

Allotment & Environment Committee

6th December 2023

6pm Town Council Offices, Kingsway, Bishop Auckland

Present: Cllr Michael Siddle (Chair), and Cllr Katie Eliot, Cllr Andrew Legge

Also Present: Sarah Harris, Town Clerk &, three reps from Pollards Allotment site and one rep from the Pollards Site.

AEC29/23 - Apologies for absence – were received from Cllr Kimm Lawson & Sam Zair

Resolved: that the members accepted the apologies for absence.

AEC30/23 - Declarations of interest – no declarations made

AEC31/23 - Minutes of the previous meeting held on 6th September 2023 were presented

Resolved – that members agreed that these were a true record.

AEC32/23 – Report of the Town Clerk

AEC32.1/23 -Tenancies 2023-24 - an update was provided to confirm the tenancies had been issued, and the report detailed the number outstanding. Once final payments are made, payments to associations would be sent over for the percentage plus any collected association fees.

Resolved: that members noted the update

AEC32.2/23 -Enforcement Action - a summary of enforcement action was given (see file report)

Resolved: that members noted the action, and welcomed the structured management processes now in place.

AEC32.3/23 -Waiting List – that the waiting list was in the 18, with some vacant plots coming available, (see file Copy).

Resolved: that members noted the waiting list and active management now taken to fill plots quickly.

AEC23.4/23 – Draft Association agreements – Two rounds of meetings had been held with Associations to develop the document (see file copy). One main sticking point is surrounding the requirement for annual meetings of associations to have a quorate number for decision making and appointment to ‘exec committees’ with a requirement for the committee to also be quorate in making decisions which affect all. Associations are struggling to get larger numbers to any meetings.

Resolved: that members noted the work undertaken, and that they felt more comfortable that decisions should be made by majority through good governance practices, which involve a quorate of members. That the next versions should be progressed with and presented to associations, following feedback from National Allotment Society.

AEC32.5/23 – Maintenance 2023 – updates (see file copy) of maintenance works and bringing back into use the 10-12 plots at woodhouse close were provided.

Resolved: that members noted the update, and welcomed the progress being made.

AEC24/23 – Environment

River Wear Trust are planning on having their river fest meeting in Summer 2024. They are working with more groups in the town.

In Bloom – has dropped the Coundon Part and is now Bishop Auckland In Bloom. More detailed plans and projects are being drawn up.

Green matters – has replaced the green fair, they are working do support at other events rather than have their own. Working with likes of Community Action Teams, wardens, in bloom and River Wears Trust

Resolved: that Members noted the updates.

AEC24/23 – Public Participation –

*When will the associations receive their percentage payments. **Payments will be issued in January***

*Associations would like clearer process for supply of co-worker information – **process will be addressed and looked at.***

*When will water charges for 2024-25 be set. **They will be set probably at Easter, liaison will take place with associations.***

What will the gate code with contractors for Edgehill be managed. Process being looked at by Deputy Clerk.

*Will Associations receive copies of the Risk Assessments and method statements for contractor works. **Each case will be assessed, but ordinarily no, as the council are the commissioner. Tenants will be asked to keep off plots when work is being undertaken. Not happy to have association members involved without those. Conversation will be had and it will be decided on a works by works basis.***

New tenancy packs are confusing to new tenants they need to be streamlined. – packs are continually being reviewed.

*How will off shots of water be managed moving forward. **Water strategy being looked at overall, it's a longer term piece of work. If someone inherits a tap as part of their plot they are responsible for it, as unable to take everything out and start again.***

*Need clear list of co-workers for the National Insurance – don't feel that we have that at present. **All co-worker forms are copied over, so lists should be there but we can look at an improved format.***

*Trees overhanging and damaged from Weardale Railways side. **Will look into it and contact the railway, tree works are being costed at the site, as we have had issues getting quotes from contractors.***

AEC25/23 Exclusion of Press and Public In accordance with the provisions of Section 1 of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, as amended by Section 100 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council do now exclude the press and public for the remaining item on the agenda by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted since publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest.

Signed chair
December 2023

Resolved: that Members exclude the press and public.

Public members left

AEC26/23 – Strategy long term vision of the allotment sites was discussed. Updates were provided on advice from National, and that a norther area rep meeting and site visit will take place in January.

Resolved: That members agreed to still seek costings of a contractor/ handy person be explored and brought back as part of budget setting to see if it would be feasible and they welcome the update. Clerk to write to those whom have expressed and interest in land purchase, to advise that the process is more complex now but options are still being looked at with some updated news expected in the new year.