

**PARKS AND COUNTRYSIDE SERVICES
COMMUNITY SERVICES TEAM
ALLOTMENT ADVISORY GROUP
Minutes of Meeting**

**Tuesday 5th December 2017, 6-8pm
Committee Room, Town Hall**

Present:

**Councillor Zahira Naz (Chair)
Ceri Ashton, Allotment Manager
Caroline Jennings, Allotment Officer (minutes)
Dave Aspinall, Woodland Manager
John Howe, SAF and Woodseats Allotment Society
Margaret Boulton, SAF and Ecclesall Allotment Society
Marion Gerson, SAF and Manor Allotments
Ken Croggon, Archer Lane Allotment Society
Michael Jordan, Mossway Allotment Society (SAF President)
Michael Booth, Mossway Allotment Society
Rob Hawkins, Hangingwater Allotment Society
Phil Webster, SAF Vice President
Jude Lambe, Walkley Bank Allotment Society
Councillor Douglas Johnson
Ann Hopkinson, Hagg Lane Allotment Society
James Brown, Heeley and Meersbrook Allotment Society
Liz Wade, Norton Lees/Norton St Pauls Allotment Society
Sue Lee, Woodseats Allotment Society**

ITEM	DETAIL	ACTION
1	<p>Apologies for Absence</p> <p>Councillor Lewis Dagnall Janet and Alan - Rustlings Road Allotment Society Councillor Cliff Woodcraft</p>	
2	<p>Minutes and Matters Arising</p> <p>Mariam Gerson thanked Ceri Ashton and the team for getting the minutes of the last meeting out so promptly.</p> <p>Ceri Ashton thanked Phil Webster for providing the volunteer hours probation services have put in at Roewoods Allotments.</p> <p>P2 Some discussion around water charges and the office being in breach of regulations, Margaret Boulton asked about this. Ceri Ashton re-iterated that if SAF believe that the current charging system breaches any regulations, they need to specify which regulations (since the Allotment Office cannot find any applicable regulations which the current system is in breach of). Michael Jordan said that he thought it was against regulations to charge for water in advance. Ceri Ashton asked which</p>	

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	<p>regulations.</p> <p>P3 Ceri Ashton advised she has circulated the Plymouth report (and had not received any requests to discuss any of the items in more detail). Marion Gerson asked if this could be revisited in AOB.</p> <p>Ceri Ashton fed back that Councillor Mary Lea was intending to take a decision to introduce a seasonal bonfire ban. Michael Jordan said it would be difficult to police a ban. Ceri Ashton responded that it would be easier to police than the current regulations. John Howe raised the problem of new tenants getting rid of their green waste, Ceri Ashton explained they would need to wait until the end of the ban period. Michael Jordan expressed the need for a definition of a fire, and asked if metal incinerator bins could be exempted from the ban. Ceri Ashton replied that she would discuss this possible compromise with Councillor Lea.</p> <p>P4 Ceri Ashton fed back that she had sought advice from legal and individuals excluded from private sites could not be automatically excluded from SCC sites. This is because the exclusion policies of the private sites may be different from ours, and also because we would not know in all cases that an individual had been excluded from a private site, so it would be unfair to exclude some individuals. The only way around it would be to background check all tenants, which would be unfeasible.</p> <p>P6 Ceri Ashton said she had sent the annual report to Forid Meah.</p> <p>P7 Ceri Ashton asked Rob Hawkins to confirm the location of the land in Fulwood he had mentioned as a possible option for new growing space in the South West. Rob said that it was Fulwood House, but there were no developments at present. One to keep an eye on.</p> <p>Rob Hawkins said he would like to mention the recent arson attacks at Hangingwater, and security on site. He said that the minutes said the allotment office hadn't been informed, but should have said he did not know if they had been informed. Caroline Jennings explained that she is in contact with the police and is looking at getting a covert camera installed. Rob Hawkins said they are getting in from the bottom of the site by the river and security gates could go there. It was agreed that Caroline Jennings will to look at this area, although it is not possible to secure the whole site.</p>	<p>CA</p>
<p>3</p>	<p>Terms of Reference of the Group</p> <p>Caroline Jennings presented the proposed updated terms of reference (see also circulated document).</p> <p>Caroline explained the key changes. The proposed new terms of</p>	

