

Minutes of the Meeting of the **ALLOTMENTS AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE** held in the Four Clocks Centre, Bishop Auckland on **TUESDAY, 19TH NOVEMBER 2013 AT 4.00 P.M.**

Present: Councillor Anderson, (in the Chair) and Councillors Blackburn and Race

Also Present: David Anderson (Town Clerk).

A&E.6/13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor S. Zair

A&E.7/13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were submitted.

A&E.8/13 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no members of the public in attendance.

A&E.9/13 ALLOTMENT WATCH

Members noted that Bishop Auckland Neighbourhood Watch had been introduced in early 2011 to help with the prevention and detection of crime on allotments. The scheme was initially set up at Woodhouse Close Allotments, but had been extended to include South Church and the Pollards allotment sites.

The Chairman of the Allotments and Environment Committee had recently attended a meeting organised by the Allotment Watch Co-ordinator where consideration was given to the introduction of a SmartWater project in the Bishop Auckland and Shildon AAP area.

The project would include the use of SmartWater, a liquid containing a code which could be read under ultraviolet light. It was intended to be applied to valuable items, so that if they were stolen and later seized by the police, their original owner could be determined. Signs would also be placed at the allotments within the scheme to deter potential thieves.

The total cost of the project was £2,200 which would be part funded by the AAP to the tune of £1,500.

The Town Council had been requested to make a contribution of £500 to the project.

Given the recent spate of thefts and vandalism on the Council's allotment sites it was considered appropriate to support the project.

RECOMMENDED: That a contribution of £500 be given to the Allotment Watch SmartWater project.

A&E.10/13 EDGE HILL ALLOTMENTS – MAINTENANCE OF HEDGE AND DITCH

Members noted that under the terms of the lease of Edge Hill allotment site the Town Council was responsible for the maintenance of the boundary hedge and ditch, which should be undertaken every two years.

Quotations were therefore to be sought with the intention of awarding the work to the company offering the lowest quotation. The necessary work would be accommodated within the Allotments budget.

Given the infrequency of meetings of this Committee it was proposed that the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman of the Allotments and Environment Committee, be authorised to award the work to the company offering the lowest quotation.

Signed:
Chair

RECOMMENDED: That the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman of the Allotments and Environment Committee, be authorised to award the work to the company offering the lowest quotation.

A&E.11/13 WOODHOUSE CLOSE – MAINTENANCE OF INTERNAL ROAD

Members noted that an internal road within the Woodhouse Close Allotment site was rutted and potholed which was causing rainwater to collect and discharge into nearby allotments. The condition of the road is also a potential risk to allotment holders and visitors.

An estimate to level the road and treat the surface with chippings has been obtained at a cost of £940. This would however provide only a temporary solution as the road as the chippings were likely be displaced by vehicles.

It was suggested that the road be scraped and rolled to level the surface to provide a temporary repair for the winter period which will alleviate the problem of water being displaced into nearby allotments.

A longer term solution would need to be identified with a view for the work to be carried out early spring 2014. A possible solution could be to surface the road to an appropriate standard with tarmac or 'sticky chippings'.

- RECOMMENDED:**
1. That remedial work be undertaken to resolve the flooding issue over the winter period and the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman of the Allotments and Environment Committee, be authorised to seek the most economical option.
 2. That the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman of the Allotments and Environment Committee, be authorised to seek a suitable long term solution for the internal road.

A&E.12/13 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 excluded the press and public for the remaining items on the agenda by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted since publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest.

A&E.13/13 MP ENQUIRY – WOODHOUSE CLOSE ALLOTMENTS

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk detailing a complaint received via Helen Goodman MP regarding plots in the south west area of Woodhouse Close Allotments.

Most of the issues were in the main legacy issues inherited from the former Wear Valley District Council in 2009 when Bishop Auckland Town Council took over responsibility for this allotment site and had been raised and dealt with previously. The allotment site was regularly monitored. The Town Council also liaised very closely with the Secretary of Woodhouse Allotments Association. Additional visits were made whenever complaints were received.

