

## Allotment & Environment Committee

26 September 2022

5pm Town Council Offices, Kingsway, Bishop Auckland

**Present:** Cllr S Zair (Chair) Cllr K Eliot, Cllr H Balmer-Howison and Cllr A Zair

**Also Present:** Sarah Harris, Town Clerk & Vicki Booth Deputy Clerk

Representatives from Edgehill, Pollards, and South Church Allotment Sites

**AEC006/22 - Apologies for absence** – Were received from Cllr J Blackburn as he was away.

**Resolved:** That the apologies were noted and received.

**AEC007/22 - Declarations of interest** from members on any item on the agenda, including any interest prejudicial or personal as recorded on the Members register of interests.

**AEC008/22 – Minutes of the meeting from 26 July 2022** were presented.

**Resolved:** That the Minutes were the Minutes be approved as a correct record of the meeting and recommendations contained therein were adopted by the full council meeting on the 6<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

### **AE009/22 Report of the Town Clerk**

AE009.1/22 General Allotment update

The Clerk provided an update on **Allotment Mapping Project**, there has been some delays, but initial Maps are being drawn up, along with Ariel photographs of each site. Next stage is that an open day will be held where people are able to come in to look at the map of their plot and then dispute where boundaries lie if necessary. This had hoped to be September but due to delays through this is likely to be late October or early November. Tenants to be reassured that the maps are to be used for Town Council records. Once the boundaries and mapping is identified and agreed plot markers will be installed, and some re-numbering may be necessary.

**Resolved:** That members noted the update.

The Town Clerk and Deputy Clerk have visited every site over the past month to undertake **site inspections** for council records. Full inspections have been challenging as not all sites have clearly defined boundaries, therefore some sites do need to be revisited. Levels of cultivation and condition of plots on some sites was concerning.

Plots which are not 50% cultivated, have prohibited items, require repairs and maintenance are receiving warning letters, as part of enforcement action. Those which are not 50% cultivated are also being advised that full rent is payable from November 2022.

Prior to the inspections work had been done with one association to issue letters to some tenants regarding plot condition. This is being followed up, with further after the inspections.

Site **Risk Assessments and Maintenance plans** have been drafted for each site.

**Resolved:** That Members noted the report and receive further reports relating to enforcement action.

Whilst still a little clunky the new system of management of **waiting lists** from the Town Council is working and ensures Town Council Compliance with GDPR. An additional form being developed to ensure that once a tenant is allocated they are happy that their information is passed over the Association if there is one.

Some persons on the waiting people are outside of the Town Council Boundary line, however some current tenants do live outside the boundary due to historic lettings etc. Agreement on rules surrounding the boundary is needed as part of the rule consultation. 10 Plots have been allocated since the July Meeting, 27 people remain on the waiting list, 15-20 plots available but 10 or more need major remedial works. The Edge hill waiting list has been exhausted.

Former vacant plot at Pollards which was allocated at the last meeting has now been passed on to new tenant. The main structural remedial works are planned for week commencing 26 September this was delayed due to contractor availability. The tenant has made an exceptional start to the renovations.

**Resolved:** That Members agreed continued to monitor the waiting list situation.  
That Members agreed an option to recommend to Full Council on the boundaries and distance acceptable for new tenants, as part of the rule and regulation consultation and update.

The **Horticulture show** which was scheduled for Sat 24<sup>th</sup> September 2022 in No.42 Market Place was cancelled. Due to the observation of Royal Protocol and official mourning no promotion of the event was able to be undertaken in the run up to the event. The event is costly to the Town Council and therefore as it could not be guaranteed that there would be a good foot fall and increased community and school engagement, staffing capacity was also a factor with staff being pulled into Operation London Bridge Protocols.

**Resolved:** That members note the report, and work with the Events Committee on ideas for 2022.

**AC009.2/22 Rules and Regulations Consultation** - The draft consultation document was circulated. The proposed amendments to the rules are not radical or greatly different to what is already in place, simple additions have been made to strength the rules and make grey areas more clear. To ensure tenants have the opportunity to comment, a range of engagement methods would be used including, Online access to the consultation, Hard copies issued to associations, and tenants by request, 1-1 meetings with association representatives and drop in sessions for tenants if requested. The consultation would be promoted via the website, social media, posters on site, and to associations asking for onward cascade. The proposed timeline of the consultation was set out with an end date of 10 October with the next Committee Meeting being on 13<sup>th</sup> October before the final document is proposed to full council on 18 October 2022.

