

**PARKS AND COUNTRYSIDE SERVICES  
COMMUNITY SERVICES TEAM  
ALLOTMENT ADVISORY GROUP  
Minutes of Meeting**

**Tuesday 26th September 2017, 6-8pm  
Reception Room A, Town Hall**

**Present:**

**Councillor Zahira Naz (Chair)  
Councillor Lewis Dagnall  
Councillor Mary Lea  
Councillor Cliff Woodcraft  
Ceri Ashton, Allotment Manager  
Jane Bullimore, Allotment Officer (minutes)  
Dave Aspinall, Woodland Manager  
Marion Gerson, Manor Allotments Society and SAF  
Michael Jordan, Mossway Allotment Society (Sheffield Allotment Fed President)  
Michael Booth, Mossway Allotment Society  
Phil Webster, Roe Woods Allotment Society (SAF Vice President)  
John Howe, Woodseats Allotment Society and SAF  
James Brown, Heeley and Meersbrook Allotment Society  
Jude Lambe, Walkley Bank Allotment Society  
Alan Potts, Rustlings Road Garden Society  
Pete Sides, Rodney Hill Allotment Society  
Rob Hawkins, Hanging Water Allotment Society  
Ann Hopkinson, Hagg Lane Allotment Society  
Paul Jordan, Crookes Quarry Allotment Society  
Liz Wade, Norton Lees and St Pauls Allotment Society  
Ken Croggon, Archer Lane Allotment Society  
Forid Meah, Woodseats Allotment Society**

<b>ITEM</b>	<b>DETAIL</b>	<b>ACTION</b>
<b>1</b>	<p><b>Apologies for Absence</b></p> <p>Margaret Boulton, SAF/Ecclesall Allotments Councillor Douglas Johnson</p> <p>Michael Jordan mentioned Richard Lee, who sadly passed away recently. Richard made substantial contributions to the group and to Woodseats Allotment Society.</p>	
<b>2</b>	<p><b>Minutes and Matters Arising</b></p> <p>The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record.</p> <p>Michael Jordan requested that the minutes are distributed more promptly. Ceri Ashton replied that the Allotment Office would endeavour to do so.</p>	

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	<p>Phil Webster Reported back that he was in touch with Brushes and Firshill TARAs. Posters had been provided and put in notice boards.</p> <p>Ceri Ashton reported back on the cost of Japanese knotweed treatment (which had already been communicated to SAF). The office estimates that it costs approximately £700 a year (based on the ranger's time, fuel and herbicide). Sometimes it is necessary to use a contractor (e.g. larger stands of knotweed, or knotweed close to a watercourse). This can put the cost up by approximately £500-£2000 a year.</p> <p>Ceri Ashton reported back on her investigation into whether the current way of charging for water and water infrastructure maintenance is in breach of OFWAT regulations (previously investigated by Chris Heeley). Her findings were that OFWAT governs the supply of domestic water supplies by the industry, not the provision of water on allotments. She repeated Chris Heeley's request for SAF to provide specific details of what regulations they thought the allotment office's water charging were in breach of.</p> <p>Ceri Ashton reported back that obtaining prices for site improvements and investigation of a security issue on Lees Hall Avenue (Meersbrook Allotments) were still ongoing.</p> <p>Ceri Ashton reported back that the hours put in by Probation Services do need to be recorded as volunteer hours (but separately from hours spent by volunteers working directly with SCC). Phil Webster agreed to provide this information.</p> <p>Ceri Ashton reported that the reduction of the row of conifers adjacent to Woodseats allotments was underway. Michael Jordan queried why they weren't being removed all together, since this could have been cheaper in the long run. Ceri Ashton explained that the trees belonged to Bereavement Services so the decision was theirs, and that Bereavement Services had felt that if the trees had been removed entirely, a fence would have been needed, to divide the crematorium grounds from the allotments.</p> <p>Ceri Ashton reported that there was no update on the flood defence proposals, and the implications for Roscoe Plantation.</p>	PW
3	<p><b>Plymouth's Allotment Management</b></p> <p>Ceri Ashton explained that she had written a report on Plymouth's allotment management in response to questions from Richard Lee at the last meeting. She explained that she wasn't sure about going ahead with this item, due to Richard passing away so recently, and asked for views. Michael Jordan said that he felt the item should be presented. Ceri Ashton checked that nobody disagreed, then went ahead and presented</p>	

