

Community Initiatives
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Report

Report subject: Allotments Action Plan

Report to: City Area Committee (Community)

Date: Tuesday 2nd September 2008

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1. Introduction:

- 1.1. The Committee adopted the Allotments management plan at the meeting on 25th March - minute 68 (2) refers

2. Background:

- 2.1. The Allotment plan is the culmination of a considerable amount of consultation with tenants, officers, Councillors, the Salisbury Allotment Association (SAA) and the Police amongst several others.
- 2.2. The primary outcome of the adopted plan is the collation of an action plan which identifies for discussion and resolution all the various issues which were identified via consultation in the main body of the document.
- 2.3. As a first step, this paper aims to offer options for approval for various, though not all, of the issues raised for implementation.

3. The Issues

- 3.1. Attached at Appendix A is a table highlighting the issue, the SAA response / suggestions and Officers comments / recommendations.
- 3.2. As an addition to the various recommendations outlined in the Appendix, it is intended to set up a formal liaison group comprising relevant Officers, the SAA committee members and the wardens. A proper agenda will be drawn up for each quarterly (to begin with) meeting and minutes taken. This will give a formal process to enable allotment representatives to air issues and for all parties to agree ways forward and solutions. It may well be that after the initial two or three meetings that the frequency can be reduced.
- 3.3. The Committee will be aware that there are now waiting lists at most sites for plots. As such, one area at Fisherton Farm is currently at an advanced stage to return to allotment use from grazing (giving 15, 5 rod plots) and a further area adjoining Fisherton Farm is being costed and planned out for re-use.

4. External Funding:

- 4.1. The Allotments do not qualify for any currently known 3rd party funding whilst managed by the Local Authority.
- 4.2. It is possible, though not certain, that alternative external funding streams may be identified in due course.

5. Finance:

- 5.1. Virtually all the aspects highlighted in the attached Appendix will need funding from the city special expense account.
- 5.2. The sum required as outlined in the Appendix amounts to just under £20,000 with likely further investment in future years as mentioned.
- 5.3. In principle, this sum can be met from the committee's current reserves
- 5.4. It should be noted that there has been very little investment in the allotment service in recent years beyond routine running cost requirements.

6. Recommendations:

It is recommended that

- 6.1. A sum of £20,000 be made available to fund those items highlighted at points 3a, 5a, 9a and 13a, financed from the Committee's reserve account
- 6.2. That the policies related to 1a (bonfires), 4a (wardens) and 14a (livestock) be confirmed
- 6.3. That more expansive, comprehensive reports be submitted to a future meeting with regard items 2a (rent reviews), 3b (additional water troughs), 6a (paperwork), 8a (keys / rotovating service) and 11a (pest control)
- 6.4. That those items at 7a (dedicated allotments Officer), 10a (self management) and 12a (website issues) be noted

7. Implications:

- 7.1. Financial: As outlined in the report
- 7.2. Legal: None at this stage though further advice may be required regarding the Allotments Act in due course
- 7.3. Personnel: None at this stage
- 7.4. Community Safety: None at this stage
- 7.5. Environmental: None at this stage
- 7.6. Human Rights: None at this stage
- 7.7. Ward(s) Affected: Virtually all within the City

Salisbury Allotment Association (SAA) Suggestions / Officer Recommendations:

