

WEST SWINDON PARISH COUNCIL**Community Growing & Community Pantry****1. Background**

- 1.1 From 2017, with the creation of new Parishes, Swindon Borough Council devolved allotments to the each parish. For West Swindon, this passed Blagrove allotments as a single allotment site for West Swindon residents. The Parish Council inherited a waiting list at this time which has been sustained. During the pandemic, the list doubled in numbers and has now been closed with over 50 residents on the list.
- 1.2 Over the last five years, the Parish Council has reviewed land across the Parish with a view to creating new allotment plots. Most available land is part of public open spaces. The Parish Council has investigated an extension to the existing allotment site and the results of this will be brought to Full Council for consideration.

2. Detail**Community Growing:**

- 2.1 As part of the review of allotment availability, there has been consideration of community growing. These would be shared spaces which could potentially be sited on former play area backland sites. Feedback from Swindon Borough Council's Property department is that this would be acceptable if it remains as open space, if the areas are fenced and locked it would need prior approval and planning permission.
- 2.2 As a trial, the Parish Team have cleared an empty corner at the Blagrove allotment site and a community growing club has been created. Funds from the Freshbrook Clean and Green fund have been used to create a workable space. The purpose of the trial will be to test out interest in growing in a shared space.
- 2.3 The Community growing project will give any edible produce away and will also collect and share any surplus fruit and vegetables from other plot holders.
- 2.4 If there is a high level of interest in community growing, other spaces could be created.

Community Pantry:

- 2.5 Community pantries have been around for a long time, some operate on a large scale with a shop interior, whilst others are fridges and shelves in community spaces. Some provide discounted food, others provide items for free. The benefits are supporting zero waste and supporting people with extra access to food and household items. Residents in West Swindon can access the foodbank however the frequency of visits is often limited as it is meant to be short term or crisis support.

- 2.6 Prior to the pandemic, Swindon Borough Council Housing team started a food recycling café in Toothill which offered surplus food from supermarkets free to local people. It folded after struggling to establish regular sessions.
- 2.7 The Community Growing volunteers are keen to link with a community pantry in Toothill/Freshbrook so that surplus food from the allotments has a route for distribution. The Parish Team could build a free standing cupboard for the purpose of sharing basic food supplies and any surplus food.



- 2.8 Locations would need to be agreed. A pantry could be inside community spaces such as school grounds or the West Swindon library. Outside locations could be close to community routes such as church or community centre car parks. It is possible that this type of project would be prone to vandalism however it could be tested on a trial basis.
- 2.9 Access to Fareshare or other supermarket surplus schemes would be helpful as a basis for the collection of items.

3. Financial Implications:

- 3.1 The Parish Council has no budgets set aside for community projects but does have a budget of £1,000 for community celebrations which could be used for this purpose. Alternatively start-up funds could be taken from the Clean and Green fund.

4. Recommendations:

- 4.1 Councillors note the information in the report and give feedback on the potential progression of community growing and community pantries.

Paula Harrison
Parish Manager