

YEOVIL TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES of a meeting of the **GROUNDS AND GENERAL MAINTENANCE COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Town House, 19 Union Street, Yeovil on **Monday 12 July 2010**

(7:00pm – 8:45pm)

Present:

Steve Hawker (Chairman)
Clive Davis
Pete Goodman
John Grana
Tom Parsley
Jon Trevett (co-opted non-voting)

Also Present:

Alan Tawse – Town Clerk
Sally Freemantle – Assistant Town Clerk
Steven Barnes – Play and Youth Facilities Officer, SSDC
Rich Davy – Streetscene Co-ordinator, SSDC

Public Comment

There were no comments from members of the public.

7/235 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the previous meetings held on 11 May and 17 May, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

7/236 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Phil Chandler, Wes Read and Alan Smith.

7/237 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

7/238 **CORRESPONDENCE**

There were no items of correspondence.

7/239 **PLAY AREA REFURBISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE UPDATE**

The Committee considered the report by the Play and Youth Facilities Officer (Agenda Item 5 refers) and Steve Barnes explained the safety matting underneath the high swing at Yew Tree Park had unfortunately been

removed, but has now been replaced and requires the grass to grow to keep the matting in place. There were also some additional minor adjustments that had been required including the laying of tarmac by the top gate and a small repair to the zip wire. He was pleased to report that the new play area continues to be extremely popular and the increased usage has required consideration of additional litterbins. It was also added that due to the landscaping and the nature of the mounds on the site that the streetscene team had found that the grass cutting of the area was taking slightly longer.

With regard to play area maintenance, concern was raised by the Committee that a section of the perimeter fence at the Howard Road Recreation Ground was broken and Rich Davy explained that a capital bid was in place to replace the fencing with bow top fencing.

The Committee considered the proposed designs presented by Steve Barnes for the refurbishment of the Monksdale Play Area. Steve explained that the design incorporated an oval shape informal football kick about area in the centre of the site surrounded by natural grass mounding and outlined the possible location for the other items of play equipment around the site which would all be within the bow-top perimeter fence. In answer to a query regarding access, Steve explained that the site was fairly flat and that he would be assessing the kerbing around the area with regard to accessibility for wheelchair and pushchair users. He also explained that he would pre-empt the requirement for new bins on the site. With regard to time frame, Steve explained that the tender process could commence at the end of July with an intention to start building in the late autumn.

RESOLVED

- (1) that all the above matters be noted; and
- (2) that the proposed design for Monksdale Play Area be accepted.

7/240 CORPORATE ALLOTMENT MAINTENANCE WORK – 2010/2011

The Committee considered the report and spreadsheet by Rich Davy. In answer to a query regarding the usage of the hand mower Rich explained that it was used on all sites with suitable areas and would produce a list of sites for the next Committee meeting.

In answer to a query regarding the maintenance of untenanted plots, Rich explained that following acquisition of information at the beginning of every month, vacant plots are strimmed. However due to the ongoing success of lettings there were very few plots that required strimming.

RESOLVED

that all the above matters be noted.

7/241 **NEW INITIATIVES BUDGET**

The Committee considered the Town Clerk's report (Agenda Item 7 refers). In answer to a query the Town Clerk explained that the Policy, Resources and Finance Committee had not imposed constraints on the new initiatives budget at this stage but had agreed that all service committees be reminded of the need for the allocation to be used for new initiatives only.

Some discussion took place regarding the potential proposals and it was agreed to investigate the possibility of turning the former ski centre site into a town farm. It was recognised that a project such as this would require application for additional funding from outside bodies.

RESOLVED

- (1) that the matter be noted; and
- (2) that the possibility of turning the former ski centre site into a town farm be investigated and costed by the officers for further consideration at the next Grounds and General Maintenance Committee meeting.

7/242 **ALLOTMENT LETTINGS**

The Committee considered the report of the Town Clerk (Agenda item 8 refers) which included a detailed breakdown of the present waiting list for allotments and outlined the present lettings policy.