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	<p>reference reflect the change of cabinet member responsible for allotments. They also reflect the fact that all constituted allotment societies are now invited to send a representative to every meeting (initially this was for one meeting a year, but the meeting was found to be productive and feedback from societies was positive, so the practice of inviting them to all meetings has been adopted). Under the previous Terms of Reference, food growing organisations and all Councillors were invited to attend each meeting. Attendance was low. Under the new terms of reference, they are still welcome to attend if they wish but will not be sent an invitation to every meeting. Community allotment groups are also welcome to attend meetings if they wish.</p> <p>Marion Gerson requested that Sheffield Allotments and Leisure Gardeners Federation be replaced with Sheffield Allotments Federation.</p> <p>It was requested that 'All elected members' be replaced with 'All elected members of the Council', for clarity.</p> <p>Councillor Douglas Johnson asked why the title of the Terms of Reference included 'and local food growing'. Ceri Ashton explained that whilst managing the Council's allotments was the primary function of the office, it was also within the remit of the office to have involvement in other elements of local food growing (usually by way of signposting and giving advice, or commenting on strategic issues).</p>	<p>CA</p> <p>CA</p>
4	<p>Site Improvements Update</p> <p>Caroline Jennings gave an update on progress of the improvements.</p> <p>The following projects are currently being treated as priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security fencing at Norwood allotments. • Completion of Security fencing at Roe Woods allotments • Security fencing at Oxley Park allotments • Installation of water supply for Sothall Green allotments. • Installation of water supply at Park Road allotments (in the Rivelin Valley) <p>Quotes are being sought for the following projects, to be undertaken if external funding can be secured:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resurfacing 2 sections of unadopted highway adjacent to Meersbrook allotments • Security fencing at High Wincobank allotments, where there has been a recent spate of break-ins. In partnership with Places for People funding is being sourced from the ward pot. <p>The following projects are being deferred for now:</p>	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security fencing at Ouse Road • Security fencing at Beauchief allotments. • Security fencing at Mickley Lane allotments • Replacing water infrastructure at Highcliffe allotments • New site in the South West <p>Michael Jordan reiterated SAF's offer for John Martin to be involved in the consideration of new sites. Ceri Ashton responded that she was still aware of this offer.</p>	
5	<p>Proposed New Groups Policy (see also circulated report)</p> <p>Ceri Ashton presented the report.</p> <p>John Howe asked about concessions for groups, Ceri Ashton confirmed that groups meeting the criteria can claim a 75%. In contrast to individuals, groups do not have to claim the concession again every year, but are expected to make documents available to the office on request.</p> <p>Rob Hawkins stated that he didn't feel that community groups were in keeping with statutory allotments. Ceri Ashton responded that community allotment groups were about helping individuals to grow their own food, which was very much in the spirit of allotments. Rob Hawkins stated that community groups were being encouraged instead of making adaptations for people with disabilities. Ceri Ashton responded that this is not the case. The allotment office continues to make adaptations for those with disabilities where appropriate and reasonable (e.g. the provision of raised beds). However for some people, the option of joining a community group can preferable to taking on a tenancy.</p> <p>It was asked whether this policy meant that all community groups had to be disabled friendly. Ceri Ashton responded that it depends who the groups support. Obviously groups who aim to support people with disabilities need to be suitable for people with disabilities. Other groups support e.g. homeless people, or people with mental health issues. If these groups are approached by someone with disabilities and adaptations are necessary, they should consider whether such adaptations are reasonable and appropriate. In some cases the best option may be signposting people to more suitable groups/plots.</p> <p>Jude Lambe asked if the groups information pack was available on line. Ceri Ashton responded that she would check. Paper copies are available from the office.</p> <p>If the Groups policy is adopted, it will be sent out to all known groups. Michael Jordan said that to formalise this group policy is a must. Marion Gerson proposed that the group should</p>	CA