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	<p>the report (see report for detail).</p> <p>Ceri Ashton asked members of the group to consider the practices listed in the final report. Any which could be beneficial to adopt in Sheffield could be discussed subsequently in greater detail.</p> <p>Marion Gerson stated that she thought an administration fee would be a good idea.</p> <p>Forid Meah stated that he is concerned about any underspend being lost. Ceri Ashton explained that any overspend is met out of other budgets, and that over the last few years this has worked in favour of the Allotments budget. She also explained that as a part of the Council, the Allotment Office is bound by the Council's requirements for financial management.</p> <p>Ceri Ashton stated that she felt it could be beneficial to invoice from 1<sup>st</sup> September (or perhaps 1<sup>st</sup> October), but that she also had reservations about introducing another change for tenants. Jude Lambe asked whether all tenants would be consulted on this matter. Ceri Ashton replied that it isn't usual practice to discuss such a decision with all tenants. Allotment Advisory Group is the forum for consultation.</p> <p>Michael Jordan asked whether it was mainly because it would spread the office's workload across the year more evenly that Ceri was interested in invoicing in the Autumn. Ceri replied that it was partly this, but equally that it would help combat the issue of plots becoming overgrown whilst being let in the spring, when tenants vacate at the end of the current rental year.</p> <p>Ceri Ashton agreed to circulate the report on Plymouth's Allotment Management.</p>	<p>CA</p>
<p>4</p>	<p><b>Bonfires Revisited</b></p> <p>Jane Bullimore presented a report, introducing once again the suggestion of a seasonal ban on bonfires.</p> <p>It was suggested that if a ban is introduced, it should start earlier than the 21<sup>st</sup> of June.</p> <p>Michael Jordan stated that it would still be difficult to enforce. Ceri Ashton replied that it would be easier to enforce than the present regulations, since any evidence of burning on a plot during the ban period would constitute evidence of a breach of the regulations.</p> <p>James Brown asked how it would be enforced at weekends. Ceri Ashton reiterated that an outright seasonal ban would be easier to enforce than the current regulations. James Brown</p>	

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	<p>stated that only new tenants really need to burn, and that he does not see it as a big problem. Paul Jordan stated that he only burns in the winter anyway. Marion Gerson agreed.</p> <p>Forid Meah asked, wouldn't a seasonal ban just result in more complaints during the winter? He asked how big the problem was, and suggested that educating tenants on the issue might be the answer. Ceri Ashton responded that the office receives very few complaints about smoke nuisance in the winter, since residents don't tend to want to sit in their gardens, hang washing out or leave windows open during the winter. She explained that the office had previously formally logged all complaints of smoke nuisance and presented the findings to the group to demonstrate the scale of the problem. She stated that on Woodseats the society's efforts to educate tenants about the issue had really paid off, but that citywide there is still a big problem.</p> <p>Jude Lambe stated that in the 1960s, a relative of hers had an allotment and fires were only permitted after 7pm on a Thursday.</p> <p>Liz Wade stated that something more prescriptive and clearer was needed, and that the problem was not just with newcomers. Marion Gerson stated that no burning at all for a set period of time would be much clearer. Councillor Cliff Woodcraft agreed that the rules should be simple and clear.</p> <p>Pete Sides asked, what if residents don't know the policy, and still complain in winter? Ceri Ashton reiterated that there are very few complaints during the winter, and explained that if a resident complains but no breach of tenancy is taking place, officers explain this.</p> <p>Michael Jordan asked, what about just having just one day when burning was allowed. Ceri Ashton asked, if we did that, what day should it be? She suggested Thursdays.</p> <p>James Brown asked whether he should challenge tenants who are breaching regulations. Ceri Ashton reiterated how successful the efforts of Woodseats Allotment Society had been, but stated that allotment societies did not need to be confrontational with tenants. Simply pointing out that the tenant is breaching the regulations can be sufficient.</p> <p>Councillor Mary Lea stated that it was necessary to consider the allotment holders, but also residents too.</p> <p>It was agreed that there would be a subsequent discussion between officers and Councillor Mary Lea, once everyone had had the opportunity to consider the comments made.</p>	

