

EXETER ALLOTMENTS FORUM

Thursday 6 October 2016

Present:-

Bill Martin and 7 others

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APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from:

Clive Wilson, Hamlin Lane; Erica Connor, Guys; Rob Shields, Rackfield; Steve Scaith, Clapperbrook; Cath Jowitt, Trews Weir; Rebecca Wells, Cowick; Simon James, Marypole and Mincinglake; and from Councillors

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MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

Dan Smith mentioned that Radio Devon had had a slot on allotments and their brilliance. It mentioned that waiting lists are now as low as they have ever been and it is a very good time to apply for one. This slot resulted in several new applications.

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the last meeting by those who had received them.

There was a check by show of hands to see how many people had received the minutes sent out by email. About half the group said they had had them. It was agreed that minutes of meetings would be put on the ECC allotments website as soon as they were available as draft or provisional minutes.

Action – Maggie or Dan

David Hayes apologised for not sending out the FAQs and new tenant interview forms used at Topsham as agreed at the last meeting and promised to do it following this meeting

Action David Hayes and Dan or Maggie

David Hayes asked about dates for distribution of Smartwater kits mentioned at last meeting. Faith Stafford agreed to try to establish dates in October for this.

Action Faith Stafford

ALLOTMENT SERVICE UPDATE

Dan said that there were no major issues to report. Rent demands had all been sent out.

Maggie confirmed that she would send out vacant plot list once she knew which people had given up as a result of rent demands and increases. Maggie pointed out paper copies of new rules (2016/2017) and letters of acceptance available at the meeting. There was a discussion of bonfire rules which were confirmed as Sept 1st to March 31st on Saturday afternoons and Tuesday afternoons. There had been some complaints but mainly because neighbours had not realised that the permitted times for bonfires had started. A question was asked about how long it took before plots were presumed vacant if rent was not paid. Dan said the timetable was

- Invoice sent
- If not paid in two weeks further pink invoice sent
- They would then 'chase' rent by phone or email, so about 5 or 6 weeks would elapse before the plot would be considered vacant. Maggie pointed out that people may move and letting her know may be low down on their list (Rules state 40 days after rent not paid before plot can be re-let)

There was a discussion about rubbish left on plots and whether skips could be requested. Dan said common sense was needed. If the new tenant could clear they should be encouraged to do so. Dan was reluctant to send skips as they tended to be misused, though one might be sent if allotment reps were prepared to 'police' the skip. It was also possible to send a 'man and van', though this was more expensive. It might be necessary to wait until several plots needed clearing in order to provide decent size load.

There was some discussion of metal collection on sites which could then be sold by local associations.

Maggie said there was talk of a Facebook page and asked people what they thought of the idea. There was general agreement that this was a good idea to 'get the word out' about allotments.

There was a question about the waiting list. Dan said it had dropped to its lowest level ever earlier in the year, but now stood at about 150 though he thought it would be at about 100 by next week. The waiting time for new applicants west of the city is about 2-3 months, though some areas such as Topsham are nearer a year.

A discussion followed about tenants taking on a bigger plot or another plot. Sue Chedzoy, Hamlin Lane, expressed concern that if tenants applied direct to the council they might be given a plot even though they were not good tenants. It was emphasised that site reps or managers need to control the allocation of plots and ensure that anyone taking on another plot or a larger plot was a suitable tenant before this could be agreed. Maggie assured the meeting that the process of letting plots would be through site reps/managers wherever possible.

CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR UPDATE

Bill Martin asked Dan about the state of the current budget and about setting a budget for next year. Dan said there was some money left in the budget. He reminded the meeting that individual councillors, both city and county had their own amounts of money for local issues and that associations could apply for funds for projects from their councillors as well.

Bill urged the meeting to contact their councillors about the next budget, point out the benefits of allotments and urge their councillors to increase the spend on allotments.

Action – all

Faith Stafford asked whether the new rules were issued with rent demands. Dan said they were not but updated rules were on the website. Dan asked Maggie to send copies of the new rules to all who attended the forum.

Action - Maggie

Faith asked whether associations could have lists of contact details for tenants at their sites. Maggie confirmed that all associations which had signed a management agreement could have tenant details.

ADVANCED TOPIC RAISED BY FORUM MEMBERS

Covered in item re contact between council and site reps/ managers above.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

A question was raised about maintenance schedules and whether sites could have advanced notice of work to be done. Dan said there was no schedule as such but associations should contact him about work to be done

A question was raised about security at Prince Charles Road now brambles had been cut down. The wall belongs to Railtrack but Dan agreed to have a look at the site and decide if the council could do anything such as anti-climb paint.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting will take place on the 19th January, 6th April and 20th July. They were agreed as future dates.

There being no other business, the chair closed the meeting at 7.55pm.