

03. LILAC landscaping



context



Context

LILAC stands for Low Impact Living Affordable Community. It is a cohousing community that I helped to establish and now live in. This design mainly took place in parallel with the construction phase of the project. At the time, power within the community was quite centralised: the board had a significant weight of responsibility and work, while some other members felt excluded and dis-empowered. This was creating a bottleneck and causing tensions within the group.

A condition of our planning permission was that the landscaping be implemented as per the approved architect's plan. The plan had been developed with relatively limited member consultation; many of the current members had joined after the consultation. There was little understanding or sense of ownership of the plan.

Fortunately, there was considerable flexibility in terms of plant locations, varieties etc. in the plan, so there was an opportunity for the community to adapt it and add detail together.

A process was needed to devolve decision making and empower members to take ownership of the landscape design while assuring the board that statutory & budgetary limits would be respected. This would allow members to connect to the project in a practical and tangible way, and in turn build capacity, trust and social capital within the community.

LILAC's pond under construction

approach

A photograph of a garden path leading to a building under construction. The path is made of light brown soil and curves through a garden with various plants and trees. In the background, a building is under construction with scaffolding and a person visible. The foreground is filled with green foliage and trees, including a large tree with reddish leaves on the right.

Approach

I used the OBREDIM (Observation, Boundaries, Resources, Evaluation, Design, Implement, Maintain) design cycle as the framework for this design.

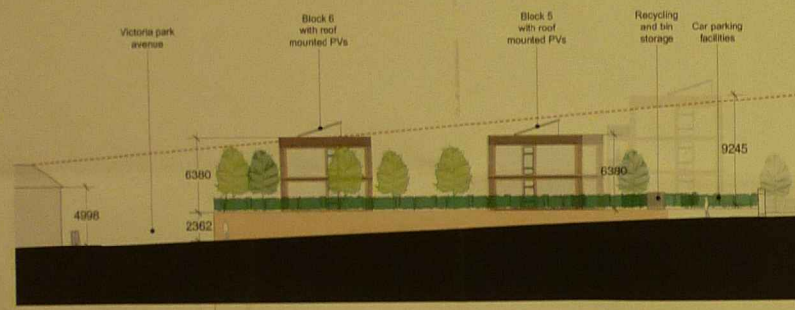
I felt that I had already made some key observations, while the brief came with some very clear boundaries. Also, as I have a tendency to stick with SADIMET, I wanted to see how OBREDIMET might be different.

Whilst developing the design I also reverted to using SADIM occasionally, partly to see if it would be more helpful for moving my thinking on, and sometimes when doing the detailed design for smaller elements of the overall process.

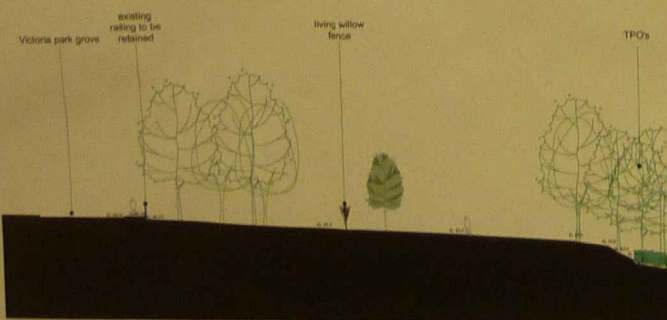
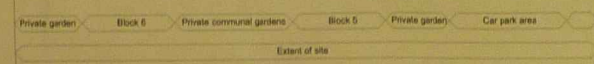
observation



