



Report for the Welwyn Parish Community Engagement Committee –

5th November 2018.

Digswell Community & Gardening Project

Background

The committee may already be aware of the general facilities at the Digswell Community & Gardening Project. However, although it is titled as Digswell, the site is just outside the Welwyn Parish boundary and is located within the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council area.

The site was originally part of a Borough Council's leisure site and provided nursery / planting support for the Councils area. In 1995 the site was taken over by the St John of God Hospitaller Services as a horticultural training centre for people with Learning Disabilities. The charity provides an important centre to help develop vulnerable people from the local Community. We work with them to help develop a personal support plan and to ensure that what they receive meets their personal needs.

The Vision.

To dream of impacting on both the lives of the people we serve and in practising our unique form of hospitality within the society we live in by offering and delivering holistic, value-based support in a way that not only does not discriminate but actually challenges discrimination in our communities.

The Project

The Digswell Community & Gardening Project has been supported in the past with funding from HCC and the Borough Council and is now working to become more self-sufficient in the community.

The Project has been operating to provide support for people in our society who need a little extra help. They are supported to carry out various horticultural tasks in the nursery area that gives them a way of developing their skills and confidence in the community. They are supported by a small staff team consisting of Support workers, Project Coordinator, Community Engagement Lead and a dedicated team of volunteers. The nursery has been supplying inexpensive nursery plants to the communities in Welwyn Garden City, Welwyn and surrounding areas and plans to expand this service further.



There are other activities organised during the week, including a Music Group and an Art Group that provides further opportunity for the people that the project supports.

On site there is also a busy Scrap Store and this provides a place where recycled items and materials are used to support schools, community groups and individuals who are interested in using these interesting materials. A tea and coffee shop, which has been upgraded recently, provides refreshments for the visitors to site.

During the year the Charity organises a number of special events to encourage greater awareness and include all members of the wider community -

Spring Plant event,

May Fun Day,

Welwyn Festival Week,

Summer Festival,

Halloween Evening and

Christmas Fair.

The site is also a focus for younger children of our community from Play Groups who visit and enjoy the play area, woodland walk and the nature area.

The future for the Digswell Community & Gardening Project

Discussions are continuing with the Borough Council about the future tenure of the site and this will hopefully mean that the Project can develop to support a larger number of people in need and the wider community.

There are plans to develop the site further, to include support for people who are on their own and would like to develop their practical skills. The focus is on starting a “Men’s Sheds” project, just one in a number of Community facing projects that are currently in the initial stages of development.

The existing areas of the site will be developed over the next year to ensure the site is accessible to the whole community and becomes a good community resource. The vision is for the site to become a Community Hub.



Recommendations

The Charity takes this opportunity to remind the Parish Council of the facilities that are offered at our site that helps some of the disadvantaged members of our wider community.

The Charity seeks continuing support and to raise awareness of its opportunities/facilities and the good work they do and to explore with the Parish possible involvement to help in –

- a) Supplying the Parish's future requirements for bedding plants.
- b) Provide space in the Welwyn News for publication of news items.
- c) Raise awareness to all the Community about the Project and its facilities and events.

Parish Councillors wishing to visit the site and explore the possibilities for the parish, or also as individuals, are welcome to come along or call Sue Beard on 01707 334076 who will be happy to give you the grand tour !

November 2018.