

BERKHAMSTED TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the

ALLOTMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Berkhamsted on

Thursday 9 January 2014 at 10.30 am

PRESENT:

Councillors: A Armytage Chair
E Collins
J Laws

Allotment

Representatives: John Eaton, Sunnyside
John Fisher, Butts Meadow
Jenny Sippings, Sunnyside
Keely Charlick, Sunnyside Rural Trust

Town Council: John Bushby, Town Warden

ALSO PRESENT: 1 member of the public.

OFFICER: Gary Cox - Town Clerk

AMT 1/14 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Diana Reay, Geoffrey Wallington and Lin Philips

AMT 2/14 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting held on 17 October 2013 were agreed, subject to:

13/55.3. to read 'John Fisher reported that boundary issues between plots BM-18 and 19 had been resolved.'

13/56.1 Keely Charlick advised that 'SSRT was not against trees being removed from the nature corridor. But the Trust would not expect trees to be removed without good reason, such as poor health of the tree or that it posed a safety risk.'

AMT 3/14 Progress reports on actions arising

13.56.1 ***Overshadowing Tree***
John Eaton reported that the problem caused by overshadowing trees along the western boundary of the nature

corridor (SSO-C9) would be resolved if AMT agreed a later agenda item, to extended works to trees. Those overshadowing trees had been identified by the Tree Surgeon as diseased, growing in a way that it was likely to fall in the future and was recommended for felling.

Asset Renewal Expenditure

AMT 71/13 The Clerk confirmed expenditure on a replacement piping would be brought to account against asset renewal funds.

Dellfield Stop Cock

AMT 72/13 The Town Warden advised that a plumber would be repairing the damaged stop-cock as soon as the weather improved.

Allotment Reports

The Chair thanked Allotment Representatives for submitting site reports in good time to be circulated with the agenda.

Allotment Risks

AMT 74/13 The Management Team noted that the Clerk had written to a tenant asking for the child's trampoline to be removed from SSN-7 as it was contrary to clause f of the tenancy agreement: '...keeping the whole allotment gardenin a good state of cultivation' and expressing concern about the potential risks if a child was to use the trampoline on the allotment plot.

Section 31(6) Deposits

AMT 75/13 The Management Team noted the payment of £310 to Herts County Council as the charge for lodging Section 31 (6) deposits had been made.

AMT 4/14 Public Participation

Mr Dyer, a local resident and allotment holder raised points on two items on the agenda.

Allotment rent payments

Mr Dyer suggested that names of those tenants who had not paid on time might be notified to site representatives, who if they saw them at the allotments, might advise them to pay their outstanding rent

Sunnyside Rural Trust lease arrangements

Mr Dyer suggested that any legal costs incurred in converting a renewing annual lease to a longer term should be met by the Trust rather than the Town Council.

Mr Dyer also suggested that he would want to see Sunnyside Trust pay full land rental charges for each plot when the long term lease came up for renewal in 2019; for that lease to include clauses to increase rent in line with any other tenancy increases; and to include terms in the lease consistent with allotment tenancy agreements.

AMT 5/15 Allotment Rent Payments

The Management Team noted allotment rents collected for 2013/14 to be £7,833.95; that all but one tenant had paid; and that tenant had been evicted.

The Management Team also noted that

- where appropriate, allotment representatives had been provided with a list of tenants with rent outstanding and had contacted them by email to remind them to pay or give up their plot.
- the Clerk was conducting a review of the efficiency and effectiveness of allotment rent collection, as part of a wider review of allotment administration. The Clerk would make proposals for consideration at the next Allotment Management Team meeting in April 2014.

The Management Team considered a proposal that if the administrative costs of running the allotment were higher than the income, then it might be more cost-effective to provide allotment free of charge.

The Clerk was asked to provide more details of administration costs alongside income and expenditure estimates for the next meeting, for the Management Team to consider principles in setting allotment rents. **Action: Town Clerk**

AMT 6/14 Income and Expenditure Reports

The Committee noted the budget and forecast outturn for 2013/14, with an anticipated surplus of £632 to go into the allotment general reserve; and that the main variance was an increase in improvements to £2,200 to include tree management proposals, to be considered later in the agenda.

AMT 7/14 Budget 2014/15

The Management Team noted the allotment budget proposals for 2014/15, including no change in income at £8,200, estimated expenditure of £8,155 and a projected Allotment Reserve fund in the region of £6,000.

The Management Team also noted that estimated expenditure included

- £2,500 for further work to trees and work to repair the entrance to Butts Meadow
- £800 legal fees to register the Town Council as owners of each of the allotment gardens with Land Registry.

John Fisher asked for clarification of the date Butts Meadow was established. It was thought to be in 1914, in which case this was the Centenary year for that allotment garden and may warrant a celebratory event. **Action: Town Clerk**

AMT 8/14 Allotment Reports

The Committee received allotment reports (attached to these minutes).

i ***Dellfield***

There were no issues to report.

ii ***Sunnyside Old and New***

There were 13 vacant plots on Sunnyside New and no waiting list.

