

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 17 May 2010**

(7:00pm – 10.05pm)

Present:

Steve Hawker (Chairman)
J Vincent Chainey
Dave Gooding
Pete Goodman
John Grana
Simon Hester
Andrew Kendall
Tom Parsley
Jon Trevett (co-opted non-voting)

Also Present:

Alan Tawse – Town Clerk
Sarah Hunt – Assistant Town Clerk
Steven Barnes – Play and Youth Facilities Officer – SSSC

Public Comment

There were no comments from members of the public.

7/225 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the previous meeting held on 8 March, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

7/226 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Phil Chandler, Clive Davis and Alan Smith.

7/227 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

7/228 **CORRESPONDENCE**

The Chairman read out a letter from the Western Gazette dated 13 May, praising Yew Tree Park and its new play equipment.

7/229 **PLAY AREA REFURBISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE UPDATE**

The Play and Youth Facilities Officer updated the Committee on the newly opened Yew Tree Park Play Area (Agenda Item 5 refers) and clarified that the chestnut fencing on the big slide at Yew Tree Park was a temporary measure and had been erected to protect the plants in order to give them a chance to get established.

In answer to Tom Parsley's question about the potential difficulties of maintaining the sand at the bottom of the big slide, the Play and Youth Facilities Officer explained that the Government was advising that nationally, play areas should be more natural, using different surfaces and materials, including sand and bark. He would be ensuring that there would be twice weekly inspections of the sand at Yew Tree Park and this frequency would be increased if necessary.

The Committee was advised that the shrub and tree planting at Yew Tree Park would be easy to maintain and in keeping with the area.

The Play and Youth Facilities Officer advised that sand would not be appropriate for Monks Dale Play Area, as it was a much smaller space. This partnership project between the Town Council and South Somerset District Council was well underway. Final proposed designs for the play area would be submitted on Friday 28th May, which was the date of the next Steering Group Meeting.

RESOLVED

that the matters be noted.

7/230 **ALLOTMENT LETTINGS**

The Committee considered the report of the Town Clerk (Agenda item 7 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 52 persons on the waiting list for an allotment plot, 96% of whom had expressed a preference for a particular site(s). The number had reduced from the previously reported figure of 70 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 the last meeting of the Committee.

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 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.

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.

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 below this figure at 16 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 52 persons on the current waiting list (37%) resided outside Yeovil Town.

During the ensuing discussion, reference was made to the higher demand for plots on the south west side of the Town. In response to a query, the Town Clerk indicated that a high proportion of those persons on the waiting list who had expressed a preference for an allotment plot on the Rustywell and/or Turner's Barn Lane sites resided outside Yeovil Town.

Attention was also drawn to the fact that a number of existing tenants rented more than one allotment and the impact, which this arrangement had on the overall availability of plots. It was suggested that limiting all tenancy agreements to one plot would be a more equitable arrangement and would help reduce the waiting list.

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.

Reference was also 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 farmers
- The use of land currently held for other purposes
- The inclusion of allotment provision in S.106 agreements

Attention was also drawn to the way in which the Town Council managed the cultivation of plots by individual tenants, and the Allotment Tenant Representative indicated that he was satisfied with this process.

Following a detailed discussion on the merits of the current lettings policy, the Committee

RESOLVED:

- (1) that 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;
 - 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 investigated and, in the event of such an arrangement being adopted, the applicant be required - at the time of the tenancy being offered and throughout the duration of the tenancy - to be resident within this area and to produce acceptable documentary evidence to that effect;
 - (3) that 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 implications of limiting all tenancy agreements to a single plot and the extent of the practice of existing tenants renting more than one plot be investigated by the Town Clerk and the outcome be reported to the next meeting.

7/231 **BEST VALUE**

The Committee considered the Town Clerk's report (Agenda Item 8 refers) and

RESOLVED

- (1) that this year's achievement in relation to the letting of allotments be noted and the target of maintaining next year's lettings at an 80% occupancy rate be met; and
- (2) That the outcome of the planned customer satisfaction surveys of play areas be noted.

7/232 **SUNNINGDALE ALLOTMENTS – HEDGING WORK UPDATE**

The Committee considered the report (which was distributed at the meeting) by the Assistant Town Clerk (Agenda Item 6 refers). Quotations were currently being sought from local fencing contractors for an effective, long-lasting barrier along the western boundary. The local Crime Prevention Officer had advised that metal railings on the Raglan Housing Association owned wall at the end of Hathermead Gardens would be an effective, permanent deterrent.

RESOLVED

- (1) that the matters be noted; and
- (2) that the Committee approve expenditure of up to £1,000 towards the costs of additional fencing work on the site.

7/233 **ALLOTMENT TENANTS WORKING GROUP**

The Committee reviewed the Tenants Working Group Minutes dated 26 April 2010. The Town Clerk explained that, subject to the availability of funding, it was still hoped that the plot at Newtown, which had been set aside for tenants with a disability, would soon be able to be used for its original purpose.

The Assistant Town Clerk was investigating reports of tall leylandii at Rustywell and was seeking information from the Allotment Representative in order to progress the matter further.

The Town Clerk explained that the corporate allotment budget had been increased for the last five years, subject to an adjustment in 2009/10 to reflect the Council's contractor taking on responsibility for the maintenance of the Milford Dip and Goar Knap sites. He added that prior to this period, the budget had been continually under-spent and had been set to reflect actual demand. Allotment holders were invited to bid for specific items, including additional skips half way through the financial year and it was hoped that fewer skips would be needed if composting on site was increased.

RESOLVED

that the matters be noted.

7/234 **FINANCIAL STATEMENT FOR PERIOD ENDING FEBRUARY/MARCH 2010**

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

RESOLVED

that the Financial Statement for February and March 2010 be noted.

Public Comment

There were no comments from members of the public.

Chairman

SH/27/05/10