Elevation 1



Elevation 2

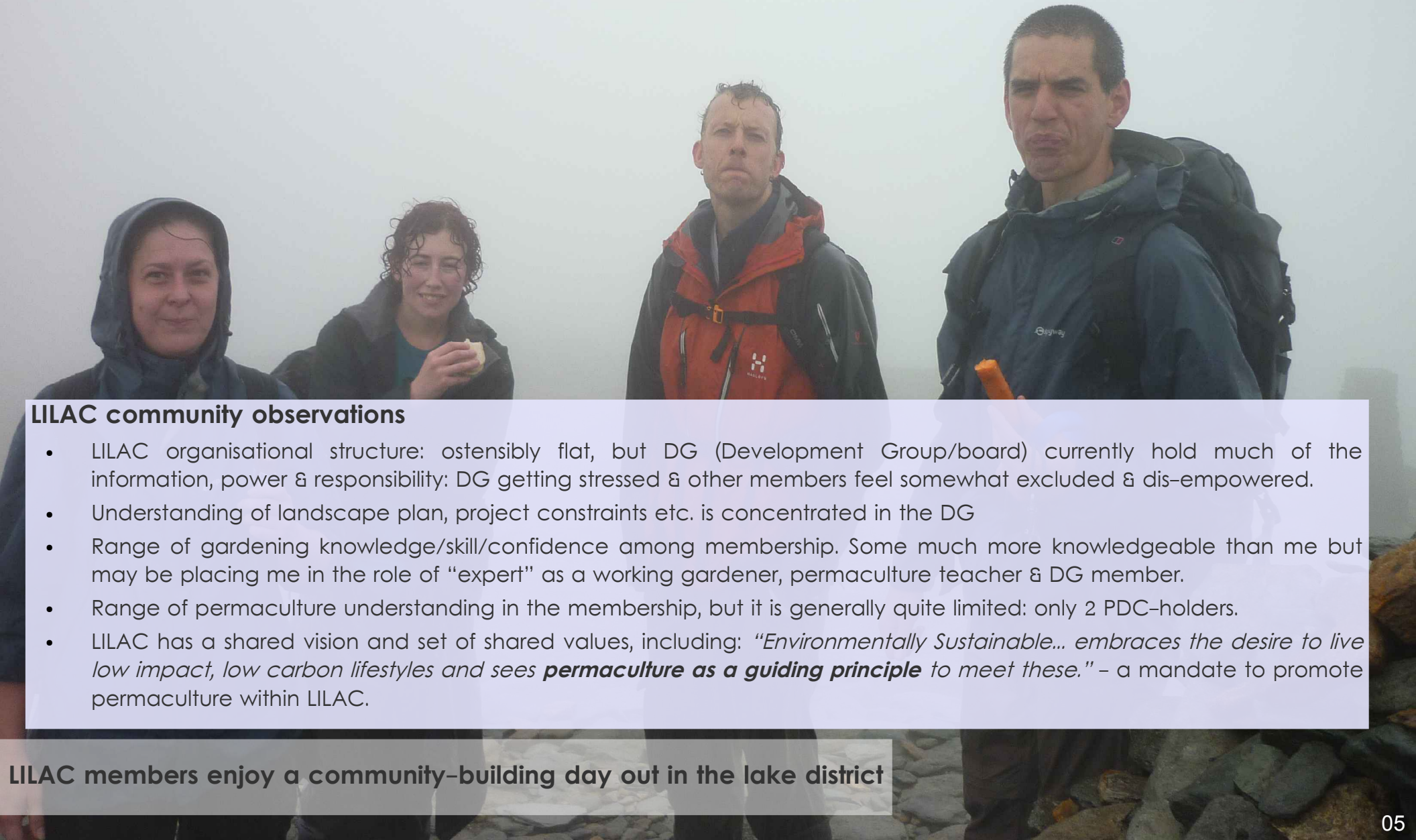


Elevation 3

- ### Project observations
- Arboricultural survey & report completed
 - Ecological survey & report completed
 - LILAC is committed to achieving to CfSH level 4, and need the landscaping points.
 - Landscape visioning exercise & Member-consultation with the landscape architect carried out by first wave of members
 - Soft-landscaping drawings produced: includes numerous discrete areas or zones, e.g. pond, trees, village green, herb garden etc.
 - Planning permission granted
 - Agreement that building contractors will perform hard landscaping; LILAC members will implement the soft landscaping.
 - Architect's landscape plan promotes food production, biodiversity, play, social interaction
 - £6K in the project budget for trees, plants & sundries
 - LILAC membership has grown considerably since consultation: original brief may not reflect all current members' priorities.

Elevation drawings: White Design

observation

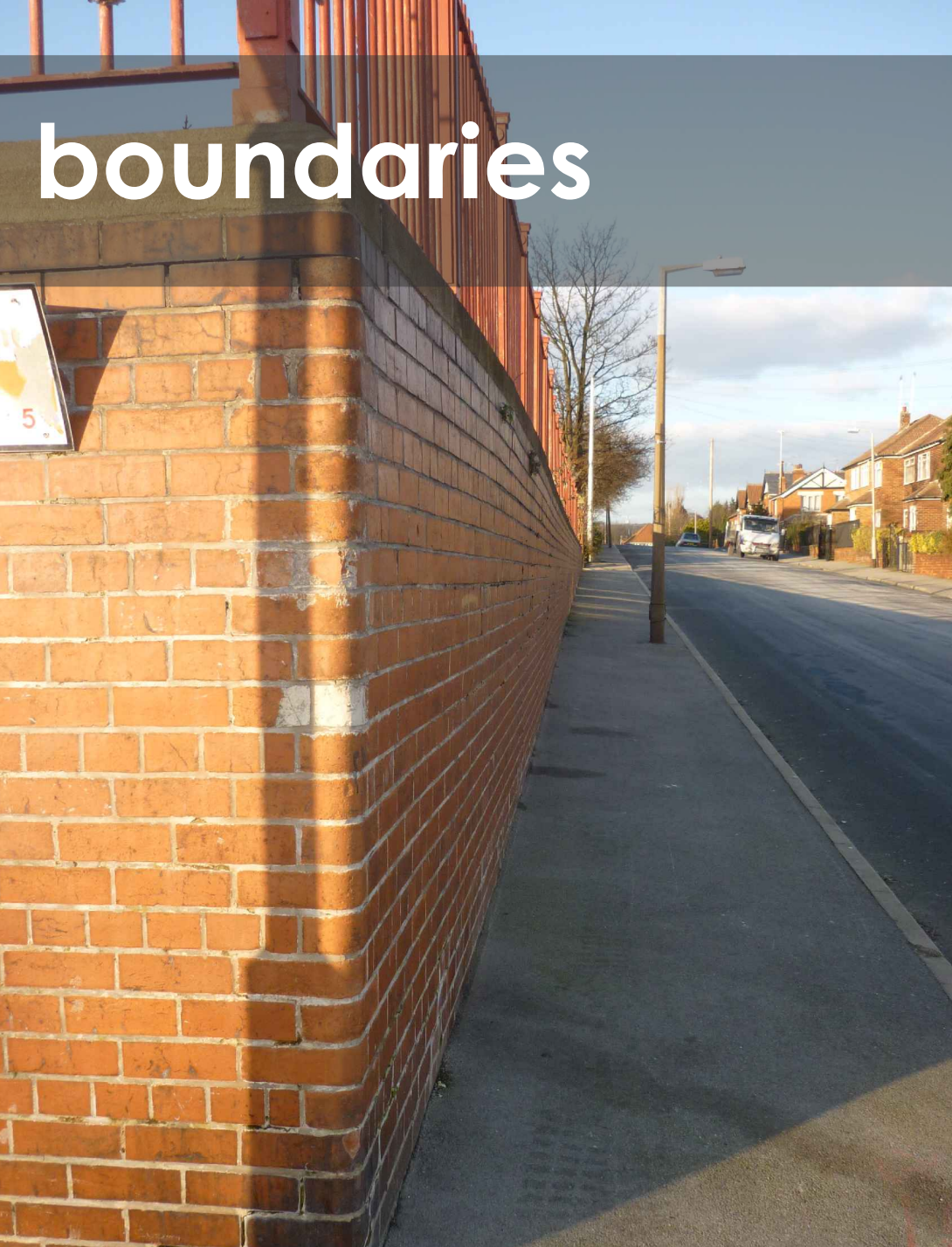


LILAC community observations

- LILAC organisational structure: ostensibly flat, but DG (Development Group/board) currently hold much of the information, power & responsibility: DG getting stressed & other members feel somewhat excluded & dis-empowered.
- Understanding of landscape plan, project constraints etc. is concentrated in the DG
- Range of gardening knowledge/skill/confidence among membership. Some much more knowledgeable than me but may be placing me in the role of “expert” as a working gardener, permaculture teacher & DG member.
- Range of permaculture understanding in the membership, but it is generally quite limited: only 2 PDC-holders.
- LILAC has a shared vision and set of shared values, including: *“Environmentally Sustainable... embraces the desire to live low impact, low carbon lifestyles and sees **permaculture as a guiding principle** to meet these.”* – a mandate to promote permaculture within LILAC.