Mgt Plan Item	SAA Comments / Suggestions	Officer Comments / Recommendations
1. Review policy toward allowing bonfires on sites	<p>All sites responded. It was generally felt that bonfires should be allowed on certain days as at present. The Council should make adequate provision for non-combustible waste to be disposed of leaving the necessity for bonfires for ridding of diseased (potato blight etc) compost to be burnt as this should not be composted. Any bonfire should not be left unattended or left to smoulder. See comment in Item 4.</p> <p>SAA Suggestion - remain as existing, monitored by warden</p>	<p>The current allotment rules state that tenants should not have bonfires on a Monday or Friday, a decision taken by the Committee about 14 years ago as a result of a number of complaints There are no other restrictions or rules related to bonfires within existing tenancies. Nuisance from bonfires can however also be dealt with through civil legislation generally which makes the Council potentially a target. Lots of tenants do not rely on having bonfires but some see them as an accepted part of the allotment culture and history. There is however an increasing pressure on both local authorities and indeed individuals to be more environmentally sensitive and in this respect the current rules do conflict somewhat with the Council's corporate aims and objectives. Managerially bonfires do not currently cause any problems and legally the Council has the power to ban bonfires on its land if it so chooses. The SAA suggestion of the Council providing disposal facilities (via skips) would be hugely expensive and possibly open to abuse.</p> <p>Officer Recommendation -</p> <p>a. On balance it is suggested that bonfires be allowed to continue as per existing arrangements, monitored by the wardens and reviewed after 2 years.</p>
2. Review 50% financing policy along with current practices regarding keys, rotovating etc.	<p>All sites responded. Replies were varied but included a suggestion of 3/5yr leases and payments by direct debit. Other comments included entitling allotment holders to have one free key with perhaps a clause being added to the agreement that if key was not returned a charge of £25 would be made or free keys but with a refundable deposit when returned. Suggestion from many that refundable deposit of £15 should be added to account. See comment in item 4.</p>	<p>This is a potentially complex issue which has a large number of potential options available. As such it is suggested that the financing structure of the allotment service is subject to a specific report to the CAC Community at its next meeting on 21st October.</p>

<p>3. Undertake review of current water facilities and usage.</p>	<p>All sites responded with many comments made. Many troughs are considered in poor condition, some leak etc. Some felt they should be put on hard standings, others felt this would be a waste of resources. Numerous plot holders highlighted a return of allowing the use of hoses. It was felt that more troughs are needed and a plot holder should be allowed to contribute if they personally wanted to use a hose. There are more women tenants now and to carry heavy cans any distance was unreasonable. Questions were asked as to the possibility of toilets on sites.</p> <p>SAA Suggestions - Troughs and taps repaired as necessary, re-introduction of use of hosepipes where plot holder is prepared to pay with wardens advised of such plot holders and report on mis-use etc. Possible provision of drinking water taps/toilets?</p>	<p>Unlimited water is currently provided on allotment sites via field troughs controlled by ball valves. In addition there are a number of self closing taps installed providing drinking water. As a rough, general guide there is a trough available for every 10 - 12 plots. Water is an increasingly expensive commodity with the 2007/08 expenditure being £8,800 (or roughly £18 p/a per tenant). A few requests were made from tenants requesting that taps to which hosepipes could be attached should be provided. Officer's would strongly urge the Committee to not proceed with this request as it will inevitably lead to hugely increased bills, a high level of water wastage and possibly a degree of conflict amongst tenants vying to use the tap(s).</p> <p>Officer Recommendations -</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. That a programme be formed to service, clean out and re-lay each trough onto a solid 100mm concrete base to ensure stability. This will cost £175 per trough though economies of scale will bring this cost down. It is suggested a figure of £4,375 be made available immediately to fund the re-positioning of around 25, with a similar amount being budgeted for in 2009/10. b. That a survey of trough provision be undertaken to identify any shortcomings in provision and this to be reported back to the Committee for financing if necessary. New, installed troughs, assuming an easy connection to the water supply, cost approx £400 each.
<p>4. Review Warden service</p>	<p>All sites responded and felt this service very mixed. Some wardens are excellent, some almost invisible. It was felt that Wardens should be given a Job Description of what is required / expected of them in return for their free plot. They could, and should, be utilised to advise on unkept plots and problems, notice boards, green skip emptying as well as ensuring that keys are returned. They could also liase with Association Committee Members who, in turn, are one voice to SDC. This could also alleviate the necessity of council visits to sites.</p> <p>SAA Suggestions - Urgent review required with job descriptions introduced asap.</p>	<p>As the SAA states, the warden service is currently variable in its effectiveness. Wardens currently get a free plot as recompense but there are no laid down criteria as to what is expected of them. It is strongly urged that the Committee agree to the introduction of a job description arrangement, signed up to by the wardens to include a small number of requirements of them including attending warden meetings (to be introduced), monitoring plot usage, bonfires etc on their respective sites.</p> <p>Officer Recommendations -</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. That a job description for allotment wardens be drawn up and introduced asap, to include a re-appointment clause every 2 years.
<p>5. Consider reviewing information signs</p>	<p>Unanimous comments in that new Notice Boards are required. These should be sited in suitable positions for all to read and should be large enough and waterproof. Space for Information as to Wardens name and contact number, rules, Allotment Association information, events, news etc. Warden to be responsible for SDC info and Allotments Assoc committee member responsible for their info and posters.</p> <p>SAA Suggestions - That new signs be considered at all sites</p>	<p>The current allotment signs are now around 16 years old and are generally in need of a complete overhaul. It may be feasible to strip the existing signs, re-write and then re-use them which will be relatively cost effective as the support posts etc are already in place. This approach will cost around £300 per sign which will be around £250 per sign cheaper than providing brand new ones. There are currently 15 signs on the sites</p> <p>Officer Recommendations -</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. That the Committee consider funding a complete overhaul of the existing 15 signs at a cost of £4,500

