

RURAL ACTIVITIES GARDEN CENTRE - PROJECT PLAN FOR ITS MODERNISATION AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Cabinet Member	Cllr David Simmonds and Cllr Philip Corthorne
Cabinet Portfolio	Education and Children's Services and Social Care Health and Housing
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Papers with report	RAGC - Project Plan

HEADLINE INFORMATION

Summary	The report sets out the proposals for the Rural Activities Garden Centre (RAGC) as a multi use site to ensure a sustainable future for the Centre and enable residents with learning difficulties, disabilities and mental health issues to engage in appropriate training, volunteering and supported employment activities.
Contribution to our plans and strategies	Sustainable Community Strategy, Disabled Peoples Plan, Sustain Prosper and Renew.
Financial Cost	The project plan identifies a potential accommodation upgrade which it is estimated would have a capital cost of £240,000 will have a capital financial cost.
Relevant Policy Overview Committee	Education and Children's Service POC and Social Care Health and Housing POC
Ward(s) affected	Yiewsley, All wards

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

1. Note the extensive potential that the Rural Activities Garden Centre has for supporting residents with learning difficulties, disabilities and mental health issues into appropriate training, volunteering and supported employment.
2. Instruct officers and to action the proposed Project Plan to ensure the Centres sustainable future.

INFORMATION

Reasons for recommendation

The Rural Activities Garden Centre has considerable potential to support residents with learning difficulties, disabilities and mental health issues to gain skills which support greater independence and where appropriate supported or full employment. This project will open up real opportunities to provide local services for people with learning difficulties, disabilities and mental health issues or in need of a route to rehabilitation in a more effective and sustainable way.

The site offers many opportunities to provide a multi use facility that will serve the community and benefit many residents. By prioritising opportunities for vulnerable adults alongside activities which generate income for the Centre sustainability and positive future can be achieved.

Alternative options considered / risk management

Alternatives for the Centre have been considered, including an out sourcing approach. The development of a multi use site, where several Council Services can contribute positively and work together for the benefit of the centres users is the preferred option.

All services who will be working together on the site have already had successful interaction with the Centre with positive results and the risks are minimal.

Comments of Policy Overview Committee

The Social Services, Health and Housing Policy Overview Committee will be considering this report at a special meeting held on Monday 25th July. Education and Children's Services Committee Members have also been invited to attend. Any comments from this meeting will be circulated to Cabinet to consider.

Supporting Information

1. The Rural Activities Garden Centre (RAGC) is currently a day service for people with learning disabilities, providing horticultural skills and opportunities to socialise and meet others. The centre currently operates as a garden centre, selling the plants and produce grown by the trainees and giving gardening advice. Poultry is reared on site and eggs are sold. The site is currently run by Social Care Health & Housing Directorate and some management and supervision is provided.
2. The National Development Team (NDT) was commissioned to undertake a thorough options appraisal "Developing the Rural Activities Garden Centre" (Feb 2009). As of this time there were around 26 clients making use of the centre. The majority of clients had been attending the centre for over 12 years and 7 had been there for at least 20 and 4 for more than 28 years. The remainder had been using the centre for between 1 and 3 years. 17 of the clients also attended other day centers or colleges. The clients also attend other venues including Brookfield and Longmead Adult Learning Centres, and day centers at Woodside Day Centre, Parkview and Grassy Meadows.

3. There are strong current and historic links between RAGC and the Adult Learning Service. The Adult Learning Service has been providing learning and training opportunities for service users at the RAGC, in partnership with the Social Services, Day Services Team since 2004, across a wide range of subjects to meet the identified needs of the centres users. In recent years the Adult Learning Service has developed courses, with a strong horticultural content, working with the RAGC to support vulnerable residents into supported employment or greater independence.
4. The site offers many opportunities to provide a multi use facility that will serve the community and benefit residents. Prioritising opportunities for service users alongside activities which generate income for the Centre are essential for ensuring sustainability.
5. During an Event held on the 17th June 2010, facilitated by Officers and attended by Service Users, Parent Carers and stakeholders, 3 key priorities were identified.

Priority 1 Master plan for the site. Phased improvements

Priority 2 Educational use for adult education, work experience, college, environmental studies. (would need a classroom)

Priority 3 Outside Gardening Gangs Private/Contract work

These have formed the basis of a larger offer for both current users and for all residents wishing to use the centre in the future.

