

Allotment & Environment Committee

6 April 2023

5pm Town Council Offices, Kingsway, Bishop Auckland

Present: Cllr Sam Zair (Chair), Cllr Michael Siddle, and Cllr Andrew Legge

Also Present: Sarah Harris, Town Clerk & Vicki Booth Deputy Clerk, three reps from Pollards Allotment site, one from Edgehill and one from South Church.

AEC01/23 - Apologies for absence – were received from Cllr Jamie Blackburn & Harley Balmer-Howieson

Resolved: that the members accepted the apologies for absence.

AEC02/23 - Declarations of interest – Cllr Siddle's wife has a plot on the Edge Hill Allotment site.

AEC03/23 - Minutes of the previous meeting were presented the meeting had been inquorate.

Resolved – that members agreed that these were a true record, and whilst not a full minute set, as the meeting was inquorate.

AEC04/23 - Allotment Mapping Update – David Banks, from Northern Counties Allotment Association gave an update of the mapping process and at what stage the development was at. Phase 1 was complete and Phase 2 hard stated. What remains to be done is some spot measurements of lines to ensure the plot mapping is accurate. Exercise to be complete by summer 2023 along with corresponding excel spreadsheet. Final stage will give the opportunity for people to see the final plans and have the opportunity to query. Utilities can be mapped as an overlay to the process. Each plot will be able to be numbered and have marker pins installed to clearly identify the plots.

Resolved: that members noted the report and look forward to receiving the next stage of the process.

AEC05/23 – Report of the Town Clerk

AEC05.1/23. **General Allotment Update** - the clerk presented the general allotment update (see file copy) and it covered:

Tenancy Update – Nov 2023-Oct 2024 – all tenancies had been returned and rents paid.

Waiting list and Vacant Plots down from 36 to 13 (2 vacant plots at present) – potential Long term strategy to use piece of land which were the former stables at woodhouse close, and allocate to 7 or more plots.

Community Engagement – Green Fair and Best Allotment – process and event developing nicely, and whilst not a horticulture show the best allotment activity is inclusive for all tenants. Bishop in Bloom discussions were also taking place.

Site Visits & Reviews – Due to take place in June 2023 will be more robust this time to build on our data and work with tenants. Request for all members to do site visits in 2023.

Signed chair
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Record Keeping – new processes ensures that there is through inspection with pictures at inspection and when allocating and returning plots.

Resolved: that Members noted the report.

That the Chair noted thanks to Clerk & Assistant Clerk on the work to get the waiting lists down to accommodate the community demand

That members agreed that if they should visit the sites to have a clearer understanding of the issues to be addressed.

AEC05.2/23. Association Relationships and Agreements – detailed meetings with each site shortly as one size does not fit all. Request for members to be involved with the development of these agreements. South Church rent review to take place going forward. Finalised association agreements to be in place asap. WVDC on some constitutions and these need to be brought up to date.

Resolved: that members agreed that clear agreements are to be developed and put in place, and that members will be involved in the meetings with associations.

AEC05.3/23 Maintenance Plans – General maintenance plans developed for each site, need proactive plans and prioritise accordingly, as level of facilities ranged across sites. A consistent baseline needs to be agreed.

Resolved: that members agreed. TC to obtain costings of maintenance plans and to bring to next committee for discussion

AEC05.4/23. Water Costs – a report on the current costs of water at sites was presented. Water does not need to be provided as part of a site or current lease. Push taps recommended, encourage use of water butts and is highlighted in 2023 updated rules. Plot size, flat fee or banding to be considered by members as per the report (see file copy).

Resolved:

that members agreed that charging for water would enable the current spend on water to be used to maintain sites. Therefore this item to be escalated to Finance committee, with the recommendation of adoption of the banding method, as it was views as the fairest option.

that members agreed to that a pin code lock for Woodhouse Close be purchased and installed to help to stop water misuse of taps and fly tipping

that members agreed for a maintenance plan that if taps break they are replaced with push taps

AEC06/23 – Public Participation –

Pollards Association – raised queries re maintenance – pot holes causing concern due to need of vehicle access and requested time frame for programme of works as damage to vehicles. Gravel previously provided washed out and now holes are deeper. And that the Association agreements required asap

Response - it was confirmed that the potholes are on the maintenance plans, but there is no definitive timeline that the Council can give at present.

Edge Hill Association – Insurance on site,

Signed chair
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Response: Clerk to have individual meeting with association to resolve.

South Church – Self managed site in good position due to previous members doing a lot of work from European money to get their site up to standard. Aware South Church is sometimes disadvantaged as have a better starting position and wanted this noted.

AEC07/23 – Appeal Hearing Update- plot cleared, items stored in town council yard until 3rd June 2023. Need to issue with clearance invoice. Spoke to National Allotment Society and agree we are following the process.

Resolved: that members noted the report and thanked the Clerk and team for handling this issue professionally, and that the invoice for clearance is to be issued.

AEC08/23 – Lease Agreement for Edgehill rent is due for the 3 yearly review. The clerk presented information to the committee.

Resolved: that members agreed for clerk to get legal advice via Durham County Council regarding the lease agreement, and response.

AEC09/23 – Allotment Management Strategy the Clerk presented an updated strategy. See file copy

Resolved: that the clerk should get legal advice on the status of some sites.