

PART 1 - PUBLIC

Decision Maker: Environment Portfolio Holder; and
Resources Portfolio Holder

For pre-decision scrutiny by:

Environment PDS Committee on 5th April 2011

Date: 5th April 2011/26th April 2011

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Executive Non-Key

Title: **COMMUNITY NURSERY DEVELOPMENT**

Contact Officer: Louise Simpson, Development and Partnerships Manager, Streetscene & Greenspace,
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Chief Officer: Nigel Davies, Director of Environmental Services

Marc Hume, Director of Renewal and Recreation

Ward: Plaistow & Sundridge and Darwin

1. Reason for report

This report seeks approval for the Brook Lane former allotment site (Plaistow and Sundridge Ward), and land south of Cranworth Cottages, between Nos. 17 – 43 Leaves Green Road (Darwin Ward), to be used as a community horticultural nursery and supporting growing area until such a time when the land may be sold for development.

2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

2.1 **That the respective Portfolio Holders agree that:-**

The former Allotment Site at Brook Lane, Downham and Land South of Cranworth Cottages, between Nos. 17 – 43 Leaves Green Road, Leaves Green be used to establish community horticulture nursery facilities

2.2 **That the Environment Portfolio Holder agrees to:-**

The proposed community horticulture nursery, and growing area, subject to adequate external funding being secured.

Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing policy. Empowering community involvement in the development of parks and greenspace
 2. BBB Priority: Quality Environment. Contributes to other BBB priorities
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Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Estimated cost £34k for 2011/12 and £22k for 2012/13
 2. Ongoing costs: Recurring cost.
 3. Budget head/performance centre: N/A External funding is being sought to fund project
 4. Total current budget for this head: £NIL
 5. Source of funding: Project funding is expected to be delivered through external funding opportunities
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Staff

1. Number of staff (current and additional): current - 1 Partnerships Officer plus support as and required by existing staff
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: 16 hrs per week dedicated officer time
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Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Non-statutory - Government guidance.
 2. Call-in: Call-in is applicable
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Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): All Bromley residents
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Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? Yes.
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments:
3. Cllr Turner and Cllr Harmer support the proposal
4. Cllr Morgan does not support the current proposal
5. Cllr Scoates - supports the proposal in principle and has some advice on detail

3. COMMENTARY

- 3.1 For the past year, the Parks and Greenspace Service has delivered two pilot health initiatives called 'Park Time' and 'Grow Time', which are funded by the local Primary Care trust (PCT) and based in the Cray Valley. This programme is a natural extension to the work of the Friends of Parks groups, as many parks volunteers comment on how their quality of life has improved since they have been working outdoors in a park landscape setting.
- 3.2 The 'Park Time' and 'Grow Time' programmes seek to improve people's health by involving them in landscape maintenance work and growing projects. By using Bromley's greenspace as a catalyst, clients benefit from improvement to their physical and mental wellbeing. The additional benefit is that our park and greenspace landscapes are improved because of the work of these clients. Both groups are now formally constituted and sit under the "Friends of Parks" umbrella.
- 3.3 'Park Time' and 'Grow Time' clients include those suffering with depression, post traumatic shock syndrome, and from stroke. The group contains a diverse mix of personalities with differing medical issues. Officers have worked hard to ensure all clients support each other to enable each person to get the most from every work day. This has led to the building of confidence and self esteem for individuals, and to the making of friendships. The social element to the day is just as important as the physical activity benefits, as many clients have been isolated from their community because of illness.
- 3.4 The two programmes run side by side each other. Those with an interest in conservation and horticulture work with the "Park Time" team, and the "Grow Time" clients learn to run an allotment site and grow their own produce. There is always one structured teaching session throughout the day and subjects include propagation, soil preparation, composting, building raised beds, crop rotation, weed identification, horticulture, pruning, biodiversity and insect habitats.
- 3.5 The groups have inspired the Cray community with their enthusiasm, which has enabled additional growing projects to being started in partnership with Affinity Sutton, Giggs Hill Church and the local junior schools, St Mary's and St Paul's. The group has also cleared derelict ground to provide an additional 26 allotment plots for local people to use. Clients are now independently growing plants in their own gardens and several have hired their own allotment plots.
- 3.6 The next stage in development, is for the programme to become sustainable, without relying on the Council's financial resources. The vision is to expand this programme to work across all Wards, providing additional maintenance to Bromley's 155 parks and open spaces. There is the added bonus of having 55 Friends Groups, 52 Allotment sites and over 20 sport providers, who are actively supportive of this scheme, and who provide the community mentoring to enable this programme to succeed.
- 3.7 To enable growth, there is need to identify an area that the "Grow Time" and "Park Time" clients can call 'home'. This needs to be an area that is large enough to grow shrubs, trees and plants, to provide new stock or replacements, which can then help populate Bromley Councils flowerbeds and shrubberies. All training, tools etc are to be funded externally through the PCT and other agencies. The existing clients have also raised their own funds to provide the necessary seeds.
- 3.8 The clients require a piece of land, of appropriate size, which is separate to park land, as planning consent will be difficult to obtain for polytunnels, sheds, toilet etc within a parkland setting. It also needs to be separate from established allotment sites, as there is already a waiting list for these plots.

