

PARKS AND COUNTRYSIDE SERVICES

COMMUNITY SERVICES TEAM ALLOTMENT ADVISORY GROUP

Minutes of Meeting

Tuesday 9th October 2018, 6-8pm
Conference Room, Town Hall

Present:

Councillor Zahira Naz (Chair)
Ceri Ashton, Allotment Manager
Jane Bullimore, Allotment Officer (minutes)
Ann Hopkinson, Hagg Lane Allotments
Michael Booth, SAF and Moss Way Allotment Society
Michael Jordan, SAF and Moss Way Allotment Society
John Howe, SAF and Woodseats Allotment Society
Liz Smith, Woodseats Allotment Society
Margaret Boulton, SAF and Ecclesall Allotment Society
Marion Gerson, SAF and Manor Allotment Society
Ben Wallbridge, Manor Allotment Society
Councillor Cliff Woodcraft
Phil Webster, SAF and Roe Woods Allotment Society
Jude Lambe, Walkley Bank Allotment Society
James Brown, Heeley and Meersbrook Allotment Society
Councillor Douglas Johnson
Councillor Garry Weatherall

ITEM	DETAIL	ACTION
1.	Apologies for Absence Ken Croggon, Archer Lane Allotment Society Forid Meah, Woodseats Allotment Society Rob Hawkins, Hanging Water Allotment Society Janet Milton, Rustlings Road Allotment Society Dave Aspinall, Woodlands Manager Councillor Lisa Banes Minutes and Matters Arising	
2.	P2 Ceri Ashton reported that 10 students claimed a concession in 2017/2018. She said that direct debit processes are under review by the Council. We do not know whether there will be any change to the £100 minimum threshold for allotment holders to pay invoices by direct debit. P3 Ceri said Jane Bullimore is getting quotes for the standpipe at Ouse Road and Caroline Jennings is looking at the feasibility	

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	<p>of replacing any of the ground taps at Rustlings Road with standpipes, and getting quotes for surfacing at Carfield Lane.</p> <p>P4 Ceri asked if anyone from Norton Lees and St Pauls was present, to check if they had discussed hedge planting at their meetings. There was not. Ceri said the office will contact them. Caroline Jennings has written to tenants at Elm Crescent regarding water supply and the responses are coming in. Ceri reported that prices are being sought for site improvements over the winter.</p> <p>P6 Ceri reported that the call off order for tree work is being raised. The contractors will do the outstanding trees at Moss Way.</p> <p>Ceri said that during 2017/18 36 people gave up their tenancies voluntarily after receiving an inspection letter. Cllr Garry Weatherall asked if the Allotment Office bill tenants where plots are left in a state. Ceri said that the Allotment Office has pursued tenants when plots have been left in a particularly bad state e.g. fly-tipped on. They have involved Environmental Services who seek to prosecute. She clarified that Environmental Services meet prosecution costs but it can be difficult to get sufficient evidence to prosecute. She explained that in the absence of a prosecution, it is difficult to make tenants pay for the cost of removing waste left on plots, and that a deposit scheme will be discussed at a future meeting as an alternative way of approaching this issue (although the amounts for the deposit suggested in January's consultation do not come close to the actual cost of removing the amounts of waste that are sometimes left). She added that the Allotment Office does not refund rent when plots are vacated in poor condition. This rent can go towards the costs of clearing vegetation and waste.</p> <p>Marion Gerson raised a question regarding hedge heights where the ground level is higher one side than the other. Ceri said officers use their discretion and do not usually measure the precise height of hedges, but said that the rules are six feet for external hedges and five feet for internal ones. Phil Webster said in the past the Police had advised that hedges should be kept high to deter criminal activity. Ceri said they do not consistently advise this; she has been advised by the Police that hedges should be kept low to maintain visibility, so that intruders are more likely to be seen. Michael Jordan said some flexibility is required; Ceri responded that the team do use some discretion and common sense, and that in the situation Marion was describing, situations needed to be considered individually if there is a problem.</p> <p>Ceri said that a separate budget code for publicity had not been set up yet. It will be next financial year that this takes effect.</p>	<p>CJ</p> <p>CJ</p> <p>CJ</p> <p>CJ</p> <p>CA/CJ</p> <p>CA</p>

