



# Andover Town Council

To **note** questions received from tenants and note answers given by the Town Clerk in relation to water bills.

Item  
No.  
**8**

**Produced for:** Allotments Committee

**By:** Town Clerk

**Date of Report:** 31 Jan 2024

## Background:

The water bills have varied from year to year and questions have been received by the Officers.

## Question from tenant OX DROVE:

In the absence of any previous water bill I had assumed that the invoice you provided was a component of the allotment invoice I had paid earlier.

Similarly, it is not clear how the bill has been determined.

Is it on a pro rata basis and if so has it taken account of partial or unused plots over 2023?

Equally, has it taken account of those plot holders who have chosen to extract water from the supply by means of water pumps and hose reels?

In short, the lack of transparency as to how the bill was determined on an equitable basis does give me cause for concern. At the same time I note that no steps have been taken to connect the water trough for those on the higher slope of the allotment and protect the lower trough from bird faeces.

If you could ask the committee to reflect on my concerns I would welcome any response they may wish to make.

## Answer Given:

We understand your questioning of the water charges.

To date water charges have not been passed onto tenants at Ox Drove, because no bills have been received from Business Stream. (Water supplier)

Business Stream still have not set up Andover Town Council as the account holder, despite being chased multiple times.

The water meter reading was taken on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023 and showed 000598.

At some point Business Stream WILL charge the council for the water used, and this does need to be charged to tenants as per the tenancy agreement.

We have therefore calculated the value of the amount of water used and the service charge that is likely to be levied. This has been charged to all tenants this year.

Once the Council receives the first water bill, an adjustment can be made if necessary.

Please note that now yearly readings are going to be taken, it will be much easier to ensure that water costs are being charged correctly each year going forward. Councillors will be advised of your concerns.

The water cover for the trough has been added to the work program and will be completed in February.

## Question from tenant CHURCHILL WAY:

### A tenant has been advised:

"When we receive the water bill, it is split between the total amount of plots on the allotment site. Therefore, everyone will be paying the same amount for the water charge per plot."

**The tenant has replied:**

Thanks for your reply.

I think it would be more equitable to charge those who only use half the space, half the water costs of a full plot. We do of course pay half the rent of a full plot.

I will pay this invoice currently, but would appreciate it if this issue could be added to the agenda for the next Town Council meeting please.

**Response from Officers:**

To prorate the water bill on every allotment plot would take a lot of time for 500+ individual plots because there are very varying sizes of plots on each site.

It is possible to be done, but this may lead to requests for discounts from:

- Tenants that don't use water hoses
- Tenants that only carry water with watering cans
- Tenants that only use their own water butts.

Without having a meter on every single plot, it is not possible to monitor usage by each tenant accurately. Therefore, it is fairer to charge everyone at the same site, the same amount.

Councillors will be advised of your concerns.

**Question from tenant BARLOWS LANE:**

Current year invoice = £14.10, last year = £4.55, previous year = £11.27. This is a very wide fluctuation in charges and while not an excessive cost per plot it does suggest a very wide variation (nearly 50%) in usage or loss. For the site as a whole the variation in charges amount to several hundreds of pounds.

Are you satisfied the current (and previous) readings are correct and meters accurate? and can you supply figures for the amount of water used per year?

Does the council have an explanation for this variation in charges? and will you be monitoring future usage to ensure accurate charges and minimal losses?

**Response from Officers:**

The variation in charges is due to several factors:

- The price of the service charge varies year on year.
- The unit price of water varies year on year.
- The method of calculating the fee, has until this year, been based on the amount paid in the preceding 12 months. As the invoices from the Water supplier are paid at different times of the year, and some are estimated, and some based on actuals, the comparison year on year was not accurately reflecting the usage between each allotment rental season. However, tenants HAVE been charged what the council has paid, just the timings are a little staggered.
- A water reading was taken as soon as was possible after Sept 2023, and another will be taken on 30 Sept 2024. Accurate figures will be charged next year for the usage during the rental term.