LILAC members enjoy a community-building day out in the lake district

boundaries



Retaining wall, south-east corner of site

- ### Resource boundaries/constraints
- My time (to plan & run events)
 - Members' time to attend events
 - Money: budget limit of £6K
 - Members' knowledge & skills

- ### Responsibility boundaries
- Internal (LILAC board/membership)
 - LILAC/professional project team (including building contractors)

evaluation

Key priorities & issues

- Members' empowerment is key to future health of the community:
 - Getting people involved in decision making is a higher priority than the optimum placement of specific elements. Most soft landscaping design choices can be reviewed and revised as members' permaculture knowledge grows.
 - Ideally, placement of more permanent elements like trees should be right first time.
 - Honour & use existing knowledge in the group
 - Avoid a culture of dependency on me as the "landscape expert"
- Develop permaculture knowledge & skills in the group over the long term: Invite people to explore it when they're ready – don't try to impose it
- Uphold LILAC's shared vision & values of low impact living, respect, inclusion, diversity etc.

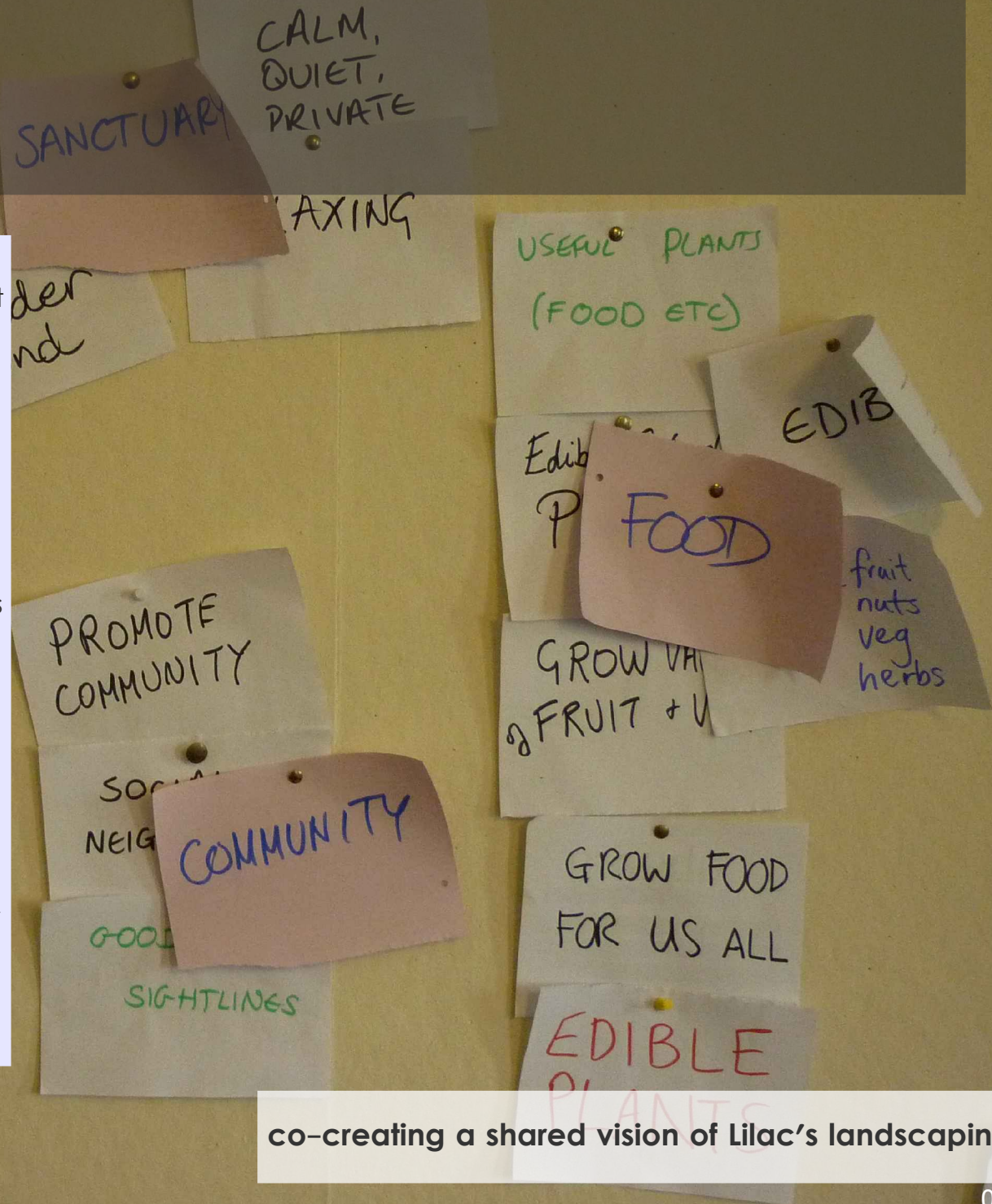
all-member design workshop 18/09/11

evaluation

An emerging brief:

Design a process that empowers LILAC's current members to:

- Co-create a shared vision of LILAC's landscaping
- Deliver the vision:
 - Develop discrete designs for the different areas of the site
 - Develop an implementation plan
 - Allocate budget to various areas/zones
 - Carry out landscape operations
- Understand LILAC's legal constraints/obligations
- Promote plant knowledge-sharing
- Promote gardening skill-sharing
- Develop group's permaculture knowledge & design skills
- Build/develop links with the wider community
- Have fun & create community glue/social capital



co-creating a shared vision of Lilac's landscaping

design

Functions

The brief can be restated as the functions that the design should perform:

1. Empower members
2. Create a shared vision
3. Members understand legal constraints/planning obligations
4. Develop designs for each area
5. Develop implementation plan
6. Members learn about permaculture & develop design skills
7. Promote plant knowledge sharing
8. Promote gardening skill sharing
9. Develop links with wider community
10. Have fun and create community glue/social capital

Elements

I identified the following elements that could support the functions:

