



ANDOVER TOWN COUNCIL

Constantia Basis Virtutum

Minutes of Allotments Committee **Surgery**

Time and date

5.30pm on Friday 11 October 2019

Place

The Upper Guildhall, High Street, Andover

Cllr A Watts (Chairman) (P)

Cllr M James (Vice Chairman) (P)

Cllr L Banville (A)

Cllr G Davis (A)

Cllr R Rowles (P) (arrived at 5.34pm)

Cllr D Treadwell (P)

Officers Present:

Wendy Coulter (Town Clerk)

Michelle Young (Committee & GDPR Officer) (Taking the Minutes)

Allotment Wardens Present: 4

Members of the Public: 6

Allotment Holders Surgery

Cllr A Watts (Chairman) opened the surgery at 5.30pm and welcomed all attendees.

The Chairman

Asked if anyone had any suggestions, questions or concerns.

Long term plans for an allotment on Picket Twenty. There are large spaces on both sides of the site. Would it be better at the beginning of the development to look at a larger site to combine the 2 potential sites?

The developers are looking at more housing, however, its public ground at the moment and its easy to get to.

The Town Clerk advised that there are different rules and regulations with Planning and that there is a proposed site at Picket Twenty for the allotment, to take place in 2 years. We would have to talk to Test Valley Borough Council to see if your suggestion would be possible.

Wonderful job on the new gates at Vigo Road Allotment. Where the old gates were, would it be possible to turn that space into a carpark, if we do it ourselves?

Allotment Officer advised that quotes are being obtained as part of phase 2 and to utilise plot 45, as it is right on the track. Once the bushes are removed and gravel put down, it will be perfect for parking cars on.

How is it going with Pest Control?

Allotment Officer advised that pests will never be completely eradicated. Barlows Lane has had a reduction on reports of rats and complaints. Site visits are planned soon with the Pest Controller and his dog. All the allotment sites have visit timesheets up on the boards to show when the Pest Controller has been to the sites. It's the best its been in the last 18 months. Both of the Allotment Officers will be attending training on Pest Control, in particular the use of chemicals. We have also asked the Pest Controller to attend an Allotment Committee meeting to provide another talk too. Additional quotes for alternate Pest Controllers have been sought, however, these have shown to be more expensive.

Cllr A Watts (Chairman) closed the surgery at 5.41pm



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Officers Present:

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Allotment Wardens Present: 4

Members of the Public: 6

Members of the Press: 1 (arrived at 5.57pm)

AC 45/19 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies received. Cllr L Banville advised she will be late.

AC 46/19 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

AC 47/19 MINUTES

It was proposed by Cllr R Rowles and seconded by Cllr M James that the Minutes of the Allotment Committee Meeting held on Friday 16 August 2019 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

A vote was taken which was unanimous.

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Allotment Committee Meeting held on Friday 16 August 2019 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

AC 48/19 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Member of Public 1:

"I wish to speak to appendix C – the draft allotment budget for 2020/2021 and in particular to the proposed increase in rents.

This increase is proposed on the grounds that (a) there has been no increase since 2013 and (b) the taxpayer is subsidising allotment holders to the sum of £15 per plot. The first point is irrelevant. The second statement is totally outrageous and a gross misrepresentation of the true facts. I will return to this point later.

The increase suggested is 12p per sq metre from 40 to 52. This is an increase of 30% and would only be justified if council costs had also increase by a similar amount. In fact costs are almost static. Even the projections given use an inflation rate of just 1.8%. An increase of 30% is an act of extortion on the 500 – 1000 customers of the council and totally unjustified.

If you are to justify an increase you must show a corresponding increase in costs or evidence of similar rates charged and paid elsewhere. Neither of these appear in this report.

Also missing from the report is any assessment of the number of allotment holders (customers) who will be lost as a result of the swingeing increases. A 20% loss of customers would wipe out any increase in income. I certainly will review my expenditure if such an unjustified increase is implemented. And yet this important factor is ignored in the calculations.

