

MINUTES of the Meeting of the ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE held at The Guildhall, Church Street, Harwich on Monday 5th September 2011 commencing at 7pm

Present: Cllrs C Callender, Gibbins, J Henderson, McLeod

In the Chair: Cllr King

Co-opted Members: Mr M Button, Miss J Clark, Mr N Inglis, Mr W McCoy, Mr F Mesha, Mr S O'Hara, Mr Steward

Clerk: Mrs L Ballard

Also present: Cllrs Brown and Thurlow and 7 members of the public

The Chair informed members of the public that any questions raised should be in relation to items on the agenda only. Mr Wood raised his hand to speak and the Chair asked if it was pertinent to the agenda, to which he replied yes, then proceeded to comment on public speaking at a previous committee meeting, along with various correspondence between himself and the Clerk and that he felt he had been subjected to poor customer service. Cllr King confirmed that delays in responding are due to the need to obtain advice prior to doing so, which takes time. Referring to Standing Order 61, as was, Mr Wood asked the Chair if Cllr King concurred with the response of the Clerk that it was down to Chair discretion whether to allow a member of the public to speak, to which the Chair replied yes. Mr Wood said there was an issue with the Code of Conduct and he was aware of the Council's Complaints Procedure. Cllr King noted that Mr Wood had spoken for 8 minutes and that we need to move on.

Mr Anthony Russell referred to Clause 5 of the Tenancy Agreement and was concerned the Committee were being rather hard on elderly tenants in terms of recent letters sent concerning the condition of plots. He mentioned two incidences of upset tenants and suggested that the Committee should've spoken to the Co-opted members first rather than direct to the tenants. Mr Russell also informed members about the condition of some sites and mentioned carpets and asbestos sheeting as being present in some incidences. Cllr King asked if this mess was being caused by tenants or members of the public, to which Mr Russell confirmed tenants, and proceeded to ask if a note could be put on allotment notice boards thanking tenants for tidying up their sites.

A representative of the tenant of Plot 3a Dunns Meadow spoke on her behalf to appeal the recent NTQ. She asked how long the plot had been unworked before being allocated to the tenant, as the plot was in a bad condition and took a long time to bring it up to standard and, still, bags of rubble remain. She mentioned that a lot of effort has been put into clearing the plot recently and would the Committee consider overturning its decision to terminate the tenant's agreement, as help will be sought to ensure it's kept up to standard.

Mrs Brown, Boatswain's Call tenant, said she'd also received a letter recently regarding the condition of her plot and was unhappy given that she'd explained her situation with Mr Button, Co-opted rep for the site. She felt that the Committee were not listening to the reps and making them feel useless. Mrs Brown said this method of communication has always worked well previously and should continue to. Cllr King confirmed that no procedures, in terms of issuing letters, have changed. Mrs Brown also informed members of rubbish being dumped from outside the site.

A12/11 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**
Apologies received from Cllrs O'Neill and Todd.

A13/11 **DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

None.

A14/11

MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Allotments meeting held on 27th June 2011 (previously circulated) be approved by the Committee and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

A15/11

KING GEORGES AVENUE – PLOT 5

The Chair confirmed that after a period of uncertainty, Tendring District Council has confirmed that the land within Plot 5 is no longer required for use by developer Taylor Wimpey and members discussed the various options for re-letting given its overgrown state. **RESOLVED:** to re-let the plot with the option of halving it and possible rent-free period.

A16/11

ALLOTMENTS GROUND RENT

Members discussed the current ground rent for tenants and whether this should be increased for the 3-year period commencing 2012/13 in light of the need to maintain the sites, which incurs a cost to the council.

RESOLVED: not to increase the ground rent for the 3-year period commencing 2012/13.

A17/11

TENANCY AGREEMENT

Members discussed the current tenancy agreement and the implications for making changes, including the need to provide 12-months notice and the requirement to enforce any additional rules that are added to the agreement. The Clerk informed members that any changes would have to be agreed and added to the agreement to coincide with the renewals being issued later in September. **RESOLVED:** to make no changes to the Tenancy Agreement.

