

BACKGROUND

The coronavirus pandemic has claimed tens of thousands of lives across England with over 450 those being Swale residents; not to mention the dramatic and life-changing impact on people's livelihoods, family lives and mental wellbeing. It is proposed that the residents of Swale should have area set aside and designated as a place to remember loved ones and provide somewhere to reflect on the pandemic and the impact on all our lives. It is intended that a place be created where generations to come can take refuge from their daily lives and reflect. It also provides a focus on creating public outdoor space at a time when the importance of having access to gardens and outdoor space has been so vastly recognised as a core factor in maintaining good mental and physical health.

Memorial gardens have traditionally been created to remember the victims of conflict or terrorism attacks, but their background does have relevance to the current pandemic. According to a report by Historic England, memorial parks and gardens really took off after World War One when the scale of loss and the views of returning soldiers led to memorials that considered the needs of the living – rather than monuments that focus on the dead.

PROPOSAL

The initial proposal is for each of the three main areas within Swale to be provided with support and funding to create a memorial to remember those who have lost their lives, pay tribute to the amazing work our key workers and create a space for all residents to reflect on the experience of the pandemic.

It is not proposed for the names of those who lost their lives from Swale to be featured in the gardens as it is recognised that the deaths are continuing and due to the nature of how Covid-19 deaths are recorded, this could lead to some upset experienced by family members of those who feel their loved one's death may have been wrongly recorded.

The council would maintain any sites developed as part of the ongoing maintenance of the parks and open spaces, with volunteer support also welcomed where capacity and interest exists.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

As well as general feedback on the proposal, specific feedback is requested on the following areas:

- How should this be funded?
- Which Cabinet Portfolio/Cabinet Committee should lead on this?
- Should a Time Capsule of the pandemic be installed?
- Do you have any suggestions on the location of the memorial garden(s)?
- Is having one in each of the three main areas within Swale the right approach or should there be one larger garden to cover the whole of Swale?