Design & Access Statement (version 1.0)

Proposal for permanent change of use of land and for the erection of an 'eco-classroom' at Hulme Community Garden Centre.

This statement is in support of Hulme Community Garden Centre's (HCGC) proposal permanently change the use of land to erect a single storey timber eco-classroom.

Hulme Community Garden Centre (HCGC) is a unique community led inner-city horticultural project. Our mission is to bring the local community together through gardening. As a not-for-profit organisation we provide low-cost plants to the local community but we are foremost a volunteer and education hub working with socially excluded people across Greater Manchester and promoting horticultural and sustainability issues to schools, colleges, the local community and wider public

We provide support, education and training for people who, for whatever reason, have been marginalized by society. We work with schools, colleges, businesses and partner other voluntary organisations and community groups encouraging people to grow their own food, green their own communities and lead active and healthier lifestyles. In 2008 we provided 150 free workshop places encouraging local people to get involved in horticulture, worked with over 60 community groups and provided nearly 650 volunteering and training opportunities. This year we have developed Manchester's first public access green roof and are hoping to soon build a living wall and the proposed eco-classroom and. In addition, in 2009, we will expand our training programs to see us helping housing and tenants associations and new and prospective allotmenteers, work with more schools and implement pioneering programs for people with learning difficulties and/or mental health problems.

HCGC is underpinned by organic principles and promotes sustainability, horticulture and the environment, civic engagement and voluntary activity, urban gardening and food production, independent living, health and well-being. We also provide back to

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work and skills training and placements for longer-term unemployed people. We have been established for 10 years and now welcome over 6000 visitors per annum, all of whom have access to free expert horticultural advice.

Since February 2000 HCGC has used the site at 28 Old Birley Street to provide the services above. On that date, temporary permission was granted by Manchester City Council to change the use of land from amenity use to that of a community garden centre. Since the inception of the Centre our mission and operations have remained constant and we are asking the Council to make this now established change of use permanent.

In terms of access, this remains as stated on the original application i.e. a single entrance of Old Birley Street with a paved path with wheelchair access ramps to the shop 'portacabin'. The site is fully accessible, as far as is practicable, throughout. Since the establishment of the Centre, many site and infrastructure improvements have been made to improve access for wheelchair users and for people with impaired mobility including specially designed raised beds and hard standing in community allotment areas to ensure that wheelchair users can fully participate in on-site activities. We have also put lighting throughout the site.

The proposed classroom will be used to support and enhance the existing service provision described above also enable us to launch an expansive training program empowering and additional 500 people per year people to grow their own food and live healthier lifestyles – a scheme aimed at improving the skills and confidence of people with mental and physical disabilities, mental health service users, young people, tenant and housing associations and allotmenteers. The development will cement HCGC's position as a vital community resource for two of Manchester most deprived areas; Hulme and Moss Side.

The classroom will be a sustainable build in that it will use, as far as is practible, locally sourced timber, will have a flat 'green roof' and, in the main, use sun-pipes for the

purposes of lighting. Heating for the structure will come a wood burning stove - a environmentally responsible form of heating. The classroom will be fully insulated; double glazed strengthened doors and windows with the highest practical insulation properties will be used in the construction. Additional lighting will be provided by the use of strengthened windows (please refer to the drawings enclosed with this application) and strip lighting for the winter months and evenings.

We will ensure that the structure is sympathetic to and harmonious with our existing site. The timber external walls will have a dark protective stain with doors and door and window frames having a lighter honey stain. Using natural materials and a green roof will mean that the structure will blend perfectly with the surrounding garden area. A program of planting will be undertaken after construction (using unusual plants such as hops) so that climbing plants will blur the boundaries between the building and the garden. The roof, as mentioned above, will be a living or green roof planted with sedum and wildflowers. Green roofs are well recognised and documented for the wide range of social, economic and environmental benefits they can provide. Uptake in the UK is growing, in London and Birmingham, for example, green roofs are being promoted for the function they serve in terms of surface water management and provision of habitat for rare animal species. It is in urban areas particularly where green roofs are seen to provide greatest benefit to building occupants, surrounding buildings, visitors and local wildlife.

I keeping with DDA regulations and concomitant with the ethos of the centre and the needs of our visitors the building will be fully accessible to accommodate wheelchair users and people with impaired mobility that constitute a significant proportion of our service users.

The area proposed for the siting of the classroom is a currently underused patio area well within the boundaries of the Centre. Currently situated on the patio is a timber pergola which will form part of the framework of the proposed structure. There will be no adverse environmental impact to any of the areas around the site, on the contrary, the introduction of the green roof will deliver huge biodiversity benefits for the area. The

structure will also have minimal visual impact . Flanked on two sides by woodland and hedging, by the rest of the Centre to the front and a polytunnel to the remaining side the structure will be barely visible from street level. Where there will be a visual impact is in terms of the view from the higher dwellings of the Homes for Change social housing which are opposite the Centre on Old Birley Street. This impact, however, will be a positive one with a view of the green roof. The existing green roof at the Centre which is clearly visible from these dwellings has received nothing but positive feedback from the residents. It is of note that members of the local community have been consulted as to the design and function of the proposed structure and all feedback has overwhelmingly positive.

This proposal has come about due to HCGC winning substantial funding from the 'Local Food' strand of Big Lottery funding. A total of just under £300,000 has been awarded to HCGC and its partner organisation, Debdale Eco-Centre in Gorton, to provide training to the beneficiaries discussed above. The classroom forms a key plank of the project and indeed the project would need to massively scaled down if the planning for this project is not approved. An approved application will enable HCGC to help 500 direct beneficiaries per annum but it will also mean the creation of one full-time and hopefully two part-time posts at the Centre. The build will also serve as an environmentally sound meeting and small conference centre which would be hired out enabling to HCGC to further protect its long term financial position.