

Council – 14th September 2020

Response to petition: re Anti-social behaviour at Radley's Wood, Rushall.

Service: Public Health- Healthy Spaces Team

Wards : Rushall Shelfield Ward

1. Summary

A petition was submitted to Council at its meeting on 27th February 2020 regarding the problems of anti-social behaviour at the public open space known as Radley's Woodland, adjacent to Radley's School in Rushall. The petition contained 2,176 signatures mainly from children and teachers of the school.

The Council's petitions scheme states "if a petition contains at least 1,500 signatures it will be debated at a meeting of the Council"

2. Report detail

2.1 Statement of the petition

"Radley's primary School. Save Radley's Wood Petition. Be part of the Fabulous 500!

Our School is right next to the wood. It is an area of mature trees and flowers, but it is in danger of being destroyed by neglect!

We are asking you to sign this petition to help us to take the wood into the school and create a Forest School facility for our children and our community. If we can get 500 signatures then the council will hear our petition.

This means we would be able to train staff as Forest Rangers and run outdoor activities for our children as part of our everyday curriculum, children could take part in real-life reading 'bear hunts', teddy bear's picnics, story telling, orienteering, maths, scientific and geological investigations, fire lighting and shelter building, problem solving and teambuilding, to name but a few.

It would provide a regular connection with the outdoors in a safe environment and would save parents/ carers money, as we currently have to make trips to areas such as Cannock Chase to undertake these types of activity.

Longer term, we would like to be able to make the area available for forest activities for our local Brownies, Guides and Scouts groups as well as other schools. We could also invite staff from Bryntisilio to come to us.

This petition supports the gifting of the site to Radley's Primary School to secure the site for the future and to provide outstanding learning opportunities to promote both curriculum learning and health and wellbeing by connecting our children with the natural world on a daily basis.

Our Main concerns for the wood are:

- 1. There is a good chance the woodland will be destroyed by fire, as there have been a number of these recently*
- 2. Fly tipping is getting worse- hundreds of free newspapers, human waste, dog mess and nappies are regularly dumped.*
- 3. The woodland is being damaged by illegal motorbike dirt track trails that have been dug out.*
- 4. There have been incidents of people living in the woods*
- 5. 'Adult' activities including drug- taking and drinking taking place*
- 6. Children at play in school have been verbally abused by youths in the woods*
- 7. Local children are now scared to go into the woods because of 'big kids'*

It does not have to be this way. Together, we can make a difference! Please sign our petition to give our children the opportunity to connect with the natural world."

2.2 Background

The woodland is a fairly small area in open grassland which is on uneven ground, and is mainly made up of self-set hawthorn. The woodland occupies part of a former limestone working area and some of the trees are protected by Tree Preservation Orders. The site is also designated as a Site of Local Importance for Nature conservation.

The school would like the Council to gift the land to the school in order for the school to fence off the area and make it into a teaching area and Forest school outdoor classroom. The school are very concerned about the amount of fly-tipping, damage by motorbikes, drug taking and other anti-social behaviour which is taking place in the woodland. The school feel that this solution would solve the problems of the neglect to the local area and would deter young people from abusing the open space. Furthermore, it is recognised that having access to green space is supportive to learning outcomes.

While the aims and objectives of the school are laudable, it is however important for Council to recognise that the land is designated as public open space and excluding open public access runs contrary to that designation. To inform future decision-making, the Council's Planning Policy team are currently carrying out an open spaces audit to assess if certain areas of the borough have enough public open space for the population that they serve and they are awaiting the

outcome of this audit. Unfortunately, this audit work is delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and therefore a full report on the implications of the petition has not been produced as a result. In the absence of this work to inform future decision-making, the professional advice to Council remains opposed to any change to the open space designation at this time.

The Council has declined a previous request from the school to fence off an area of sports field on the same area of public open space due to the importance of public open space to everyone in the community.

Council will note that because of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown, public open space has become more precious to the local community as they have sought the restorative benefits of exercise and quiet contemplation in green spaces. Visits to green spaces in the Borough went up by 40% during lockdown. It is important for the Council to maintain access to as many areas of green space as possible to allow all elements of the community access to the greenspaces it owns. Small elements of the community who destroy areas of open space and cause anti-social behaviour should not be allowed to ruin these spaces for the majority. There is a need for more community volunteers to assist in the management and maintenance of our open spaces and we would welcome this sort of intervention from the residents in the area, without the need for restricting access to open space.

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