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	<p>New signs have been ordered regarding the bonfire ban and laminated ones are being used in the meantime.</p>	
<p>3</p>	<p>Rent Proposal</p> <p>Ceri Ashton gave a presentation on the rent proposals.</p> <p>John Howe said that he felt the rent increase was too high but Ceri pointed out that the majority of people who answered the questionnaire agreed that an increase in line with inflation is acceptable. Councillor Garry Weatherall said we have to respect what the questionnaire respondents said. Everyone was given an opportunity to comment and there was a response rate of 22%, which is a good response rate for a consultation. Michael Jordan said that he was concerned that the consumer price index might not be the best measure. Ceri said that that is the standard measure of inflation which has always been used and she did not think there was a better way to measure inflation. Councillor Zahira Naz said it is used across the Council. Ceri Ashton re-iterated that the proposal is for a one year decision. If external factors change, a different decision can be made for future years, but a decision for 2020/2021 has to be made now, due to the requirement to give tenants a year's notice.</p> <p>Jude Lambe said that raising income other ways, such as charging for hedge-cutting, may help the budget in the future, but this will take time.</p>	
<p>4</p>	<p>Chargeable Additional Services Pilot Scheme – Hedge-cutting</p> <p>Jane Bullimore talked through the report which said that as a result of consultation we are hoping to introduce a chargeable hedge-cutting scheme this Autumn/Winter.</p> <p>John Howe asked whether the pilot scheme included tree work. Jane responded that trees are treated separately; this proposal is specifically about hedges.</p> <p>Jim Brown asked about different types of hedging such as where the hedge is hawthorne rather than privet; this is harder to cut. Jane said we may need to look at this case by case. He also asked about what would be done with waste Ceri said this could be chipped and the chippings put in communal areas or left on the plot.</p> <p>Michael Jordan asked if the service applied to internal or external hedges. Jane said that tenants are responsible for all hedges if they form part of the plot. Michael asked about where hedges adjoin public footpaths. Jane responded that these hedges are still the tenant's responsibility if they adjoin their</p>	

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	<p>plot. Where there are hedges that do not directly adjoin any plot, the Allotment Office arranges their maintenance.</p> <p>Michael Jordan raised the issue of some trees at the perimeter of the Moss Way site. Ceri asked if this had been discussed with Caroline Jennings at a recent site meeting. Michael confirmed that Caroline knew which trees he was referring to.</p> <p>Councillor Cliff Woodcraft said he felt it might be a bit bitty as some plots are hard to identify. He asked if the Allotment Office had obtained prices. Jane Bullimore responded that prices had not been obtained yet. Ceri Ashton stated that there would need to be a standardised way of charging, as economies of scale would be lost if the contractor had to price up each individual plot separately.</p> <p>Jim Brown asked if people could still use a private contractor of their own choosing. Jane said yes of course. He said that tenants would need to be advised to make the hedge as accessible as possible. Sometimes materials are stored beside the hedges.</p> <p>Michael Booth asked about using Probation Services to cut hedges. Jane said Phil Webster had organised this at Roe Woods. Phil advised that guidance should be given on where to leave clippings where the Probation Service are used.</p> <p>The height that hedges would be cut to was queried. Ceri said we often advise hedges are cut to 4 feet so that they have space to grow and are easier to keep below 5ft.</p> <p>Michael Jordan said he felt that there was a lot to consider and asked if the Federation could discuss it. Ceri said yes and asked for comments from the group to be sent back to her by the end of the month. She said that we need to keep it simple. It is a pilot scheme and can be tweaked in future. Cllr Douglas Johnson said we could perhaps consider charging according to time. Jude Lambe suggested we seek advice from a contractor on how we might proceed.</p>	<p>All</p> <p>CA</p>
<p>5</p>	<p>Proposed Changes to Concessions</p> <p>Ceri Ashton talked through a report on proposed changes to concessions.</p> <p>It is proposed that we include Carers Allowance as a criteria for the 75% concession in future. Councillor Johnson stated that it is not a means tested benefit, but an income replacement benefit. Ceri said she would look into this further and get in touch with Councillor Johnson</p>	<p>CA</p>

