

PARKS AND COUNTRYSIDE SERVICES

ALLOTMENT ADVISORY GROUP Minutes of Meeting

Monday 17th July 2023 6-8pm
Victoria Hall

Present:

Councillor Brian Holmshaw (Chair)
Ceri Ashton, Allotments Manager
Caroline Jennings, Allotment Officer (Minutes)
Rowan Longhurst, Countryside Service Manager
Phil Webster, Sheffield Allotment Federation
Michael Booth, Moss Way Allotment Society
Michael Jordan, Allotment Federation
Stacey Grocock, Mossway Allotments
David Martin, Roscoe Plantation Allotment Society
Councillor Woodcraft SCC
Fred Oldham, Norton St Pauls Allotment Society
Simon Turega Hagg House
Catherine Marshall-Marsden, Manor Allotments
Lovene Rhule, Allotment Federation
Paul Jordan, Crookes Quarry Allotments
Bill Atherton, Archer Lane
Rob Hawkins, Hangingwater Allotments/Federation
Sue Lee, Woodseats Allotment Society
Tony Mays, Rustlings Road Allotments
Steve Marples, Hagg House Allotment Society

ITEM	DETAIL	ACTION
1.	Introduction Councillor Brian Holmshaw introduced the meeting and reminded attendees that it is an advisory group, not a decision-making group, but that views of the group would be noted and passed to the Committee (who make formal decisions) where appropriate.	
2.	Apologies for Absence Councillor Barbara Masters Jim Brown Meersbrook Allotment Society	
3.	Minutes and Matters Arising Matters arising: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ceri Ashton reported that she has been in touch with Highways again regarding the safety concerns about allotment traffic crossing the pavement at Woodseats and Highways are considering whether there is anything else that could be done.	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The list of sites with vacancies on the website is updated frequently (approximately fortnightly if there are changes). • Burning is an ongoing discussion with Environmental Services, Councillor Brian Holmshaw asked about a timescale, Ceri Ashton said this was unknown. It may well not get resolved prior to the wider policy reievw. • Self-management visit to Chesterfield happened, and good contacts made. • Lyme disease information is on the website and will go in the new handbook. • Minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a true record. 	
4.	<p>Annual Report 2022-23 (circulated before the meeting)</p> <p>The report was not presented in full, since attendees had been asked to read it in advance of the meeting. Ceri Ashton picked out some key points.</p> <p>Michael Jordan stated that during the pandemic there has been no paperwork on the expenditure at this time therefore little work must have been carried out, the conclusion being that the council must have made a profit. Ceri Ashton said that this had already been covered in previous meetings, and showed the group the 2020/2021 annual report. The budget was overspent in 2020/21. Major work was carried out at Woodseats (a large security fencing project, which Sue Lee confirmed) and a long-overdue new database was purchased (which was vital for working remotely). Extensive hedge flailing was carried out. The only usual activity which was not undertaken was tree work to reduce shade.</p>	
5.	<p>Rents 2025/26</p> <p>Ceri Ashton gave a presentation. She explained that with inflation still remaining high (currently 8.7%), in view of the comments last year and the outcomes of the survey last year, rather than proposing an in increase in line with inflation she was proposing to go straight to carrying out another survey. She proposed that there would be more options (all actual figures) and it would be made clear that the recommendation would be based on the overall picture of the responses, not the single most popular answer. Michael Booth stated that this was not fair, and it should be the single most popular response. Ceri tried to introduce the concept of averages, using an example. Michael Booth still maintained that the recommendation should be based on the single most popular response. Bill Atherton stated that he did not agree that using the single most popular response was the fairest approach. It was</p>	

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	<p>agreed that Ceri would seek advice from colleagues in other teams on how the survey should be interpreted. Ceri stated that all options would need to be increases, but of different sizes, e.g. 2%-8%.</p> <p>Rob Hawkins asked if the rent can be changed after a decision. Ceri Ashton reminded the group that tenants need to be informed of the rent a year in advance, and that when inflation changes, the rents will always lag behind by a year. This has been to the severe detriment of the budget in 2023/24. She also reminded the group that it is only because inflation is so high that we are consulting more widely; this isn't required for an increase in line with inflation. Steve Marples asked if the rent can be changed if inflation lowers, Ceri Ashton responded that future increases can be smaller once inflation is smaller.</p> <p>Councillor Woodcraft made the point that if the level of service is to be maintained there has to be an increase, and less service will be provided if it's lower.</p> <p>Sue Lee asked if staff salaries had been factored in, with the changes made to the allotment ranger service, she wonders if the same money is paid to the rangers, Ceri Ashton confirmed that the budget for ranger support remains the same; it is just delivered differently.</p> <p>A question was asked about where we overspent in 2022/2023/ Ceri Ashton explained that it is difficult to finish bang on budget, since income and expenditure both continue throughout the year. The site improvements had been a little too ambitious, and some large water bills had come in right at the end of the financial year.</p>	
6.	<p>Events on Allotments</p> <p>Caroline Jennings gave a brief presentation on the procedure groups need to follow for gaining permission for holding events on allotments. Ceri Ashton to circulate to the group after the meeting.</p> <p>Steve Marples suggested a form to complete if an event is planned, Ceri Ashton advised that yes one can potentially go on the website.</p> <p>Simon Turega suggested a good idea would be to have the office offer promotion exposure, Ceri Ashton agreed we could email tenants we have details for and put on the website.</p> <p>Phil Webster mentioned the discounted public liability insurance there used to be and the reason why it stopped (via the Green Spaces Forum). Ceri Ashton said that it was oversubscribed and Parks 'friends of' groups had been prioritised. Rowan Longhurst said she would revisit this.</p> <p>Sue Lee said that Woodseats failed to notify the events team in time, the team do need 8 weeks' notice, so timescales are also</p>	