3.9 Officers have identified two suitable areas of land for the production and growing on of trees, shrubs, and flowers.

4. **FORMER BROOK LANE ALLOTMENT SITE**

4.1 The former derelict Brook Lane Allotment Site which has an area of approximately 0.8 acres (0.33ha), and is located in Plaistow and Sundridge Ward, has been identified by Environmental Services Department as suitable for this purpose. This site has been the subject of previous reports to the Resources Portfolio Holder in 2005 and 2006, when a sale to Broomleigh Housing Association, who own adjoining properties, was proposed, and the possibility of acquiring an access from Avondale Road was also considered. The site is designated as urban open space and is subject to a restrictive covenant which prevents residential development, and there is a culvert passing under the site. The Council only has pedestrian access to the site and would have to market it jointly with, or acquire, an adjoining property. It is, therefore, considered that it will be difficult to achieve any development on the site. However, the site does provide an ideal location for a purpose built community nursery. Any of the necessary building structures such as a toilet block, rest room, and greenhouses would be lightweight structures, so as not to compact the existing water network.



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5. **SURPLUS LAND OFF LEAVES GREEN ROAD**

5.1 Additionally, there is also an area of land known as the 'Land South of Cranworth Cottages', between Nos. 17 – 43 Leaves Green Road, within Darwin Ward which is required to provide an additional growing area. The land is currently managed by the Valuation and Estates Division, as part of the Green Belt Portfolio. The site measures 2 acres, with approximately 0.25 acres comprising of woodland. Two highway soakaways are positioned close to the south west boundary.

- 5.2 In the late 1960's the land was declared surplus to the requirements of the then Housing Committee, after refusal of Planning Permission for residential development. After being incorporated with an adjacent parcel of land and let for grazing for a number of years, the land was subsequently incorporated into Milking Lane Farm. In 2007 this arrangement came to an end when the farm was sold, and consideration was given to letting the land for horse grazing again. Enquiries concluded that Planning Permission would be required to change the use from agricultural to the grazing and keeping of a horse. As the area suitable for grazing measures only approximately 1.75 acres, if permission was obtained, it would be on the condition that only one horse would be permitted (the Bromley Unitary Development Plan states a minimum of 0.4 hectare [approximately 1 acre] per horse). The Horse Trust has advised that, as horses are herd animals, it is not recommended to graze horses alone for long periods of time. Additionally, following a recent unsuccessful marketing exercise involving a similar sized parcel of land for horse grazing, there would appear to be little demand for grazing sites of this size. It is therefore considered that the site is not suitable to be let for horse grazing.
- 5.3 As the site is designated Green Belt, it is unlikely that any built development would be permitted on this site in the near future although the farmland to the rear has, it is understood been purchased for speculative development.
- 5.4 The parcel of land is currently vacant, and as a result the site has been known to attract the attention of Travellers, presumably looking for sites to occupy. To date no unauthorised occupation of this nature has taken place.
- 5.6 This land is ideally suited for use by Parks and Greenspace to expand the Healthy Lifestyles work by providing an additional growing area for herbaceous stock. The soil is of good quality and would therefore be used to "grow on" plants once they leave Brook Lane. This would ensure that the plants become hardy before the volunteers from Grow Time and Park Time plant them out in the parks.