It was agreed that these vacancies be advertised on the Town Council website and noticeboards. **Action: Town Clerk**

Rabbits

There was an increasing problem with rabbits on Sunnyside Old. The Clerk was asked to contacting a local resident who had expressed an interest in ferreting on the site, as a way to reduce numbers. **Action: Town Clerk**

Working Party

The Allotment Society Working Party would be tending wood and leaf piles, improving A and B roads and gravel a muddy path used by car drivers onto the site.

The Clerk would provide contact details for the DBC Footpaths Officer who may be able to give advice on the most appropriate material to use when covering a footpath. **Action: Town Clerk**

iii ***Butts Meadow***

There were 3 vacant half-plots and a continuing problem with non-organic waste left on the site. The Management team agreed that allotment holders should determine how much waste was to be removed, and contact the Clerk to hire an appropriate -sized skip so that a working party of allotmentees could clear the waste from the site. **Action: John Fisher**

iv ***Sunnyside Rural Trust***

There were no issues to report.

Keely Charlick provided an overview of the role of the Sunnyside Rural Trust which is a charity supporting young people and adults with learning difficulties with training and work skills in horticulture, conservation so as to enhance their development and improve their quality of life.

The Trust has sites in Northchurch, Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead, where it runs a plant nursery and offers a range of contracts and services to the public, such as garden maintenance, PAT testing electrical equipment and selling eggs and fresh produce from the allotments.

More details of the work of Sunnyside rural trust can be found on their website @ www.sunnysideruraltrust.org.uk

AMT 9/14 Allotment Risks

The only identified risk identified was the child's trampoline on SSN-7. The Town Council had written to the tenant asking for the trampoline to be removed from the allotment garden.

The Management Team noted that the recent wet weather had made conditions on allotments very difficult and occasionally hazardous underfoot.

The warden was asked to undertake further risk assessments of the allotments against such conditions. **Action: Town Warden**

The Clerk was asked to confirm liability and insurance arrangements for any accidents that might occur on the allotments. **Action: Town Clerk**

AMT 10/14 Public Rights of Way

The Management Team noted that Section 31(6) deposits and statements for all allotment sites have been approved by Herts County Council to prevent pathways being deemed as public rights of way.

AMT 11/14 Tree Maintenance

The Allotment Management Team meeting on 11 July 2013 agreed that essential work to trees on Sunnyside should be carried out up to a cost of £1,500.

The Management Team noted that a full survey essential work had identified a wider range of work that was needed, at a cost of £2,187 excluding VAT. This quote included a 10% discount if all identified tree work was undertaken.

The Management Team agreed to expenditure of £2,187 on a wider range of essential tree maintenance work on Sunnyside. This expenditure would be subject to approval of Full Council. **Action: Town Clerk**

AMT 12/14 Sunnyside Rural Trust Lease Arrangements

Keely Charlick set out existing lease arrangements for renting land at Sunnyside which currently, was through two differing leases.

One was a long term lease up to 2019 for land was in poor condition when first let. The Trust made a substantial financial commitment to bring the land back into cultivation. Recognising that investment, the Town Council provided a discount on the rent for the duration of the lease.

The second is a one year renewable lease for land on both Old and New sites. This lease was set on an annual renewable basis to ensure that the Town Council could claim back some plots at relatively short notice, should there be a high demand from residents for allotment plots. The Trust pays the full rent on that lease consistent with rates charged to all tenants.

Keely asked that the Town Council consider amalgamating the annual lease into the longer lease. The advantage would be that the Trust could make a longer-term commitment approach to improving allotments on the second lease, as it had done with those on the first lease. There would also be administrative savings in not having to renew the lease each year.

Keely advised that the Trust would be willing for the combined lease to include an agreement to give up some plots at shorter notice if resident demand for plots increased and could not otherwise be met; and to include tenancy conditions in the lease that also applied to all other tenants. The Trust would not be looking to increase the number of plots rented and there could be scope to consolidate plots into more on

John Eaton responded that Sunnyside Allotment Society would be content for such arrangements, on the provisos that:

- There was no undue impact on rents or water rates for other tenants;
- Tenancy conditions were applied in the lease with the Trust, that were, as far as possible, consistent with those applicable to other tenants;
- There was flexibility within the lease for the Trust to hand back plots for residents should the demand and waiting lists for allotments increase.

The Management Team agreed that the two leases with Sunnyside Rural; Trust should be amalgamated and asked that Keely, John and the Clerk develop proposals, including obtaining any legal advice that might be required. **Action: Town Clerk; John Eaton and Keely Charlick**

AMT 13/14 Date of Next Meeting

The Management Team noted the date of the next AMT meeting at 10 30am on Thursday 24 April 2014, which would include an agenda item on a review of the allotment financial management principles; and proposals from a review of allotment administration. (See AMT 5/15) **Action: Town Clerk**