Hello and welcome to [a walk in search of common land](https://soundcloud.com/delawarrpavilion/a-walk-in-search-of-common-land).

This activity is commissioned by the De La Warr Pavilion as part of the [*Care & Citizenship* project](https://www.dlwp.com/care-and-citizenship/) and starts in April 2021 while the UK is still under COVID restrictions.

I’m going to guide you through the start of a design process to support you to become a designer in your neighbourhood and create new stories of sustainable living. We are going on a walk in Bexhill to identify common land, currently under-utilised, for the creation of urban forager’s gardens for the good of all.

I believe there is a place for everyone to contribute to the future of society and the planet. We humans are all part of nature, not separate from it. If we are to survive as a species, we need to work with nature.

During the walk you can imagine new possibilities for these under-utilised spaces in your neighbourhood. I will invite you to share your experiences on the [*Town Tales, Home Stories* website](https://dlwp.surge.sh/).

These may be your first steps in creating change in your neighbourhood.

Before you start download the related resource [*Citizens are designers*](https://www.dlwp.com/care-and-citizenship/citizens-are-designers/). If you can, print or save the resource and bring it with you on your walk. There are suggestions for things to bring with you and several pages in the back for you to complete. Otherwise, just find some pens and paper to bring along.

You are responsible for your own safety, cross the road at controlled places and do this walk in daylight hours, perhaps with a friend or family member. Children must be accompanied by an adult. This audio guide is in three parts and starts at the De la Warr Pavilion so pause the audio now and make your way there to begin with part 1.

**Part 1 – The Commons**

We are starting the walk at the De La Warr Pavilion, on the south side of the building. You will start in the garden area looking out to sea.

If you refer to the resource [*Citizens are designers*](https://www.dlwp.com/care-and-citizenship/citizens-are-designers/) you will see that walking is part of the discovery stage of the design process. In this stage we ask a question that sparks us to explore potential solutions to problems in our community. For this project we ask, “What if we developed an urban forager’s garden in the Bexhill community, to grow free food and increase the biodiversity and beauty of the neighbourhood?”. It’s important then to take a walk to see for yourself what might be possible.

This project introduces you to elements of permaculture practice. Permaculture is a design system for creating sustainable human environments. The three ethics of permaculture design are [earth care](https://permacultureprinciples.com/ethics/earthcare/), [people care](https://permacultureprinciples.com/ethics/peoplecare/) and [fair share](https://permacultureprinciples.com/ethics/fair-share/). Permaculture is a great tool for designing community growing spaces.

Your task is to locate public space that has potential as a forager’s garden, space that isn’t well utilized, marginal and forgotten areas that are often overlooked.

In order to create a sustainable future, I believe we need to protect our commons. What do I mean by Commons? Have a think. What does Commons mean to you? You can discuss this, and other questions I ask in this guide, with your fellow walker or walkers.

While you are thinking about the question begin to walk towards to the lower promenade.

Where you are now is public space where you are free to roam, to enjoy the sights, sounds, the plants and trees and other people.

How does it make you feel? Keep in mind this feeling as we continue on our way.

So back to the question. What did you decide about the commons?

Was it about land? Or was it about other things as well?

Common land is subject to rights allowing people to use the land or the produce of the land which is owned by someone else – This is known as the ‘rights of common’. Our natural commons can be thought of as the resources we need to live such as water, air and land. However, Commons are not just resources but can be thought of as an element of what we do, we call this our common culture. If we can collectively manage our Commons we might make our communities more sustainable and resilient.

Pause the audio and, if you haven’t already, make your way down to the promenade and go to part 2.

**Part 2 - Reclaiming the Commons**

As an act of discovery this walk can be unplanned. As you walk, you can choose which way to go, following your own intuition and knowledge.

Decide for yourself to walk to the east or west along the prom.

While you walk pause this audio for a few minutes and listen to the sounds around you.

After a short while take a turn so you begin walking inland away from the seafront? Cross the road and take a route that’s unfamiliar to you, visit a street you don’t know.

Do you think walking can keep us alert to our environmental responsibilities? Does walking make you more observant?