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	support the policy. The group agreed.																																														
6	<p>Customer Consultation and Satisfaction Survey</p> <p>Presented by the Allotment Manager Ceri Ashton</p> <p><u>Rent consultation</u></p> <p>What is being proposed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A rent increase in line with inflation for 2019/2020 • To consult with all tenants on changing the pricing structure in 2020/2021 • Consultation via a questionnaire to be sent to all tenants in January 2018 (along with notification of 2019/20 rents) • To carry out a customer satisfaction survey (separate from the consultation, but possibly at the same time) <p>Proposed changes in pricing structure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current charges consist of rent and water (both linked to the plot size), plus loft charges for a small number of pigeon plots • It is proposed that all tenants pay an admin charge in addition, which is not linked to the plot size • This would help address the issue of plot splitting causing greater administration, but not currently bringing in any more revenue • For example applying an admin charge of £20 (a low estimate, but a larger administration charge would result in a steeper increase for tenants on smaller plots) and slightly decreasing the water charge <table border="1" data-bbox="376 1402 1305 2007"> <thead> <tr> <th>Plot type</th> <th>Rent</th> <th>Water</th> <th>Admin</th> <th>Total</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>99</td> <td>£28.75</td> <td>0</td> <td>£20</td> <td>£48.75</td> </tr> <tr> <td>99W</td> <td>£28.75</td> <td>£8.75</td> <td>£20</td> <td>£57.50</td> </tr> <tr> <td>199</td> <td>£57.50</td> <td>0</td> <td>£20</td> <td>£77.50</td> </tr> <tr> <td>199W</td> <td>£57.50</td> <td>£17.50</td> <td>£20</td> <td>£95.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>299</td> <td>£75</td> <td>0</td> <td>£20</td> <td>£95.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>299W</td> <td>£75</td> <td>£23</td> <td>£20</td> <td>£118.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>301</td> <td>£115</td> <td>0</td> <td>£20</td> <td>£135.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>301W</td> <td>£115</td> <td>£35</td> <td>£20</td> <td>£170.00</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Example of proposed pricing would bring in approximately £20,000 compared to current rent (assuming unchanged</p>	Plot type	Rent	Water	Admin	Total	99	£28.75	0	£20	£48.75	99W	£28.75	£8.75	£20	£57.50	199	£57.50	0	£20	£77.50	199W	£57.50	£17.50	£20	£95.00	299	£75	0	£20	£95.00	299W	£75	£23	£20	£118.00	301	£115	0	£20	£135.00	301W	£115	£35	£20	£170.00	
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	<p>concessions and occupancy).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should the admin charge be proposed for Parson Cross Family Gardens? (This would be a substantial proportional increase) • It is proposed that the pigeon loft charges are increased. Currently the loft charges do not come close to the cost of maintaining the structures, a cost which is met by the office. <p>Ceri Ashton asked for any questions so far.</p> <p>Michael Jordan asked whether it would be possible to meet with Councillor Mary Lea, before a final decision was made about the rent for 2019/2020. Councillor Zahira Naz advised him to contact Councillor Lea as soon as possible, since she is very busy, and the decision will need to be communicated to tenants in January.</p> <p>Rob Hawkins stated that splitting plots does generate income, using the example of plots in the 299W (201-300sqm, with water) category. Ceri Ashton explained that as had been explained before, the vast majority of plots across the city and the vast majority of plots which are split fall into the 301W (over 300sqm, with water) category. These plots are currently £160 a year, and splitting them almost always generates two 199W (101-200sqm) plots, currently £80 a year.</p> <p>Rob Hawkins suggested that we charge by the square metre, not in categories. Ceri Ashton agreed that this was probably the fairest system. However a move to such a system would doubtless result in very many requests for re-measurement, more than the office could keep up with. Furthermore, tasks such as monitoring non-payment and projecting income would be more complex, with most plots having different rents. However it is possible; some authorities charge this way. She suggested that a compromise could be creating further categories, however this too would make the situation more complicated. An additional 99/99W category was created a few years ago, for the benefit of those with plots under 100sqm (many of whom have two plots, and were previously paying twice as much rent than those with plots 101-200sqm for the same area). Some Councils have fewer categories than we do.</p> <p>Michael Jordan said he had concerns about the admin charge proposal, because of the steep increase it would mean for those with smaller plots. Ceri ascertained that he was opposed to it all together, even if the admin charge was smaller.</p> <p>Sue Lee stated that she understood the rationale for the admin charge, and was not opposed to it, but felt that in the example given the increase was too much for those with smaller plots, and a smaller admin charge would be better.</p> <p>Jude Lambe asked if the figures could be sent out. Ceri Ashton</p>	<p>CA</p>