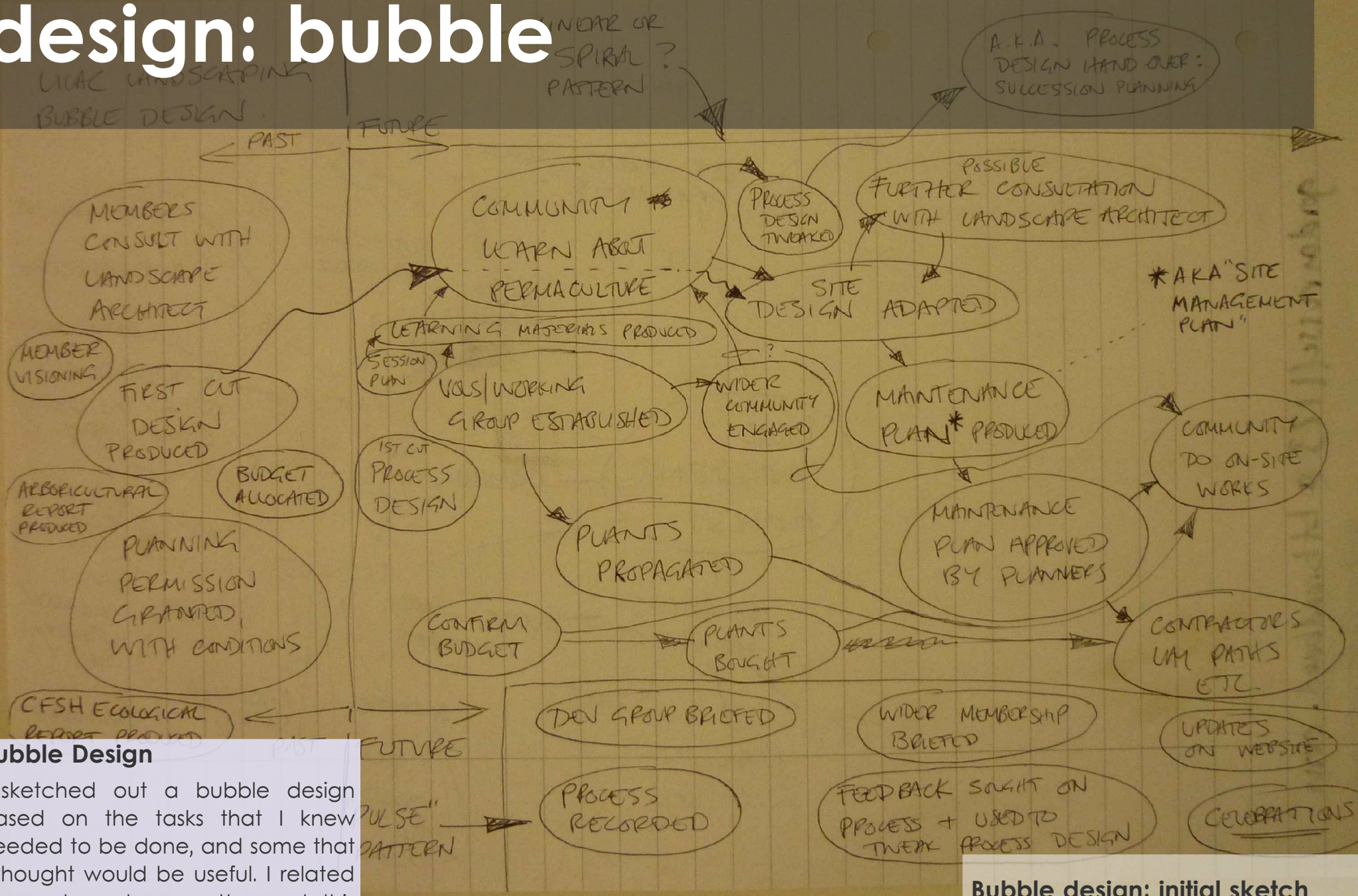
- a) Team:** establish a Landscape team drawn from the wider membership (promotes group empowerment/responsibility).
- b) Roles:** appoint "area coordinators" from within the team (promotes individual empowerment/accountability)
- c) Design Workshops:** All-member workshops:: visioning & design consultation exercises.
- d) Meetings:** Working group meetings: detailed design, Implementation planning, budgeting.
- e) Work days:** All-member work days: Skill- & Knowledge-sharing
- f) Education:** A programme of Permaculture workshops & courses

design

Functions/elements matrix	Team	Roles	Design Work-shops	Meetings	Work-days	Edu-cation
Empower members	X	X		X	X	X
Create a shared vision	X		X	X		
Members understand legal constraints/planning obligations			X	X		
Develop designs for each area		X	X	X		
Develop implementation plan		X		X		
Members learn about permaculture; develop design skills			X	X	X	X
Promote plant knowledge sharing	X		X	X	X	X
Promote gardening skill sharing	X				X	X
Develop links with wider community					X	X
Have fun and create community glue/social capital	X		X	X	X	X

Each element performs multiple functions; each important function supported by multiple elements

design: bubble



Bubble Design
 I sketched out a bubble design based on the tasks that I knew needed to be done, and some that I thought would be useful. I related concepts such as patterns at this stage...

Bubble design: initial sketch

design: zones

Zones in Community

I experimented with using zoning to describe the degree of involvement each discrete group at LILAC would have with the landscape plan. As the overall coordinator (initially), I placed myself in the middle; Zone coordinators next as they would have greater involvement than the wider landscape working group. The membership is before the DG because they are technically a higher authority, and would need to be consulted on many design decisions.

The use of zoning helped me to determine how elements relate to and impact the various groups (see over). However, it also became clear as I worked with zones that the concept of spatial zones is not nuanced enough for this context. The zones that I had identified in my community represent active participants in the process; different groups can have influence over elements, rather than just being passive containers for them. Indeed, some of the zones ARE elements in the design.

So, the use of zones in this design is interesting and useful to an extent (i.e. as an additional lens to view aspects of or elements within the design through), but it is potentially confusing as well.

