



Blyth Town Council

Minutes of the meeting of the Allotments Committee held in the Council Chamber at Arms Everytne House on Tuesday 6 October 2015 at 6.30 pm.

Present:

Councillors: K Ellis (Chair), J R Potts (Vice-Chair), B Elliott, O Potts, L Rickerby

Also Present:

Councillor R Parker

Officers:

S E Rickitt Town Clerk (Democratic Services)
D Clough Assets Officer
M Hawthorne Committee Clerk

Members of the Public: 15

No	
1	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Councillors: D Rutter, A Turnbull
2	DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND GRANTS OF DISPENSATION None.
3	MINUTES OF THE ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE HELD ON 2 JUNE 2015

	<p>The Minutes of the Allotment Committee Meeting held on the 2 June 2015 were AGREED by the Committee and signed by the Chair.</p>
4	<p>ASSET OFFICER'S REPORT (a copy is attached to the signed minutes)</p> <p>The Assets Officer referred to the report circulated at the meeting and gave the following update:</p> <p>Beatrice - letters have been sent out to allotment holders for non-payment of rent. There are a surprising number of holders of the new plots returning their keys.</p> <p>Wensleydale – the Committee considered the options for a replacement lock and agreed that a replacement lock and keys to be installed the same way as Winship Street.</p> <p>Delaval Crescent - The Committee congratulated the tenants on their recent Gold Award from Northumbria in Bloom and said the Council would actively encourage other tenants to put themselves forward for such awards.</p>
4	<p>ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION (please see report from Town Clerk, Democratic Services)</p> <p>The Town Clerk (Democratic Services) advised that letters have been sent out to all allotment holders as part of the consultation process to consider moving to one association. At the end of the consultation period 6 responses had been received out of a potential 500+. The Town Clerk(Democratic Services) asked that if anyone had not received a letter, they confirm their address with the Assets Officer. In light of this the Town Clerk commented that he would recommend that the Council do not continue to pursue the plan for one association.</p> <p>The Town Clerk (Democratic Services) referred to his detailed report which outlines the reasons for the consultation and recommendations. The Town Clerk (Democratic Services) made reference to Blyth Smallholdings who have a 25 year lease which is not registered with Land Registry. He suggested that a separate meeting is held with Blyth Smallholdings to discuss this issue.</p> <p>With regard to Newsham and New Delaval the Town Clerk (Democratic Services) recommended that the Council give formal</p>

notice to terminate the current management arrangements from 1 April 2016 but to offer the Association a meeting to consider possible options.

Councillor Bruce commented that she would like the Council to continue to examine the potential for one association with D Clough taking the lead. Councillor Potts noted that at a meeting of Chairs and Vice-Chairs and allotment holders there was little enthusiasm for the proposal and the feeling was that allotment holders were happy to look after their own allotments.

Comments were invited from members of the public present at the meeting.

S Newell, 10th Avenue commented that no-one is interested in having one association.

G Davis asked what the purpose is of having two different types of management arrangements with two organisations. The Town Clerk (Democratic Services) advised that there is no explanation as to why Blyth Small Holdings have taken a lease on the allotments. He added that the obligation of the Town Council is minimal in terms of maintaining the allotments (maintaining adequate and secure fences around the boundary and allotment roads). The Town Clerk (Democratic Services) suggested that if they wish to manage their allotments then a management agreement may be the most appropriate course of action.

G Newell said allotment holders are concerned at what it might cost them if an association is formed and referred to the information which suggested an admin clerk may be required. If allotment holders were reassured that it wasn't going to cost them then there may be more enthusiasm.

Councillor Rickerby supported the comments from Councillor Bruce and said if allotment holders have an understanding of what is going on then she would support her views.

The Town Clerk (Democratic Services) advised that is very difficult to anticipate costs as it would depend on the agreement.

G Davis said a lot of people are concerned that they will be responsible for costs and this will make it uneconomical to have an allotment. He added that allotment holders want assurance from the Council that they will invest in, and manage allotments. He asked that the Council provide some costings and consult with

