

Notes of the Allotment Site Secretaries Meeting

Thursday 5th February 2026 @ 2pm

Council Chambers

| ITEM | | ACTION |
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| | Present: Andrew Colquhoun (Lower Torfield) Derek Hassell (Bembrook and Apps Field) Colin Blackman (BOS Field) Bridget Baker (Pauls Field) Deborah Derber (Pauls Field) Nick Kellett (Collier Road) David Jex (Choice) John Funnell (Choice) Steve Allam (Lower Cornwallis) Colin Anstee (Lower Cornwallis) Diane Huggins (Downs Road) Claire Humm (Fernbank) Cllr Jo Walker - Chair (HBC) Lewis Coyne (HBC) Clive Read (HBC) Marian Hollingsworth (HBC) | |
| | Cllr Jo Walker welcomed everyone and introductions were made around the table. | |
| | Apologies for Absence and non attendance Lesley Bickerdike (Lower Torfield) sent in apologies. Margaret Blurton of Marina Allotment informed she wouldn't be able to attend and non attendance was Holly Clamp (Lower Clive Vale) | |
| 1. | Minutes of the last meeting held on 21st September 2023 Agreed as read. | |
| 2. | Matters Arising There were no matters arising. | |
| 3. | Expenditure Progress Report (Circulated prior to meeting) CR advised that everything has been completed as per the table distributed apart from securing the gate posts at Lower Cornwallis and loose slats and replacement of tube frame at Collier Road gate. Remaining budget is £1358.40 which will no doubt be spent in this financial year. | Note |

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| | <p>JF asked why the need to send documentation by post to Site Secretaries when it has already been emailed, therefore cutting down on the cost of postage. MH informed that it was always emailed but Site Secretaries at previous meetings requested hard copies as well as they didn't have access to a printer.</p> <p>Agreed that MH will no longer send hard copies and will be emailed only.</p> <p>The monthly report that MH sends will continue to be posted as it is not possible to email this from the Allotment database. MH will ask post room staff to send these in future by 2nd class post.</p> | <p>MH</p> <p>MH</p> |
| 4. | <p>Allotment Rules</p> <p>This is to remain on the Agenda for any amendments. Anyone that wants to suggest changes to the Allotment Rules is to do so by emailing parks@hastings.gov.uk</p> <p>No amendments received so far.</p> | ALL |
| 5. | <p>Allotment Tree Survey</p> <p>MH reminded Site Secretaries, and those that are new, of the previous Allotment tree survey which was carried out in 2014 specifically for trees that were detrimental to plot cultivation. As a result of this survey and with only £2K from the Arboricultural budget, a 5 year programme was created and various works were raised agreed with the site secretaries and completed. However, that £2K from the Arb budget terminated in 2023 due to the Councils Financial Controls.</p> <p>LC has now secured an additional £2K to the Allotment budget for tree work affecting those plots. A new survey will be carried out in the summer this year and a 5 year programme will be drawn up outlining the sites that will require works to trees.</p> | CR/MH |
| 6. | <p>Tenancy Situation Table (Circulated prior to meeting)</p> <p>MH went through her report and outlined that there are now 416 prospective tenants waiting.</p> <p>She informed that she carried out her usual exercise of contacting prospective tenants in August last year where 516 were waiting at the time to gauge their interest on whether they wish to remain on the list. A deadline response was given, followed by reminders and as a result of her review, 147 were removed from the waiting list.</p> | Note |

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| | <p>The average waiting time continues to be approximately 5 years for most sites. All prospective tenants are advised of the wait time when their applications are acknowledged.</p> <p>The waiting list is continually monitored and further advised that another way of reducing numbers is where plots that have become vacant and are big enough to divide, we will continue to do this. We will also consider existing plotholders requests to divide their plot where possible.</p> <p>98 plots have been relet since 1st April last year. The relets were as a result of Notices issued for non cultivation, non payment of rent or voluntarily vacated. Several notices were issued during our spring and autumn inspections.</p> <p>Notices issued is a 6 week legal process and sometimes can take a bit longer taking into account plotholders mitigating circumstances.</p> <p>CB informed that he has noticed that several new plotholders have taken up tenancies at BOS Field which most were a result of inspections carried out by Clive and notices issued.</p> <p>CR commented to say that it is important to note that primarily the aim is to encourage plotholders to cultivate their plots in preference to terminating tenancies by Notices to Quit.</p> | |
| 7. | <p>Any Other Business</p> <p>AC submitted 13 items under Any Other Business for response outlined below followed by our responses highlighted in yellow. Cllr Jo Walker read out the questions and the answers provided.</p> <p>Overview</p> <p>1. One perspective on the more detailed issues raised below is that over many years financial restraints on Council spending have made it increasingly difficult for the Council to fulfil its obligations as a landlord for most of the allotment sites in the Borough. While plotholders do not expect the Council to be subsidising allotments as a whole, there is inevitably consequent frustration about the decline in Council services and also unnecessary barriers being put in the way of activity by sites in substitution for the Council's responsibilities as landlord.</p> <p>HBC Response: As a result of HBC's challenging financial situation, over the past few years budgets across the council have experienced significant scrutiny, with non-essential and non-statutory spend reduced to a minimum. In terms of allotments, the income received through fees is just enough to fund emergency tasks such as water leaks, padlocks, keys, repairs to fencing and vandalism. Any additional work would need to be funded by the</p> | |

service, which means the fees would have to be adjusted to reflect this."