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	<p>Cllr Garry Weatherall asked if students could be engaged as volunteers. It could be a volunteering opportunity for them.</p> <p>Concern was expressed about people using students to sign up for plots. Marion Gerson said that people will try and find loopholes where they can and this is no different to other concessionary criteria. Michael Jordan asked if anything can be done about people defrauding the system. Ceri said this is difficult to prove.</p> <p>A question was asked about the proportion of tenants receiving concessions. Ceri reported that 42% of tenants have a concession.</p>	<p>CA</p> <p>CA</p>
<p>6</p>	<p>Outcomes of January's Equality Monitoring Forms</p> <p>Jane Bullimore presented a report on the outcome of the equality monitoring. As a Council Service we have to monitor who uses our Service in order to identify any gaps. The report presented the findings against the most recent census information for Sheffield. The findings were that older white British men were the most represented amongst allotment tenants. According to the survey results, there is an underrepresentation of minority groups and those with a faith.</p> <p>Jude Lambe asked if the findings differed from officers' experiences. Ceri said that officers did feel some groups seemed under-represented in the survey as compared to our observations. Maybe some groups were less likely to fill in the monitoring forms. Michael Booth asked why we asked about religion. Ceri answered that this was a requirement to make sure that no groups of people are being excluded in any way.</p> <p>John Howe asked about whether sites are suitable for people with disabilities and whether any improvements are planned. Jane answered that quite a few sites are suitable and that we do make alterations where we can eg raised beds. He asked if the most accessible plots can be reserved for people with disabilities. Ceri explained that some plots which are suitable for people with disabilities are allocated to other applicants if no-one is waiting who specifically needs these plots so they don't get overgrown. Also allotment law requires that plots are offered to applicants in the order that they applied.</p> <p>Councillor Johnson said that results did not suggest that people with disabilities are being prevented. In terms of ethnicity Marion Gerson said that in her experience, once someone from a particular community comes on to site, other people from the same background may be become interested in taking a plot, due to word of mouth publicity. Phil Webster said that some communities are well represented on community plots.</p>	

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	<p>Councillor Garry Weatherall asked how we compare to the other core cities. Ceri responded that we can have discussions with them but the profile of their cities' populations will differ. Jude Lambe asked if we feel that we are representative. Michael Jordan asked why we monitor. Ceri answered that we are required to so that we can monitor trends and ensure that people aren't being excluded.</p>	<p>CA</p>
<p>7</p>	<p>Items raised by Sheffield Allotment Federation/ Any Other Business</p> <p>Jude Lambe asked a question on behalf of a tenant regarding Morley Street. She asked if all allotments under statutory provision there will remain (there had been some rumours about closure of the site?). Ceri Ashton responded that the currently used plots at Morley Street and Morley Street Gas allotments are statutory and she was not aware of any proposals concerning them. She explained that consent had been obtained previously to take a block of plots out of statutory status. These plots had been cleared, but never put to any use. At one point the site was going to be used for a family garden, but there were visible fragments of asbestos so the site was put in Parson Cross Park instead.</p> <p>A question was raised about any further progress regarding Regather's proposal for a market garden at Corker Bottoms Allotments. Ceri responded that Councillor Mary Lea and the ward councillors have been consulted. Tenants of the site would be consulted next.</p> <p>Michael Booth asked if ducks are permitted on plots. Ceri explained that they are not, but that they had been in the past and tenants who already had them had not been asked to remove them. Ceri explained that they are not permitted because they require more space than chickens, and should have access to water, and providing a suitable habitat for them was not so compatible with having a cultivated plot.</p> <p>Phil Webster asked if the Allotment Handbook is a legal document. Ceri answered that it is, because it is referred to in the Allotment Handbook.</p> <p>Margaret Boulton asked the outcome of the University's request to do soil sampling to check for contamination. Ceri said the request was declined as the Council's Land Quality Team would have to be involved and they did not have the capacity.</p> <p>A question was raised as to whether there has been an increase in crime on allotments recently. Michael Jordan reported that Moss Way has had an increase in thefts. Jim Brown reported that there have been a spate of incidents at Meersbrook with many gates damaged and property strewn all</p>	

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	<p>around. Things had been quiet for 18 months but this has been so serious that a key change is necessary. Unfortunately, whoever has caused the damage appears to have had a key to the site. It is hoped that a lock change will help but it is a massive undertaking. The Society at Meersbrook are helping with the change-over. There was a query regarding the use of CCTV. Ceri reported that following the introduction of the GDPR, an officer had been appointed to lead on CCTV for the whole of Parks and Countryside, who is currently looking at options and procedures for both Corker Bottoms and Moss Way.</p> <p>There were positive comments from both Jim Brown and Michael Booth about the involvement of PCSOs regarding the break-ins. Ceri said that the Allotment Office can provide anti-vandal paint if required. Signs must be put up wherever it is used.</p> <p>The Allotment Federation AGM is on 20th November at the Quaker Meeting House.</p>	
	<p>Date of Next Allotment Advisory Meeting</p> <p>Tuesday 11th December, 6-8pm, Town Hall</p>	