

ALTON TOWN COUNCIL
ALLOTMENTS SUBCOMMITTEE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29th JANUARY 2020 AT 09:30

| | | | |
|----------|--------------------------|---|---|
| Present: | Councillor Sharon Cullen | - | Chairman |
| | Councillor Pam Jones | | |
| | Pat Harris | - | Finance & Admin Manager |
| | Alexandra Bond | - | Property & Grounds Administrator |
| | Pat Harding | - | Secretary, Alton Allotment Association and Site Representative, Borovere |
| | Mike Penn | - | Site Representative, Borovere |
| | John Pritchard | - | Site Representative, Whitedown |
| | Marion Morgans | - | Site Representative, Hawthorns |

1 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Mr Marcus van Hagen, Alton Allotment Association Chairman, Mrs Maggie Martin, Alton Allotment Association Treasurer, Mrs Kate Quick, site representative at Whitedown and Mrs Yvonne Thorne, Site Representative at Wooteys. Mr Steve Herbert, Site Representative at Spitalfields, indicated that he would not attend the subcommittee meeting.

2 **Minutes of meeting held on 11th September 2019**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11th September 2019 were accepted.

Item 6 of the minutes "Rent Renewals" was discussed as Mrs Harding asked about whether or not new tenants had to pay when then were taking plots towards the end of the year. Mrs Harris responded that from now onwards no plot would be offered from September and until the new year. Mrs Harris also said that the rent renewals letters would go out in October and rents that hadn't been paid by 31st December would result in tenancy being terminated on the first week of January. Mrs Harding protested that if plots were left in good conditions in September, they should be reallocated straight away rather than waiting until the new year. Mrs Harris responded that we needed to have a clear policy applying to all vacant plots and that while Borovere plots were often left in acceptable conditions this was not the case for most plots vacated.

Mrs Harding suggested that the documents provided to plot holders were misleading. It appeared that the information present in both the handbook and tenancy agreement did not reflect the Council's latest policies. The tenancy agreement notably refers to a notice expiring on or before 5th day of April or on or after the 29th September in any year, and states that a tenancy can only be terminated on the motif of unpaid invoice if the rent or any part thereof is in arrears for not less than 40 days. The handbook as for itself says that tenancies commencing from September will be rent free until the end of the year and that rent renewals are to be paid by the end of January.

Councillor Cullen asked for a meeting to be organised in February to agree on any necessary update and amendments required for both documents.

To close the discussion and as Mrs Bond had provided Mrs Harding with a list of the membership fees received by Alton Town Council on behalf of the allotment association Mrs Harris asked for the latter to raise an invoice to the Council indicating the total amount to be transferred.

3 **Update on vacant plots and waiting lists**

Mrs Bond gave an update on vacant plots and waiting lists, specifying that the figures given for the latter were per preferred site – or site assigned where no preference had been expressed – as most applicants were interested in more than one site. At the time of the meeting there was 19 people on the waiting list of which 4 applicants for Borovere, 3 for Whitedown, 4 for Spitalfields, 2 for Wooteys, 4 for Hawthorns, and 2 pending. There were also 13 vacant plots of which 1 at Borovere, 5 at Whitedown, 5 at Spitalfields, 1 at Wooteys and 1 at Hawthorns.

Councillor Cullen commented that there were more applicants than vacant plots however not much more and while the town's population was growing the request for allotment did not seem to follow. Advertising through social media and inclusion of allotments in the District local plan was discussed. Councillor Jones said that Alton allotments should be advertised on the Council's Facebook page on a regular basis.

4 **Update on tree works, hedge cutting and maintenance**

Mrs Bond confirmed that the housing association had taken action on the hedge and trees damaging the retaining wall between Borovere allotment site and Hermitage Close and that the necessary works had been carried out. Mrs Harding asked if any hedge cutting on the allotment side was scheduled. Mrs Harris responded that, having spoken to senior groundsman Dave Gilbert recently, there was no need for hedge cutting at the moment however this would be undertaken in due time.

Mrs Harris also said that works had been scheduled with the Council's tree surgeon to do Whitedown's hedge and that letters advising plot holders to remove any possessions between their plot and the boundary of the site to allow a 3ft/1m maintenance strip would be sent out. Mrs Harris confirmed that both the Northern and Southern boundaries would be done.