As walkers, we are part of the environment and actors within the space.

Look around and take notice of what’s happening in the streets you walk in. Remember that we are looking for sites that might be suitable as a forager’s garden. This means planting things that can grow without too much human intervention. Ideally it would provide year-round food such as berries, herbs, fruits and nuts.

Do you remember during early COVID lockdowns how quiet the streets were and how clearly you could hear birdsong? Did you notice how plants began to grow in unexpected places? Perhaps having less distractions and a purpose for your walk helps you to focus and see some things for the first time? The best forager’s garden sites will be accessible to pedestrians, even those with pushchairs or wheelchairs. They might be on a quiet road or slightly set back on a busy road. You might find a disused flower bed or a neglected grass verge. Common land can be publicly or privately owned. With some private land, such as railway stations, it might be quite easy to get permission to develop a garden.

Remember, as well as listening you can use your other senses, touch, smell, taste and sight. Walking allows us to use all our senses and using more than sight, can add to the enjoyment of being outdoors.

Take note of things that interest you. You might notice some wild food for foraging. You can add these findings to the Town Tales, Home Stories website later on. Write notes and take photos of potential sites for growing projects.

How important is public space to you? Since the late 1970s about half of all public land – 2 million hectares in total, or 10% of Britain’s overall land area – has been sold off. We might call this land enclosure. Historically, there has been resistance to enclosures of land and this resistance has led to the creation of land rights or spaces like national parks being established.

What do you think could change for the better for public spaces in Bexhill?

Does it inspire you to think of more land being used for community growing? Allotments, community gardens and urban farms allow people to come together to both build communities and grow their own local food to help enhance sustainable food production. At the same time, they offer food and shelter to non-human citizens such as bacteria, insects, and fungi.

Continue to walk until you find a site that you feel has potential. If you were unable to find a suitable site, why not go to a site that you do know of?

Pause the audio and once at a site go to part 3.

**Part 3 – Creating the Commons**

In part 3 we are focusing on a specific site that has potential. Now you need to establish the viability of the site as a growing space.

Slowly, start to observe the site. Here is a list of what to look out for:

* Is there easy access to the site?
* Who owns it? (If you don’t know make a note to find out later.)
* Is there existing vegetation, trees, hedges, shrubs or wildflowers?
* What are the general conditions such as wind exposure, sun, shade and slope?
* Are there signs of people, animals and wildlife?
* Can you spot any potential problems?
* Are there any other useful resources (water, wood etc.)?
* And is there anything else you notice?

You’ll need some of this information to make a base map of your site. A base map defines the boundaries of the area you want to develop. It gives you a rough project size, which will help you work out what you can fit in it - like size of trees, raised beds etc.

Take photos, record sounds, make drawings. Discuss the site with your fellow walkers.

What do you imagine could exist in your chosen space? Can you visualize a space perhaps with apple or plum trees, wild berry bushes, herbs and wildflowers? Would it attract birds and insects? Maybe there is room for a bench?

How might the planting of a forager’s garden change the neighbourhood?

How would you ensure the design implemented was used and maintained? How might it be collectively managed?

Now it’s time to add your findings to the [*Town Tales, Home Stories* website](https://dlwp.surge.sh/).

Respond to the questions on the website to add audio content of your experience of walking in search of common land. You can do this now or when you get home. On the website you can also listen to other people’s stories.

I hope you have enjoyed this guide. It has been created to support you to establish spaces of care in the community. Growing more plants will increase biodiversity in our towns and cities. If we provide care, nature will respond.

**Links:**

Care & Citizenship:

[www.dlwp.com/care-and-citizenship](http://www.dlwp.com/care-and-citizenship)

Citizens Are Designers: In search of our common food:

<https://www.dlwp.com/care-and-citizenship/citizens-are-designers/>

Urban forager’s garden design workshop:

<https://www.dlwp.com/event/in-search-of-our-common-food/>

Town Tales, Home Stories Web App:

[dlwp.surge.sh](https://dlwp.surge.sh/)

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De La Warr PavilionTransition Town Hastings