

Report for Councilors regarding Allotment project for meeting on 14th

Meeting held on 4th November

Samir Pandya and Paul Partridge from Braintree District Council (BDC) and Councilors Dorothy Griffin, Tony Pritchard and the Clerk for Great Notley Parish Council (GNPC)

Actions from last meeting

Samir confirmed that a pre application planning meeting had been held with planners at BDC and a detailed site layout plan will be required together with ecological, soil and environmental reports.

Countryside Properties had been contacted but had no historical data about the site.

The location of the water mains needs to be confirmed by GNPC using the report from Anglian Water

Top soil is available for use from Horizon 120

Update on reports

Soil survey - Samir advised that the soil survey had been received and advised that low and medium contamination had been revealed with a conclusion that the land is not suitable for allotment cultivation and that the recommendation is to remove the soil and replace with fresh soil which BDC consider to be too expensive and beyond budget.

Samir suggested that the way forward would be to have raised beds. Dorothy asked how that would work and whether it would be safe for the cultivation of crops to be eaten as contaminants could leach through. There was a discussion about the fact that the Parish Council would have a duty of care to allotment tenants not to harm them and there needs to be confidence and expert advice that any arrangements would be safe. Both Samir and Paul considered that it would be OK to have the raised beds. Samir advised that he had approached environmental health at BDC for comment upon the proposal.

It was agreed to provide the soil survey to the Parish Council to read and consider whether any further advice is required.

Bat Survey – Two of the six visits have been carried out but can't be concluded until next spring.

Reptile survey – The survey had revealed lizards and slow worms but the conclusion was that there is lot of suitable surrounding environment for them and that a destructive search needs to be carried out prior to any construction. Paul asked for clarification that no relocation would be required.

Pre-planning application meeting

The planners had raised concerns about access. There is a presumption that tenants will park in the car park and a suggestion that there would be a bespoke

area for them to park but clarity required as to whether any payment would have to be paid for parking.

The planners also wanted to know about footpaths as there are other users who walk through the area including young people walking to football and workers at Skyline who have parking permits in the car park and then walk over to the units. There would possibly need to be a re-routed footpath to avoid people walking through the site.

The planners advised that lots of details of the site layout would be required in any planning application including fencing location and colour, location of standpipes, sheds or shared storage. Therefore prior to any planning application there would need to be a meeting with prospective tenants to be clear on wishes and needs and also whether they would still be interested in the site if it is not a traditional site but raised beds. BDC would then arrange to engage a consultant to prepare the site design. It was suggested that Nicola Murphy at BDC who works in landscape services may be able to assist. BDC would like to be in a position to submit the planning application in the spring of 2023.

It was suggested that it may be worth taking a look at other raised bed sites and speak to NAS to see where they are in Essex

A further meeting will take place in December

Receipt of the Soil Survey

Later in the day Samir provided a copy of the soil survey which I have now read. I would like to highlight the following issues of concern –

- Due to the high volume of vegetation and the location of the water main the survey did not cover the entire area (page 23 of report)
- A high number of contaminants were found in the soil as a result of the area being used to dispose of construction waste from Skyline including arsenic, benzene, hydrocarbons (page 24 of report)
- Lots of concrete, brick and ash are present in the soil and there was even an odour of hydrocarbons observed.
- The report is quite clear in its risk assessment that it is not suitable for use as an allotment site.
- The recommendation in the report is that the soil is removed and replaced. And that any construction workers should be warned of unknown contaminants.

I am concerned that the comments by the representatives from BDC were quite blasé that the project could proceed with raised beds which they stated would be safe (even though they are not experts) whereas there is no such suggestion in the soil survey of this being an option. It simply recommends removal of the contaminated soil. The concerns raised by Councilor Griffin were somewhat dismissed on the basis that the risk is stated to be low when having read the report this is not the case with the risk stated to be moderate and the report is 100% clear

that although there is no toxic waste on site it is in no way safe or suitable for allotment cultivation.

The suggestion of raising this with an environmental health officer would not seem to resolve the issue as they would not have investigated the site and are not contamination experts.

I would suggest that bearing in mind that the Parish Council will have a duty of care to allotment tenants, it will need to have expert advice as to whether raised beds will allow for safe cultivation and what method should be used to enable it to be safe as there are a number of options for raised beds. I would suggest that this is the primary issue to be resolved before any further actions are taken in relation to this project.

Please consider this report at the meeting on 14th November 2022

Suzanne Walker

7th November 2022