

PARKS AND COUNTRYSIDE SERVICES

ALLOTMENT ADVISORY GROUP Minutes of Meeting

Wednesday 27th September 2023 6-8pm
Victoria Hall

Present:

Councillor Brian Holmshaw (Chair)
Rowan Longhurst, Countryside Service Manager
James Musgrave, Interim Allotments Manager
Jane Bullimore, Allotment Officer (Minutes)
Phil Webster, Sheffield Allotment Federation/ Roe Woods Society
Michael Booth, Sheffield Allotment Federation
Stacey Grocock, Sheffield Allotment Federation
Lovene Rhule, Sheffield Allotment Federation
Rob Hawkins, Sheffield Allotment Federation/ Hangingwater Society
Esther Fisher, Moss Way Allotment Society
Lisa Kirkup, Manor Allotment Society
Colin Williams, Ecclesall Allotment Society
Gary Watts, Norton Lees Allotment Society
David Martin, Roscoe Plantation Allotment Society
Fred Oldham, Norton St Pauls Allotment Society
Steve Marples, Hagg House Allotment Society
Bill Atherton, Archer Lane Allotment Society
Ann Marshall, Woodseats Allotment Society
Tony Mays, Rustlings Road Allotments
Councillor Barbara Masters
Councillor Marianne Elliott

ITEM	DETAIL	ACTION
1.	<p>Introduction</p> <p>Councillor Brian Holmshaw introduced the meeting. He welcomed James Musgrave as Interim Allotments Manager. James introduced himself and said he has worked with the Council for 17 years – with the Ranger Service. He explained that he will be in post as Interim Allotments Manager for at least 3 months.</p> <p>Brian said that some of the items which the Federation had asked to raise had been covered in the previous meeting or would be covered in Matters Arising. These were flailing, use of Ranger time and Events Policy. The Federation and some Societies felt the events policy needs re-visiting. James said the Events presentation had been circulated but attendees said they had not received. James agreed to circulate as starting point and then a meeting could be arranged to look specifically at</p>	

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2.	<p>events. Lisa Kirkup requested that two other items be added to AOB Security and Police intervention and leaving allotments. Brian agreed to add.</p> <p>Apologies for Absence</p> <p>Michael Jordan, Sheffield Allotment Federation Sue Hinde, Crookes Quarry Allotment Society Simon Turega, Hagg House Society Councillor Cliff Woodcraft Councillor Talib Assam</p>	
3.	<p>Minutes and Matters Arising</p> <p>Matters arising: p4 Should be National Allotment Society not Allotment Federation. Rob Hawkins said that while they don't provide Public Liability Insurance themselves – they have a link to a reasonably priced insurance provider. Query was raised about why insurance can no longer be offered via Greenspace Forum. Karen Lewis, Community Partnership manager has said that it is currently only available to Parks groups. Rationale is that these spaces are open to all members of public, unlike allotment sites and have to prioritise because of funding available.</p> <p>Colin Williams said that his understanding was that National Society membership covers you for public liability. Brian asked if Officers could look at liability queries – agreed.</p> <p>p5 Rangers hours. Phil asked about Rangers hours. Rowan Longhurst said she couldn't give information on precise hours but said that we are still in a period of transition from one Ranger to a Team who sometimes work in pairs and sometimes alone. She said we expect the equivalent of one full time employee. This will mean that leave etc has to be factored in. She reiterated that we are only 6 months into new arrangement and that seasonal demands vary. It will take time for Ranger Team to gain knowledge. Bob Chowdry was very knowledgeable and with experience know how to deal with things. Michael Booth said that a pair of Rangers were out delivering NTQs. James explained that we have to get these out promptly and so they are a priority and that the Rangers would be doing other work. Michael said they had not picked up litter whilst on site with NTQs.</p> <p>Minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a true record.</p>	JM/JB/CJ
4.	<p>Rents for 2025/26</p> <p>Rents for 2025/206 was first discussed at previous AAG. Has to be agreed a year in advance. Due to the Committee cycle will need to be agreed at November Committee. We had been raising rent in line with inflation but due to especially high rates</p>	

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	<p>this year and last, and concern expressed by SAF and societies we have been consulting tenants re rent increase. This year's survey has been e-mailed to tenants, is on the Allotments website and posters are going up on site. Paper copies can be sent on request. Closing date is 6th October.</p> <p>James said we will look at the mean average from the survey and make a recommendation. We have been advised to take the median not the mode.</p> <p>Lisa said that she had been told by Ceri that one of the reasons Sheffield's rents are so high is because we have a high percentage of people claiming a concession. She has concerns about tenants who are not eligible for a concession but are on low incomes. She asked if there is anything we could do to make things better for people in this situation. Is there any money/ support available elsewhere or way to spread cost? Rowan said we can ask Core Cities and look at money available from other funding sources.</p> <p>Lovene said that she felt that people with a concession gardened less well because they paid less. There was a discussion about whether the current concession rates were appropriate. Jane Bullimore said that there had been a review in recent years and agreed to check when that was.</p> <p>Michael asked why the first figure suggested was 5% on this year's survey, when last year we gave an option of no increase at all. Rowan said that we can't operate the service below this rate as costs have gone up so much. We are in a different position from last year. Brian said that construction prices have increased beyond inflation rates.</p> <p>Colin Williams said that the only option if unhappy with rents is to explore the self-management route. He accepts that rents have to increase or service will be reduced. He said that we need to be clearer about what services would be lost if income is reduced. James said it would be mainly site improvements budget. We have to ensure sites meet health and safety requirements and we can supply water etc. Fred Oldham agreed that we need to be clearer about what would be cut if income is reduced.</p> <p>Rob Hawkins asked why decision needs to be in November. Brian said it is to do with Committee Cycle. Can't be left until January or will be too late to notify tenants</p>	<p>RL/JM/JB /CJ</p> <p>JB</p>
5.	<p>Site Maintenance Improvements</p> <p>James went through a list of proposed site improvements (attached). These have been identified by tenants, societies and the team. Rowan explained, for the benefit of newcomers, that the group identified site security as a priority. Unfortunately several sites have had break-ins over the past year and some of</p>	

