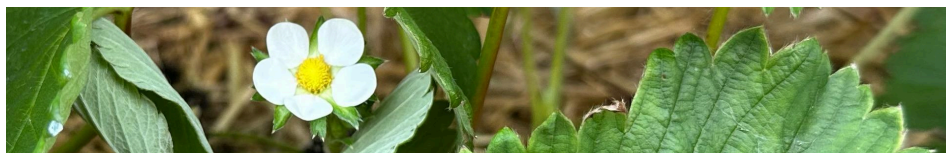


Elm Village Open Garden

Proposal to Manage the Elm Village Open Space - Raised Area, Barker Drive, NW1



Submitted by:

Elm Village Garden & Landscape Maintenance Community Interest Company, hereinafter referred to as CIC. Company No. 14170279.

In partnership with:

- Elm Village Tenants & Residents Association (EVTRA)
- Elm Village Garden Society (EVGS)

With the full support of :

- Camley Street Neighbourhood Forum (CSNF)
- Camden Garden Centre Ltd

Inaugural Executive Committee:

- Peter McGinty – CIC Officer; Chair, Elm Village Tenants & Residents Association (EVTRA)
- Benjamin Masse – Secretary, EVTRA and Elm Village Garden Society (EVGS); Resident, 29 Barker Drive
- Myrtille Valex – Resident, 29 Barker Drive

We extend our sincere thanks to all Elm Village residents who contributed, directly or indirectly, to this document, including: Frances and Ed Lee, Helene Fawcet, Shirley Richmond, Sayra Tekin, Sayuri Inman, Sheila Sansbury, Max Bondi, Meike Klein, Jill Ju, Laura Gallant, Megumi Inman, T. Valiukevic, Helena Morris, Patrick O'Neill, Sue Bryan, Jane Witham, Glen Gibson, Anne Wooding, Sally Inman, Julia Abbot, Peter Wooding, Deedee Levine, Paige O'Malley, amongst many other residents.

Date: 30 June 2026 | Application deadline: Friday 3 July 2026

Our pledge

As a partnership of Elm Village residents and local organisations with strong roots in Elm Village and the surrounding area, we are genuinely committed to preserving, maintaining, and enhancing Elm Village Community Growing Space as a community food-growing and wellbeing space on Barker Drive, in a spirit of care and shared ownership.

We are the people — young families and retirees, gardeners and wildlife watchers — who live beside it, have been involved in maintaining it through its recent transitions, and are ready to take full responsibility for its future management and development.

We recognise that access to land, nature and healthy food is not equally shared. By providing an inclusive community growing space, we aim to help address these inequalities while reducing social isolation, improving mental and physical wellbeing, strengthening local food resilience as well as supporting biodiversity in our urban community.

1. Fostering a Community Food Growing & Wellbeing Space

Building on a Strong Legacy

The Elm Village Community Growing Space (EVC GS) has a long and significant history as a community food-growing and wellbeing space. Established in 2011, the site provided therapeutic gardening, training and food-growing opportunities for people facing unemployment, disadvantage or mental health challenges. It was managed by Urban Growth until 2020, then Castlehaven Community Association held the site's licence from 2021 until its recent expiry.

At its peak, the site featured raised beds, a greenhouse, and composting facilities producing compost, leaf mould, and liquid fertilisers. From students to corporate volunteers, along with local residents, various people have benefited from the space. While some of the original infrastructure is no longer in place, key features remain and provide a strong foundation for future development. Through this application, we seek to restore and build upon this valuable legacy.

We also bring first-hand knowledge of the site and its practical constraints. Following Castlehaven's departure, volunteers from Elm Village Gardening Society (EVGS) continued to maintain the site informally until the water supply was disconnected in spring 2026, making ongoing maintenance unsustainable. Nevertheless, those months of hands-on stewardship allowed us to develop a detailed understanding of the site and demonstrated that EVGS has both the capacity and commitment to manage it effectively.

Through collaborations with local partners, we aim to build on this foundation to deliver a wide range of activities, engage a broader audience, and maximise the site's value for the local community and the surrounding area. The initiative will actively encourage the sharing of gardening knowledge, experience, and skills across generations and backgrounds, and foster a real sense of community.

