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Community Way
Croxley Green
Rickmansworth
Hertfordshire WD3 3SU

Environment & Amenity Committee 3 October 2017

Enhancing children's interest in caring for our green environment

Introduction

A particularly valued feature of Croxley Green is the amount of open space dedicated for public enjoyment. It is apparent that Croxley Green residents place significant value on this aspect of parish life. Green spaces play a crucial role in urban and suburban areas and potentially will become even more important in the future as our climate changes. They help to protect us against flooding and extremes of temperature, whilst supporting wildlife and help gardeners to be healthy, and can provide an amazing range of benefits.

Although the Parish Council offers services and funding directed at improving the green environment for primary age children (Rangers) and for the benefit of local residents generally and people passing through (e.g. Flowers4Croxley), there are no specific services offered for preschool children.

Instilling a love of land and the practical use it can be put to in producing fruit and vegetables at an early age should encourage future generations to see value and get enjoyment (and informal education) from green space. There is a common concern that children spend too much time, particularly in the early years' context, in sedentary and indoor activities. Such a tendency may lead to poor health in later life if inactivity becomes a habit. Poor health increases the burden on local NHS facilities.

This proposal partly addresses these issues.

Discussion

This proposal is for the Parish Council to become an allotment holder at the Barton Way site, adjacent to the Parish Offices; for the Rangers to maintain the allotment and to run bi-weekly sessions during the Spring and Summer and monthly sessions during the rest of the year for **preschool** age children, each accompanied by a responsible adult, so that the children learn about sowing, planting, caring and harvesting crops and/or flowers and providing habitats for wildlife, with the advantage of being able to take home something they themselves have 'created'.

- The Rangers' work with Flowers4Croxley improves the look and feel of the parish particularly for shoppers and visitors – essentially adults – and Cllr Hobbs' proposal adopted at the July 2017 Council meeting extends that element.
- The Parish Council Rangers work hard with all three local primaries to enhance school age children's appreciation of open and green spaces. The work that the Rangers do at the schools is much appreciated.
- The Royal Horticultural Society encourages school gardening (<https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/home>) and Malvern Way School is a participant. There is no equivalent provision in our community for pre-school age children.
- As a Parish Council we make little direct provision for encouraging preschool children to see the green environment as a significant asset.

- The allotment holders at Barton Way, Lavrock Lane, Croxley Hall Woods and Frankland Road get pleasure from the work they do and the harvests they reap. It is evident, at least at Barton Way, that holders also take their children and grandchildren to the sites and those children enjoy what they see (and eat).

Before the previous Senior Ranger resigned I talked through this idea with both Rangers who supported it. They believed that they would be able to allocate time without compromising their current work load and without causing overload. It will be necessary for the new Ranger to be DBS checked (the current Senior Ranger has this already).

The additional cost of the Council is anticipated to be relatively small, comprising annual rental of an allotment, seeds, plants, soil improvement products (compost, manure), some tools for use by children (plastic or wood and child friendly), some tools for use by Rangers (that are not already used during their day jobs) and other consumables.

An informal discussion with the Barton Way Lettings Secretary suggests that there would be no objection to the Parish Council taking an allotment for this purpose. To ensure good relations with other allotment holders it would be essential that the children are properly supervised, hence the requirement for each child to be accompanied by a responsible adult. Councillors, who have an interest in fruit and vegetable growing and the time, would be encouraged (subject to having been DBS checked) to volunteer to support Rangers at the sessions.

The Clerk advises that the Parish Council has previously been an allotment holder so there is some precedent for this idea.

Recommendations

1. That the E&A Committee
 - a. approves the principle of renting (and paying the annual rent of) an allotment at Barton Way adjacent to the Council offices;
 - b. approves the addition of the responsibility of running sessions to the Rangers' job function following completion of initial suitable training of our new ranger (to allow for some slack in the workload);
 - c. Approves an annual budget of £1,000 (excluding Ranger time) to implement this proposal, and seeks its inclusion in the Council budget.
2. That the proposal be implemented in early 2018 with the first sessions with children are planned for Easter 2018, subject to the availability of an allotment and preparing it in advance.
3. That the scheme, if approved, is reviewed for uptake and interest after the first and second years of operation to ensure that it is worth continuing.

Cllr Nigel Cole
September 2017