

PARKS AND COUNTRYSIDE SERVICES

ALLOTMENT ADVISORY GROUP Minutes of Meeting

Tuesday 14th May 2024 6-8pm
Conference Room 2, The Circle, 33 Rockingham Lane

Present:

Councillor Brian Holmshaw (Chair)
James Musgrave Interim Manager
Jane Bullimore, Allotment Officer (Minutes)
Rowan Longhurst, Countryside Service Manager
Councillor Cliff Woodcraft
Phil Webster, Sheffield Allotment Federation, Roe Woods and Parson Cross Societies
Rob Hawkins, Sheffield Allotment Federation, Hangingwater Allotment Society
David Martin, Roscoe Plantation Allotment Society
David Marshall, Roscoe Plantation Allotment Society
Mark Ramsell, Rivelin Valley Allotment Society
Fred Oldham, Norton St Pauls Allotment Society
Jude Lambe, Walkley Bank Allotment Society
Dan Bilton, Walkley Bank Allotment Society
Andy Millman, Archer Lane
Steve Marples, Hagg House Allotment Society
Simon Turega, Hagg House Allotment Society
John Cawthorne, Heeley and Meersbrook Allotment Society
Ann Marshall, Woodseats Allotment Society
Chris Saywell, Norton Lees Allotment Society

ITEM	DETAIL	ACTION
1.	Introduction Councillor Brian Holmshaw introduced everyone to the meeting, and everyone introduced themselves. Brian said that he likes to hear lots of different voices at the meeting. One of societies raised a concern about the tone of the previous meeting – saying that the meeting was uncomfortable at times. Brian asked that everyone be polite and respectful.	
2.	Apologies for Absence Councillor Barbara Masters Councillor Marianne Elliott Michael Booth – Sheffield Allotment Federation Paul Jordan/ Sue Hinde – Crookes Quarry Allotment Society Colin Williams – Ecclesall Allotment Society	

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3.	<p>Minutes and Matters Arising</p> <p>P2 Re-visiting Events policy. A sub-group is to be convened. Mark Ramsell asked for a date. James said he hoped to have a date by end of May. Ann Marshall suggested in the interim those organising events should submit a risk assessment, proof of public liability insurance and a site plan. Agreed this is a sensible way forward. James said office to be notified of any planned events.</p> <p>P2 updates and action points from minutes- agreed it is useful to have a table which reports progress</p> <p>P2 Minutes on line. Jane Bullimore reported that she had been told by the Communications Team that minutes needed to be in a more accessible format to go online. Since meeting advised that minutes could go up as they are, if member of public has issue, they can be referred to the Allotments Team. Jane is seeking advice on a more accessible format.</p> <p>P2/3 Funding Information provided by SYFAB has been circulated via AAG mailing list</p> <p>P4 Self-management – James has had a couple of enquiries and will set up an online meeting.</p> <p>P4 Parkwood/Shirecliffe update. £19 million identified for Parkwood site – mainly improving infrastructure. Short term improvements for allotments will be plot clearance to clear fly-tipping and improved fencing to make site less prone to tipping and improve site security. Also looking at producing a simple masterplan for any future funding. Levelling-up fund cannot be used for this, but a costed plan would help to take things forward. Rowan Longhurst said we are waiting for more information from Central Government.</p> <p>P4 query on budget available for site improvements – currently forecast is ca £80,000. Suggestions for improvements will be brought to Advisory Group. Aim is to get sites up to Sheffield Standard. Mark Ramsell said he didn't think the criteria used were always appropriate for allotments. He thinks it would be helpful for societies to be involved in assessments. Rowan said that she welcomes any input.</p> <p>Query re staffing costs – current forecast is £176,227</p> <p>P4 spend on tree works - £9,000 spent on tree works and additional work carried out as health and safety works (from a</p>	<p>JM/ALL</p> <p>JM</p> <p>JB</p> <p>ALL</p>

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4.	<p>separate budget). For 2024/25 we have allocated £10,000 – priorities will be assessed in the Autumn. There is also some work outstanding from last year.</p> <p>Meeting agreed as a true record.</p> <p>Starter Plots – consistent approach A discussion was held on starter plots as there is a feeling that we need a more consistent approach and Societies would like clarification on charging.</p> <p>Fred Oldham cited Chesterfield as an example where people had to demonstrate their commitment on starter plot before being allocated a tenancy. Agreed an interesting idea but would require administration and there may not be sufficient plots available. Dave Martin thinks tenant should be vetted. Jude Lambe said being a co-worker can be like having a starter plot – you get experience without holding the tenancy.</p> <p>John Cawthorne expressed concern about moving from a well cultivated starter plot to an overgrown plot. He thinks that plots need to be brought back more quickly. Rob said there are rules in handbook about what is expected and James added that we can serve notice on people if they haven't done anything within 3 months but the Notice can be appealed. Plots need to be cleared to give people a fighting chance. James said we are investing in getting the worst plots cleared.</p> <p>Ann Marshall says the two small starter plots at Woodseats work well.</p> <p>Steve Marples raised the issue of charging for starter plots. James is concerned that this looks like sub-letting as starter plots are assigned to societies for free on condition that they manage them. Dan Bilton said they levy a charge for people using starter plots or other tenants believe people using them are getting plots for free and the Society have to 'chase up' people using the plots.</p> <p>Jude and Dan shared the agreement they have with people using starter plots at Morley Street (attached) – which the group appreciated. Jude and Dan explained that they have had issues with someone who was using the plot but being in breach of the agreement. It has caused the society some problems and Jude said it had put her off the idea of self-management. She believes it would be a good idea to have a consistent approach with starter plots across the city. There are a number of factors to consider. The Morley Street plots are open access, but others are on locked sites.</p> <p>Mark congratulated Jude and Dan on coming up with an agreement. It is a good starting point for discussion. Mark said</p>	