It was noted that there were currently 47 persons on the waiting list for an allotment plot, all of whom had expressed a preference for a particular site(s). The number had reduced from the previously reported figure of 70 (March 2010) and 52 (May 2010) following completion of a check of all those on the list as to their ongoing wish to be considered for a plot in the future, and plots becoming available since those meetings.

The Committee noted that the Council had 326 allotment plots on 11 sites - all of which were currently let. The total number of plots was well in excess of the minimum provision advocated by the Thorpe Report of 1969, which had suggested that the "irreducible minimum provision" should be 15 plots to 1,000 households. In the case of Yeovil Town, this equated to 204 plots, which was 60% above this figure.

Members were advised that the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG) currently considered the irreducible minimum to be 20 plots to 1,000 households which, in the case of Yeovil Town, equated to 272 plots. Again, the number of plots provided by the Town Council exceeded this figure – by 20%.

A national survey carried out last year in conjunction with the NSALG, which had recently been updated, found that the average number of people waiting for an allotment plot was 58 per 100 plots. In Yeovil Town, the current figure was significantly (76%) below this figure at 14 per 100 plots.

Members noted that under the present lettings policy, residents or former residents of the Town of Yeovil and those who have a connection with the

Town through their employment were eligible to apply for an allotment tenancy. It was indicated that 19 of the 47 persons on the current waiting list (40%) resided outside Yeovil Town.

The following breakdown of the current waiting list was set out in the report:

Allotment Site	Number of Plots	Preferences
Elizabeth Flats	26	2
Goar Knap	40	1
Hillcrest	7	0
Larkhill	29	1
Milford Dip	38	0
Monks Dale	19	3
Newtown	35	2
Rustywell	24	6
St George's	29	2
Sunningdale	56	2
Turner's Barn Lane	23	10
Two or more sites	-	18
No Preference	-	0
Total	326	47

It was noted that 2 of the 11 sites had no waiting list and 8 (73%) of the sites had two or less persons on the list.

Following on from the previous meeting, the Town Clerk reported that the legal implications of adopting a policy restricting the waiting list to persons who resided within the administrative area of Yeovil Town had been investigated. He explained that as the persons on the waiting list had no contractual arrangement with the Town Council, there was no legal obstacle to taking this approach which, if implemented, would result in the list being reduced from 47 to 28 persons.

He added that a further two people on the list were existing tenants (one of whom resided in Yeovil Town) who were seeking an additional plot which, under the proposed change to the current policy, would further reduce the list to 27 persons. This equated to an average number of people waiting for an allotment of 8 persons per 100 plots, which was 86% below the findings of the recent national survey of 58 persons per 100 plots.

He also provided the following breakdown of the number of plots rented by individual tenants:

- 239 tenants have 1 plot
- 31 tenants have 2 plots
- 7 tenants have 3 plots
- 1 tenant has 4 plots

The Committee was informed that should the Town Council wish to limit tenancy agreements to a single plot, it would be necessary to give the affected tenants twelve month's or longer notice to quit their additional plots expiring on or before the sixth day of April or on or after the twenty-ninth day of September in any year.

An analysis had also been undertaken of the all current tenancies, which has showed that 75 (23%) of the Town Council's 326 plots were let to persons currently residing outside the administrative area of Yeovil Town.

Members also noted that, in accordance with Government guidance, the Council occasionally divided large plots that became unmanageable for existing tenants on health grounds, or plots that became vacant where the next person on the waiting list expressed a preference for a smaller plot. As well as meeting the needs of such individuals, this approach enabled more people to take up allotment gardening.

During the ensuing discussion, members considered the merits of ways by which the waiting list could be reduced and the impact that this would have on existing and future tenants. Whilst it was acknowledged that there was a waiting list at present, it was noted that full occupancy had only been achieved over the past two years and might fluctuate in the future and that, in relative terms, the supply of and demand for plots in the Yeovil Town area was well within national guidelines.

