

MINUTES of an Allotment Committee Meeting of Melksham Without Parish Council held on Monday 12th May 2014 at Crown Chambers, Market Place, Melksham at 7.00pm

Present: Cllr Richard Wood (Chair), Cllr John Glover (Vice Chair), Cllr Rolf Brindle, Cllr Stephen Petty and Cllr Pat Nicol

Apologies: There were no apologies.

- 631/13 **Declarations of Interest:** Cllr Glover declared an interest as an allotment holder and as a member of Melksham Gardeners' Society. The Clerk declared an interest as a Committee member of Melksham Gardeners' Society.
- 632/13 **Public Participation:** There were no matters raised.
- 633/13 **Minutes of the last Allotment Committee Meeting 12th August 2013:** These minutes were noted.
- 634/13 **Allotment Tenancy Agreements:** The Committee noted that there were differences between the tenancy agreements for Berryfield and Briansfield and between the agreements of longstanding tenants and new tenants. These differences were creating difficulties in enforcing current allotment rules.
Recommendation: The Council amend both tenancy agreements so that they are the same and new copies of the agreement to be sent to tenants, with all changes highlighted when next invoiced.
- 635/13 **Site Visit Report:** The Council noted an inspection report carried out by office staff and the Allotment Warden on 30th April 2014.
- 636/13 **Financial Report:**
- a) **To note year end accounts for 2013/14 (Allotment Account):** The committee noted that the allotment account showed a profit of £200 for the year, however the Clerk reported that the grass cutting contractor for Briansfield had not submitted an invoice for 2013/14 despite being chased on several occasions. The parish caretaker had cut the grass at Berryfield to date but this would be included in the new grass cutting contract 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2017. In 2014/15 the cost for grass cutting for Berryfield would be £245 and for Briansfield would be £435 which would leave the allotment account in a deficit position by the end of the year.
 - b) **To note rent increase information (arising from Min. 323/13):** It was noted that there was an error in the date reported under this minute number, it should have read "October 2014" and not "October 2013" as the rent could not be increased until the next allotment year, 1st October 2014 to 31st September 2015.
 - c) **To clarify rent invoice and payment timescales:** The Committee discussed the issue of the differing timings of the financial year, invoice dates for allotment tenants and rent payment due dates. These timing differences were not only confusing, but meant that if tenants were asked to vacate their plot due to lack of payment then the plot was being re-let at the wrong growing time of year for a new tenant to take over.

It also meant that the plot lay fallow in May, whilst payments were chased, which was when a lot of weeds grew.

Recommendation: *The Council give notice to all tenants that their current tenancy will terminate on 31st September 2014. A new tenancy agreement (as per Min 634/13) will be issued clearly stating that invoices will be due on the 1st October (rather than 1st April as currently stated).*

637/13

Water issues:

- a) **Water charges:** The council noted the water supply charges for the allotments for 2013/14. There were two water taps at the Berryfield Allotment and one water trough controlled by a ball cock at the Briansfield Allotment. The charges for Berryfield were double that of the charges for Briansfield. It was suggested that this disparity of water usage was due to the use of hosepipes at the Berryfield Allotment and a discussion took place over whether hosepipes should be allowed. It was agreed that the Berryfield tenants used hosepipes responsibly but potentially could be charged a higher rent than tenants of the Briansfield Allotment. The committee considered whether the hosepipes should remain at the Berryfield site, or whether the Council should do something to address the difficulties faced by the tenants at Briansfield sharing one water trough. Cllr Petty suggested that the council reduce inadvertent water wastage by changing the taps on both standpipes on the Berryfield allotment to the push down time-release models that would cut off water supply if not continuously depressed.

Recommendation: *The Council fit Time-release valves on the Berryfield Allotment stand pipes as and when the current taps need replacement valves.*

- b) **To clarify “no hosepipe use” in tenancy agreement:** The tenancy agreement does not state that hosepipes cannot be used.

Recommendation: *The tenancy agreement is re-worded to state that “no permanent attachment can be put onto the taps for hosepipes, including pipes buried underground”.*

- c) **To consider tenant request for a tap at Briansfield:** A request had been received for a tap to be installed at Briansfield for hand washing only. It was noted that the council were unable to do this as Wessex Water rules no longer allowed the installation of standpipes, hence the installation of a trough at the Briansfield allotments.

- d) **To re-consider tenant request for additional water trough at Briansfield (arising from Min. 196/13 and Finance Committee Min. 339/13):** The Clerk reported NSALG (National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners) guidance which stated that there should be one water point per 6-8 plots. The Committee considered that one water trough for 36 allotments was not adequate and asked the Clerk to obtain quotations for a new trough. Tenants had previously offered to dig the ditch for a new trough connection and the Clerk agreed to see if there was still interest in doing this.

Recommendation: *The Council install a second water trough on the opposite site of Briansfield allotment to the existing trough.*

638/13

Health and Safety issues:

a) **To consider tenant request for signage:** The Clerk reported that a tenant had been unable to adequately describe to the ambulance service the correct location of the allotments when an accident had occurred there, causing a delay. The tenant had requested a sign at the Allotments detailing the postcode of the site to enable quicker access if the situation arose in the future.

***Recommendation:** The Council provide a sign for each of the allotment gates stating that the allotments were owned and managed by Melksham Without Parish Council, naming each allotment garden with their post code, and giving the office phone number for daytime queries.*

b) **To consider Tenant request for redesign of car park entrance:** The Committee noted a request from a tenant for a redesign of the car park entrance moving the gate back into the car park in order that cars could pull off the lane whilst opening the gate. The Committee considered that this would be a costly exercise and that the minimal amount of traffic using the lane were not disrupted by tenants temporarily stopping to open the gate. Members noted that the gate was usually left open by tenants.

***Recommendation:** The Council reply to the tenant to explain that they do not feel it currently is an issue and therefore will not be making costly alterations to the existing gate design.*

639/13

Blocked Footpath: The Committee noted that this "footpath" was not actually a rights of way, and thus no action should be taken.

640/13

Photography Workshop: The Committee noted a request from Melksham Gardeners' Society to hold a photography workshop at the Parish allotment gardens on a June/July evening to be confirmed. The Society intended to extend the invitation to the event to the allotment tenants. The Committee considered this to be an excellent idea, but wanted tenants to be informed by way of a laminated poster at each allotment garden. Cllr Wood suggested that photographs from the event could be framed and displayed at the Council offices, with payment for this from the Chair's allowance. ***Recommendation:** The Council give permission for Melksham Gardeners' Society to hold a photography workshop at the Allotment Gardens.*

The following item was held in Committee:

641/13C

Right of access to Council owned land (arising from Min. 194/13): The Clerk reported that despite correspondence from the Council's solicitors to the resident, and to the resident's solicitors there remained a fence across the access to the Council's land.

***Recommendation:** The Clerk to conduct a land search for title deeds for the Parish Council owned land at Berryfield. The parish caretaker to continue to take down the fence and the contractor to continue to cut the grass on the track to the end of the allotment*

Meeting closed at 9.05 pm

Chairman, 19th May 2014