Existing Zones in community

- Zone 0: Development Group
- Zone 1: LILAC membership
- Zone 4: Local neighbours & community
- Zone 5: Wider Society

Proposed Zones in community

- Zone 00: landscape team/DG liaison (me for now)
- Zone 0: Area coordinators
- Zone 1: Landscape team
- Zone 2: LILAC membership
- Zone 3: Development Group
- Zone 4: Local neighbours & community
- Zone 5: Wider Society



Many zones make light work of the tool shed

design: zones

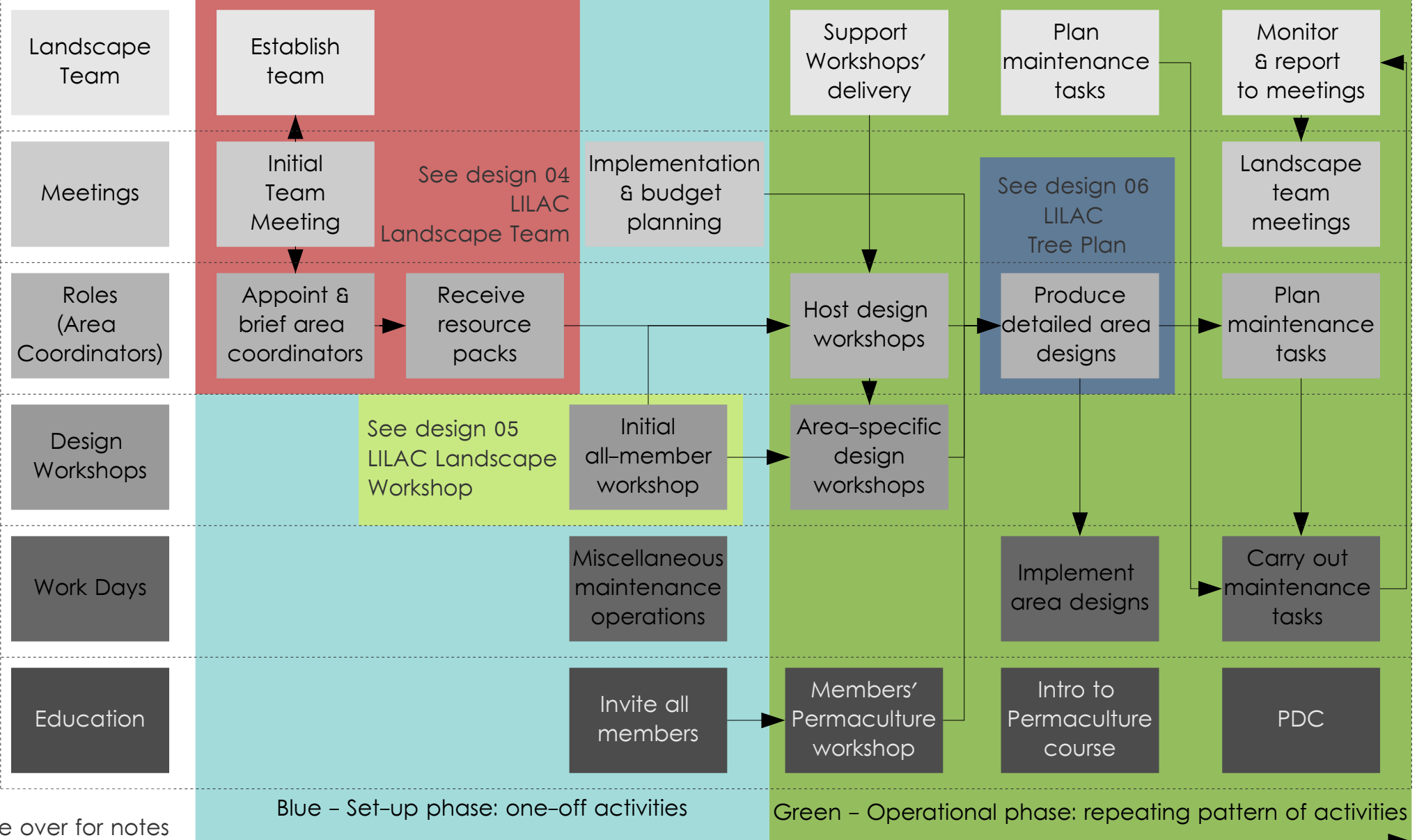
“Placement” of Elements in Zones

I used the matrix below to describe the relationships between the elements and the “zones”. I came to realise that there are more types of relationship between these community zones and their elements than simply “zone x *contains* element y”, or “element y *is placed within* zone x” (as might be the case in a land-based design).

So I have named the relationships. The matrix should be read across and then up, so the first entry is “Zone 00 Landscape team/DG liaison *designs* Team”; then “Zone 00 Landscape team/DG liaison *designs* Roles”; “Zone 00 Landscape team/DG liaison *Design/host/facilitate* Workshops” and so on... An “x” denotes that they’re the same thing.

Zone/element relationship matrix	Team	Roles	Design Workshops	Meetings	Work days	Education
Zone 00: Landscape team/DG liaison	<i>designs</i>	<i>designs</i>	<i>Design/host /facilitate</i>	<i>Attend/chair/ take minutes</i>	<i>Design/host /facilitate</i>	<i>Design & deliver</i>
Zone 0: Zone coordinators	<i>drawn from</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>Design/host /facilitate</i>	<i>Attend/chair/ take minutes</i>	<i>Design/host /facilitate</i>	<i>Invited to</i>
Zone 1: Landscape team	<i>x</i>	<i>contains</i>	<i>Attend</i>	<i>Attend/chair/ take minutes</i>	<i>Design/host /facilitate</i>	<i>Invited to</i>
Zone 2: Lilac membership			<i>Invited</i>	<i>read minutes</i>	<i>Invited to</i>	<i>Invited to</i>
Zone 3: Development Group			<i>Invited</i>	<i>read minutes</i>	<i>Invited to</i>	<i>Invited to</i>
Zone 4: Local Neighbours & Community			<i>Invited (to some)</i>		<i>Invited to</i>	<i>Invited to</i>
Zone 5: Wider Society						<i>Invited to</i>

design: schematic



See over for notes

Time

design: schematic

Design Schematic Explanatory Notes

The diagram does not capture all the detail. Rather it shows the pattern and maps some relationships between elements.

Elements are shown down the left, activities relating to them extend to the right. During the set-up phase (blue background) each activity takes place once, and is designed to get the team and area coordinators up and running, and establish patterns of good practice. More details of these activities can be found in designs 04 & 05.

The operational phase (green background) represents a repeating pattern: a separate design will be produced & implemented for each area identified within the landscape plan. Each design will include a design workshop/consultation with other LILAC members, implementation and maintenance through work days. Area coordinators report progress to the landscape team at meetings. Minutes of meetings are circulated to the wider membership.

Area-specific designs will be informed by the members' shared vision for the landscape that is established at the initial design workshop (see design 05). It is hoped that zone coordinators will also take up the opportunity to learn more about permaculture through the education activities, and that their designs will be informed by this as well.