When we look at the services supposedly provided a large proportion of the costs are not services to allotment holders. They are base running costs which this council would need to meet even if it had no allotment holders. Anyone who has spent anytime working in agriculture or related industries would understand that there is a basic management cost for land even if it is unused. Sadly this understanding appears missing from the report.

If we look at the figures for 2019/2020 – a massive 73% of the £31,380 costs are for maintenance, repairs and pest control. Services provided to allotment holders amounts to just £8,550. Income from allotment holders is £26,000. Allotment holders are subsidising this council not the other way round. The value of the time, effort and money they put into managing and maintaining this land far exceeds any council input.

This council is obliged by law to provide allotments if required. It is also obliged to maintain the existing allotment land on behalf of the local community who ultimately own it. Even if you had no allotment holders you would still need to maintain the land, its fences and hedges and ensure adequate pest control. These allotments are part of the green space, the lungs, of the town and a public amenity. It is your responsibility as a council to ensure they are maintained to an adequate standard and your responsibility to raise funds from the community as a whole to cover the costs. It is not acceptable to try and raise that money from the 500 or so residents who by holding allotments are actually reducing your responsibility and costs.

Providing allotments is a public service and a key responsibility of this council. Making a profit is not and neither should it be. The so-called deficit of £8500 is a justifiable expense in provided this service and is peanuts compared to the thousands this council is squandering on its own pet projects, favourite charities and self aggrandisement.

I strongly urge you to reject these proposed increases."

Chairman's Responses:

It is only a proposal at this stage.

Cllr R Rowles commented that the purpose of generating the report was to simplify things for members of the public, in order to show where the costs come from. It is important to show what is happening with the monies.

Member of Public 2:

As the Town Council runs 500 to 600 allotments in Andover, would you consider running a small gardening competition for non-allotment holders next year? There used to be a "Test Valley in Bloom years ago. What I am suggesting would not need to have a monetary prize. It could have 20 different classes.

Cllr R Rowles requested that everyone who would be interested in attending a meeting to discuss it further to submit their emails addresses.

AC 49/19 PICKET PIECE ALLOTMENTS (OX DROVE)

Members noted the updated report on the transfer of the Picket Piece Allotments (Ox Drove).

AC 50/19 DRAFT ALLOTMENT BUDGET 2020/2021

Members considered the draft Allotment Budget for 2020/2021.

It was agreed that value for money should be sought and that there were many ways in which it could be done. It was suggested that members of the public have a responsibility to present ideas of how to achieve this and not just the council.

Councils will always loose money, however, they have a duty to cover costs, which are always increasing and as yet have not increased the allotment rents. The issues with rats will never be completely gone, however the present Pest Controller is the cheapest and reports of rat issues have lessened. The council has a duty to provide the monetary information to the public and its important to highlight there have been no increases since 2013.

It was proposed by Cllr R Rowles and seconded by Cllr A Watts that the Allotment Budget 2020/2021 be recommended to the Budgets and Staffing Committee for inclusion in the Town Council Budget 202/2021.

A vote was taken which was unanimous.

RESOLVED: That the Allotment Budget 2020/2021 be recommended to the Budgets and Staffing Committee for inclusion in the Town Council Budget 202/2021.

AC 51/19 ALLOTMENT OFFICERS REPORT

Members noted the Allotment Officers' report.

It was suggested that diary dates were set on a six monthly basis for all councillors to attend allotment site visits.

AC 52/19 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Members noted the Committee Wok Programme.

There were no additional items or amendments made.

C 053/19 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Members noted that the next Council meeting would take place on **Friday 13 December 2019**, in the **Rendezvous, Union Street, Andover**, starting at **5.30pm**.

C 054/19 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was proposed by Cllr R Rowles and seconded by Cllr A Watts that the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting at item 11, due to the confidential allotment issues.

A vote was taken which was unanimous.

RESOLVED: That the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting at item 11, due to the confidential allotment issues.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 6.22pm.

Chairman

Date