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	<p>they do not have starter plots, but Rivelin Valley Allotment Society offer tenants who are struggling 'an hour of power'. Others interested in this scheme. Will get details from Mark. Could be a way of keeping plots in better order.</p> <p>Cllr Woodcraft asked about whether you could have perennials on starter plots – Jude said at Morley Street there were fruit bushes that could be pruned and picked. Chris Saywell said he wanted to discuss access on locked sites (Morley Street and Hangingwater are open).</p> <p>Agreed that it would be useful to have a sub-group with societies who have starter plots to come up with guidelines that everyone can follow. Their recommendations can come back to AAG</p> <p>The conversation moved on to overgrown plots. James was asked if we still trim plots. He said that we would not trim plots where they were grassy but where they are woody and a brushcutter would be needed we can do them or arrange for a contractor to do them.</p>	<p>JM/ALL</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>Site Security</p> <p>Dave Martin said Roscoe Plantation Society has been working with Police and Councillors from the Local Area Committee in response to plot break-ins. Police said evidence is vital but often difficult to collect. They suggested that items are marked up. Further meetings are planned. Mark from RVAS asked to be invited to future meetings.</p> <p>CCTV discussed but issues with data protection. Fred Oldham said that CCTV not always considered by Police even in cases of domestic theft. John Cawthorne thinks the cameras themselves might be stolen as happened with air quality monitoring equipment at Meersbrook.</p> <p>Mark Ramsell said he thought natural protection from spiky hedges the greatest deterrent. Species such as Blackthorn. He said the Council had provided whips which once established offered good protection. James Musgrave said that there should be whips available for societies who want them again this year and requests should be sent through to him.</p>	<p>DM/MR</p> <p>ALL</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>Budget breakdowns by site</p> <p>We traditionally show spend citywide but request has been made by Steve Marples to show spend by site. This can be done where data available but some work is trickier to</p>	

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7	<p>breakdown by site – for example hedge flailing. It would require staff spending time breaking data down rather than focussing on other tasks such as site inspections.</p> <p>Steve Marples asked to do a presentation about how information on spend could be presented but this was not felt appropriate by the Chair and Rowan. Steve feels that the end user should be asked what they want and then analysis should be informed by that. Rowan said there are only certain ways that data can be extrapolated and that we will break it down as best we can without tying up too much officer time.</p> <p>Dan Bilton queried the purpose of getting spend at this level of detail and expressed concern that it could lead to tensions between societies – there needs to be an acknowledgment that spending is in areas with greatest need. Rowan asked Steve who he was speaking on behalf of – was it one site, a number of sites or the Federation. Rob Hawkins said he also felt we need to be more accountable. Rowan said she believes the Council are and re-iterated that different sites have different needs. Rob would prefer to see figures rather than pye charts. Mark said he thought Rob was being unfair and that information is presented and breaking it down further would take up too much time. John Cawthorne said when he had requested figures for spend at Meersbrook, Rowan had provided the information that he asked for.</p> <p>Ann Marshall pointed out that not all sites are represented at AAG – so others may have a view. Jude mentioned that some societies such as Walkley Bank Allotment Society also identify site improvements when accompanying allotment officers during the inspection process. There was a suggestion that something asking for tenant's views re priorities could go out with rents letter/newsletter.</p> <p>Burning</p> <p>The Allotment Team continue to get complaints about burning during the Summer – though far fewer than before. We are waiting for the Air Quality Strategy which could dictate rules for tenants. James thinks we should reduce period people allowed to burn – it shows that we are committed to reducing impact of smoke and should lead to fewer complaints. Following a walkabout at Meersbrook he thinks allowing burning only from November to February might be best. Concern expressed by Dave Marshall and Paul Jordan that this might be difficult because of weather. James suggested covering cuttings with a tarpaulin. Mark Ramsell said RVAS had hired a chipper to use for. Dan Bilton said it is most difficult on sites with a lot of hedges such as Morley Street but the Society there are looking at possible solutions. Any at Archer Lane made the point the</p>	

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	<p>point that the issue of domestic wood burning stoves should be tackled.</p> <p>The group to work together to look at alternatives and share information.</p> <p>Allotment Competition Phil Webster asked about the Allotment Competition. It will run from 16th-18th July. Publicity to go out and judges to be announced. Same categories as last year.</p> <p>AOB</p> <p>Skip Requests – requests should be sent to Allotment Office. Look at previous allocations and need</p> <p>Bark chippings, Manure, Shredding Services – Allotment office unable to provide these. Societies often organise these</p> <p>Raising awareness of Lyme Disease – on website and will feature in new rulebook. Also, Weils Disease. John Cawthorne said he had contracted illness from cow manure – so need to be vigilant</p> <p>Legal update – possession of items on termination of tenancy. Under section 41 – tenants have 30 days to collect items – need to look at how this might affect turnover.</p> <p>Livestock update – birds need to be registered annually. Information on DEFRA website. Allotment service to update information</p> <p>Hazardous waste – increasingly getting hazardous waste on sites – such as settees. Handbook says waste not to be brought on. Urged by Paul Jordan to be tougher on people who break rules.</p> <p>Allotment Manager post – interviews for permanent post coming up</p>	<p>ALL</p>
	<p>Date of next Meeting - TBC</p>	