

## **EXETER ALLOTMENTS FORUM**

Thursday 19 January 2017

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### **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from:

Rebecca Wells, Cowick and Councillor Paul Bull

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### **MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING FROM LAST MEETING**

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the last meeting by those who had received them with a small amendment on page one to change the reference of the Chair to Joint Chair.

Dan apologised that the previous draft minutes were not posted on the web-site, and promised to make sure that they will be posted promptly in the future.

#### **Action – Maggie or Dan**

Further apologies from Dan about not forwarding on the FAQs for potential plot holders from David Hayes and the Topsham Association. This will go out to all forum members and be linked on the Council web-page.

#### **Action Dan or Maggie**

Representatives from Prince Charles Road asked about the site boundary wall. Dan had been down to examine it and noted the most serious section was in one corner where fly tipping had occurred. As the wall is not owned by the council we are unable to make any structural changes but Dan did promise to continue to look into it.

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### **ALLOTMENT SERVICE UPDATE**

Dan showed that an official Facebook page has been created for the Exeter City Council allotment sites where both the council and allotment holders can post news, photos and updates from the various sites. The hope is that over the coming months it will become a place for both current tenants and those wishing to take on an allotment to share ideas and news and to help foster a good community spirit.

Dan also updated the forum to the news that the Whipton Lane site have now signed a seven year lease with the Council to take on the management of their site. This occurred in October with the Association now responsible for setting and

collecting rents and maintaining the infrastructure of the site. It was expressed by the representatives from the site that they will still be sticking closely to the rules that the Council have and to the way that the remainder of the sites in the city are run. They were invited to give an update as to their progress at the next forum.

Joint Chair Bill Martin asked how the budget was looking coming into the end of the financial year and if there were any funds available for site projects. Dan responded that he was on course to use what was remaining in the budget by the 1<sup>st</sup> April and that there would be no substantial amount remaining for additional work. The Joint Chair encouraged members to contact both their City and County Councillors who have private funds that they can spend on community works. There is also a City Grant of up to £2000 that the forum could attempt to access in the future if there was a project that they agreed on that would benefit all the sites across the city.

The distribution of Smart Water Kits in the autumn was successful with new tenants. Faith Stafford said that this can become an annual event that should aid the security of all the sites.

Faith Stafford also brought up the discussion that occurred last year about having an allotment show in association with someone like Toby Buckland who could judge and would benefit from the publicity. There was little support from the members present however maybe through the use of social media and the new Facebook page word could be spread to individual plot holders and enough support could be generated in the future. Dates for the St Thomas Allotment Association show {to be confirmed} and the Topsham Association show on the 20<sup>th</sup> August were advertised with other sites encouraged to join in.

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#### **CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR UPDATE**

There were no update from either of the chairs or vice chair.

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#### **ADVANCED TOPICS RAISED BY FORUM MEMBERS**

Vice Chair David Hayes shared the Topsham guide on how they go about inspecting and potentially evicting tenants that are not cultivating their plots. Representative from Prince Charles Road said they followed a similar structure and that they had struggled with not knowing the exact dates that plot holders had been given warning and eviction notices for. Dan said that this would be improving with the latest set of inspection that will happen in the coming weeks.

The problem of new tenants not getting on top of their new plots quickly was raised. There was a discussion about implementing a three month probationary period for new tenants with site reps contacting the plot holder if they think they might be struggling and if nothing improves a warning letter from the Council to be sent at the end of the three months. A proposal to have this added to the allotment rules was put forward by Nick from Prince Charles Road and seconded. A vote was taken with 13 members voting for the motion, one against and no abstentions.

Dan will get back to the forum at the next meeting about adding this to the rules for 2017/18.

The member from Rackfileds mentioned the 60% cultivation level and said there were plots on the site that due to trees etc. nothing was being grown but were being maintained. Common sense was deemed to be the best way to judge these cases as long as the plot is being maintained then that was the main thing

**Action – Dan**

Sue Chedzoy of Hamlin Lane enquired if the Council still organised compost deliveries? Dan replied that this was no longer available for both cost and legal changes. However individuals or groups were still welcome to organise for deliveries to the sites of things like compost and manure.

**Action – N/A**

Reps from Prince Charles Road asked about Council support for larger project on sites such as the drainage issue at the entrance of their site since it was altered. Dan suggested that their first option would be to contact their Councillor who could look into the matter. Failing that contact the allotment office and Dan would look at each project individually and see what would be involved and find out about costs. He could then ask if additional funding could be found for that specific project.

Site security was also raised with former tenants still having access to sites if they have not returned their old key. Dan replied that new combination padlocks have been purchased and he is looking to roll out their implementation on a site by site basis over the coming 2/3 years. Help would be needed from associations and site reps in organising refunds for people's key deposits when this occurred. Pincas 1 did a similar thing a few years ago and managed it well with set times tenants could come to the site and sort out their refund.

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

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Mr and Mrs Copp attended the meeting who are residents that neighbour the Whipton Lane site. Mrs Copp gave a well prepared argument about the changes to the bonfire timings this season and the adverse effects it has had on them being able to dry their clothes outside in their garden due to the additional smoke being generated every Saturday from the allotments. The representative from Marypole asked about the environmental concerns of bonfires in the city. Dan responded that

the Environmental Health team at the council are responsible for air quality in the city, however their main focus is on vehicle emissions which is the biggest factor. They will only step in if an individual is causing a regular and persistent nuisance from a fire. After a back and forth discussion about both the timings of bonfires and the method they are burnt that can create either more or less smoke Dan said that he will be contacting both allotment tenants and neighbouring residents of the worst effected sites to get feedback from them on the changes to the timings this year. He hoped that be the next forum meeting he will have enough feedback to present so that a compromise might be reached in readiness for the bonfire season next autumn.

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### **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The dates of the next meetings were agreed for 6<sup>th</sup> April and 20<sup>th</sup> July.

The Joint Chair expressed his thanks to Dan and his team for organising the meeting and to those who attended.

There being no other business, the chair closed the meeting at 8.45pm.

Chair