5 **Half plot and quarter plot options**

Due to a rising demand for smaller plots the possibility to split existing plots in half is to be considered. Mrs Bond reminded the subcommittee that what was now referred to as full plots and half plots used to be known as respectively half plots and quarter plots in the former allotment register. As a consequence, the Council does not offer quarter plots anymore as these would otherwise correspond to original plots being split in eight.

There are two issues with turning full plots into half plots. First, a practical one, as this requires putting new plot markers and updating sites maps; as the latter have been

drawn by hand this is not a straightforward process and result in the map looking more and more cluttered. Secondly, half plots are only charged half price even though they require the same level of administration as full plots; coupled to the fact they need less work from plot holders it is likely that more and more people will ask for their plot to be split in half, increasing the administrative burden.

Councillor Cullen suggested that half plots should from now onwards be re-let full rent when new tenants come in. Plot holders who have always paid half rent will continue to do so until they vacate their plot. Councillor Cullen also recommended that mention of the price be removed from the tenancy agreement. Members of the Allotment Association disagreed with the basis of this argument, pointing out that half plots, having less land, have less scope to grow the range and quantity of produce that a large plot can provide. Mr Pritchard suggested that the Allotment Association would contact the National Allotment Society for advice and information.

6 **Any other business**

Mrs Morgans asked if there were any updates regarding the damage caused by the cattle grazing and leaning on the fence at Hawthorns. Mrs Harris responded that the grazer, who is responsible to maintain the fence as part of their agreement with the Council, had been contacted, and were considering putting up an inner fence on the grazing side.

Mr Pritchard said the gate nearest to the school at Whitedown needed a new latch. Mrs Harding and Mr Penn said that more than one plot holder asked if the Butts Road gate could be reinstated. Mrs Harris responded to all that Dave Gilbert would investigate both issues and that tenants interested in the Butts Road's gate may be given the combination for the lock.

Mrs Harding asked for waste collection costs and suggested that green waste and general waste dates be swapped to go back to as it used to be in the past. Mrs Harris indicated that last year's costs were £785 for general waste and £775 for green waste. Councillor Cullen and Mrs Harris agreed that the green waste could take place in April and the general waste in October. Mrs Harding asked for the budget figures mentioned at the last meeting to be communicated in writing. Mrs Harris said these would be added to the minutes of the present meeting.

7 **Date of next meeting**

A meeting dedicated to reviewing the plot holder handbook and tenancy agreement is to be organised at the end of February. A Doodle poll is to be used to determine the exact date. The next ordinary allotment subcommittee meeting is scheduled on Wednesday 22nd April at 09:30.

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The meeting closed at 10:45.

APPENDIX

Income and expenditure for Allotments on 31st December 2019
Allotment Allocated Budget for 2019/20

| | Budget | Actual* | Over/ Under | | |
|--|--------|---------|------------------|----------------------|--|
| Expenditure: | | | | | |
| Water Charges | 1500 | 716 | -784 | under budget | |
| Maintenance | 2000 | 1828 | -172 | under budget | |
| Improvements | 3500 | 2218 | -1282 | under budget | |
| | | | | | |
| Expenditure Totals: | 7000 | 4762 | -2238 | | |
| | | | | | |
| Income | | | | | |
| Rents | 6100 | 6557 | 457 | over budget | |
| Admin Fees | 400 | 345 | -55 | under budget | |
| | | | | | |
| Income Totals | 6500 | 6902 | 402 | | |
| | | | | | |
| Works commissioned but not included in above works are: | | | | | |
| Tree Works at Whitedown Allotment quoted at £2,800 and have therefore used budget available from underspend against budget on expenditure of £2238 and additional income of £402 | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| Included in above figures: | | | | | |
| Maintenance: | | | | | |
| Skip Hire and waste removal from allotments | | | £1,561 | | |
| Stopcock keys | | | £25.12 | | |
| Water leak repairs | | | £161.26 | | |
| Timber and fence posts | | | £81.21 | | |
| Total | | | £1,828 | | |
| | | | | | |
| Improvements: | | | | | |
| Notice Boards and associated fixings | | | £1,999.40 | | |
| Allotment plot signs | | | £161.70 | | |
| Steel strips for signs & connectors | | | £56.43 | | |
| Total | | | £2,217.53 | | |
| | | | | | |
| Water Charges | | | | | |
| Hawthorns | | | £344.80 | | |
| Borovere | | | £129.06 | | |
| Whitedown | | | £248.54 | | |
| Wooteys | | | £45.02 | ***one bill in query | |
| Total | | | £767.42 | | |