<p>6. Undertake a review of current paperwork, rules and legal documentation, processes, etc.</p>	<p>It is generally felt that creating more paperwork is a waste of resources both in man-hours and cost. The Agreement sent out to tenants should be completely re-written. This would alleviate letters having to be written to tenants asking them to rid their plot of weeds etc. The Second Schedule of the Agreement should include in clause 2 that non compliance <u>will result in eviction</u>. Clause 3 should be expanded to include eviction of plot holder. Clause 4. Charge to be made for non-compliance re clearing vacated plot of unwanted structures etc. Clause 8. Without doubt immediate eviction should take place if a tenant should be found to commit any of these offences. New Clause to include issue of site gate keys. £15 to be added to allotment rent in first year. This to be refundable on vacating the plot, Warden to be responsible for retrieving these keys. Suggestions made to perhaps include e billing for those tenants who have e-mail addresses. This would vastly cut down on paperwork.</p> <p>SAA Suggestions - Creation of a new Agreement by consultation with Parks Department, Accounts, Legal and Allotments Association would alleviate many problems regarding unnecessary and costly paperwork and man-hours.</p>	<p>Virtually all the paperwork associated with the management of the allotments is determined by the Allotments Act and is therefore laid down in statute. What can / can't be added is therefore strictly governed. A couple of the suggestions made by the SAA are feasible but others are not if the Act is to be adhered to. That said, the Act is extremely beaurocratic, time consuming and restricts the Councils ability to move fast. Legal advice is being sought as to how strictly the Council should adhere to the Act, whether or not there is flexibility to create rules / paperwork to suit local requirements and whether the Council must adhere to the Act at all or just use it as guidance. Without doubt, any variation from abiding strictly by the terms of the Act will require the full consent of allotment tenants. However, if increased abilities to move off tenants not keeping their plots correctly is a stated aim, then consent should be achievable.</p> <p>Officer Recommendations -</p> <p>a. That due to the complexities relating to the Act and to ensure that the Council's position is not compromised, a full report be submitted to the Committee at its next meeting on 21st October outlining all the issues and potential solutions.</p>
<p>7. Assess the viability of a dedicated Allotments Officer</p>	<p>Although a dedicated officer would be beneficial this was felt to be too costly. If the Warden situation was addressed then a lot of the problems would be alleviated quickly. Wardens could report on condition of plots etc. etc. as in Item 4. SDC Officers should be given powers to act and could then have regular meetings with Wardens and Association Committee to address these problems quickly and efficiently.</p> <p>SAA Suggestions - That a dedicated Allotments Officer be not pursued at this time</p>	<p>Whilst a plausible and understandable aim, a dedicated Officer would be costly. The 12 sites in Salisbury would in no way warrant a full time Officer, probably requiring around 16 hrs / week (2 full days) which is about 10 hrs / week more than is currently allocated. A new post to cover the 2 days would cost around £6,000 p/a with on-costs. It is suggested that if other actions within this report are implemented then the need for a dedicated Officer may be mitigated further. To further support this, in the short term additional resources will be arranged to offer additional support to the allotments service</p> <p>Officer Recommendation -</p> <p>a. That this issue not be pursued at this time but reviewed in 2 years</p>
<p>8. Review current free rotovating service and free keys for new tenants.</p>	<p>The issue of free keys could be addressed as in Item 6 above. (£15 added to first years tenancy, refundable if key handed back to Warden on vacation) No new plot holder should be expected to take on a plot that is waste high in weeds, therefore a "one off" rotovating service should be free. This service would be reduced if plots were not allowed to get to that state in the first instance.</p>	<p>These issues cannot be detached from the further report recommended at 2 above and will be addressed as such</p> <p>Officer Recommendation -</p> <p>a. That these issues be considered as part of the further report regarding the funding of the Allotment service on 21st October</p>

