

**ALTON TOWN COUNCIL
ALLOTMENTS SUBCOMMITTEE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD REMOTELY ON 17th June 2020 AT 09:30**

Present: Councillor Sharon Cullen – Chairman
Councillor Pam Jones
Councillor Matthew Bayliss
Alexandra Bond – Property & Grounds Administrator
Marcus van Hagen – Chairman, Alton Allotment Association

1 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Marion Morgans, Yvonne Thorne, Pat Harding, Mike Penn, Kate Quick, John Pritchard, and Maggie Martins.

Mr van Hagen commented that these are challenging times for his colleagues from the allotment association and that some are not familiar with all technologies. Mr van Hagen asked that the association be informed, would remote meeting training be offered.

2 **Minutes and matters arising from the meetings held on 29th January and 25th February 2020**

The amendment to the minutes of the meeting held on 29th January 2020, which was requested by Mrs Harding prior to the meeting, was accepted.

The minutes of both meetings were approved.

3 **New Plot Holders' Handbook**

Items 3 and 4 of the agenda were addressed simultaneously. The subcommittee agreed on the importance of having no inconsistencies between the plot holder handbook and the tenancy agreement.

Councillor Bayliss pointed out that the maximum size for trees was not clear and that as a plot holder he wished he could find more practical information such as when the water is going to be turned on and off and which months plot holders should expect to see the grass mowed. Information such as hedge cutting could also appear in the handbook. Councillors Cullen and Jones commented that this sort of information is usually displayed in the notice boards or otherwise passed on by site representatives. Councillor Bayliss said he did not mean to see the exact dates appearing in the handbook but that general information should be provided.

Councillor Jones and Mr van Hagen praised the overall quality of the handbook.

4 New Tenancy Agreement

Mr van Hagen said the association was not too happy about the text. Councillor Cullen suggested that the association send their comments. Mrs Bond reminded the subcommittee that a first version of the new agreement was distributed at last meeting and that comments should have been received prior to the present meeting to be incorporated into the document. Councillor Cullen asked that the association's comments be received by the end of July and that the final version of the document be presented for adoption at next subcommittee meeting.

Councillor Bayliss suggested that the content of clause 7 be moved to the handbook to reduce the risks of inconsistencies between the handbook and the tenancy agreement. Councillor Cullen said that the document was based on NALC model. Mrs Bond commented that having all rules moved to the handbook would avoid having to reissue all tenancy agreements every time we update the rules. The subcommittee agreed that the content of clause 7 should be moved to a specific section of the handbook and that the tenancy agreement should refer to such section.

5 Update on plot inspections

Mrs Bond reported that she had never witnessed such a level of care across all sites and referred to the information shared prior to the meeting, which can be found in Appendix A. There are currently 9 plots that are untended, of which at least 1 is to be tidied up by the association so that no action is required from the Council.

It was agreed that a carefully worded letter would be sent instead of the usual inspection letters taking into account the current health crisis. Mr van Hagen said the association would be willing to help whenever possible but has limited resources and asked if the grounds team could supply membranes to help keep the plots under control. Mrs Bond said she would liaise with Pat Harris to see what is feasible.

Councillor Jones suggested that the association used online communication channels to encourage plot holders to contact the allotment association when confronted with difficulties caring for their allotment. Mr van Hagen commented that there was a risk this would lead to unmanageable expectations.

6 Update on vacant plots and waiting lists

One plot was recently vacated and left in a poor state. Councillor Bayliss said Mrs Bond should try and offer the plot as it is as someone may be interested, which the subcommittee agreed on.

Councillor Bayliss asked why the spare land in Hawthorn was not used to allow for more allotments. Councillor Cullen responded this was something to do with the skyline, access to water and risks of congestion due to lack of car parking space causing hostility from

residents. Councillor Jones said there had been discussions about using the land to grow flowers instead. Councillor Bayliss asked that Mrs Bond investigate the exact reasons.

7 **Any other business**

A number of issues was brought to the attention of Mrs Bond.

- 1) While it would be practical to be able to communicate with all plot holders by email, 98 of them did not share their address with the Council. Pat Harris has suggested that a poster be put up in all notice boards asking plot holders who have not yet shared their address to send it to Mrs Bond. As Mrs Bond would likely end up with most of the addresses already in her possession Councillor Jones said it would be useful for the Council to be able to send bulk text messages to a specific list of people as required. Mr van Hagen warned that this kind of system has a cost and Councillor Jones said this may be something that could be budgeted.
- 2) John Pritchard has expressed concerns over the security of the sites due to a number of keys not being returned to the town hall every year following tenancy terminations. At the moment there are still six keys missing from tenancies terminated in January. Councillors Bayliss, Jones and Cullen agreed this was a low risk and barely an inconvenience for the council.
- 3) A clear policy is needed for polytunnels. The subcommittee is of the opinion that polytunnels would increase productivity and should be allowed but that strict rules should be in place. The rules should take into account the aesthetics and particularities of each site as well as potential impact on neighbouring plots and residents, notably in terms of size. The allotment association is to prepare a proposal for consideration at next meeting.

Councillor Bayliss wishes that the grounds team and officers be thanked for their fantastic work during the pandemic. The subcommittee joins him and Councillor Cullen would like to add a special thanks to Pat Harris for organising the green waste collection.

8 **Date of next meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled on Wednesday 16th September. As agreed with Councillor Cullen the time of the meeting will be confirmed closer to the date.

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The meeting closed at 10:58.

APPENDIX A

16th June 2020 Plot Administration Overview

Site	Vacant plots	Plots offered	Waiting lists **	Untended plots
Borovere	0	0	9	0
Whitedown	0	0	5	4
Spitalfields	1 *	0	8	3
Wooteys	0	0	5	1
Hawthorns	0	0	7	1
Total	1	0	34	9

* To be strimmed down before being offered

** Waiting lists per preferred site