I took on the trees 'area'; as trees appear higher up the scale of permanence I wanted to ensure that – as far as possible – the design used permaculture and the placement of the trees was right first time. see design 06.

Permaculture intro courses and PDCs happen independently; members are still actively encouraged to attend.

design: implementation plan

Implementation Schedule

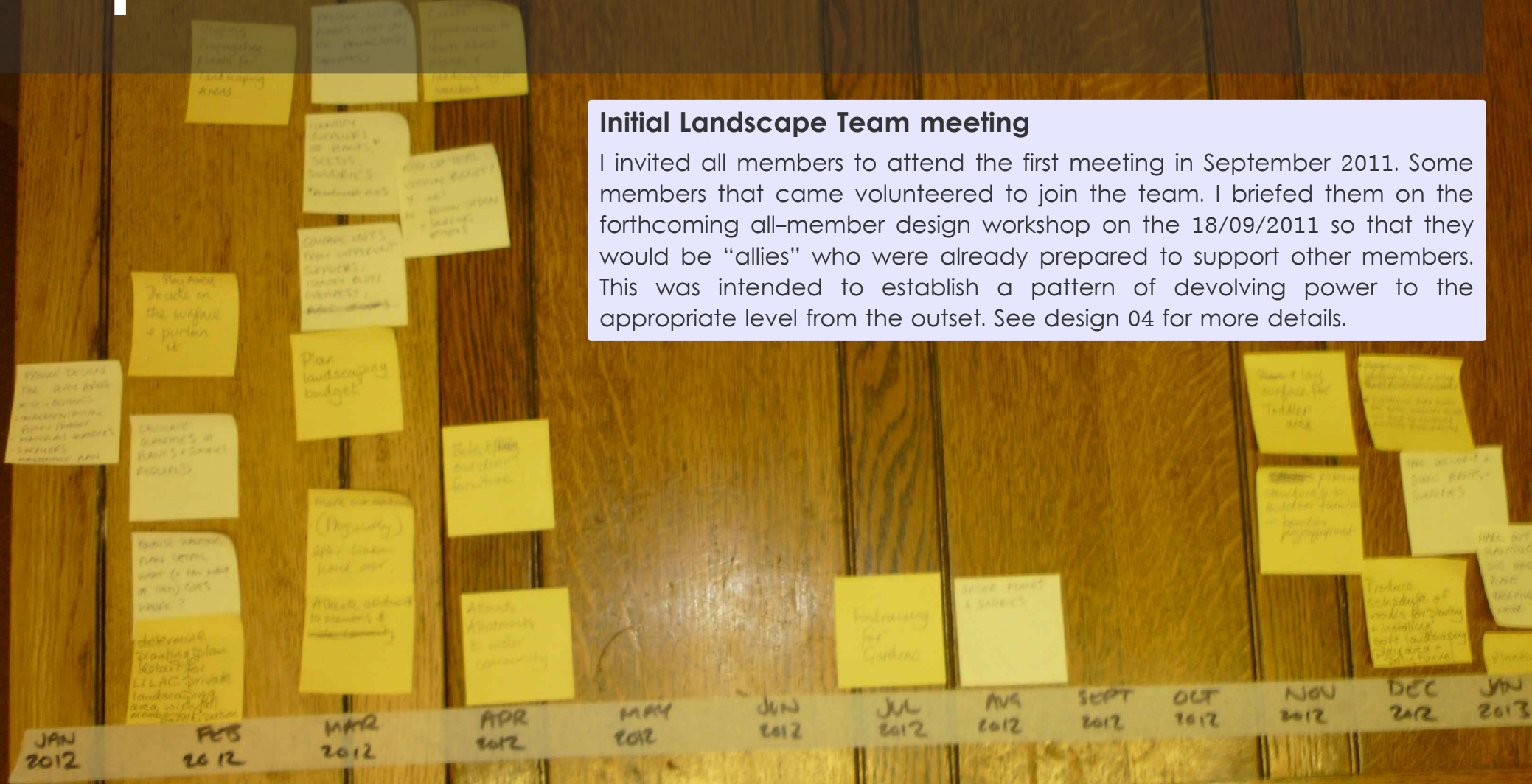
I designed meetings/workshops in the set-up phase carefully; later meetings were planned collectively

- **Autumn/winter 2011: Set up phase**
 - 01/09/11 – Me: Design Team; plan forthcoming team meetings & prepare resources
 - 04/09/11 – Landscape Team meeting: appoint & brief zone coordinators
 - 18/09/11 – All-member workshop: visioning, legal briefing & design work
 - 30/10/11 – Me (+ volunteer?): produce & submit Site Management Plan to planners
 - 20/11/11 – All-member work day: sow green manure, further design work
 - 08/01/12 – Landscape Team meeting: implementation & budget planning
- **Spring 2012: Transition between Set-up phase and Operational phase**
 - All-member work day: mow & dig in green manure
 - Me: invite all members to 1 day permaculture intro
 - Area coordinators: begin to develop their designs at workshops
 - Landscape team becomes more self-managing as I step back & make space
- **Summer & autumn 2012: Operational phase**
 - All-member workshops to finalise designs
 - Me: Deliver 1 day permaculture intro
 - Landscape team is self-managing budget & implementation plans
- **Winter 2012 – autumn 2013 First year of occupation: Operational phase**
 - Area coordinators/Landscape team: invite all members to work days & design workshops
 - Landscape team is completely self-managing
- **Beyond year 1: Operational phase**
 - Landscape team demonstrates its own evolution...

implementation: team

Initial Landscape Team meeting

I invited all members to attend the first meeting in September 2011. Some members that came volunteered to join the team. I briefed them on the forthcoming all-member design workshop on the 18/09/2011 so that they would be "allies" who were already prepared to support other members. This was intended to establish a pattern of devolving power to the appropriate level from the outset. See design 04 for more details.



Implementation time-line produced at Landscape Team meeting 08/01/12

implementation: roles



ZONE: East of Common House

MAIN USES

Herbs for cooking
escape from a meeting
It's a great window - people don't view at LHA

Appointing Members to Area Coordinator Roles

Some of the attendees at the initial Landscape Team meeting stepped into zone coordinator roles. I distributed “area coordinator resource packs” to them. See design 04: [Lilac Landscape Team](#).. Other area coordinators came forward from outside the team later; membership of the Landscape team was not a prerequisite for coordinating a Landscape area.

