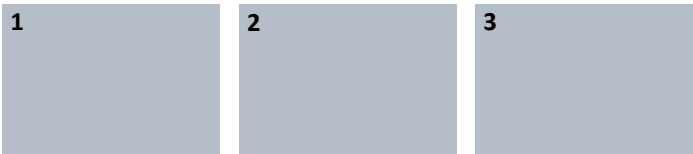
 Park area boundary



Chaplin Community Garden historic development

Fig 2
Historic development

1 1842 Tithe Map
2 1879 Ordnance Survey (OS) plan
3 1903 OS plan



- 1842**
- The residential area of Easton largely developed during the second half of the 1800s and early 1900s. By 1842 the site of the present day park was occupied by a small collection of cottages close to the lane that would become Nicholas Road as shown on this Tithe Map of the Parish of St George (1)
 - Also marked on this map are the watercourses that defined this low lying area of the parish



- 1879**
- By 1880 the Victorian residential streets were beginning to be laid out, although incomplete at the time of this Ordnance Survey Town Plan
 - At this time the terraced houses that would stand on the site of the present green space had been constructed, although the adjoining site had yet to be developed (2)



- 1903**
- By the early 1900s the neighbourhood had developed into a very densely populated residential suburb
 - All the terraced housing on the neighbouring streets including Chaplin Road (3) and Nicholas Road (4) had been completed with little amenity space beyond the small private gardens

Fig 3
Historic development

1 1950 Bristol City Council town plan

2 1972 OS plan

Chaplin Community Garden historic development



1950

- It is interesting to note that the park was not created as a result of wartime bomb damage, but survived the war as depicted on this 1950s plan that was created by the Bristol Corporation as part of its post war planning preparations
- Shops at the street corner are marked as part brown and part green buildings (5)
- Areas of proposed clearance to enable future roads or community facilities are shown in red (6)
- The nearest bomb site to the park is visible in white on Woodborough Street at the edge of the image (7)



1972

- By 1972 clearance of the terraced housing that had occupied the site for nearly 100 years had begun as part of an attempt to improve the road junction
- This Ordnance Survey plan shows that an open space had been created at the street corner through the removal of three properties (8)
- The last two houses were probably demolished soon after to provide a reasonable space for a neighbourhood pocket park on the site
- By this date the Spring Woods Nursery School, now the Early Years Centre had been constructed on the site proposed for clearance in 1950 (9)

Identity of place

2



Chaplin Community Garden

Summary description

The community garden provides a welcome green respite from the dense, terraced urban streets that define the character of the neighbourhood.

The trees along the street edge provide visual interest in views along Chaplin Road and views across the street corner.

The space is accessible from two gateways through the boundary railings and the stone base for the former sundial provides a focal point for the two benches in the hardstanding area.

The western half of the park is a grassed area that creates a more informal green space.



Positive Context

Trees particularly on Chaplin Road side

Views along adjoining roads providing opportunities to enjoy the local historic streetscene

Intimate seating area



Chaplin Road



Above, park entrance and noticeboard

Left, seating area and sundial base

Strengths and challenges

Following the Our Place mapping activity the participants were asked to identify the various character strengths in the local area.

In addition to these positive elements a number of particular challenges to the maintenance of the area's character were also identified.

These strengths and challenges have been correlated in the adjoining table.

Strength	Description	Challenges and opportunities
Green space within dense terraced street context	Small, intimate, enclosed green space with seating in paved area	Some survey responses reported that a lack of flowers and colour in the space was an issue and this can be addressed through the positive work of the local volunteers
Organised group of local volunteers	The community garden is benefitting from lots of positive work by the local volunteers including clearing overgrown areas and plans for planting	At the time of the online survey the grassed area had not been cut for a while and due to the pandemic volunteer and council work had reduced. However, during summer 2021 these issues are being addressed and the park now appears better maintained
Wildlife particularly birdlife	Residents regularly report that a key enjoyment of the space is the amount of birdsong that can be heard. The park plays an important role along with the adjoining back gardens in making a significant contribution to the local green network	This green network is reliant on private back gardens providing wildlife havens. The park and local residents can play an important role in highlighting the importance of the local ecology for the benefit of all
The park is seen as being a friendly place	The enclosed grass space allows for valuable social opportunities as well as providing an area where domestic animals can benefit from a green environment and a space for limited exercise	It was generally felt by the local participants that the number of benches and their spacing was a positive and that any further seating should be informal in nature. Misbehaviour by a minority of dogs using the park was reported. The hope is that increasingly positive use of the space and additional care being taken in enhancing its features will help to address any such issues

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Significance

3



Understanding Significance

Heritage Values and Significance

The conservation principle of ‘Significance’, the sum of the cultural and natural heritage values of a historic place, underpins modern conservation policy and practice. It provides a framework for understanding and comparing different values that have established in a given place through time.

