

Nextdoor Nature

Taking over green space in your area!

Guidance for England only. Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland have different advice. See the separate documents.

- Have you got your eye on a patch of land in your area?
- Do you think it would be a great space to grow some vegetables or herbs for the local community?
- Do you want to turn it into a wildflower haven for bees and insects?
- Do you think it needs a bench and a bit of a tidy-up?

You can get control! Read on...

Who owns it?

1. Ask your Local Authority (council). Find out who your Local Authority is by clicking this link and entering your postcode. <https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council> Then go to their website and send an email to their enquiries email or planning email or ring them. They might have their own deeds records or County Record Office.
2. If the Local Authority doesn't know, then simply ask the local shops, businesses, and houses.
3. Around 85% of the land in the UK is registered with the Land Registry. It will cost £3 to do an online search. Click here (England and Wales only): <https://www.gov.uk/search-property-information-land-registry> As your patch of land won't have an address, you'll need to do a map search. You can use the online map, and if you want to double-check, you can ask for an "index map search."

Index map search:

This costs £4 and you need to submit form "SIM" with as much information as possible, and an Ordnance Survey map reference. Find out more here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/index-map-application-for-an-official-search-sim>



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4. You could also check the Land Registry records for the properties and land next to the land you're interested in, as sometimes they might say "plus the adjoining land" or similar.

But note! Even if some land is not registered, it still doesn't mean that no-one owns it – so don't assume you can just take it over. Do as much research as you can.

Do you want to buy it?

This is unlikely for a Nextdoor Nature project, but you might get asked by the council about "Assets of Community Value."

Every Local Authority in England keeps a list of these Assets. They are buildings or land that are "mainly in actual use for the social, well-being or social interests of the local community". So, this can include parks and green space. If an Asset goes up for sale, then local people are allowed to come together and bid for control over it, by forming a Community Interest Group or other specified typed of group. Find out more here <https://www.oss.org.uk/need-to-know-more/information-hub/community-assets-and-protecting-open-space/> and here <https://mycommunity.org.uk/community-assets-and-ownership>

Do you just want to use it?

This is the most likely choice for a Nextdoor Nature group.

You will need the landowner's permission. In some cases, there will also be a leaseholder who rents the land from the landowner: for example, a car parking company which rents land from the council. It took a local group two and a half years to negotiate for the use of a small strip of land alongside the carpark (an extreme example!). You'll need to talk to both the landowner and the leaseholder.

You might be asked for a risk assessment – see our separate guidance. They will probably want to see a plan for what you want to do, so be ready. And they could want to do a "utilities survey" first. You definitely don't want to dig through an electricity cable!

Do make sure there is a contract which states who is responsible for what, and for how long. It does not have to be complicated, but it does have to be clear. They may put restrictions in place, such as a ban on using power tools, or certain rules about how the land can be used.



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Check with the planning department of your Local Authority about planning permission. Simply growing food will be “agricultural” but if there’s a building on the land and you’re going to be doing other activities, it may need a change of use.

You will need to consider insurance such as public liability insurance. Talk to your Local Authority, and also see our document about Insurance for Groups.

What’s your plan?

You may find a lot of help in the “Groups” folder of the resources. You do need some kind of plan so that you know who is responsible for doing what.

You also need to know how this project will be sustained. You can’t just plant something and expect it to look after itself. What happens in winter? What happens next year?

Will you need a budget? You might need funds for the insurance, or tools, or publicity. Think about fundraising – we have documents and advice about that.

Finally, you’ll need a crisis plan or list of things to do in an emergency. What if something happens to the land that you’re responsible for? A fire, perhaps? Or someone critical to the project becomes ill or moves away. Come up with all the possibilities, and what you can do to stop them happening, or what you’d do if they did happen.

Need to know more? Follow these links!

The Wildlife Trusts has various other practical resources. [How to start a wildlife garden from scratch](#), [how to grow a wild patch](#), and [climate-friendly gardening may all be useful](#).

The government is trying to make it easier for you to grow food in your community. [See here](#).

The Royal Horticultural Society has useful information about [community gardening here](#).

Social Farms and Gardens has information for city farms and community gardens. They are also funded to support projects in Wales, [but they have advice for all four nations](#).

The Open Spaces Society has very clear information about [Assets of Community Value here](#) and find out how to bid on [Assets through My Community here](#) and [here](#)

This document from My Community tells you more about Community Assets, bidding for ownership, and other ways to reclaim land [here](#).

The government has advice on reclaiming land [here](#).