To reinitiate activities, we prepared a multi-year plan as follow:

Year 1 (2026–27): Restoration and Preparation

The site has been left to grow wild with weeds, most tools were taken when Castlehaven departed, and the water supply has been cut off. We have also missed the beginning of the 2026 growing season. Year 1 will be dedicated to restoring the site, transforming it into a

safe, welcoming, and well-maintained space that can be enjoyed by participants of all ages, abilities, and cultures:

- Clear the site: tackle the weed, mow the grass, clear the rubbish;
- Focusing on accessibility: fix and stabilize the raised beds, clear the pathways, and set up shaded zones to ensure people of all mobility levels and age groups can participate;
- Repair and improve the compost bins, set up a station for homemade manure liquid fertiliser (or "manure tea") production, and sow green manure;
- Retool the space: we will begin with what EVGS and the CIC already have, and build up equipment gradually;
- Develop seasonal growing plans and guidance that reflect the needs and preferences of our diverse community;
- Produce a community gardening safety guide outlining clear procedures to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all volunteers and visitors.
- Strengthen existing partnerships and establish new ones (networks, charities, and funding sources).

In terms of community events, Year 1 will include:

1. The Big Help Out, a community clearance and restoration day in autumn 2026, bringing residents together around the shared goal of getting the site ready — both a practical community-building moment and a festive kick off of the new initiative (with live acoustic music and some cakes!);
2. a Spring Planting Day in March/April/May 2027 to mark the opening of the first full growing season, with guided planting sessions, seed swapping, and children's activities.

EVGS and the CIC already organise such activities to support the maintenance and day-to-day management of Elm Village community gardens and communal spaces. The invitations will be extended to the whole local community.

Years 2–3 (2027–28): Full Programme

Once the site is restored, we will implement a full seasonal growing programme drawing on RHS guidance and the site's own history:

- Rotational planting across raised beds: various vegetables, comfrey, herbs, fruit trees;
- Compost production and liquid fertiliser, continuing the site's historic composting programme;
- Biodiversity improvements: wildflower areas and pollinator habitats, complementing a beekeeping programme.

We will focus on organic crops grown using natural farming methods that prioritise ecological balance and soil health, produced without the use of synthetic pesticides or artificial fertilizers. The priority will be given to common but expensive produces found at supermarkets, which also typically come into plastic wraps, such as strawberries, herbs, and salads.

To better reflect the needs and cultural diversity of the local community, the site will also be divided into several dedicated spaces, such as a Medicinal Garden (calendula, echinacea, lemon Balm, chamomile..); an Exotic Garden, adding to the fig tree already there and to accommodate for the specific ethnic communities (Japanese Loquat, kiwi berries, passion fruit vine, globe artichoke, coriander...); a “Growing Together Space” for children gardening initiation, and a bee-friendly flower borders to supply a range of species which will flower year-round (to attract not only honey bees).

In terms of community events, subsequent years will, at minimum, include a Spring Planting Day and an Autumn Harvest Festival. The latter will be celebrating the season’s produce, with cooking demonstrations, a community sharing table, children’s activities and some live entertainment, as we used to do in Elm Village.

Infrastructure Notes

The site has two unused waterbutts which we will set up for rainwater harvesting to support seedling propagation. This will provide a useful supplementary source, though the site will remain dependent on the restoration of mains water access (see Section 2).

2. Funding and Capacity for Coordination, Maintenance and Equipment

As experienced EVGS gardeners, we will continue to make use of the RHS Space to Grow resources and guidance to support community engagement, but also project promotion, fundraising and the ongoing development of the site.

Budget & Funding

We estimate a core annual budget of £1,500–£2,000 for seeds, compost, tools, and basic maintenance in Years 2–3, once the site is restored. Year 1 costs may be higher due to unexpected repair work.

For the first year of operation CIC, EVTRA, and EVGS will cover the following:

- Public Liability Insurance of £10M
- Coordination through volunteers
- Expertise and tools for maintenance and repair
- Seeds and plants

The CIC is prepared to underwrite the first year's core operating costs up to £2,000.