Landscape Team meeting 03/03/13

implementation: design workshops

EDUCATION
PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE LIVING
TO LEARN FROM MAKING IT
INCREMENTAL + EVOLVING

MEDICINAL
Medicinal herbs aromatics

OUTSIDE COOKING + EATING
AREAS TO COOK AND EAT OUTSIDE
Clay Over using sub soil

FOOD
EDIBLE PLANTS
GROW FOOD FOR US ALL
GROW VARIETY FRUIT + VEG
FOOD - fruit nuts veg herbs
EDIBLE Edible Colourful Plants
USEFUL PLANTS (FOOD ETC)

WHAT DO WE WANT FROM LILAC'S LANDSCAPING?
PLAY!
PLACES TO PLAY AND HANG OUT
WOODEN PLAY PARK FOR ALL AGES
ALL AGE PLAY
Play Space
NOOKS DENS
TREE HOUSES?
Play - treehouse swings climbing
TO PLAY!!!

AESTHETICS
SHADE IN SUMMER + LOOKS GOOD IN WINTER
BEAUTY DIVERSITY + VARIETY
YEAR ROUND INTEREST
LOOK GOOD WITH THE BUILDINGS
Pleasing to our Senses
BEAUTIFUL AND WELCOMING
LOTS OF GREENERY
VARIETY OF SPACES (PLAY)

SANCTUARY
RELAXING
Easy to Meander Round
CALM, QUIET, PRIVATE

COMMUNITY
PROMOTE COMMUNITY
SOCIAL NEIGHBOURLINESS
GOOD SIGHTLINES

PROMOTES BIODIVERSITY
Wildlife habitat
A COLOURFUL BIODIVERSE JUNGLE
CO₂ capture

Initial All-member Workshop
The initial all-member design workshop allowed us to revisit and restate our vision for LILAC's landscaping. This could then inform all future area-specific design workshops. Also, modelling good facilitation set up a pattern for other area coordinators to follow when they later consulted on their areas' designs. See design 05 LILAC Landscape Workshop.

implementation: work days

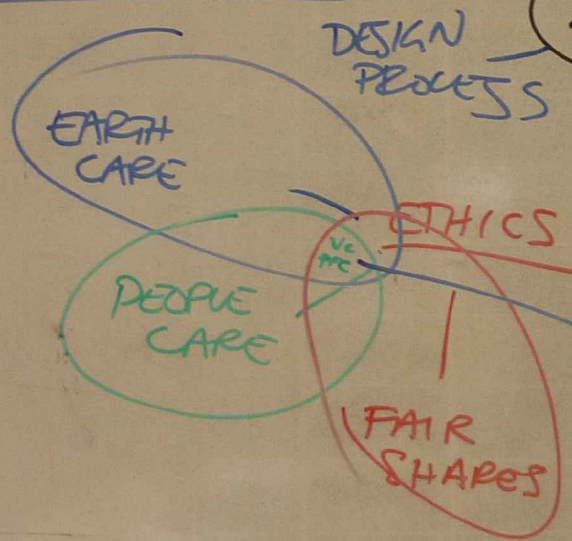


All-member work day 20/11/11

This was the first work day; integrated into a design workshop, it involved sowing *Secale cereale* as a green manure for the coming winter.

implementation: education

A DESIGN SYSTEM
FOR MAKING SYSTEMS
THAT ARE EFFICIENT AND
RESILIENT BY COPYING
HOW NATURE WORKS



WHAT IS ^{MENT} PERMACULTURE?

NO IDEA!

OZZIE BLOKE

CLOSED CYCLES - USING "WASTE" PRODUCTIVELY - MULCH! - SELF SUSTAINING

PRINCIPLES - WORKING WITH NATURE - BENEFICIAL RELATIONSHIPS - GUILDS - 3 SISTERS

DESIGN - MIN. EFFORT, MAX GAIN - CONVENIENT - ZONES - USER-FRIENDLY

NOT ALWAYS NEAT + TIDY - NATURAL/UNID LOOK - PRODUCTIVE MESS

LILAC! :)

Diaries
Wed 19th

1 day permaculture intro 23/09/12

September 2012: I ran a one-day permaculture workshop for anyone at LILAC that was interested. 5 members attended.

maintenance

Ongoing maintenance activities

The Landscape Team is now self-managing, i.e. maintained by its members. The group meets monthly to report on progress on each zone, review the budget, and to plan future work days.

Landscape work days are held monthly and are now promoted as skill-sharing days to emphasise the opportunities for members and neighbours to come and learn.

Design workshops for the few outstanding areas of the site continue to run.

Since this design, 1 Lilac member has attended an intro course run by me, 2 have gone on to gain PDCs through Leeds Permaculture Network and another is booked on the next Leeds PDC.



All-member work day 06/04/2013

evaluation

Application of permaculture ethics

People Care

- Empowering the wider membership
- Taking stress off the Development Group
- Enabling people to share their knowledge and gain new skills

Earth Care

- Encouraging members – especially area coordinators – to use the permaculture approach to designing & managing their areas
- ongoing programme of permaculture education for members to deliver ecological benefits for LILAC's site

Setting Limits to Consumption & Redistributing Surplus

- Redistributing "surplus" power and control to the wider membership
- Encouraging area coordinators to plant edibles, reducing food miles