**Resolved:** That the Members noted the report, and endorsed the consultation timeline and document with a go live date of 27<sup>th</sup> September 2022. They agreed that the 1-1 meetings with the associations would take place the following week and would involve the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee.

**AC009.3/22 Allotment Tenancies Nov 22-October 23 Update** - As per the previous meeting the new tenancy year will run from 1<sup>st</sup> November to 31<sup>st</sup> October. This is in line with Durham County Council, and is seen as best practice. This enables plots not to go to ruin over the winter if a tenant decides not to continue, and enables those wishing to do a summer season to get prepared. This is also better logistically for administrative purposes as it does not conflict with the financial year end. Paper work will be issued to tenants over a two-week period from 20 October. This is to allow for the updated rules to be included in packs with the new tenancies. Full tenancy agreements will be used again, with all tenants expected to sign the agreement.

**Resolved:** That Members noted the update report.

**AC009.4/22 Association Agreements** - That agreements would be developed to set out relationships and responsibilities between the Council and the Association. These were being developed and would take some time to draw up to ensure a consistent approach across sites.

**Resolved:** That Members noted the update report, and were in united in agreement that these agreements were needed to ensure quality and consistent service across all sites.

**AC009.5/22 Allotment Rent 2023-24** - In accordance with the current allotment rules and regulations the Council must give tenants 12 months notice of an increase in rent. Notification is therefore given of any future rent increase when invoices are issued in October ahead of the new rent year starting in November, moving forward. A range of options were proposed.

**Resolved:** That Members agreed that Allotment rent would remain at 0.54p per Square meter for the rent year 2023-24.

**AE010/22 Public Participation-To hear from any members of the public subject to Public Participation Policy** - To hear from any members of the public subject to Public Participation Policy. The public were reminded that the section as per the policy is for 15 minutes in total. Each person may speak once for 3 minutes only in respect of business itemised on the agenda in relation to written questions. No written questions were received in advance of the meeting. A verbal question or statement concerning an item on the agenda asked by a member of the public during a public questions session at a meeting will normally be taken into account during the subsequent discussion of that agenda item. However, the Chairman may also direct that a response to a question posed by a member of the public be referred to a Councillor for an immediate oral response or to an employee for a written or oral response.

***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.6.***

Edgehill Allotment Association – asked if they would get copies of the boundary maps, copies of the risk assessments and maintained plans when complete?

The Council Confirmed that this would be possible.

Pollards Allotment Association raised - Would the Boundaries be able to be just looked at by the Association first? and them have copies? And they would prefer the meetings on site.

The final maps would be shared, but the working maps would not be able to be shared all tenants would be given the opportunity to comment if necessary. Final arrangements are still to be made, however it is likely that the open session would run on a weekend from the Town Council offices.

**AE011/22 Report of the Town Clerk** was presented:

**AC011.1/22 Allotment Strategy** – The need to have a detailed strategy to establish which direction the Council wished for the allotments to 'grow' was highlighted.

**Resolved:** That Members were in agreement that a strategy needed to be developed. They tasked the Town Clerk with developing a strategy and reporting back to a future meeting.

**AC011.1/22 Risks, Maintenance and Quotations for works** – The Clerk updated members on the processes undertaken and updated on maintenance required. One site and plot in particular was highlighted with having an issue which with partnership approach with the association could be used as a trial for improvements and some maintenance.

**Resolved:** That the Members were in agreement that there were some risks and maintenance which needed attention. The Clerk to continue to update the plans and risk assessments, and bring them back to future meeting. That Members agreed for the trail plot and partnership working to go ahead and get a report back to future meetings on progress.

**AC011.1/22 Enforcement Action** – The Clerk updated members surrounding enforcement action which had needed to be taken across the sites.

**Resolved:** That the Members noted and agreed the actions to be taken, and that the Chair of the committee would support the Clerk on the action.

**AC011.1/22 Complaint** – The Clerk raised details surrounding a complaint received.

**Resolved:** That Members agreed for the Clerk to respond to the complainant asking them to raise it through the association process, and for the Clerk to speak with the association to ensure that a fair and consistent approach is taken.