Waiting lists and evictions

2. The current waiting list for people hoping to take on an allotment tenancy from HBC is over 500, set against a total of about 630 plots. Marina has another 130 or so plots on a self-managed basis, and with its own long waiting list. The waiting lists never seem to decline, reflecting continued demand.

HBC Response:

Information in this paragraph is incorrect. Marian will update the Site Secretaries in the usual way under the Agenda heading of Tenancy Situation Table.

3. It would be unrealistic to expect HBC to create major new sites for allotments when housing targets are so tight. There might be some scope at the margins to reduce the waiting lists by sub-dividing plots; this is a practice which HBC has adopted to some degree and which the Federation would support. The Federation continues to explore other areas of suitable land, but these are bound to be small. It has also been lobbying for the inclusion of a Planning Obligation in the draft HBC Local Plan for developers to provide space on housing sites for communal growing. We had a small win earlier this year by persuading Better Braybrooke to bring the Pocket Park back into cultivation.

HBC Response:

Any additional land appropriated for allotment use requires fencing, gates, mains water supplies, vehicle access paving etc and there are no funds to compulsory purchase land and no extra available resources.

4. There is considerable and continuing frustration about the time it takes to evict people who are failing to cultivate their plots efficiently. The net result is that other, keener people sit on the waiting list even longer than they should. A common pattern is that some new plotheolders take on a plot, but it then quickly becomes evident that they are unable to put in the work to cultivate the plot properly so it becomes overgrown. Could there be a regime for early inspection and eviction, and if necessary for new tenancies?

HBC Response:

All plots are inspected twice a year and some on an adhoc basis. Most plots that become vacant are a result of Notices issued which is a 6 week process. This is the legal time given. It involves 3 inspections within the Notice period. Extra time is given to plotheolders where there are mitigating circumstances as to why they have not attended to their plot. Marian will update the Site Secretaries with regard to number of Notices issued in the last year as well as the number of plots vacated/let since April last year.

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| | <p>Rubbish management</p> <p>5. Another frustration is that the Council apparently expects new tenants to remove rubbish left on the plot by their predecessors. This seems an unreasonable practice from HBC as the landlord.</p> <p>HBC Response: This has been discussed with Senior leadership and the decision is that HBC do not have funding available at this time.</p> <p>Skips provided in the summer of 2023 to 6 sites cost in the region of £2,250-</p> <p>6. More generally over recent years, the Council as landlord has declined to take action to remove accumulated rubbish from sites. The burden has switched to individual sites to manage it if they can, sometimes at significant cost.</p> <p>HBC Response: This was escalated to Senior leadership and the decision is that this is an extra service and if this was made available, rents would have to be increased.</p> <p>Site security and maintenance</p> <p>7. With the decline in HBC finances, site security has also been reduced for some sites. As fences have deteriorated and not been repaired, there have been more break-ins for vandalism and theft. There was a serious incident of arson and vandalism on one site last weekend. And, particularly on the east side of town, sites are very vulnerable to entry and predation on a wide range of crops by badgers.</p> <p>HBC Response: Much improvement has been made previously to strengthen and replace perimeter fencing and gates when capital funds was available. Repairs following unauthorised intrusions are made immediately however where there are boundaries where fencing is in a weakened condition this would be investigated and replaced with new once funds are available.</p> <p>8. There are various detailed issues across the allotment estate relating to gates, sheds, grass cutting, paths, steps and overgrowth. Several sites have long reported issues with trees overhanging plots, thus adversely affecting crops; the budget for this problem is apparently over-stretched.</p> <p>HBC Response: Our in-house grounds maintenance team are currently over stretched and under resourced and this is due to budget constraints. If you have concerns regarding encroachment of vegetation, hedges and paths, then please do contact us.</p> | |
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Marian will update you on the 5 year rolling programme to manage Trees Detrimental to Allotment Cultivation.

Insurance

9. Councillor Jo Walker is already aware of the problems caused for Bembrook allotments by HBC's insistence of £10m insurance cover before they can put up a composting toilet on site at their own expense. Arguably, the provision of toilets, and their maintenance and insurance, on all sites should be the landlord's responsibility. Provision for women is particularly important. Instead, loos have been closed on at least two other sites for lack of insurance.