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	<p>agreed to distribute the presentation.</p> <p>It was asked whether the concessions would apply to the admin charge. Ceri Ashton responded that she felt concessions should apply to all annual charges (although Marion had proposed ceasing to apply the concession to the water charge).</p> <p>Rob Hawkins said he wanted to know what proportion of the total budget was spent on staffing. Ceri Ashton replied that this is always included in the annual report, and displayed the relevant section of last year's annual report, which showed that staffing costs accounted for just under half of the budget.</p> <p>Rob Hawkins stated that any decrease in the water charge would be detrimental to Rodney Hill, who had undertaken water self-management as a pilot. Ceri responded that SAF had been saying for a long time that the water charges were too high, and that she thought water self-management was working out well for Rodney Hill. Rob Hawkins stated that Rodney Hill said they had not 'received any figures'. Ceri explained that they had received a payment, and would shortly receive another. Michael Jordan stated that the contract was not fair, since the amount paid to the society was determined by the office. Ceri Ashton explained that this is not the case. The initial payment was an estimate based on the projected amount collected and projected amount spent. Each year thereafter, the next year's payment is adjusted to correct any over/underpayment the previous year, once the actual income and expenditure are known. This system was adopted so that Rodney Hill Allotment Society would not have to wait a year for their first payment (in case they incurred any costs during the first year). Ceri Ashton agreed to report back on the amounts paid.</p> <p>Ceri Ashton continued with the presentation.</p> <p><u>Concessions consultation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is proposed that we consult on changing the threshold for claiming the senior citizen concession back to state pension age for new claimants • It is proposed that we consult on simplifying the criteria for students, by making the concession available to all full time students, regardless of loan entitlement • A 50% concession for students? <p>It was asked how many students have plots. Ceri Ashton responded that she could establish how many people had claimed the concession on the basis of being a full time student with a full student loan entitlement this year. Data would not be available on students who had not claimed or were not eligible to claim.</p>	<p>CA</p> <p>CA</p>

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	<p>Jude Lambe asked whether those on apprenticeships could claim a concession. Ceri Ashton responded that she would look into whether they would currently be able to meet any of the existing criteria, and explained that the office couldn't seek to means test people individually.</p> <p>Councillor Douglas Johnson asked whether it would be possible to have a concession for anyone under 25, to help increase occupancy and encourage more young people to take up plots. Ceri Ashton responded that whilst it was important to encourage young people, some people aged under 25 are not on a low income and the concessions should be aimed at those who need them most.</p> <p>Marion Gerson said that if apprentices could claim concessions, there could be a temptation for families of apprentices to abuse the system and claim concessions. Ceri Ashton agreed that any broadening of the criteria meant more people could potentially abuse the system, but she did not think that should be a reason not to make concessions available to those who need them.</p> <p>James Brown asked Ceri Ashton if there had been any development on people with half plots being able to pay by direct debit. Ceri Ashton explained that at present the minimum invoice value which can be paid by direct debit is £100, and a standard half plot is currently £80. The Council has just moved onto a new finance system and this could result in some changes. In the future, it may be possible for tenants to fill in an on line mandate, rather than send a paper mandate to the office to process. Such changes could mean direct debits could be more widely available. Ceri explained that she did not yet know if there would be any changes to direct debits for 2018/2019, but would be finding out and advising all tenants in January.</p> <p>Ceri Ashton continued with her presentation:</p> <p><u>Equality Monitoring</u></p> <p>At the moment we only have information on our tenants that directly relates to their tenancy. We do not hold details such as date of birth (except when this has been provided in relation to a concession). Council services are required to collect and monitor equality data. This is overdue. Councillors Zahira Naz and Lewis Dagnall have already expressed an interest in the demographics of the allotment community. At present, such information is only available for the waiting list (it is collected along with the annual waiting list re-registration process). Equality data helps to identify any groups that may be under-represented, which can highlight that there could be barriers preventing them access the service, which need to be addressed.</p> <p>Ceri Ashton proposed to send out the Council's equality monitoring form along with the proposed consultation document.</p>	<p>CA</p> <p>CA</p>