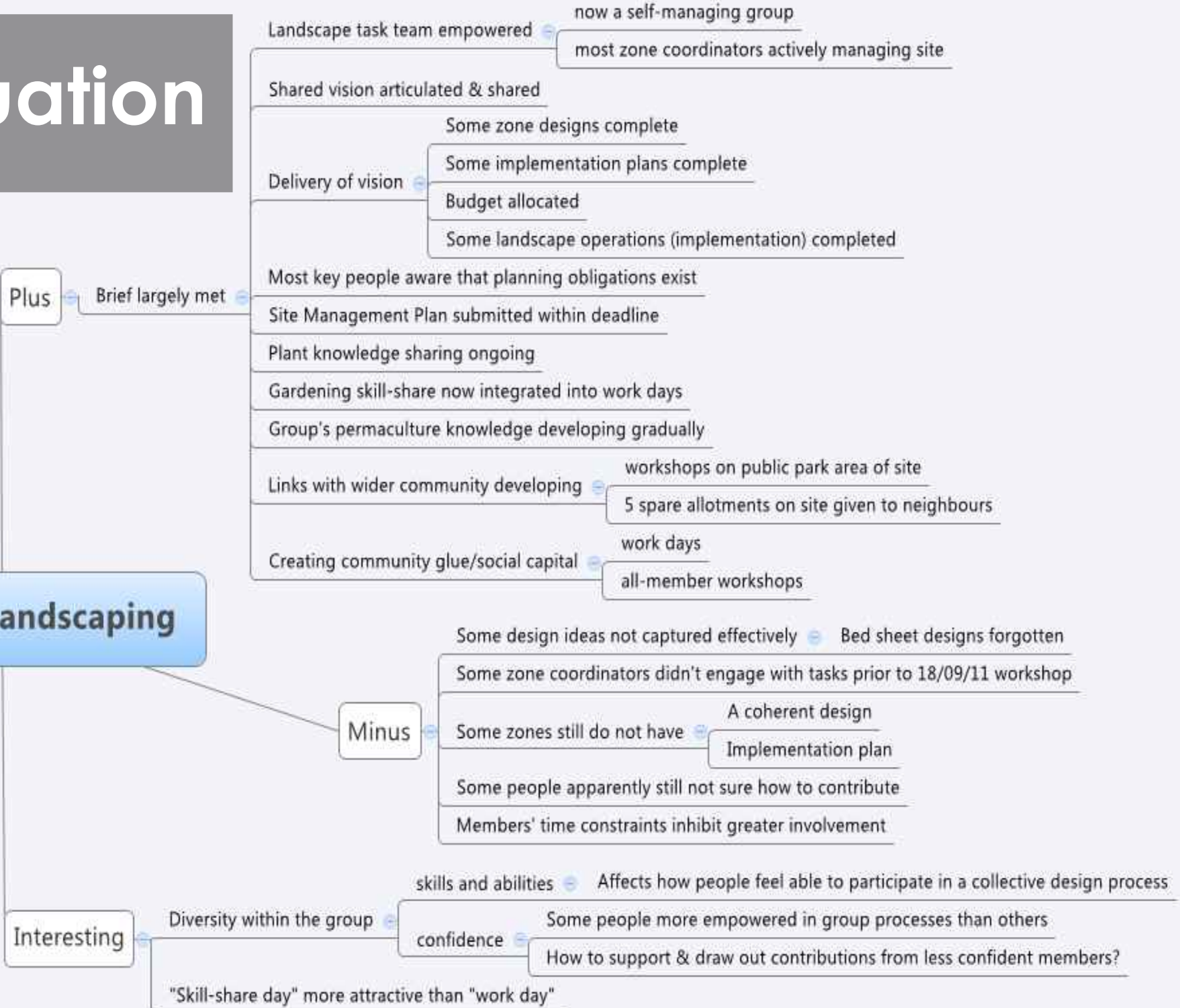
evaluation

Application of permaculture principles

Observe & Interact	Observation of existing dynamic in LILAC community, project progress & constraints, etc.
Catch & Store Energy	-
Obtain a Yield	Every element in the design is there to bring some benefit, be it empowerment, learning etc.
Apply Self-regulation & Accept Feedback	Observations on how people engage with the process; adapt as and when necessary. Offering “skill-sharing days” instead of “work days” attracted otherwise disengaged members
Use & Value Renewable Resources & Services	-
Produce no Waste	-
Design from Patterns to Details	Started out with functions, identified elements to perform them, arranged into time line, detailed planning for early events.
Integrate Rather than Segregate	Multi-functional ‘elements’ in design. Include all members in as many activities as appropriate
Use Small & Slow Solutions	Avoid the temptation to ram permaculture down people’s throats. Let the learning take place gradually, and invite people to come to it when they’re ready
Use & Value Diversity	Make space for everyone’s unique contributions by offering a range of ways for people to get involved: workshops, work days, meetings etc.
Use Edges & Value the Marginal	Some members find meetings & planning difficult to engage with, but are very practical
Creatively Use & Respond to Change	-

evaluation

03. LILAC Landscaping



evaluation

Leeds Architecture Awards

In January 2014 we were awarded a commendation in the Landscape category of Leeds Architecture Awards.

This was an external acknowledgement of the quality of the design and implementation work carried out by the community.

The winner of the category was Leeds University's "Sustainable Garden", which had been designed using permaculture principles by a former student of the Leeds Permaculture Design Certificate Course.



reflection

What went well?

- The early meetings: having prepared so meticulously meant that they went very well.
- Feedback from one participant at the all-member workshop on 18/09/11 was “that was the best workshop I’ve ever been to.”
- After initially establishing a pattern of working group meetings, all-member workshops & work days, plus additional training, the team took responsibility as I stepped back and invited people in.
- Members have been keen to participate in practical work days, particularly when learning was an explicit outcome.

What was challenging?

- The all-member group lacked the time to really engage with the design. This has had some impact in terms of a sense of ownership of the landscaping for some members, and potentially the quality of the final designs.
- Adapting land-based tools (zones) to social systems – not necessarily the best tool for the job.
- My choice of elements resulted in some inconsistency between them – some are categories, some are instances of elements.

reflection

Long term visions & goals

- LILAC's landscape task team to keep operating and to gradually deliver all of the soft landscaping, and take care of ongoing maintenance.
- LILAC's membership continue to share botanical & horticultural knowledge & skills indefinitely.
- To develop my skills for facilitating groups through design projects
- To be able to offer group design facilitation as a paid-for service?
- Develop 3D modelling skills to support future design work by creating more effective/realistic visualisations for people who struggle to work with plans & drawings.

Next achievable steps

- Inject some enthusiasm / direction into zones that have lacked input. In particular, the zones that I'm managing need some attention:
 - Finish off implementation of Tree Plan
 - Begin all-member design consultation for "triangle" zone that I have recently taken on as a zone coordinator
- Watch some online Sketchup tutorials and develop more sophisticated 3D models for forthcoming designs



I recently came across this quotation:

*“A leader is best when people barely know he exists.
Of a good leader, who talks little, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say,
“We did this ourselves.””
— Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching*

It captures what I hoped to achieve with this design:
a framework that is open enough for people to step into and lead themselves,
yet structured enough to give them the direction and confidence to do so.