Funding sources we will pursue:

- Camden Council community grants
- National Lottery Community Fund
- London Community Foundation
- Veolia Environmental Trust
- Mayor of London's Grow Back Greener Fund
- Camden Garden Centre (sponsorship and in-kind support)
- Local business sponsorship

We intend to work with the Eden Project to consider applications to various funds such as The Fore, the Asda Foundation and other relevant options.

An informal brainstorm with residents surfaced community-driven fundraising activities leveraging the garden crops such as: open days with gardening and cooking workshops, baked and dried herb sales, comfrey and nettle tea sales. Other activities focused on community bonding and the peaceful nature of the site will also be considered, such as open sky yoga, acoustic concerts, reading or poetry sessions in partnership with the Pritchard & Ure café.

It is worth noting that working in partnerships with other local organisations will save resources and open up more funding opportunities.

Requests to Camden Council

We make two formal requests that are prerequisite to viable stewardship:

- **Water supply:** the water to the site was turned off in spring 2026, which is why EVGS volunteers were unable to continue maintaining the beds. We ask Camden Council to restore this supply as part of the licence, and to clarify whether ongoing water costs will be met by the Council or by the licence holder. We would welcome agreement on this before signing.
- **Waste collection:** EVGS volunteers are willing to collect and bag waste on site. We ask that Camden Council commit to collecting those bags at the same frequency as it does for Barker Drive park below. This has not been happening consistently, and formalising it in the licence agreement would resolve a practical problem that has undermined the site's upkeep.

Coordination, Maintenance & Equipment

An elected executive committee — with seats for EVTRA and EVGS and representatives from supporting organisations — governs the project. Residents hold meaningful roles in all decisions. The CIC provides the legal and operational backbone, but this is a resident-led initiative at its core.

EVTRA and EVGS have the experience and on-the-ground knowledge needed to reactivate the site from day one. Input from similar projects can be drawn upon, such as the Adelaide Community Garden Club. We will also join the Capital Growth network. Worth noting that EVGS already has approximately 20 active volunteers and the broader EVTRA membership (representing 150 residential units across Barker Drive, Bergholt Mews, Blakeney Close, and Rossendale Way) provides additional capacity for outreach and events.

Our community's depth of expertise is a clear and defining strength. One resident has cared for the communal flower beds across the Elm Village estate from the outset, providing invaluable horticultural knowledge rooted in the Village's foundations. We also have a trained beekeeper who brings specialist expertise and strong links to the wider beekeeping community, creating opportunities for exploratory and training sessions for both children and adults. In addition, the CIC employs two experienced staff members with proven, hands-on expertise in managing communal growing beds and green spaces.

More broadly, the Elm Village resident community represents a rich pool of complementary skills — from project management and construction to marketing and communications — alongside membership of other voluntary organisations and networks that extend our reach well beyond the estate. This is not a small group of enthusiasts; it is a genuine community with the capacity to make this project succeed.

Beyond the core team, we intent to grow participation across the wider community through two channels:

1. active promotion via EVTRA communications, estate notice boards, social media, and door-to-door outreach;
2. structured partnerships with local organisations. This will include renewing collaborations with previous partners (such as GoodGym Camden and Capel Manor College), while establishing new relationships with local organisations (e.g. Camley Street Neighbourhood Forum, Camden Garden Centre). We also aim to develop a social prescribing pathway, welcoming referrals from GPs and link workers, alongside self-referrals

3. Appropriate Governance, Insurance and Risk Management

Legal Entity

The licence will be held by Elm Village Garden & Landscape Maintenance Community Interest Company (Company No. 14170279). As a registered CIC, this entity provides:

- A legally recognised body capable of holding a licence and entering contracts
- Public liability insurance at the level required by Camden Council
- Formal governance obligations including officer roles and annual filing
- Access to grant funding streams not available to unincorporated associations

For reference, EVTRA, as a volunteer-run tenants' association, operates without paid staff or dedicated organisational insurance — as is typical for resident associations of this kind. The licence will therefore be held by the CIC, with Peter McGinty as its officer, providing the appropriate legal vehicle and insurance framework. The elected executive committee ensures that community governance sits at the heart of the arrangement.