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	<p>important (but in this instance the events team decided their event was classified about small).</p> <p>Stacey Grocock asked about bonfire night events. Ceri responded that as per other events the permissions process would depend on the scale etc. For any event, please get in touch. She reminded the group that fireworks should not be used at events on the allotments.</p> <p>Ceri Ashton mentioned that it wasn't a recommendation, but the National Allotment Society can provide insurance for personal belongings, information is on the National Allotment Society's website. Ceri agreed to re-circulate the link.</p> <p>Rowan Longhurst let the group know that Ceri Ashton is leaving the service after 13 years, and thanked her. Her leaving day is the 1st September. Michael Booth thanked Ceri on behalf of SAF.</p>	
7.	<p>AOB</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rumours that the budget is already spent. Ceri Ashton stated that this is absolutely not the case. Money is still coming in, and it is far from all spent! 2. Service and how it is run. To clarify how the service is being delivered, what are we getting. Ceri Ashton said a lot of what we do is set out in the handbook, and there will be more detail in the new rule book. She mentioned plans for an additional autumn newsletter (electronic only) which could give tenants additional updates on things the team is doing. We currently have 60% of tenants' email addresses but would like societies to encourage more tenants to pass on their email addresses. Rowan Longhurst talked about the changes in ranger support – an equivalent amount of support is delivered, but by a team on a rota basis, rather than an individual. It is still early days and we are aware of some teething problems, but the team are passionate about giving the best service. Phil Webster asked how we know that allotments are getting 40hrs from the rangers. Ceri explained that we will be paying the ranger service for the amount of support we receive. See Lee asked about having a dedicated number for one of the rangers, Ceri Ashton explained that an 'allotments phone' for the rangers had been considered, but rejected due to concerns about the practicalities of passing it between rangers. Also it is better if requests come through the office, to avoid duplication etc. She advised that calling 2500500 was the best way of getting emergency jobs to the team, as they are logged, also the importance of stressing how urgent a job may be when calling. Michael Jordan was worried about jobs like turning all the water off in winter – were the rangers aware? Ceri Ashton and Rowan Longhurst explained the rangers were well aware of this task. Bob Chowdry had spent a lot 	<p>CA</p> <p>CA</p> <p>CA</p> <p>RL</p>

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	<p>of time accurately documenting the locations of the stop taps, and showing many of them to the rangers.</p> <p>3. Self -management and how to approach this. Should there be a specialist meeting, Ceri Ashton talked about the visit to a self-managed site in Chesterfield. Although the site did not face some of the challenges some of ours do, it was still an informative visit and some good contacts were made. At the moment Hagg House and Ecclesall have suggested they are happy to pilot, nothing is set in stone, anything is open for discussion. Michael Jordon thinks a meeting would be useful to find out what a site could take on. Ceri Ashton said we need to know what sites want to take on. There is no model yet. We will tailor it around what sites want to do (and it doesn't need to be the same for every site). Michael Booth said he wants to know what's on the table. Brian Holmshaw asked if some further detail on different possible models of self management could be presented. It was agreed that this would be the focus of a future meeting – either an advisory group meeting, or a special meeting for interested parties.</p> <p>4. State of sites and turnover and how the rulebook should be used. A concern was raised by SAF that some breaches of tenancy get ignored. Cer Ashton explained that we act on breaches if they come to our attention. Not everything that is happening on a plot is always visible from the outside during a site inspection. Ceri explained how useful it is when allotment societies carry out inspections with officers, as they can flag up concerns</p> <p>5. Sky Edge Pigeon Site update Ceri Ashton explained that it wasn't one of our sites, they had recently suffered a major arson attack. Nobody has been evicted. We had looked into the possibility of accommodating the displaced tenants at one of our sites, but the tenants have decided against this.</p> <p>6. Vacant plot chart online - is it updated? Ceri Ashton explained it is updated periodically, not as often as ideally it should be, but it is stated that it is a guide only. It is useful to applicants as it gives a rough guide as to which waiting lists are longest/shortest. It also includes numbers of plots per site – a site with more plots will typically have a list that moves more quickly.</p> <p>7. Empty plot subsidy and who is paying. Michael Jordan explained that the federation had been informed that the Council receives a subsidy from the government for empty plots. He wanted to know more about this. Ceri Ashton said this isn't the case, we don't receive any subsidy from the government. She would like to know where this information has come from; if there is such funding available we should try to get it, but she had never heard of any such thing. Michel Jordan to find out.</p>	<p>MJ</p>

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	<p>8. Judging of the competition. Ceri Ashton explained that there are two judges this year, Fran Halsall and Dave Stephenson from Regather, and it is going well after the first day, a very high standard once again.</p> <p>9. How far along are the inspection of plots? Ceri explained that her spring/summer inspections and most of her follow-up inspections are completed. Caroline and Jane still have a few more to do. Ceri Ashton explained that she tends to carry out all the inspections in one batch, then sends out all the letters, whereas Caroline and Jane tend to inspect a few sites at a time then sent out letters as they go along.</p> <p>10. Locks, when will all locks be changed. The quality of locks doesn't seem very good at the moment. Ceri Ashton said she didn't think it was a bad batch, since some of the locks that have failed have been older. Often people copy keys which can damage the locks if they have been cut poorly. Norton Lees is next on the list for an upgrade to locks with keys that can only be copied by the office. Ceri explained the difference between the squire locks (the older, more basic type) and the mul-T-locks which are gradually being rolled out on more sites. The long term vision is to upgrade the locks on all sites. It will be some time before all sites have the new lock (it is a large administrative task, so needs to be staggered).</p>	
	Date of next meeting to be agreed.	