

Leisure, Environment and Events Committee

Agenda Item LEE 1845/24

Future of the Parish Council's Allotment Plot

Context

The Parish Council took responsibility for an allotment plot on the Barton Way site in 2018. This paper proposes a way forward to ensure that the Council is getting value for money in relation to its allotment project and that the plot remains fully utilised.

Discussion

The initial premise of taking on a plot was to launch a pre-schooler allotment group to help pre-school children understand how vegetables and fruit reach their plates. Former Parish Councillor, Nigel Cole, led the project. The Annex explains the concept.

The Rangers put a considerable amount of work into clearing the site, building raised beds and sorting out the huts. Nigel Cole, who had a nearby allotment, initially took responsibility for the day-to-day management of the allotment.

We held regular sessions for pre-school children and their carers through the summer to let them plant, tend, and harvest produce. Each session required quite a lot of work to organise and run with at least one councillor to supervise (Nigel Cole) and support from at least one ranger and the admin officer.

The first year (2019) went well, although the number of children involved was comparatively small. However, 2020 was affected by the first wave of Covid. We have had three years' further experience, 2021, 2022 and 2023, which have included setting up the chickens. The more recent sessions were run by the Rangers for a couple of hours each fortnight over the summertime.

There have been recent staff changes in the Council's Ranger team and currently there are not the resources to run the programme for pre-school children this summer and maintain the allotment as is needed during the growing season.

To help relieve some of our Ranger's current workload, and to bring the allotment plot back into full use, I propose arranging a group of councillors to clear and tidy up the plot one weekend. In addition, it is important to see after 5 years of running the allotment project that the Council and our residents are getting value for money out of the initiative. I propose that a further detailed paper be taken at the next LEE committee meeting in September for councillors to consider whether to continue running the plot, or relinquish it back to the Barton Way Allotment Association, ahead of the committee budget setting cycle for 2025/26.

Recommendations

It is proposed that:

- The Council organises a group of councillors to clear and tidy the allotment plot one weekend
- A paper be taken on the future of the allotment plot at the following meeting of the LEE committee

Cllr Andrew Gallagher
25 June 2024

ANNEX – PROPOSAL FOR SETTING UP AND RUNNING THE ALLOTMENT

Cllr Nigel Cole's e-mail 11 January 2019.

To: All Councillors, copy: Mr Clerk

Our awfully nice, hard-working Rangers have made great strides in taming the new allotment, installing weed resistant matting and building raised beds. The next steps are to erect a new shed, to fill the beds, to buy some tools that are right sized and safe and seeds and plugs for planting. At that point, come reasonable weather and more daylight we'll be ready to go, probably toward the end of March.

The intention of the allotment is to offer an activity for parents/carers to learn and play with their children outside, to introduce young children to the value of caring for plants and trees, and they will, in due course, be able to take something home that they have created. A secondary consideration is that being active outside is a good defence against early years' obesity and offers a natural dose of vitamin D between March and November.

The plan for using the allotment is to offer, initially, a couple of weekday sessions each month, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon, of about an hour's duration at which the children will prepare the ground, plant seeds or plugs, tend the plants, play learning games, do some drawing and use their imaginations. I've seen children playing in the mud kitchen behind the café at the Aquadrome and learned how simple ideas can be most effective.

If there is high demand for the sessions we may be able to run more frequently but that depends entirely on the Rangers' time and their ability to deliver their normal work. In the winter months sessions will take place once a month.

Numbers will be restricted and each child must be accompanied for the whole session by a responsible adult. If there are siblings of preschool age it would be unreasonable to require that two adults attend but parents/carers will need to accept that this is not a baby sitting service.

This email is to invite you, if you are not otherwise committed, to attend some of the sessions to support the Rangers and me in supervising, to offer help with planting, weeding, turning soil over, collecting water from the troughs etc and tidying up after. If enough councillors volunteer you might be needed to be available no more than once every couple of months. Should gardening not be your thing but you'd like to meet residents or just visibly represent the council at any of the sessions, that would be great too.

If you would email me back in due course, I'd be grateful.

Have a good weekend.

Nigel