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6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 By using both pieces of land, a new Community Nursery can be built, funded by external agencies, and secure in the knowledge that is a viable and long term sustainable programme. In time the centre will be able to develop a trading arm to enable self sufficiency and could potentially evolve as a viable social enterprise. Clients will come from across the Borough, to provide the man power to grow bedding, shrubs, trees and natural provenance plants for the biodiversity sites. Clients will improve their standard of physical and mental wellbeing by working with like minded people, and their self esteem will improve as they will know they are making a difference to their local community. The project will be supported by the Friends of Parks and Streets, the Allotments and grassroots sports providers. By having a dedicated community nursery, Bromley's parks, countryside and landscaped areas will benefit from additional plant stock and quality horticultural standards.
- 6.2 Members are requested to support the use of these areas of land to enable the community horticultural nursery and growing area to be established, until such a time as these sites may be considered for development. Officers will seek external funding to meet the additional pump priming finances to get the sites established and maintained is to be achieved via external grant funding and partnership working, for which these schemes are ideally suited.

6.3 Councillors Comments:

Plaistow and Sundridge Ward (Brook Lane)

Cllr Turner and Cllr Harmer - support the proposal

Cllr Morgan - not supportive although in principle the scheme is worthy. Concerned that in this economic climate, is it right to start a new initiative which will require revenue costs? Would prefer the land to be sold for development, and for the nursery to find a different site.

Darwin Ward (Leaves Green)

Cllr Scoates - believes the scheme is sound. It will protect the Greenbelt. Concerned if the scheme was to involve hard standing – would prefer site to have low visual impact e.g. a poly-tunnel and a few trees.

7 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Park Time and Grow Time are voluntary partners and providers who actively participate in the development and maintenance of individual parks and allotment sites. Their activities support the quality environment aims of Building a Better Bromley, the Environment Portfolio Plan and the Bromley Biodiversity Plan,

8 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 It should be noted that officers will seek to secure adequate external funding to meet the costs of the community nurseries at both sites for years 1 and 2. A further report will be brought back to Members to inform them whether officers have been successful and whether the scheme can be implemented. The project is not expected to require any LBB funding other than 16 hours of officer time per week. The manual labour required to develop Brook Lane and the Leaves Green sites will be provided by 'Grow Time' and 'Par Time' clients.

8.2 The table below gives the details of the expected costs and income for the two sites over the next four years. It should be noted that the scheme is expected to be self-financing from year 3.

<u>Estimated costs & income</u>	2011/12 £'000	2012/13 £'000	2013/14 £'000	2014/15 £'000
Clearance and preparation of Brook Lane site	24	0	0	0
Running costs for Brook Lane site	0	26	13	22
Estimated income generation from Brook Lane site	0	(4)	(16)	(29)
Set up and preparation of Leaves Green site	10	0	0	0
Net cost to be covered by external funding or (profit) of sites	34	22	(3)	(7)

8.3 The Brook Lane site could be marketed on the basis that the developer resolves the access, planning and other issues outlined in paragraph 4.1. In these circumstances it is unlikely that a capital sum in excess of £ 500k will be received.

8.4 The land south of Cranworth Cottages could possibly accommodate 10 / 20 plus houses fronting Leaves Green Road depending on the nature of the development and could be worth in the region of £2m if the site was not designated as Green Belt.

Non-Applicable Sections:	Legal implications & Personnel implications
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	