

Allotment & Environment Committee

05 July 2023

6pm Town Council Offices, Kingsway, Bishop Auckland

Present: Cllr Sam Zair (Chair), Cllr Michael Siddle, and Cllr K Eliot

Also Present: Sarah Harris, Town Clerk

Three members of the Pollards Allotment Association.

AEC010/23 - Apologies for absence – were received from Cllr A Legge, and Cllr K Lawson.

Resolved: that the members accepted the apologies for absence.

AEC011/23 - Declarations of interest – Cllr Siddle advised that his wife no longer had an allotment at Edgehill after giving up her plot

AEC012/23 - Minutes of the previous meeting were presented

Resolved – that members agreed that these were a true record, and

AEC013/23 – Appointment of Deputy Chair of Committee

Resolved: That the item was deferred to the next meeting due to low number of attendees.

AEC014/23 - Minutes of the previous meeting – 6th April 2023 Allotment and Environment Committee Meeting

Resolved: that the minutes were a true record of the meeting.

AEC015/23 - Report of the Town Clerk

AEC015.1/23 Draft Association Agreements - the first draft of a proposed generic agreement was presented, along with the process of meeting with the associations to have two-way dialog before a final document is agreed and signed in September.

Resolved: that the final report on the process would be brought to the next meeting, ahead of sign off.

AEC015.2/23 Inspections Summer 2023 – inspections had been carried out on:

- Broken Banks
- Edge Hill
- Pollards
- Tindale Crescent
- Woodhouse Close

A site walk had been undertaken at South Church. A inspection is needs to be planned for Mill Race and West Mills.

Signed chair
July 2023

Many plots had improved and good progress had been made, however enforcement action in the form of Informal Warning, Formal Warning and Notice To Quit had been issued on sites where severe breaches of rules and regulations were noted.

Other letters relating to joint tenancies had also been issued.

Resolved: that the report was noted, the staff were thanked for through inspection programme.

That Members would join the staff at the Mill Race and West Mills inspections and the re-inspections which are planned for late August.

That an update on the enforcement action would be brought to the next meeting.

That as per the Allotment Rules and Regulations any joint tenancies remaining should be dissolved and taken by only one tenant for the next tenancy year.

A review of the rules and regulations would be brought to the next meeting before being issued with the tenancy renewals in late September.

AEC016/23 - Environment - River Wears Trust – the Chair updated that he had met with the River Wears Trust to learn of their work, and he is concerned about the health of the river wear and that more engagement and awareness raising should be done. He is planning on getting more involved with the Trust and will invite them to a future meeting. The blue colouring in the Gainless has been investigated and it is due to historic mine workings. The trust do lots of work relating to invasive species of plants on the river banks.

Resolved: that the update was noted.

AEC017/23 - Public Participation – the committee heard the following from members of the public present subject to Public Participation

Some time ago the Pollards Association requested a written response to the reason why the Council wished to have a copy of the annual accounts of the association. This has not been received.

Resolved: the reasons were explained again, but a formal written response would be provided.

That the engagement regarding the decision on charging for water felt like it has been rushed by the council with no dialog or engagement with the tenants or associations. Many people are unhappy with the additional costs.

Resolved: that the Chair agreed the process was maybe not as engaged as it could be and the council would take it as a learning point, however the council are introducing the charge to limit the amount of funds from the public purse which are used on allotment sites. The Council does not have a statutory duty to provide water. However, it does as it makes allotment gardening easier for tenants, however some other authorities are removing the access to water to save costs.

It is recognised that the sites need investment, and maintenance, however the sites are costly and do cost more in expenditure than the council receives in income. The water charge will enable the funds that the council previously spent on water to be invested into the maintenance and development of sites.

Signed chair
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On an environmental issue it was noted that many of the back streets in Cockton Hill area were in need of improvement, some were unsurfaced, is that something which the council can look at.

Resolved: that the comment was noted, but currently the council has not authority to deal directly in this issue. However DCC councillors had re-surfaced some streets, as the issue lies where they are unadopted or privately owned. A wider clean up campaign such a neighbourhood week of action by DCC may help things. However this would be a DCC project and to help to secure those things, then people need to ensure that they are reporting incidents of fly-tipping etc to DCC so that the council had a full picture.

AEC018/23 - *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*

Resolved: that the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting.

AEC019/23 - Termination of Tenancy – Progress update - the clerk updated the Members on the progress on an ongoing termination of tenancy at Edgehill Allotment Site.

Resolved: that the update was noted.

AEC019/23 - Maintenance needed on sites – varying levels of maintenance is needed. A verbal update was given.

Resolved: that the maintenance lists would be brought to the next meeting, with a RAG rating to prioritise getting repairs and maintenance.