Democratic Governance

As mentioned above, the CIC will be overseen by an elected executive committee with representation from EVTRA, EVGS, and the resident community. All three inaugural members — Peter McGinty, Benjamin Masse, and Myrtille Valex — are Elm Village residents with direct involvement in the site's history.

Myrtille Valex holds a business degree and a PhD in Urban Studies, with a particular interest in urban development and neighbourhood revitalisation. In addition to her professional work, she has developed significant expertise in community building and engagement, having led the expansion of the international Parents of EJM Alumni network, and coordinated the EJM Conversation Groups programme, which supports over 120 members. She also served on the EJM committee of *Être Parent Aujourd'hui* (EPA), helping to organise public conferences on educational matters.

Benjamin Masse holds a master in Anthropology and a business degree. He brings experience leading community and trade organisations as a committed volunteer executive, serving as secretary of EVTRA and EVGS, and in governance roles at SOPREF, ADISQ, and SOPROC, organisations championing the independent cultural and entertainment industry in Canada. He sat on school boards and currently serves as president of the non-profit *AgenticAdvertising.org*. He is experienced in writing funding proposals and securing both private and public support for mission-driven organisations.

Peter McGinty holds degrees in Mathematics and Computer Science and now works as a data analyst. Prior to that he was an IT project manager in Banking and Finance for many years. He has also taught in Camden Secondary schools, is a mentor to students at the

London AI Campus Opportunity Centre in Camden, and teaches coding to Humanities students at a London university. He is a founder member and Secretary of the Camley Street Neighbourhood Forum, Chair of the Elm Village Tenants & Residents Association, and Managing Director of the Elm Village Gardening Community Interest Company.

Insurance and Risk Management

The CIC carries public liability insurance appropriate to community gardening (£10M).

Risk assessments will be conducted for all volunteering sessions. A safe working practices guide will be provided to all regular volunteers and visitors, taking inspiration from GoodGym's established community task safety framework.

The site is gated, closing at dusk and opening at 7:30am — our regular resident presence will be the most effective deterrent to antisocial behaviour. We will explore reorienting or extending the existing CCTV coverage of the Camden Garden Center to include the site.

4. Links with Local GPs, Link Workers and Volunteering Opportunities

We are excited about the opportunity to reopen EVCGS as a space for therapeutic gardening, nature connection and community wellbeing, aligned with the borough's Green Social Prescribing programme.

Social prescribing is central both to the site's history and to our vision for its future. Camden has long recognised EVCGS's potential as a space for inclusion, learning and wellbeing. We are committed to building on that legacy.

GP and Link Worker Connections

To support this ambition, we have contacted the Camden Care Navigation and Social Prescribing Service to better understand local referral pathways and partnership opportunities, and we look forward to hearing from them.

In parallel, we are in discussion with the Camley Street Neighbourhood Forum, which has established relationships with local link workers and health providers. We hope to work through this network to develop referral routes and ensure that EVCGS is accessible to those who could benefit most from participation.

Our local GP practice, King's Cross Surgery, serves the Elm Village extended area. We intend to approach the practice to explore opportunities for collaboration and to have EVCGS recognised as a local social prescribing destination.

We would welcome Camden Council's support in facilitating introductions to relevant social prescribing and link worker networks.

Volunteering

EVGS already provides a structured volunteer programme. Alongside referral pathways, EVGS will continue to provide a range of volunteering opportunities for everybody, enabling local residents, beyond the estate, to develop practical skills, build social connections and contribute to the stewardship of a valued community asset.

5. Ability to Host at Least Two Community Events Each Year

We commit to a minimum of two community events per year, starting from Year 1, during the restoration phase.

As set out in Section 1, Year 1 will include a community clearance and restoration day in autumn 2026 and a Spring Planting Day in April/May 2027. From Year 2, the anchor events will be the Spring Planting Day and an Autumn Harvest Festival. These events will be promoted and open to the whole extended community.

As already stated, CIC, EVTRA, and CSNF have experience of organising similar community events.

Beyond these events, as the programme develops, we could explore other opportunities such as school visits, youth group sessions, and cross-community events.