A18/11

VACANT PLOTS/WAITING LIST/NOTICES TO QUIT

The Clerk informed members of 3 vacant plots, which are currently under offer, 59 people on the waiting list and 1 Notice to Quit issued since the last meeting.

A19/11

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

Cllr King thanked all Co-opted members for their patience and said they are highly appreciated.

A20/11

BONFIRES

Members perused and discussed guidance and good practice for the lighting of bonfires on allotment sites, and how best to make tenants aware of these.

RESOLVED: to create a single A4-sized notice containing salient points and include this, for information, with the renewal notices that will be issued to all tenants later on September.

A21/11

HALVING PLOTS

Members discussed the option of halving plots in certain circumstances, and noted that this has been agreed in the past.

RESOLVED: to continue on this basis and offer to halve plots, on a case-by-case basis.

A22/11

REMOVAL OF LARGE VOLUMES OF EARTH ETC.

Members discussed the options for the removal of large mounds of earth/overgrown areas on the allotment sites, which had been built up over the course of some time.

The Clerk confirmed that a site visit to Boatswain's Call, Long Meadows and KGA had been arranged with Trevor Mills from TDC to view these in order to ascertain the extent and cost of the works, and would contact reps to co-ordinate.

A23/11

HUT AT DUNNS MEADOW

Members discussed the options for the Allotment Association hut situated on the Dunns Meadow allotment site following Mr Hyde's retirement. Options included demolishing the hut to make way for another plot, but concerns were raised about the cost of removal of the concrete base it currently stands on.

RESOLVED: to re-send the letter, recently sent to all Dunns Meadow tenants, asking for any interest, to all tenants in with their renewal letters later in September.

A24/11

REPORTS OF CO-OPTED MEMBERS

M Button said he was disappointed some of his tenants (BC) had received letters regarding the condition of their plots as he felt he'd explained that some are elderly and are often left anxious having received official council letters in the post. He felt that having put a note on his notice board that a phone call in the first instance would've been preferable to letters. Mr Button also asked if any letters had been issued recently about ponds on sites, to which the Chair confirmed yes. He asked if HTC are expecting all those with ponds to fill them in. The Chair confirmed no. Cllr McLeod said it's about balancing the desire for ponds and the environmental aspect, with safety. Mr Button confirmed that is was the norm to have ponds and has never been a problem previously.

RESOLVED: to defer this item to the next meeting in order to allow some research to be conducted and guidance obtained with the view of drawing up some good practice information.

Mr Button also mentioned that only 1 chicken (Gertrude) remained on plot 20A and as such had been re-house to another tenant's chicken coop and the plot vacated by the tenant.

Mr Button also mentioned that he'd received concerns over the calculation for charging water rates.

RESOLVED: to add Water Rates charges to the next agenda.

Mr Inglis said he'd provided a list of plots, which had raised concern over their condition and the Clerk said these were in hand.

Mr Steward confirmed all was ok at Abdy Avenue

Mr Mesha confirmed all was ok at KGA but would like a notice board.

Miss Clark confirmed nothing to report except that a gentleman who is assisting the tenant at Plot 3 has expressed interest in another plot expected to become vacant in the near future.

Mr O'Hara confirmed all is ok but asked if Plot 22 had been sorted. The Clerk confirmed that the plot has been re-let.

A25/11

MATTERS RECEIVED IN POST

- Plot 3a Dunns Meadow – Appeal by tenant
Members discussed recent NTQ and appeal by tenant, noting the recent efforts put in to bring the plot up the standard but also noting the long waiting list. **RESOLVED:** 11 votes to 1, to overturn NTQ and permit tenant to keep

plot on the understanding that this constitutes a final warning and the plot will be reviewed in 6 months.

- Plot 7 The Redoubt – Request to halve plot
Members discussed the request to halve the plot but considered the extensive work which is required to the whole plot before this would be possible.
RESOLVED: to allow the tenant 28 days to tidy the plot and remove the buddleia, then the plot may be halved.

A26/11

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Allotments Committee will be held at **7pm on Monday 14th November 2011** at the Guildhall, Church Street, Harwich.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.25pm