	<p>allotment holders.</p> <p>S Newell asked what the advantage is of an association when there are 14 allotments and everyone is happy to continue with current arrangements. The Town Clerk (Democratic Services) said that it would not be to the advantage of the Town Council to have an association.</p> <p>F Wilson informed the Committee that the allotment holders on Wensleydale do not want to move toward an association.</p> <p>B Proud asked if there are any rules in respect of the condition and maintenance of allotments and whether the rules are established across all of the sites. He added that in general people are happy with the way things are.</p> <p>Councillor J R Potts noted that Newsham and New Delaval and Blyth Small Holdings Associations wish to remain as they are.</p> <p>G Davis said he doesn't agree with the proposal of having two classes of allotment holders.</p> <p>Councillor Elliott asked if allotment holders are aware of the pressure the Council is under. The Town Clerk (Democratic Services) explained there is an issue with the unregistered leases and the fact that Newsham and New Delaval have allowed their lease to lapse as an Industrial and Provident Association.</p> <p>Councillor Ellis confirmed that the Council will collate costs, explore the legal situation and look at repairs and maintenance for allotment sites. The costs will have to be included in the 2016/2017 budget. This information will be circulated to all allotment holders before the next meeting on Tuesday 2 February 2016. The information will be available on the website.</p> <p>The Council agreed to recommendation (2) and (3) in the Town Clerk's report and deferred recommendation (1) until further work is undertaken.</p>
5	<p>FUTURE ALLOTMENT RENTS</p> <p>The Town Clerk (Democratic Services) stated that he is seeking authorisation for Officers to begin consultation regarding potential rent increases which will take effect from 1 April 2017. He added that the allotments are not self-financing at the moment and the Council had invested a great deal of money in allotments.</p>

	<p>Councillor Bruce suggested that the rents are increased at a rate of £15.00 per annum until the Council breaks even.</p> <p>J Dixon said the allotments are not a business they are a hobby allotment holders spend their own money on their allotments.</p> <p>F Wilson stated that the rents are not covering the water rates.</p> <p>G Davis pointed out that the consultation should comply with the Equalities Act. He further added that this should be considered in the wider context of the whole of the Council budget and the impact increased rents will have on allotment holders.</p> <p>K Newell said that the Council made the point that council tax payers may not appreciate the allotments being subsidised, however, a lot of council tax payers do not use the services where they money is spent. She added that a lot of allotment holders are pensioners and they rely on their produce for food. They will not accept a large increase in rent year on year.</p> <p>P Coull commented that although £15 per annum doesn't sound like a huge amount it is 30% of the current rent and there is a requirement to give 12 months notice of an increase. Mr Coull also asked if the Council had applied for grants to maintain the raised beds on 10th Avenue. The Town Clerk (Democratic Services) will clarify whether an application has been made and if not, will ensure that the paperwork is completed for future schemes.</p> <p>The Assets Officer confirmed that as the Council does not have responsibility for any other leisure facilities nor are they responsible for parks they can increase rents. The Town Clerk (Democratic Services) explained that there is an agency agreement with Northumberland County Council to maintain parks etc. This information will also be included in the report circulated to allotment holders.</p> <p>The Council agreed to prepare a report, including costings and recommendations to be circulated to all allotment holders. This information will also be available on the website.</p> <p>The Chair thanked the allotment holders for their attendance at Committee.</p>
6	PRIVATE BUSINESS

	The Committee is recommended to resolve to exclude the press and public from the remainder of this meeting under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 to enable Councillors to be informed of the actions taken in respect of the particular tenancy considered at the previous meeting, involving potential consideration of an individual's circumstances.
7	Date & Time of Next Meeting Tuesday 2 February 2016, 6.30 p.m. in the Council Chamber, Arms Everytne House.

PART II – Confidential
(Please see attached report and decision letter)

Plot 53

Councillor Elliott commented that he was unaware of this proposal until tonight. He pointed out that Mr McEwan is an elderly gentleman with health problems. The allotment has been in his family for over 70 years and he gave up four allotments in order to maintain the one in question. It was noted that it cost the Council £22,000 to bring the four allotments up to standard. Councillor Elliott queried whether assessments have been carried out on all of the allotments in Blyth.

The Assets Officer confirmed that there have been numerous complaints from residents and allotment holders, albeit all verbal, as there is reluctance from people to make written complaints. He added that the condition of the allotment is impacting on the household adjacent to the allotment. Councillor O Potts pointed out that the neighbour has put tarpaulin along the fence in order to protect their property.

Councillor J R Potts noted that the council are the Landlords for the allotments and proposed a timescale for improvements, after which Mr McEwan will be evicted if the improvements have not been made.

The Town Clerk (Democratic Services) said that if the Council do not take action this will set precedence for other allotment users. He added that

22 letters have recently been sent to new allotment holders regarding the state of their allotments.

Following detailed discussion the Committee agreed that Mr McEwan will be allowed 60 days in which to demonstrate significant improvement in his allotment. If he fails to do so an eviction order will be served. Targets will be set throughout the 60 days for Mr McEwan to achieve. Councillors will be kept informed of developments.

The meeting concluded at 7:50 pm

MEMBERS OF THE ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE

Councillors:

K Ellis (Chair)
J R Potts (Vice-Chair)
C Bruce
B Elliott
O Potts
L Rickerby
D Rutter
G Thompson
A Turnbull

Officers:

S E Rickitt	Town Clerk (Democratic Services)
D Clough	Assets Officer
M Hawthorne	Committee Clerk