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6.	<p>the improvements seek to try and address these. In addition a number of societies mentioned crop thefts.</p> <p>One of the site improvements has been part funded by Community Infrastructure Levy money (CIL). There was discussion round other pots of money that can potentially be accessed. Rowan asked if any one had attended Local Area Committees (LACs). Lisa has attended. Brian, who chairs the central LAC would encourage groups to apply. They have been able to help at Victoria Road. Brian said that they have funding available for graffiti and fly-tip removal. He said the money available from the LAC is different to ward pot funding. Both are to support groups not individuals.</p> <p>Ann asked what order improvements are done in. Rowan said that they aren't done in a particular order but sites with pressing issues would be looked at first. It sometimes depends on contractor availability, but the work is done in a timely way and that she wasn't aware of problems in the past.</p> <p>James asked if the group if there were things we have missed. Ann mentioned the missing fencing by 122 Woodseats. We can be contacted if anything comes to light which should be considered.</p> <p>AOB</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of notice and paperwork for meeting James offered his apology and said we will get it right next time. Michael said it's hard to operate without paperwork. Steve asked if first draft of AAG mins could be circulated 2. Self-management update. Not progressed but something to look at over the winter months. Proposal that there should be a separate meeting with societies interested in going down this route – currently Ecclesall and Hagg House. Group agreed. There are lots of different models. Colin said that there is a lot on information on National Society website. There was a suggestion that Chesterfield self-managed site rep could be invited as they have learnt by experience and experienced some pitfalls. Rob was concerned that the Chesterfield group wasn't appropriate. Rowan said it was a good starting point to visit them as well as being local. 3. Victoria Hall as venue. It was agreed that the acoustics are poor. It is difficult to hear people speak. We need to bring microphones in future. The reason we use it is because it is central and accessible. A question was asked about why we don't use Town Hall any more. There is reduced staffing in the evening making it more difficult to get in and out and it's no longer possible to have tea and coffee. Rob said the Quaker Meeting House no longer accommodate evening meetings. If 	<p>JM/CW/S M</p>

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	<p>anyone is aware of other accessible venues in the city centre then we can consider these.</p> <p>4. Site inspections. Phil expressed concern that these aren't happening as they should be. James said that the Autumn ones have begun. Some of the summer ones were late because officers have had to get involved in other issues on sites. Phil asked if Roe Woods will be included on the flail list. It was confirmed that it will be. The Federation feel that the standards we are expecting are not as high as previously. Rob asked for information on numbers of non-cultivation letters sent. We can provide this for the next annual report.</p> <p>5. Security and Police Intervention. Lisa raised this as a result of recent problems at the Manor site. There was a useful site meeting with Councillors, James, Ceri and PCSOs and some measures discussed have been actioned already, with others planned. She has concerns about the Police response. According to a PCSO, crimes are recorded at address of person reporting rather than using the site address – so doesn't show site as 'hotspot'. The PCSOs only patrol until 10 and a lot of this activity is between 11.30pm/12midnight and 2am. She would like to see better link up between Police and Council. Steve asked if it was possible to use what 3 words app when identifying where crime had taken place. Brian said he has had meetings with inspectors re crimes on greenspaces but deemed low priority. It may be one to discuss with Core Cities colleagues. Michael said he felt Council should report instances in addition to tenants.</p> <p>6. Plots left in poor state. Lisa wanted to raise issue of people leaving plots in a poor state. Often inorganic rubbish – such as building materials - and sometimes asbestos. She thinks there should be penalties imposed for people leaving plots in such a state. Others share this view. Difficulty is in enforcing this. It potentially would be costlier to pursue than to deal with. James said he had experiences the same frustrations in the Ranger Service where waste is left and even though there is evidence Environment and Regulatory Service won't pursue. The Ranger Service do clear plots where there is this type of rubbish. James would like to be able to offer plots clear of rubbish but it is a resources issue. The groups asked about cameras but this has still not been worked through. Issues around costs, legality and monitoring. There was another call for considering a deposit that can be withheld if plot left in poor state but this may deter people taking plots on and would need to be administered.</p> <p>7. Date of next meeting. The next meeting will be early December. Date TBC. Group will be notified.</p>	