HBC Response:

These DIY toilets were unsuitable, one at Bembrook blew down in a storm, any new construction requires Planning permission and the second at Lower Cornwallis was in a deteriorating condition and was closed.

There is in place a tested procedure once funding is found to construct a compost toilet by plot holders ie, at Collier Road , a license was created, plot holders pay for PL insurance , HBC assisted with the Planning application, there is no liability or costs falling on HBC.

This matter of insurance cover has been escalated at Senior leadership Team level to look into.

10. The same arbitrary level of cover is apparently required for other allotment activities (and other parts of the local voluntary sector). On one site, the local committee has been told that they cannot use mechanised equipment to bring several plots back into cultivation because they don't have £10m of cover. As with the insurance issue for toilets, the effect is to inhibit local activity in place of tasks which should properly be the job of the Council. We would like to see the requirement for insurance cover set at a figure which reflects the actual risk involved in an activity.

HBC Response:

This is standard council practice for a requirement of 10 Million pound cover. Works carried out on HBC land by contractors employed by others/neighbouring properties must provide public liability insurance of £10m, RAMS and certificates ie. for chain saw, strimmer or herbicide use.

The tenant has responsibility for their safety and cultivation activities on their specific plot in accordance with their Tenancy Agreement and should take out their own insurance, the National Allotment Association can assist with this.

Again, as stated above the matter of Insurance cover has been raised to a Senior Leadership level to look into.

AC further informed Site Secretaries and Officers that Steve Manwaring is having a meeting with Victoria Conheady to discuss the issue of PL insurance for tenants, Friends Groups and volunteer activities which may help towards a solution going forwards.

We will wait to see what the outcome of that meeting will be.

Rents and finances

11. The financing of local allotments lacks transparency. A 60% increase on allotment rents across two years several years ago was intended to ensure that allotments were self-financing, including Council staff costs. The agreement at that time was that rents would subsequently only rise in line with inflation. This has largely been adhered to, but the element of the allotment budget which is supposed to go to project work and maintenance does not appear to have kept pace with inflation. Also, with cuts in HBC staffing in general, we would like to know whether staff costs linked to allotments should also have been cut. If so, arguably savings on staff costs should have released money for other parts of the allotment programme. A recent FOI request by a local plot-holder has explored the issue of rents. We believe that HBC owes it to plot-holders paying rent to be more transparent about how their money is used.

HBC Response:

I believe this issue was concluded at full Council by the Chief Finance Officer. Allotments do not make a surplus, they just about cover the service and all money from rents goes into a central pot and gets distributed to all services throughout the council.

Officer time has to also be taken into account and rents are currently being increased by inflation only.

A question was raised whether rents were ring fenced for allotments. Cllr Jo Walker confirmed that rents were not ring fenced.

Local Government Reorganisation

12. We realise that there is still a lot of uncertainty and of unanswered questions about Local Government Reorganisation within Sussex, but it would be helpful to know the direction of HBC's thinking about the future management of allotments in this context.

HBC Response:

HBC are still waiting to hear back from central government on our options, the federated district and borough model and the coastal unitary model, this is still at a high level and we do not have service information at this time.

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| | <p><i>A question was raised as to what would happen to allotments if a Town/Parish council was to be formed? Cllr Walker did check the position, and this is indeed the case, they would transfer to a Town/Parish Council.</i></p> <p>Communication</p> <p>13. Most of the points above represent an accumulation of issues over several years affecting rent-paying plot-holders. Previously, there have been biannual meetings for site secretaries with the Allotment Committee. The last of these meetings was in September 2023; the next one is apparently not going to be held for some months yet. Given HBC's financial situation, more regular meetings will not of themselves resolve problems, but they would help mutual understanding.</p> <p>HBC Response: This has been discussed at a senior level and agreed that the Site Secretaries meetings will occur once a year.</p> <p>if any site secretary or indeed an individual plotholder has any queries or concerns they should email Clive Read or Marian Hollingsworth directly.</p> <p><i>Some Site Secretaries not happy with once a year meetings and has requested that they should return to two meetings as before – February and August or an interim collective discussion if requested. LC to take up again with Senior Leadership.</i></p> <p>Risk Assessment – It was asked if HBC could provide a risk assessment. The Council provides risk assessments in specific circumstances. However, there are several examples drawn up by a previous Health and Safety Officer specifically for tenants to manage risk particularly where a working party needed to carry out some work. All Site Secretaries at that time received H&S instruction and how to complete the templates. CR will locate those templates.</p> <p>Disabled planter at Choice – JF/DJ asked what was happening about the Agreement. CR informed that this was still with legal. MH informed that it is not a Tenancy Agreement for a planter but a Licence and is drawn up by our Estates Department and then passed to Legal for signing off. CR will chase the outstanding one at Choice.</p> | <p>LC</p> <p>CR</p> <p>CR</p> |
| 8. | <p>Date of next meeting To be arranged</p> | MH |