6. Strong Local Community Connections and Partnership Working

Resident Roots

This application comes from people who live on the estate and next to the site. Benjamin Masse and Myrtille Valex at 29 Barker Drive can see the garden from their home. Peter McGinty has been Chair of EVTRA and an engaged Elm Village resident for more than two decades. More broadly, Elm Village residents have a long and proud tradition of volunteering to maintain and improve the estate's communal spaces; this application is a natural extension of that commitment.

EVTRA and EVGS

[EVTRA](#) formally supports this application and will provide ongoing community representation through the executive committee. EVGS brings direct, practical experience of the site, both as former participants during its previous incarnations and as its informal stewards over the past year. We will draw on this knowledge to develop growing guides and activity frameworks for the new programme.

Camley Street Neighbourhood Forum

The [Camley Street Neighbourhood Forum](#), as the statutory neighbourhood planning body for the area directly bordering Elm Village, is a natural ally for this project. Their involvement ensures that EVCES is embedded in the broader neighbourhood fabric beyond the estate, widening access and reinforcing the site's role as a genuinely open and inclusive community resource.

Camden Garden Centre

[Camden Garden Centre](#) sits immediately adjacent to EVCES and already has a warm relationship with the Elm Village community, donating a Christmas tree to EVTRA each year. We see significant potential in a formal partnership: horticultural expertise, plant donations, and collaboration on security improvements such as a monitoring camera.

Furthermore, Camden Garden Centre was founded in 1983 as a charity and training centre for disabled people, a mission which resonates strongly with our own social prescribing ambitions.

Community Food Growing and Equitable Distribution

We are aware of a large local network of charities operating in this field, on which we can count on.

We are joining the [Community Food Growers Network](#) and actively champion its work across the estate and wider neighbourhood. We share the network's commitment to community food growing as a force for connection, resilience, and equity — including the principle that land should be participatory, transparent, and democratically controlled, and that access to growing space should be available to all regardless of background or means. EVC GS will be our contribution to that vision, rooted in the community that has always called this estate home.

We also intend to establish a partnership with [Life After Hummus](#), a local initiative dedicated to reducing food waste and improving access to healthy food, to support the equitable distribution of surplus produce grown on site.

We aim to distribute 50% of crops to helpers and volunteers, and 50% to Life After Hummus and similar community groups.

Overall Communication and Outreach Plan

Our communication plan will embrace various strategies and tactics. We will leverage EVTRA communications, estate notice boards, social media, and door-to-door outreach as the primary resident-facing channels.

We intend to maintain an active and multi-channel communications presence:

- a dedicated EVC GS website which will include an online registration for participants and volunteers;
- a monthly newsletter and WhatsApp community tracking growing progress, upcoming events, and volunteering opportunities.

We also intend to significantly extend EVC GS's reach beyond the estate by leveraging new and renewed partnerships as a springboard for broader community engagement. Selected partnerships allow us to reach, through their respective network, a diverse and wider audience:

- Via GoodGym Camden, bringing a ready-made network of active volunteers for physical tasks and ongoing seasonal sessions;
- Via Capel Manor College, offering opportunities for horticultural students to gain practical experience on site, continuing a relationship the site has benefited from in the past;
- Via the Camley Street Neighbourhood Forum, reaching out to local community organisations and residents beyond Elm Village;
- Via Camden Care Navigation and Social Prescribing Service, inviting in people experiencing isolation, poor mental health, or disadvantaged;

Opportunistically, other partnerships will be initiated to extend the project's reach and impact.

Towards a bright and purposeful future!

EVCGS has been a vital community space for over fifteen years, under different stewards and with different programmes, but always with the same purpose: growing food, building community, and supporting wellbeing in one of Camden's most distinctive and cohesive estates. We are applying to continue and deepen that purpose, with the right legal structure, genuine community governance, resident leadership, and honest ambition.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this proposal with you.

Peter McGinty (CIC Officer; EVTRA Chair)

Benjamin Masse (Secretary, EVTRA & EVGS; Resident, 29 Barker Drive)

Myrtille Valex (EVGS Member; Resident, 29 Barker Drive)

