

Meeting: Council
Date: 13 September 2023
From: Councillor Harrison
To: Councillor Purnell

Question:

Jealotts Hill Community Landshare provides a valuable service, helping residents build resilience and improve mental health through horticultural activities. Would the Executive member responsible for liaison with community groups please update the Council on what they have done to ensure a viable future for the Jealotts Hill Community Landshare?

Answer:

I agree with Councillor Harrison that the Jealotts Hill Community Landshare site is a valuable asset which has had a positive impact on a wide range of communities. Including people with mental, physical, and learning disabilities giving them an opportunity to work together in the fresh air, build their confidence, develop new skills and find support for their health and wellbeing

A recently bereaved lady found a new way of life after visiting the site. "It's a very special place," she says. "I was a bit apprehensive and overwhelmed to start with, but spending time at Jealott's Hill and enjoying its fresh air, wildlife and flowers has helped me overcome my grief to some extent. Bereavement caused me to seek new friends and opportunities and here, that's exactly what I get" This quote was taken from Royal Horicultural Society website who call the project "An innovative community growing space.....a source of solace and new beginnings"

I don't think there is a single person in this room or watching this meeting today who does not agree that every effort must be made to save this precious landshare.

I am working closely with council officers, the Friends of Jealotts Hill Community Landshare and partners to identify ways in which the Landshare can be sustained. The site is owned by Syngenta and has been leased to Silva Homes who have been the lead organisation in managing the Land share and employing the staff that work there. Silva Homes have given Syngenta notice on the lease and the site closed at the end of August to the public with activity since, focussed on tidying the site and handing it back to Syngenta at the end of September. Silva Homes have cited the ongoing financial liability for the operations of the site with decreased levels of use since the Covid pandemic and it not being aligned to their strategic priority to invest in the communities they operate in.

Since being made aware of the possible closure of the site the Council has had several meetings with Silva Homes including one with Syngenta to understand the issues, liabilities, and opportunities for sustaining the Landshare. The council's Chief Executive has written to the Chief Executive's of both Silva Homes and Syngenta to request a meeting and further discussion. I have also personally met with the Chair of the Friends of the Jealotts Hill Community Landshare to offer my support in trying to sustain the project. Options to sustain the Community Landshare include establishing a CIC (Community Interest Company) are being explored with the support of Involve Community Services. The Council has also been looking to identify alternative organisations whose aims align with the Landshare who may be interested in taking on a lease and management of the site.

I can assure Cllr Harrison that I am committed to supporting and working positively with the Friends of the Jeallotts Hill Community Landshare, fellow borough, town and parish councillors, as well as partner organisations like Involve. I will do all I can to ensure a viable future for the Landshare and look forward to further discussions with him on the next steps in doing so.