Keeping of 'livestock' on allotments

In respect of the comment that no livestock of any kind should be kept on allotments, several enquiries had been made into the validity of this statement. However the only

Signed:
Chair

legislation relating to livestock being kept on allotments was to the effect that a tenant should not be refused permission to keep hens and rabbits, (Allotments Act 1950 s12). It would there seem that the Town Council had discretion to allow other livestock to be kept on allotments. Permission should however only be granted where appropriate. Given the proximity of Woodhouse Close Allotments to houses it may be appropriate to reconsider whether larger animals, e.g. goats, horses, should be allowed on the site.

It was suggested that the policy on keeping large animals on Council owned allotments be considered as part of a wider review of the allotments policy. It was also suggested that a market rent should be applied to those allotment plots where it was considered appropriate to keep large animals.

ACTION That the policy relating to keeping large animals on allotment plots be considered as part of a wider review of the allotments policy.

Keeping of Cockerels

A letter had been sent to the Allotments Association requesting that cockerels be kept in darkness overnight to prevent crowing early in the morning.

ACTION That tenants be reminded that cockerels should be kept in darkness overnight to prevent crowing early in the morning

General condition of allotments

Whilst the allotments could not be described as attractive the general condition was found to be acceptable for the purpose for which they were being used. However any deterioration of the allotments should be prevented.

ACTION That tenants be reminded of their obligation to keep their allotments in good and clean state. Further inspections will be undertaken to monitor the conditions of the allotments.

Animal Waste

Regular inspections had been made to Woodhouse Allotments during the summer. There were no smells of animal waste during these visits. There was evidence of good waste management during the inspections made on 31st October. This seems to be a previous complaint which has been resolved.

ACTION That regular visits be made to monitor the situation.

Nuisance Caused by Tenants Early in the Morning 5.00 a.m. to 6.00 a.m.

There was no evidence of nuisance at the time of inspection. Tenants advised that they were not in attendance during 5.00 a.m. to 6.00 a.m.

ACTION That all tenants be reminded of their obligation not to cause nuisance.

Correct planning procedures not followed

It was possible that correct planning procedures had not been followed in all cases. Letter had recently been sent to all tenants to remind them that they needed to seek permission from the Town Council before building any new structure and that planning permission may also be required from Durham County Council (DCC) depending on the size, use and location of the building.

The DCC Planning Enforcement Officer was to be contacted for advice regarding building that may not have planning permission.

Signed:
Chair

- ACTION**
1. That tenants be reminded to request appropriate permissions before building any structure on an allotment.
 2. Further advice be sought from DCC Planning Enforcement Officer regarding building that may not have planning permission.

Tethering of horses adjacent to houses

Durham County Council has sent a letter to all tenants instructing them not to tether horses on public land. Enforcement action was to be taken with the possibility of horses being seized if tethering continued. It would seem that tenants no longer tethered horses on land adjacent to the allotments.

ACTION That tenants be reminded not to tether horses on public land.

Cars, vans, pickups and horses and traps crossing footpaths to access gates cut in the boundary fence

The complaint relating to cutting of boundary fence has been raised previously and as a result tenants had been requested to seal the gates. It would seem that not all gates have been sealed.

Tenants advised that they did not or no longer use the entrance gate for vehicular access.

- ACTION**
- 1 That tenants be instructed to seal gates cut in perimeter fence and instructed not to drive across grassed areas and footpaths.
 2. That the entrance gate widened by tenants to allow vehicular access be reinstated to pedestrian access only.

RECOMMENDED: That the above actions be endorsed.

A&E.14/13 APPLICATION FOR RETROSPECTIVE APPROVAL TO ERECT A STABLE ON AN ALLOTMENT

Consideration was given to a letter seeking retrospective permission to erect a stable to accommodate 4 horses on an allotment plot on Woodhouse Close Allotments.

It was noted that permission had been granted in January 2012 for the tenant to keep a small pony overnight on the plot.

Members were of the opinion that the plot could not accommodate four horses and therefore refused permission to erect a stable for that purpose. As the request was retrospective the tenant was to be instructed to reinstate the building to its previous size.

It was however agreed that previous permission to keep a small pony overnight be confirmed.

- RECOMMENDED:**
- 1 That retrospective permission to erect a stable to accommodate 4 horses be refused.
 2. That the building should be reinstated to its previous size.
 3. That permission to keep a small pony overnight be confirmed.

Signed:
Chair