
Report To: Planning, Leisure & Environment Committee **Date:** 11th March 2024

Contact Officer: Paula Harrison

Subject: Community Growing – Russley Close

1. Community Growing - Background

- 1.1 West Swindon Parish Council has been reviewing options for community growing over the last two to three years. At the last Planning, Leisure & Environment Committee on 5th February 2024, it was agreed that at least one site be initiated for a trial and outline costs be presented to the next available meeting.
- 1.2 Following a site meeting, the backland space at Russley Close has been earmarked as a trial site. This is due to the number of local residents living within a short distance of this site who have expressed an interest in community growing (11).



1.3 The backland space at Russley Close is a naturally enclosed grassed space with a tree and shrub boundary. Access is through residential pathways. There is a bridge crossing which means that vehicle access is restricted and there is no available space for parking – therefore participants will be advised to visit on foot.

2. Russley Close

2.1 It is proposed to cut out a section in the centre of the grassed area for community growing. Ideally, the space would be sprayed with a weedkiller in the first instance and could then be hand dug and hand rotavated. It is possible that top soil will not be necessary. The area is very wet and holding surface water at the time of the site visit. These are poor conditions for ground works. As soon as there is a short period of dry weather the first markings and cutting out will be undertaken. It will be possible to create two long beds with a path through middle to enable multiple points of access. The two long beds could be sectioned off into mini beds.

2.2 There is no plan to fence or border the growing space and there will be walking space retained around the outside. There will be no change of use as it will still be public open space. It is envisaged that grass would be cut on the outside of the field area to support existing walkers. There is no easily available water supply so local growers would need to work this out.

2.3 There will need to be consideration on what local residents are being invited to do, what support will be available, and ground rules for engagement in the community planting. It is likely that there should be at least two people who lead the project so that any queries or complaints are directed to them in the first instance. It is essential that no activity on the site by local growers creates a health and safety risk for other people.

2.4 Potential guidance/ground rules could include

- Watch where you walk
- Clean up after yourself
- Agree planting together (e.g. fruit and vegetables only)
- Only water your section
- Skip the chemicals
- Share your excess
- Look out for each other
- Do not leave tools on site
- Respect other people who use the space e.g. dog walkers
- No structures, canopies, poles.

2.5 The Council would need to consider what status the group/project has, for example, it is not a group of volunteers or a group of neighbours. Can it be self organising? If the area becomes vandalised, will there be an expectation that the Parish Council puts it right? If there are disputes between members of the growing group, will the Parish Council be expected to resolve the issues.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 The Parish Council has not planned any expenditure for community growing however it could be funded through amounts accumulated in the Clean and Green fund and it might be relatively cost free if we have sufficient materials in house already. It will require a half day's labour. If the area requires any repair or remedial work this might necessitate additional resources over time.

4. Recommendations

- 4.1 That this Committee confirms progression of Russley Close as a trial community growing space.
- 4.2 That this Committee considers next steps in terms of the invitation to participants.