

EXETER ALLOTMENTS FORUM

Thursday 12 October 2017

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APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Brimble (Mincinglake & Whipton), Councillor Morris (St Thomas), Rob Shields (Rackenfield), Catherine Jowit (Trews Weir/Riverside), Anrea Shelley (Trews Weir/Canal)

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MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING FROM LAST MEETING

The minutes of the last meeting, 20th July, were read and agreed as accurate.

Dan reported that the new times for bonfires was working well with no complaints except for one which was about a fire being lit at the agreed time.

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UPDATE ON NEXT YEAR'S CHANGES TO THE DATA PROTECTION ACT

Lorraine Betts gave some advice and agreed to return to the next Allotment forum to give more advice about the implications of changes, secure email facilities and advice on safe storage of data. She thought that the current arrangement in which tenant details were shared with local associations would work under the changes to the Act.

Margaret Grapes – Marypole and Mincinglake asked about tenants who had held plots for so long that they had not agreed to share data via the tenancy agreement form.

Action: Dan agreed to write to all tenants about their data being shared
Becky Wells – Cowick Lane asked for email and phone details for tenants to be sent. Dan said that all details available were sent. The gaps were because details had not been sent by tenants.

Simon James – Marypole and Mincinglake asked if a commitment to clean up plots at the end of tenancy could be put into tenancy agreement. Dan said that this was already in the rules. Dan hoped to log photos of new plots as a record of what they looked like when taken over, but could not take on this at the moment and could not accept photos of plots at the moment, but this is a long term aim. Vanessa Nichols – Prince Charles Road asked if associations could take photos of plots as they were let. Dan agreed that this could be a good idea as a record of what the plot looked like when let.

Becky Wells – Cowick Lane asked if the system used of sending out prospective new tenant details to site managers will be acceptable under the changes. Lorraine said this is OK for now but would like associations to move to a more secure system. More details on this at next meeting.

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ALLOTMENT SERVICE UPDATE

Dan said that rent demands had all been sent out. He apologised for any gaps – people not receiving rent demands - but said there were only 3 or 4 in 1500 letters sent. Vacant plot details would be sent out in the next few weeks.

There were various questions about maintenance at sites – how much work associations could do, whether associations could pay individuals for occasional tasks, whether associations could employ contractors to do some of the work needed and then be recompensed by council.

Dan said that associations could be paid for a variety of tasks depending on the kind of management agreement they had signed up to. They could also be paid for 'one off' tasks.

Any payment should be formally agreed with Dan before the tasks were completed. No agreement with contractors should be made without prior agreement with Dan if associations expected to be recompensed.

Several questions were asked about asbestos huts regarding safety, repairs and logging of damage.

Dan said that the huts constituted a very low risk and that there were annual inspections of huts. If any damage occurred to huts in between inspections, associations should contact Dan.

Action: Associations to contact Dan regarding any damage to huts with asbestos.

Sue Chedzoy – Hamlin Lane asked if the council would clean toilets if the association could not. Dan said that this would not be possible but that associations could be paid an honorarium for cleaning the toilets. There was also a question about emptying the toilets. Dan explained that the eco toilets had two chambers and that once one was judged to be full it was a simple job to move the pan over to the empty chamber. Once the new chamber was reaching its limit the old one could then be emptied and the pan put back in its original position.

Suzy Boulton – Prince Charles Road asked about hedge trimming. Dan confirmed that the council would trim the outside and top of hedges and the inside was the responsibility of tenants.

Becky Wells Cowick Lane asked if some sites in St Thomas could move up to a level 2 agreement whilst others remained at level one. Dan agreed that this was possible but only one payment would be made to an association. He also reminded the meeting that if associations take on extra tasks they would need to make sure their insurance covered the extra tasks.

Action – associations need to make sure that insurance is adequate if they take on extra tasks. It is usual to declare activities and equipment if necessary and get insurance on that basis.

There was some discussion of insurance costs. Dan offered to pay third party insurance costs but not insurance for equipment or materials.

Simon James Marypole and Mincinglake asked about the waiting list. Dan said that it looks healthy overall with no one waiting more than a year for a plot. Most areas had about 40 names on the waiting list.

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CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR UPDATE

David Hayes reminded the meeting that developers in the city pay a levy for their developments and this money was available to community groups as well as the money which city and county councillors hold for local projects. Dawn Rivers is probably the best contact for development levy funds. She is contactable at grants@exeter.org.uk

Dan pointed out that he has very little money in his 'pot' at the moment.

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ADVANCED TOPICS RAISED BY FORUM MEMBERS

David Hayes - Topsham asked if the eviction time could be reduced once the 28day notice period was complete. Dan said the month allowed beyond the end of the 28day notice was a legal requirement and could not be changed.

Becky Wells – Cowick Lane – question about payment for maintenance by associations had been covered in earlier discussions.

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ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair questioned the need for AOB when topics could be raised under item 6.

Questions were raised about how long it took to send out 28day notice letters and letters about plots becoming vacant.

Dan agreed there had been delays in the past but said the aim was to send out such letters within a day or two.

There then followed a discussion about overgrown plots and procedures for getting tenants to clean up plots. Some site managers had received abuse from tenants when they had contacted them regarding the state of their plots. Some sites sent out advisory letters to tenants whose plots were untidy. Some sites inspect plots monthly. Some inspect with two site managers – so that any request to tidy up a plot does not come from one person but from 'site managers'.

Simon James Marypole and Mincinglake asked about the plot inspection 'module'. Dan said that there was software to help manage allotments, including inspections but that it was expensive; £2,400 to sign up and £350 a year for upgrades. East Devon use it and Dan is getting a demonstration soon.

Ron Blakey – Cowick Lane expressed concern that Dan's decision to evict someone had been overruled by senior management.

The chair thanked everyone for coming and for their contributions.

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DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was agreed for the 8th February and 17th May 2018.

(The meeting commenced at Time Not Specified and closed at Time Not Specified)

Chair