

CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY & PLANNING COMMITTEE

Date: Tuesday, 13 June 2023

Title: Nature NOW (Nourish Our Wellbeing)

Contact Officer: Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officer - Carl Whitehead

Background

The Hedgehog Club has been running highly successfully for a number of years, along with nature based education including forests schools and childminder training <https://www.thehedgehogclub.co.uk/> The organisers would like to grow and expand the work they have been doing around Witney.

Current Situation

The organisers met with the Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officer to ask if the Council would be able to support them in the work mentioned above. It was agreed the Council has the right areas of land, the country park to facilitate the project, and officers would be happy to support them in selecting the appropriate areas. A proposal is attached as **Appendix A**.

Environmental impact

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make regarding its facilities and services it operates.

The areas to be used would be pre-agreed with the Biodiversity and Green Spaces Officer and the providers are fully qualified forest schoolteachers, so have an in-depth knowledge of correct and safe use of green spaces and all accompanying safety and protection measures involved in running an event.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

There is a financial risk to the Council in that it would be subsidising a private enterprise for individuals on its land with taxpayers' funds, if agreed.

There is a very low risk of the programme not delivering the required results for public involvement and learning.

Financial implications

Described here or as stated in the report above.

- See attached report.
- There is no existing budget for this enterprise so funds would need to be sought from reserves.
- There would be a cost of officer resources in administering the scheme.
- If the Council were to proceed, it would need to ensure the final arrangement was within its financial regulations. Agreement would be required via the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. Consider how much financial support the Council can provide and the confidence that organisers will deliver what they propose and,
2. The value to the adults, children, in terms of knowledge and understanding of the natural world and how to enjoy, encourage and develop themselves and those around them and who they care for, noting it has been shown on many occasions the value to mental health and wellbeing, time spent in nature has.