Recent publications by Historic England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund set out the current thinking on what is significant and how it is to be described. These documents promote four key categories of heritage value:

- The site as a source of evidence or knowledge (*evidential*)
- The site as a link to the past, the people who shaped it and a means of learning about it (*historic*)
- The site as a source of sensory or intellectual stimulation, designed or incidental (*aesthetic*)
- The site as an embodiment of social or spiritual values (*communal*)

To these heritage values a fifth has been added to cover the contribution that the site makes to the natural environment.

Within the five value categories the different levels of importance inevitably require judgements about their relative significance as detailed in the following section.

This study takes a broad approach to ranking the assets significance based on the heritage values, any formal designation status and survey information available at the time of assessment. The following significance ratings are used:

- A+ Exceptional (international)
- A Exceptional (national - UK)
- B Considerable (regional - West of England)
- C Some (local - Bristol)
- D Little or no importance
- INT Intrusive or damaging

This approach supports future decision-making about the prioritisation and approach to management of historic assets. However, it is recognised that direct comparison across different heritage values can be problematic. For example part of the site may only be of limited historic interest but exceptional communal value to the local community.

Historic Values

English Heritage’s ‘Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance’ (2008) states that:

- *historic* value derives from the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present
- *historic* value tends to be *illustrative* or *associative*

Chaplin Community Garden is a relatively new pocket park created in the 1970s within a Victorian/Edwardian residential suburb of terraced streets.

The area is not a conservation area and the site is not a registered historic park.

Value rating C

Historic Associative Values

The site has some historic value associated with the historic development of the area as part of the city’s urban expansion in the late 19th-early 20th century.

The neighbourhood stories connected with the former houses and shops that stood on the site until the 1970s will have some local value.

Value rating C

Aesthetic Values

English Heritage's 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance' (2008) states that:

- *design* value relates to the aesthetic qualities generated by the conscious design of a building, structure or landscape as a whole
- *aesthetic* value derives from the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place
- some aesthetic values are not substantially the product of formal design, but develop more or less *fortuitously* over time, as the result of a succession of responses within a cultural framework

Aesthetic Value

The green space and particularly the trees make a very important contribution to the local street scene where other green street space is limited with few street trees.

Value rating C

Design Value

The site has some design value particularly in relation to the focal point of the former sundial and seating area that encourages community interactions.

Value rating C

Evidential Values

English Heritage's 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance' (2008) states that:

- evidential value derives from the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity
- physical remains of past human activity are the primary source of evidence and evolution of places, and of the people and cultures that made them
- age can be a strong indicator of relative evidential value
- evidential value derives from the physical remains or genetic lines that have been inherited from the past
- the ability to understand and interpret the evidence tends to be diminished in proportion to the extent of its removal and replacement

As with the historic values the site's association with the wider development of the area has some value and further research into these local stories has the potential to enhance this.

Value rating C

Communal and Natural Values

English Heritage's 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance' (2008) states that:

- *communal* value derives from the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory
- *commemorative* and *symbolic* values reflect the meanings of a place for those who draw part of their identity from it, or have emotional links to it
- *social* value is associated with places that people perceive as a source of identity, distinctiveness, social interaction and coherence

Communal Value

The site has increasing local communal value, providing a welcoming green space within a densely populated urban area.

The increased development of a local volunteer gardening group is enhancing this communal value.

Natural Value

The green space provides an important wildlife focus within this area of Easton and is an important connector within the local green network providing links to private gardens and green spaces beyond, such as at the school site on Bannerman Road.

Our Spirit of Place

The Our Spirit of Place workshops with officers and members of the community identified three themes that help to convey what is special about Chaplin Community Garden.

Intimate

A small space which gives the feeling of being in a garden

Can go there in your slippers

Spirit of Place survey responses

Green calm

Lovely place to sit and listen to the birds

Looking up at the leaves of the trees

Only green space near by

Spirit of Place survey responses

Friendly

Have got to know my neighbours here

It's lovely to see people walk their dogs in the park

Spirit of Place survey responses

Our Spirit of Place

A set of place principles has been established within each of the Our Spirit of Place themes.

These principles set out a broad approach to the future management of Chaplin Community Garden by all stakeholders; council officers, community groups and users of the space.

Intimate

Place principles:

- Any additional seating will be informal in nature such as logs or edges of raised beds
- Any design proposals will be developed in discussion with the Parks team
- The intimate nature of the focal area around the former sundial with the two benches will be maintained to promote community connections and interactions
- The distinct three areas in the park; the open grassed area, the more formal paved focal point and street corner area will be maintained

Green calm

Place principles

- The open grassed part of the park will be kept as a flexible informal peaceful activity area for all users
- Any suggested activities should be in accordance with the City Byelaws and be kept as neighbourhood socials rather than formal events
- Volunteers will work in partnership with the Parks team to introduce new planting, particularly flowering plants, focussed on the park boundaries
- Any new planting should strengthen security to neighbouring properties

Friendly

Place principles

- The information board will continue to provide up to date, welcoming information about volunteering opportunities and park activities
- Any stories about the park based on the previous residents and shops will be collected and shared with the community