Reference was again made to various ways by which the amount of land available for allotment gardening in and around Yeovil Town could be increased including:

- The acquisition of new land by local authorities
- The allocation of land by local landowners
- The use of land currently held for other purposes
- The inclusion of allotment provision in S.106 agreements

(At this point, the meeting became inquorate and the Members who were present agreed to continue discussing this item and the remainder of the agenda items on the basis of making recommendations thereon)

RECOMMENDED

- (1) that, as agreed at the last meeting, the Policy, Resources and Finance Committee be requested to approve the following changes to the current lettings policy:
 - that existing tenants not be allocated any additional plots;
 - that new tenants be restricted to one plot only; and
 - that, notwithstanding the above provisions, tenants who have been allocated a previously divided plot be permitted to take on another divided plot when the opportunity arises;
- (2) that the legal implications of adopting a policy restricting the waiting list to persons who reside within the administrative area of Yeovil Town be noted;
- (3) that, as agreed at the last meeting, the Policy, Resources and Finance Committee be requested to allocate resources to the Grounds and General Maintenance Committee to review allotment provision within Yeovil Town; and

- (4) that the extent of the practice of existing tenants renting more than one plot and the implications of limiting all tenancy agreements to a single plot be noted.

7/243 **ALLOTMENT TENANTS WORKING GROUP**

The Committee considered the outcomes of the meeting of the Allotment Tenant Working Group held on Monday 21 June 2010. Jon Trevett presented the minutes and points were raised as follows:

The Town Clerk explained that quotations for fencing for part of the western boundary at Sunningdale Allotment Site were being sought and in the interim the chestnut paling fencing was holding up well. The new whips of quickthorn and blackthorn were growing in the gaps in the hedging and the hedge was beginning to grow to form a natural barrier. In answer to a query the Town Clerk explained that he had updated the site Tenant Representative regarding this matter on 5 July.

With regard to an elm tree which was cut back by a local resident at the Newtown allotment site. The Town Clerk explained that he had been in contact with Yarlington Homes and their tenant had not realised that the tree was not their responsibility. The Town Clerk had spoken to the site representative for Newtown Allotment Site who felt that the elm would recover. He further added that Yarlington Homes would write to all their tenants regarding the cutting back of trees and reported fly tipping.

With regard to the tall conifers on the boundary of the Rustywell allotment site, the Town Clerk explained that the High Hedges Act was only applicable where the trees affect domestic properties so unfortunately was not relevant to the allotment sites. He explained that he would write to the owner of the property of the tall conifers to request that they be trimmed. It was agreed that the tenant representative would be kept informed.

Jon Trevett explained that concern had been expressed regarding a proposed two storey development adjacent to Hillcrest allotment site. The Town Clerk explained that Honeypot Nursery had submitted a planning application for an extension and that the disruption and health and safety issues would be managed just as they had been at the recent development at Monksdale.

Concern had been raised regarding the gate at Monksdale. The Town Clerk explained that prices had been sought from local firms to weld additional mesh to the bottom of the gate and extend the posts on either side. He undertook to inform the Tenant Representative on progress.

With regard to plot sizes and the suggestion that plots were divided into two to relieve pressure on the waiting list. The Town Clerk explained that this was not the case and sometimes plots were split to enable a tenant to look after a manageable size plot if he or she was unable to maintain a whole plot due to reasons such as illness. He added that when a plot becomes available it is always offered to the next person on the waiting list.

With regard to the suggestion that Hillcrest allotment site has some plots rented out as a car park the Town Clerk explained that this was not the case

and that the adjacent car park used by the Honeyplot Nursery was on land owned by South Somerset District Council.

The suggestion to simplify the use of the non corporate allotment maintenance budget to provide skips for the allotment sites was welcomed and the Town Clerk explained that he had calculated the number of skips which could be allocated to each site in accordance with the distribution of funds to each of the allotment sites dependant on their proportional number of let plots.

RECOMMENDED

that the Yeovil Allotment Tenants Working Group minutes of 21 June 2010 and all the above matters be noted.

7/244 **FINANCIAL STATEMENT**

The Committee considered the report of the Finance Administrator (Agenda item 10 refers).

RECOMMENDED

that the Financial Statement for April and May 2010 be noted.

Public Comment

There were no comments from members of the public.

Chairman

SH/27/05/10