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5	<p><b>New Exclusions Policy</b></p> <p>Jane Bullimore presented a report proposing the introduction of a new exclusions policy (see report for detail).</p> <p>Michael Jordan asked, could people excluded from private allotment sites be excluded from Council sites? Ceri Ashton responded that this was a good question, and she would check with the legal advisor whether it would be possible to exclude people who we knew had been excluded from private sites.</p> <p>Forid Meah asked, was the policy really necessary? Ceri Ashton responded that it was; each clause in it related to situations that the office had encountered.</p> <p>Michael Jordan stated that the proposed policy seemed reasonable, as long as tenants had a right of appeal.</p>	CA
6	<p><b>Rents for 2019/2020</b></p> <p>Ceri Ashton presented a proposal (see powerpoint file for detail).</p> <p>Michael Jordan stated that he was unhappy with the proposal to tie the rent to inflation. Ceri Ashton stated that it was not a proposal to 'tie' it to inflation, just to increase it in line with inflation for 2019/2020. This was because this effectively enabled the budget to stay the same.</p> <p>John Howe stated that he was concerned that an increase would lose tenants. Ceri Ashton stated that it did not appear that the announcement of an increase in line with inflation for 2018/2019 was causing the service to lose tenants; occupancy rates are currently very high (approximately 3060 tenants). She stated that the number of applications received would be analysed at the end of the year.</p> <p>Michael Jordan stated that he was concerned about the standard of workmanship at Elm Crescent, where a new fence had been installed. He stated that the wrong bolts had been used, which could be removed, and that seeing as the Council pay 'top dollar' for work, the standard should be higher. Ceri Ashton stated that the Council do not pay 'top dollar'; three competitive quotes are sought, and in most cases the contactor submitting the cheapest quote is the one who is commissioned to undertake the work. She stated that the Allotment Officer Caroline Jennings was aware of an issue with some of the bolts used, and raising this with the contractor.</p> <p>James Brown stated that it is still considerably cheaper than going to the gym, and he believes it is very good value.</p> <p>Forid Meah asked how they could decide whether the current</p>	

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	<p>level of service needs to be protected if they don't yet understand what the service is. Ceri Ashton explained that most of the attendees already understand what the service entails (i.e. citywide delivery of the allotment service). She offered to send him the annual report.</p> <p>Michael Jordan stated that it had been promised that the increase in 2014/15 would result in a higher level of service. Ceri Ashton replied that this had never been promised. The increase had been to protect the existing budget and level of service (although the office always strives to do the most they can with the budget).</p> <p>Alan Potts stated that the proposal made sense, and agreed that the rent should go up in line with inflation.</p> <p>Michael Jordan stated that there is a lack of visibility of officers, and he would like to see the staffing levels increase, even if this had to be paid for. However he also stated that tenants are still smarting from the previous rent increases. Pete Sides stated that they can't have it both ways. Marion Gerson stated that she was not. Ann Hopkinson stated that the allotments are very good value.</p>	<p>CA</p>
<p>7</p>	<p><b>Discussion on potential changes to concession criteria</b></p> <p>Ceri Ashton gave a presentation (see powerpoint file for detail).</p> <p>Paul Jordan asked, if the criteria for students is being widened, shouldn't PhD students also be able to claim? Councillor Lewis Dagnall agreed. Ceri Ashton stated that this had been considered, but PhD students generally receive a stipend, and those that meet certain criteria can claim benefits (so could claim the concession anyway). However she agreed that this could be reconsidered. She agreed to discuss it with Councillor Lewis Dagnall.</p> <p>Forid Meah asked when Ceri was proposing that these changes be introduced. Ceri responded that she did not have any date in mind; at this stage she was just inviting the views of the Advisory Group on the matter.</p> <p>Pete Sides stated that he was concerned some tenants will feel disgruntled. Marion Gerson stated that it was a good proposal and she was in favour of it. However she wonders if the 75% concession is too generous, and incentivises cheating the system, by putting tenancies in someone else's name in order to claim the concession. Michael Jordan stated that there will always be those who cheat the system. Ceri Ashton agreed, and stated that she would not want to penalise those genuinely in need of the concession because of the actions of those who cheat the system.</p>	

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8	<p><b>Any other business/items raised by SAF</b></p> <p>Rob Hawkins stated that there was some Health Authority land in Fulwood which could potentially be used for allotments. Ceri Ashton replied that she was extremely interested and asked him to provide details.</p> <p>Ann Hopkinson stated that she believes someone homeless is sleeping on a currently untenanted plot at Hagg Lane. Ceri Ashton asked her to give the details to Allotment Officer Caroline Jennings, and explained that in such circumstances the Allotment Office leaves a letter on the plot for the person, explaining that they cannot stay there but also provides leaflets/phone numbers that could help.</p> <p>Rob Hawkins stated that there had been on arson attack on the community plot, and the police had stated that they would not attend. Ceri Ashton asked if the office had been notified. Rob Hawkins replied that he didn't know whether the office had been notified. Michael Jordan stated that at Moss Way they had had a better response from the police, and PCSOs had paid attention to the site. Ceri Ashton stated that on one occasion the police had not attended on the same day when there was an arson attack at Meersbrook allotments, but that was because they were dealing with an armed robbery. Often the response is good, however the police have faced severe cuts. Councillor Lewis Dagnall stated that SYP are being restructured, and there should be improvements.</p> <p>Ceri Ashton proposed Tuesday the 5<sup>th</sup> of December, 6pm, as provisional date and time for the next meeting.</p>	RH