

PETITIONS IN RELATION TO THE RURAL ACTIVITIES GARDEN CENTRE

Cabinet Member	Councillor Eddie Lavery
Cabinet Portfolio	Cabinet Member for Community & Environment
Contact	Democratic Services – democratic@hillington.gov.uk
Papers with report	None.

HEADLINES

Summary	To inform the Cabinet Member that two petitions have been received by residents in respect of the Rural Activities Garden Centre. To consider the petitions and views of the lead petitioners.
Financial Cost	N/A
Relevant Select Committee	Residents' Services
Relevant Ward(s)	Colham and Cowley ward

RECOMMENDATION

That the Cabinet Member for Community & Environment meets with petitioners and listens to their views.

Reasons for recommendations

The Petition Hearing will provide a valuable opportunity to hear directly from the petitioners of their concerns and suggestions.

Alternative options considered / risk management

None at this stage.

Select Committee comments

None at this stage.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Two petitions have been received by the Council in relation to proposals regarding the future of the Rural Activities Garden Centre on West Drayton Road. The Cabinet meeting on 26 June 2025 is currently scheduled to consider the matter and will receive a full report setting out all relevant information.

Petitions on service matters, where 100 or more Borough residents have signed them, are considered formally by the Council as part of its established petition scheme. Both petitions received meet this requirement.

Therefore, given the relative urgency in timings, a petition hearing has been arranged at short notice to enable the petitioners to meet with the relevant Cabinet Member so their views can be duly considered before the matter is considered further at the Cabinet meeting.

The Lead petitioners, or their representative, will be able to speak and present their views to the Cabinet Member at the hearing.

Details of the two petitions are set out below:

Petition 1 - Stop LBH closing Rural Activities Garden Centre - an irreplaceable social care resource. Petition hosted on change.org

At the time of writing this report, the online petition had over 5,001 signatories with the following preamble:

At a hastily arranged meeting on 30th May, young adults with learning disabilities and their families were shocked to be informed by Hillingdon Council that it had decided to close the award-winning Rural Activities Garden Centre (RAGC) on West Drayton Road, without consultation with those impacted.

For over 40 years, vulnerable young adults with autism and/or learning disabilities from all over Hillingdon have attended this centre for social support and to benefit from confidence-building activities by working as volunteer gardeners, supervised by the brilliant staff at the centre. This work produces plants and other garden items for sale to the public, substantially subsidising the centre. At the time of writing, the council web site describes RAGC as its "hidden gem".

Over 50 people attended the meeting on 30th May and, sad to say, there were tears from some of those who attend the centre after they learnt of the planned closure. Their professional carers and a local GP at the meeting expressed alarm at the impact any closure would have on the lives of the vulnerable people they care for.

We have very little time to stop this closure as Cllr. Eddie Lavery (Ickenham and Harefield Ward) is planning to rubber stamp the closure decision at the Cabinet meeting at the Civic Centre on 26th June (from 7pm). This meeting can be attended by members of the public

as observers. If this closure goes ahead, it will have a life-changing impact on some vulnerable young adults so surely there should be proper consultation. If you agree, it would be great if you could sign this petition to request that the closure decision is withdrawn so that the irreplaceable support provided by this unique centre can continue.

Petition 2 - Stop the London Borough of Hillingdon's Closure of the Rural Activities Garden Centre on West Drayton Road, Uxbridge UB8 3JZ. Petition hosted on the Council website.

At the time of writing this report, the online petition had over 387 signatories with the following preamble:

We the undersigned petition Hillingdon Council to Stop the Closure of the Rural Activities Garden Centre on West Drayton Road, Uxbridge UB8 3JZ

For over 40 years, vulnerable young adults with autism and/or learning disabilities from all over Hillingdon have attended the award-winning Rural Activities Garden Centre (R.A.G.C.) on West Drayton Road, Uxbridge UB8 3JZ

These young adults have significantly benefited from confidence-building activities by working as volunteer gardeners, supervised by the brilliant staff at the centre. This work produces plants and other garden items for sale to the public, substantially subsidising the centre. At the time of writing, the London Borough of Hillingdon web site describes R.A.G.C. as its "hidden gem".

At a hastily arranged meeting on Friday, 30th May 2025, young adults with learning disabilities and their families were shocked to be informed by the London Borough of Hillingdon that it had decided to close the award-winning Rural Activities Garden Centre (R.A.G.C.).

Over 50 people attended the meeting and, sad to say, there were tears from some of those who attended the centre after they learnt of the planned closure. Their professional carers and a local GP at the meeting expressed alarm at the impact any closure would have on the lives of the vulnerable people they care for.

Councillor Eddie Lavery (Ickenham and Harefield Ward) is planning to make the closure decision at the Cabinet meeting at the Civic Centre on 26th June 2025 from 7.00 p.m. This meeting can be attended by members of the public as observers.

We the undersigned petition the London Borough of Hillingdon Council to stop the closure of the Rural Activities Garden Centre (R.A.G.C.) on West Drayton Road.

Key Objections Against the Proposed Closure.

The closure of the Rural Activities Garden Centre (RAGC) would result in:

- 1) a significant, negative and detrimental impact on the lives of the vulnerable young adults with autism and/or learning disabilities who use the centre.*

- 2) *a significant, negative and detrimental life-changing impact on the lives of the families, staff and professionals who support and care for the young adults with learning disabilities*
- 3) *the removal of vital and irreplaceable social support for vulnerable young adults with autism and/or learning disabilities*

In its proposed closure of the Rural Activities Garden Centre (RAGC), the London Borough of Hillingdon has acted unfairly and undemocratically:

- 4) *The families and young adults with learning disabilities were informed of the proposed closure at extremely short notice on Friday, 30th May 2025, less than a month before the Council Cabinet's decision is to be made on Thursday 26th June 2025.*
- 5) *Limited time was afforded to those interested and concerned parties to express their opposition to the proposed closure i.e. families, staff, professionals and members of the medical profession who support and care for young adults with learning disabilities.*
- 6) *The Council has failed to provide a wider local public consultation and engagement exercise and has failed to provide any transparency on its proposed closure of the centre.*
- 7) *Accordingly the Council has not consulted more broadly and widely with those both directly impacted by the proposed closure and local residents.*

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications to consider petitions and hear residents' views. Any financial implications relating to Council proposals regarding the future of the Rural Activities Garden Centre will be set out in the later Cabinet report on the matter.

RESIDENT BENEFIT & CONSULTATION

This report allows the Cabinet Member to consider the concerns raised by petitioners.

CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS

Corporate Finance

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report relating to hearing the petitioner's views.

Legal

There are no specific legal implications arising from holding a petition hearing.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Petitions.