<p>9. Undertake a review of compost arrangements, necessity etc.</p>	<p>This item is in need of urgent attention. Most sites have an area where compost has been dumped over a period of time and some are getting very large. Suggestions are that contained bays should be created for plot holders. These could then be cleared at regular intervals and would not get to the scale that some are today. (Perhaps Hills Waste Services could be involved to turn this into compost and re-sold?)</p> <p>SAA Suggestions - That a solution to the compost areas be sought asap</p>	<p>There are a number of areas within the sites where waste is stockpiled. At Fisherton Farm in particular these areas are now very large. Further dumping has been stopped and solutions are being sought to reduce these areas asap. The suggestion by SAA that Hills Waste consider composting the areas and selling the produce is unfortunately a non-starter as the scale is nowhere near large enough to make this a cost effective option - equally, setting up a compost facility is both expensive and requires a large land area. A number of solutions are however possible which will result in an amount of material being available to either re-introduce into new plots or be used on Council beds around the City.</p> <p>Officer Recommendation -</p> <p>a. That a sum of £6,000 be made available to start the process of reducing the mounds and that a further report be submitted once this work has been undertaken to outline any further needs</p>
<p>10. Consider Self Management Schemes</p>	<p>Self-Management Scheme would not be suitable for the Salisbury Area.</p> <p>SAA Suggestion - That self management of the allotments in Salisbury are not deemed suitable</p>	<p>Whilst this management model has never met favour with tenants on Salisbury's allotments, it would resolve virtually all the SCC's concerns in one go relating to rent levels, notices, management issues, warden responsibilities etc as they would be able to set their own processes without reliance on the Council. Self management is far more popular in the north of England and is actively promoted by the NSALG</p> <p>Officer Recommendation -</p> <p>a. That in light of the SAA's desire to not consider this option that this option not be pursued at this time</p>
<p>11. Undertake a review of pest control arrangements incl. fences. Etc.</p>	<p>Pest control systems urgently needed but should be site specific. Some sites do not have a problem. Butts has a "bung" which has been built up over a number of years next to the fence line which keeps rabbits and rats at bay. Other sites have problems but are unaware of any pest control system. Trial on control of rabbits on Fisherton Farm proved extremely costly. Some wardens and Association Committee members have vast information on this problem and should be included in any decision on programme of pest control.</p> <p>SAA Suggestions - That a review of pest control methods be undertaken asap</p>	<p>Pest control (almost entirely rabbits and/or rats) has long been a source of problems at certain sites in particular. In part this is down to the prevalence of natural habitats in non Council controlled adjoining land (railways etc) but also to the fact that there is known to be a national problem with regard the rabbit / rat populations. Control measures on open land are notoriously difficult and costly, as are means of restricting access to large swathes of land. The Council's appointed pest control company will bait areas to a point and can arrange for shoots. Trapping is not an option, nor gassing and ferreting is very ineffective as a control measure. There is no obvious easy solution to this problem.</p> <p>Officer Recommendation -</p> <p>a. That a further report be prepared when a cost effective solution(s) be available</p>