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	<p><u>Customer Satisfaction Survey</u></p> <p>It is good practice to carry one out from time to time, it has been identified that Allotments are overdue a survey. It has been discussed before at the AAG but not undertaken.</p> <p>Ceri Ashton stated that she felt that the customer satisfaction survey should be completely distinct from the proposed consultation questionnaire, however there is an option of sending a paper based customer satisfaction along with the proposed consultation questionnaire as there might be a higher response rate. A paper based requires more staff time to process so another option is to carry out on line separately, but with a paper based option for those without internet access.</p> <p>Ceri Ashton suggested that a higher response rate could be achieved if all the forms are sent out together. She asked the group what their preferred option was, paper based or on line. Phil Webster said both. Margaret Boulton would like to see a copy of the questionnaire before sending out. If we are sending out in January times are very tight, but Ceri Ashton will do this. Overall a consensus was reached that there would probably be a higher response rate if the customer satisfaction survey was sent out with the consultation questionnaire.</p> <p>Rob Hawkins said he thought it was too rushed, and more time should be taken to devise the questions. Ceri Ashton said that the customer satisfaction survey could be deferred and done separately, however a pre-paid envelope would be sent to all tenants with the consultation questionnaire and 2019/2020 rent notification, and it would be a shame not to make maximum use of this opportunity.</p> <p>Ceri Ashton went through some sample questions for the Satisfaction Survey. Marion Gerson asked if a 'Not Applicable' box could be added to the speed of response from the ranger question.</p> <p>Michael Jordan suggested just having 3 categories where customers are being asked to indicate their level of satisfaction. Ceri Ashton replied that she had looked at similar customer satisfaction surveys done by other services and authorities, and is it usual practice to have these 5 categories.</p> <p>Ceri Ashton asked whether tenants should be asked to indicate what site they were from (it is normal for such questionnaires to be anonymous, but some authorities ask for site name, so that responses from tenants of different sites can be compared). Some people thought this would be advantageous, others felt that some tenants may not wish to give their site name since this</p>	<p>CA</p>

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	<p>might enable their identity to be established.</p> <p>John Howe asked if there was a cost from the allotment budget, Ceri Ashton responded that it would, and that although it would be a lot of work, sending all these documents together was cost-effective.</p> <p>Sue Lee asked how the survey would be anonymous, if it were to be done by email. Ceri Ashton explained that if it was done on line, it would not be by email. It would be via a survey site and would be anonymous.</p> <p>The group voted in favour of going ahead with the proposed consultation, equality monitoring and customer satisfaction survey by post in January.</p> <p>Ceri Ashton said that she would start drafting the documents and distribute them to the group, and urged everyone to get any comments back to her by Christmas. Councillor Zahira Naz and Councillor Mary Lea will look at the documents before they are sent out.</p>	
7	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>SAF asked whether the Allotment Office had made a decision on participating in Sheffield University's Urban Soils project, led by Dr Jill Edmundson. Ceri Ashton replied that they were considering agreeing but a formal decision had not been reached yet.</p> <p>Marion Gerson thanked Ceri Ashton for circulating the case study on Plymouth's allotment service. She commented that Sheffield went down the route of increasing rents ahead of many authorities, having been hit sooner/harder by government cuts than many. Plymouth are now going down this route, and the rents will be higher than Sheffield. Plymouth have removed concessions so we have a reasonable deal here. Michael Jordan said Marion was making assumptions about future rents. Marion clarified that Plymouth had already decided on and publicised the rent levels for the next few years. Ceri Ashton confirmed this, and observed that this approach had the advantage that discussions with the Federation and allotment societies did not have to be dominated by discussions about rent year after year.</p> <p>Jude Lambe asked whether we could discuss the latest update on the flood defence proposals and the impact on Roscoe Plantation. Ceri Ashton confirmed that the proposal affecting Roscoe Plantation was currently a back-up option. Jude Lambe asked whether the office was notifying new/potential tenants about the proposal. Ceri Ashton replied that they weren't at present, seeing as there is no definite decision yet. The</p>	CA/DA

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	<p>allotment office does not want to deter tenants and reduce occupancy of the site unnecessarily. If the proposal does go ahead, tenants will be given due notice and the office will try to get the best outcome possible for tenants and the site in terms of reparation.</p> <p>Michael Jordan said he had been shocked to see a lady bent down to use a ground tap at Ouse Road allotments. Ceri Ashton explained that ground taps are present at a lot of sites across the city, and sometimes these are the only option, where lanes are narrow and used by vehicles. Michael Jordan said that vehicles do not use the lanes at Ouse Road. Ceri Ashton explained that they do occasionally for maintenance purposes, however she had looked at each tap at Ouse Road (there are other problems with these taps too) and in this case it is possible to replace them with standpipes. (Due to issues with these taps, e.g. persistent leaks, and missing chamber lids, they are all due to be replaced.)</p> <p>Michael Jordan stated that there are still ordinary bolts attaching the gate to the fence at Elm Crescent allotments. Caroline Jennings replied that she had already raised this with the contractor and had been told that they were secure. However she would go back to the contractor again and query this.</p>	<p>CA</p> <p>CJ</p>