

COMMUNITY GARDEN

Introduction

This report brings forward to Council an update on the Community Garden project to date and sets out how the project will be managed as it progresses.

Background

The concept of a community garden was first brought forward to the Amenities Committee on 29 March 2021 (minute A21/20) with a proposal to provide the then Ranger with a plot at the Crannaford Allotment site to grow on trees and have a site for horticultural educational. That proposal was not supported but the Committee did request further information on the concept of creating a more traditional community garden scheme in the town.

On 18 July 2022 a detailed report was presented to the Amenities Committee by the then Open Space Ranger. The report reviewed a number of potential sites and considered how a community garden would be developed and managed. The report concluded that the Town did not have sufficient capacity or volunteers to sustain a community garden and recommended that the project be shelved for a period of at least 5 years. Following discussion, the Committee did not support the recommendation but sought further information and a report which included the possibility of the involvement of a community interest company (CIC) (ref. minute A/22/51).

A subsequent report was provided to the Amenities Committee on 10 October 2022. This report outlined the progress following positive discussions with YouGrow CIC regarding the possibility of creating a community garden in the Country Park alongside the dog exercise area including the provision of a water supply (which could be shared with dog owners). Positive support had come forward from community groups including St Martin's School, Scouts and Guides as well as the Gateway Programme at Exeter College in addition to members of the Cranbrook Community. The Committee resolved to seek a fully costed proposal for the development and management of a community garden. (Minute A/22/64).

On 30 January 2023 a further update report was presented to the Amenities Committee. This report set out the positive discussions which had taken place with YouGrow. It outlined the management and financial direction of a community garden, particularly the provision of management by YouGrow and ongoing funding through grants obtained by YouGrow. At this stage progress had been made through the appointment of directors and a detailed brief for the project which was presented to the meeting. The Committee resolved to note the report, support the principle of the project as outlined, (in the absence of a Ranger) appoint Cllr Ray Bloxham to take forward the project in conjunction with Clive Chilvers of YouGrow and to provide further information including seeking costings for the provision of water at the site. (ref. minute A23/07).

The discussions with YouGrow were clear about the fact that the project would be driven by the CIC. The Council agreed to bring forward a water supply and pay for the ongoing use of the supply but that all other costs would be covered through grant funding.

Following a site meeting with South West Water, costs for the provision of a water connection, meter and supply leading to a new water trough adjacent to the site were approved by Council on 24 April 2023 (ref. minute 23/57). At the time of reporting the water connection is planned for 11 December 2023.

Current Position

YouGrow is now operational as a CIC with directors appointed.

Funding of £10,000 has been obtained to take the project forward.

YouGrow is working with the Ranger to engage the schools in a community garden design project. This will include the provision of a number of beds including raised beds to assist disabled volunteers.

YouGrow is working with CoCreate to support volunteers to construct the first series of beds. CoCreate is experienced in leading meaningful involvement of people from the community by providing opportunities to create a facility in the community for the community. See their website at www.cocreateexeter.co.uk. YouGrow has access to materials and tools. The developers have been approached and agreed to support the project with the provision of materials such as pallets, pallet collars and cable drums - all of which can be repurposed on site.

The first beds will be laid out by early January 2024.

St. Martin's school has agreed to support the community garden by the provision of plants grown in the school's own garden. It is not intended that the school will use class time to attend the community garden but will focus on after school times for involvement by children and families.

Beds will be designated for groups including children and those with disabilities.

Whilst You Grow will manage the project and organisations like CoCreate Exeter will add support, the garden is intended to be a community garden by the community for the community.

Town Council will provide and fund the water supply and ongoing bills. As the site is Town Council land the Council will have oversight through the Ranger.

The involvement of a town councillor as project lead is no longer required.

Further updates can form part of the Ranger report as and when they are required.

Exploratory discussions have been held with YouGrow to explore additional sites throughout the growing town to have community garden provision closer to homes given that the current site is remote from some parts of the town. A further report will come forward on this aspect in due course once the current project is established.

Recommendation

To note the report.