<p>12. Review and upgrade information inc. SDC website and leaflets etc</p>	<p>There is a massive growth in interest in allotments. Distribution of literature would undoubtedly increase this interest and more people would be applying for an allotment. This takes us back to the necessity of solving problems in Items 4, 6 and 13 and the creation of more plots. More info on web-site useful. Link to Association website already available.</p>	<p>The SDC website relating to allotments is good. Leaflets and other literature needs an overhaul though this is not currently a priority in the context of other issues highlighted in this report</p> <p>Officer Recommendation -</p> <p>a. That the situation relating to the website and leaflets be monitored at this time</p>
<p>13. Review Perimeter fencing in terms of condition., suitability etc.</p>	<p>Extremely necessary. All sites now have padlocks on gates and keys issued. Wardens to ensure new tenants aware of importance of locking gates behind them. Perimeter fencing to be replaced where necessary to prevent vandals from entering. (Police not responding to instances being reported). Perimeter fence at top of Fisherton C to be moved back to incorporate re-instatement of allotments on grazing land. Impossible to get through to Police even though Allotment Watch Scheme in operation.</p> <p>SAA Suggestions - In order to maintain security and alleviate problems of theft and vandalism this should be a priority. Impossible to get through to Police even though Allotment Watch Scheme in operation.</p>	<p>All sites currently have 1.8m high chain link as security, some having a crank top finish on top. Whilst this works reasonably well, it is prone to damage and can be climbed over by those disposed to do so. However it is likely that most unauthorised access is gained via the entrances when gates are left open by tenants - as all tenants have a key to get in / out the tenants themselves could assist with security issues. Some sites have relatively short open public boundaries (Tunnel, London Rd, Coldharbour, Cow Lane for instance) which could easily be upgraded. Galvanised security fencing as used to protect railway lines would be the ideal solution, being virtually vandal proof. Coming in 3m sections, 1.8m high with spiked tops, it may be worth considering as a pilot to assess its suitability longer term.</p> <p>Officer Recommendation -</p> <p>a. That an initial budget of £4,800 be made available to pilot a 1.8m galvanised security fence at a site to be agreed between Officers and the SAA.</p>
<p>14. Livestock</p>	<p>SDC have a ban on plot holders keeping livestock except in cases where this is already in existence. There are a number of plot holders who wish to keep a few chickens on their plots and are prepared to look after them in the correct manner and believe they have this right under the Allotment Act. The feeling is that because of complaints about a few bad practices all have now been banned. Certain individuals are considering seeking legal advice and taking action against the Council themselves.</p> <p>SAA Suggestions - That the Council reconsider its position over the keeping of livestock on plots</p>	<p>This is contentious and Officers are basically opposed to the re-introduction of livestock into the allotments unless there are very clear, concise rules around keeping them. Even the best kept livestock areas will attract rats which is an issue the SAA themselves, as well as Officers, want to treat (see item 11 above). Historically, wherever livestock has been kept the management has been problematic and complaints to Officers have followed, especially from nearby plot holders. The Legal rights are less clear and Officers would not agree fully with certain tenants claims that it is an automatic right. Additionally, with waiting lists for plots now at most sites, Officers would suggest that the primary role of providing allotments is to grow fruit and vegetables, not the keeping of livestock. As such any plots becoming available should be offered on that basis at least until waiting lists are significantly reduced. Whilst a trial could be agreed, or a specific area identified, Officers are extremely wary.</p> <p>Officers Recommendation -</p> <p>a. That a 2 year trial be agreed at Fisherton Farm only for existing tenants (as at 1st Sept 2008) to keep livestock if they so wish.</p> <p>b. That new tenants not be allowed to keep livestock during the trial period or until waiting lists are reduced considerably</p> <p>c. That clear, concise guidelines be drawn up by Officers in conjunction with the SAA for those tenants keeping livestock to agree to.</p>