6. On further exploration, it is clear that the site is capable of being developed to offer training for life and employment skills and to prepare some people for onward employment or to greater independence in their daily lives. Alongside the current service users residents, currently suffering from mental health issues or in need of rehabilitation may wish to explore its therapeutic offer by engaging in high quality horticultural activities
7. Through the effective cross service working and close partnerships formed between the Adult Learning Service, Day Services and Green Spaces the site could provide opportunities for a wide range of vulnerable residents to develop and gain a variety of skills on an individual basis or as part of a team, to build confidence, develop expertise and work tolerance and to then move on to other opportunities. As part of an Adult and Community Learning offer these opportunities may be educational, in training, volunteer, or employment related within the community, whilst other users may be suited to a regular of pattern of work and interaction based solely at RAGC.
8. For residents with learning difficulties, disabilities or mental health issues the RAGC as a multidisciplinary Centre could provide:
 - ❖ A full Foundation Learning Programme, leading to supported employment across 4 pathways, Horticulture, Catering, Retail and Hospitality, linked with the already successful programme at Brookfield
 - ❖ Opportunities for all vulnerable residents to engage in horticulture supported employment and volunteering, through partnership with Green spaces
 - ❖ "Workright" programmes which support LDD residents in and into supported employment

- ❖ Supported employment opportunities in Retail or other work placements
- ❖ Progression and employment for hospitality learners who have completed their foundation course at Brookfield
- ❖ Extension of land based courses to include practical sessions for more advanced levels, providing volunteering opportunities alongside main stream learners.
- ❖ Growing and sale of cut flowers. These could be used by adult learners for training courses.
- ❖ Fully supported Micro Enterprises for users to develop their own businesses.
- ❖ Involvements with the RHS, National garden scheme (yellow book) , Hillingdon in Bloom

9. The Project Plan (appendix 1) sets out, the actions required to ensure a smooth transition of the management of the Rural Activities Garden Centre from the Day Services Team in the Social Care Health and Housing Directorate to the Adult and Community Learning Team within Planning, Environment, Education and Community Services directorate and the future direction for the Centre. The plan has been produced by staff within both teams, all of whom have had involvement with the RAGC over a number of years from various perspectives

10. The priorities identified by users and stakeholders at an event on June 2010 have been fully considered and have been instrumental in shaping a clear vision for the centre moving forward, which is:

'To provide a horticultural bridge, over which centre users may walk with appropriate support towards greater independence and supported employment'

The Project Plan will realise this Vision through 2 phases:

Phase 1. Transition of Service Management and Resource Identification for sustainability including Capital finance.

Phase 2 Three Year Strategic Plan and Sustainability Strategy, with associated developments.

Financial Implications

The majority of actions described in the project plan will be completed using existing resources. Some training developments can be funded by the adult learning service through their existing contracts with the Skills Funding Agency and Young Peoples Learning Agency and exploration of further revenue funding will be undertaken.

The project plan includes a Capital Funding requirement which the current Administration is fully committed to.

It is estimated that in the region of £ 240,000 will be required to upgrade the current accommodation, which does not currently meet legislation nor satisfy the needs of the Disability Discrimination Act, for which a funding strategy will need

to be identified. The requirement can be incorporated into the Councils Medium Term Financial Forecast (MTFF) process, or if an investment is required in the current year consideration could be given to bidding for an allocation from any unallocated capital contingency.

The project plan also identifies a number of work streams that will aim to seek external funding and generate additional income that can be used to enhance existing resources. a number of work streams also look to develop wider links with other Council services that could generate efficiencies going forward , including closer working with the green spaces service.

EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES

What will be the effect of the recommendation?

The realisation of the proposed Project Plan for the Rural Activities Garden Centre will have a significant and positive benefit for not only current users but for those in the future who have learning difficulties, disabilities or mental health issues. It will provide a wide range of opportunities to support vulnerable residents towards greater independence and increase the numbers in supported or full employment.

The change programme will balance the needs of the existing service users who value the preventative aspect of the current service, whilst also widening opportunities accessible to new users, not necessarily solely people with a learning disability.

Consultation Carried Out or Required

Extensive engagement with stakeholders has taken place over the future direction of RAGC, including regular meetings and workshops over the last two years. In June 2010 an event was held, facilitated by officers, which centre users, parent carers and other stakeholders attended to explore new directions for the centre and to identify priorities for its future direction of travel. The proposed Project Plan has been largely influenced by this work and information.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial implications identified above. Proposals for capital investment included above will be presented to Members through the MTFF process

Legal

Under the Council's Constitution, the Cabinet has the appropriate powers to agree the recommendations proposed at the outset of this report. There are no other significant legal implications arising out of this report to bring to Cabinet's attention.

Corporate Landlord

The Corporate Landlord is in support of the recommendations within the Report

Relevant Service Groups

Planning, Environment, Education and Community Services and Social Care
Health and Housing

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL