

EXETER ALLOTMENTS FORUM

Thursday 9 April 2015

Present:-

Councillors Bull, Dawson, Lyons, Morris and Owen

Also Present were representatives from the following Allotments

Ashwood Road
Cowick Lane
Guys and Hylton
Hamlin Lane
Ide Lane
Marypole Road
Mincinglake
Newman Road
Pinces 1
Polsoe Road
Prince Charles Road
Sweetbriar Lane
Trews Weir
Whipton Lane
St Thomas Allotment Association

Roger Crane – Exeter City Council
James Sprague – Exeter City Council
Sharon Sissons – Exeter City Council

1

APOLOGIES

No apologies were received.

2

WELCOME

Councillor Dawson welcomed invitees to the first meeting of the Exeter Allotments Forum which she hoped would be very successful. She referred to the discussions at the Allotments pre-Forum meeting held in January, when the broad outline and scope of the Forum was discussed. It had been agreed that the Council would take a lead in the preparation and facilitation of the meetings for the first year, and the invitees would include those City Councillors with an allotment in their ward, the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Health and Well Being, and one delegate from each of the allotment sites in Exeter, plus a second delegate from sites with more than the equivalent of fifty full size plots.

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EXETER ALLOTMENTS FORUM TERMS OF REFERENCE

Councillor Dawson presented the draft terms of reference for the Exeter Allotments Forum which had been redrafted following the Allotments Forum pre-meeting on 29 January 2015. Members discussed the document -

- It was clarified that the Chair, at least in the first year would be drawn from a City Councillor on the Exeter Allotments Forum, and after the first year, the position would be open to all members of the Forum. The Deputy Chair

position was open to any member of the Forum.

- It was noted there was provision for a deputy to attend for a member of the Forum as included in the General Terms of Reference.
- Attendance could be extended by the permission of Chair for a specific topic, although there had to be a control of numbers.
- It was confirmed that as a Forum, there would not be an Annual General Meeting. The Terms of Reference for the Forum would be reviewed after 12 months to ensure that the Forum was working as intended.
- It was also suggested that pattern of meetings should be in May, July, October and January to avoid any clashes with elections for the city councillors.

A representative from the Hamlin Lane Allotment enquired how the numbers of shadow delegates would be managed, as not all allotments were run by allotments associations. Roger Crane advised that the terms of reference would also provide an understanding of the way that allotments were run and establishing a local level representative was vital. This process would evolve, and it was anticipated that a more robust process would help to identify future representatives. A representative from Cowick Lane Allotment recognised that forming an association could be a huge burden for smaller sites, but there were benefits of amalgamating individual sites into an association.

Councillor Owen referred to the overall aim of the Forum, which was to enable a two way dialogue with the allotment holders as well as an opportunity to share views. He hoped that where possible, individual associations could be set up for the long term mutual benefit of those on the allotment site.

A representative from the Hamlin Lane Allotment queried why there was no 'any other business' item on the agenda. Councillor Dawson replied that there was the opportunity to send in items of business to be included on the agenda. Councillor Owen also added that it would be more helpful to have items notified in advance of the meeting to ensure members were aware of the business to be discussed. As agreed as an amendment, there was now a four week opportunity to send in questions or items to be raised.

A representative from the Sweetbriar Lane Allotment referred to the outcome of the recent budget consultation exercise. He also could not see any opportunity for a formal decision to be made at the Forum? Councillor Owen advised that the detail of the budget consultation was available on the City council web site. The intention was to keep rent rises broadly in line with inflation, but they had to manage costs against income and expenditure. He added that the Forum was not a decision making body.

A representative from the Prince Charles Road Allotment referred to the code of conduct and the reference to the Chair being able to expel a member and was concerned that the Chair had the discretion to exercise this right. Councillor Dawson felt that such an action would be implicit in the terms of conduct of the meeting.

A representative from the Cowick Lane Allotment proposed that the terms of reference be accepted. This was seconded by a representative from an allotment.

The terms of reference were amended as follows:-

- A four week lead in time (rather than two weeks) for notice of the meetings would enable sufficient time to canvass or contact everyone to establish if there were any issues raised.
- the inclusion of the wording final agenda would be sent to all members of the Forum at least one week prior to the meeting.

The terms of reference, including the amendments above were approved, and a copy of the terms of reference would be attached to the minutes.

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ELECTION OF CHAIR

It had been agreed that the Chair would be elected at the first meeting for a period of twelve months from amongst members of the Forum. Notwithstanding this, the City Council would take a lead during the forthcoming year and that the position of Chair would be held by one of the attending City Councillors of the Forum, for the first 12 months. (Exeter City Councillors representing wards with allotments sites).

Nominations were invited to appoint a Chair – Councillor Lyons proposed Councillor Bull. This was seconded by a representative from an allotment.

Councillor Bull was duly appointed as Chair, and took the Chair, with the caveat that in the event of not being re-elected in the forthcoming City Council elections on May 7, further nominations for the election of Chair of the Exeter Allotments Forum would be held.

A representative from the Ashwood Road Allotment wished to place on record a formal appreciation for Councillor Dawson for overseeing the transitional arrangements.

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ELECTION OF DEPUTY CHAIR

It had been agreed that the Deputy Chair would be elected by the Forum to act on the Chair's behalf in case of absence.

Nominations were received to appoint a Deputy Chair – Councillor Morris nominated Bill Martin (Pinces 1) . This was seconded by a representative from an allotment. A representative from Prince Charles Road nominated Faith Stafford (Prince Charles Road). This was seconded by a representative from an allotment.

As an equal number of votes were received, Faith Stafford and Bill Martin were duly appointed as Deputy Chair, each with a six month term of office commencing with Bill Martin, after which Faith Stafford would take on the position.

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COMMUNICATE/ENGAGEMENT WITH ALLOTMENT SITES

Councillor Owen advised that the Allotments Forum was very important as an effective method of communication, particularly for those individuals not on email or those sites without an association in place. He invited any practical suggestions to overcome this.

Councillor Lyons advised that they had two notice boards at different points on the Polsloe Road Allotment, including by the entrance gate. She advocated creating as many opportunities to display notices, possibly placing notices on individual sheds.

A representative from the Ashwood Road Allotment agreed that communication could be an issue and he had not been able to contact all of the allotment holders

on his site. The former Allotments Manager had a record of all tenants, but that information was no longer available –he also suggested using a central letterbox, or letterboxes attached to sheds?

Councillor Bull advised that the Exeter City Council held a central list of tenants, and does want to facilitate greater engagement, but Roger Crane was unable to share its distribution with the 1500 allotment holders due to data protection constraints. It was also acknowledged that there would be allotments holders who do not want to be contacted. A representative from Ashwood Road Allotment requested a list of names and the plot numbers.

Action - Roger Crane agreed that being mindful and also following permitted Data Protection rules, he would investigate the circulation of a list of names and plot numbers for the Ashwood Road allotment.

A representative from the Cowick Lane Allotment made some suggestions to try and overcome the issue of consultation -

- creating a web site;
- collecting email addresses to produce an electronic round robin newsletter, including the option not to share contact details as required; and
- ensuring a point of contact for any allotment enquiries and field the enquiry via an email address or use the notice board.

A representative from the Hamlin Lane Allotment advised that often the priority was for allotment tenants to tend their allotment, but nevertheless, notice boards providing contact details were positioned at every entrance to their allotment. A representative from the Marypole Allotment agreed that forming an active association offered benefits to the site, but it was important not to exclude any tenants or make an all inclusive arrangement.

A representative from the Newman Road Allotment said that some tenants did not have email, but there was invariably a post box on the site. He acknowledged the freedom of information constraints, but suggested a list of names and plot numbers of each site be produced.

A representative from the Prince Charles Road Allotment enquired if the City Council could write to all allotment holders to obtain contact information at the same time as sending the rent request. Councillor Owen agreed that the City Council should communicate with the individual associations and he was aware that there were representative's willing to communicate to every tenant on the site. If there was no association, the Member representative could communicate. He agreed that that it was preferable to make initial contact with every allotment holder. The tenant's permission for their contact details, including email being shared, could be sought. Roger Crane advised that it was accepted that all new tenancy agreements would share the information with the association. There was an opportunity to opt out after October 2015.

Councillor Bull advised that the agenda and minutes of the Forum would be sent to the Forum's delegates and also published on the Exeter City Council's web site. Councillor Owen added that the Exeter Citizen would shortly be going on line and would be another opportunity for communication.

Attendees at the meeting were invited to add their email address to the attendance list for the meeting contact. This list would be passed to Roger Crane and James Sprague, but if the email addresses were shared then permission from the individual would have to be sought.

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FUTURE APPLICATIONS FROM SUPPORT GROUPS

Councillor Owen advised that before the Forum had been established, Age UK had approached the City Council, as they had received funding for a project called 'Linking Lives'. This was a pilot project to promote health and well being activities helping those who were newly diagnosed with dementia, with one of the activities including weekly gardening sessions, using a plot at the Guys and Hylton allotment. Although their project was deemed very laudable, and due to the oversubscription of sites, in future all such requests for use of allotments would be put before the Exeter Allotments Forum. Councillor Owen sought and obtained retrospective endorsement of this project by the Forum as and there had been a time limit for funding.

Roger Crane confirmed that they had cleared a number of plots, but the waiting list varied depending on the location in the city. Councillor Owen said the City Council hoped to increase the number of plots in the future and he assured the Forum members that allotments would still have place in the city.

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TIMESCALE FOR CHANGES TO THE MANAGEMENT OF ALLOTMENTS

A representative from the Cowick Lane Allotment referred to the impact from the loss of the Allotments Manager. Roger Crane appreciated there were some issues for some allotments sites, but community patrollers were assisting where appropriate.

A representative from the Guys and Hylton Allotment referred to the consultation and the options for self management with a peppercorn rent or a partnership management. It was noted that Roger Crane had drafted an agreement, which included a basic level of shared management, whereby the individual association would let the plots and report the detail to the City Council.

The Secretary of St Thomas Allotments Association (STAA) advised they had received a draft agreement, but their Association had not had the opportunity to discuss this yet, but they understood the stipulation that a formally constituted association would be a legal requirement. Roger Crane advised that once this had been discussed, to contact him to start to put the arrangements in place to exchange the contract details.

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DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates of future meetings were discussed.

It was agreed that future Allotment Forum meetings would be held between 7.00pm and 9.00pm (with a Networking session commencing at 6.30pm prior to the meeting)

- 16th July 2015 (*a change to the previously publicised date*)
- 8th October 2015

(The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and closed at 8.45 pm)

Chair

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Terms for Reference for Exeter Allotments Forum

The Forum will consist of:

1. Portfolio Holder for Environment, Health and Wellbeing.
2. Exeter City Councillors representing Wards with allotment sites.
3. One delegate from each site plus a second delegate from sites with more than the equivalent of fifty full size plots.

Council officers and representatives of other agencies, the voluntary and community sector may be invited by the Chair to attend a particular meeting to provide support, advice or information on a specific issue.

Other City Councillors are welcome to attend.

Overall Aim of the Forum

1. To promote the advantages and community benefits of having an allotment.
2. To ensure that allotment holders on City Council sites have a voice.
3. To be a link between Exeter City Council/Councillors and allotment holders and to promote effective liaison with external organisations.
4. To enable effective communications between sites and to promote initiatives and activities that are of mutual benefit.
5. To promote best practice and share experience to the benefit of all allotment holders.

General Terms of reference

1. The Chair will be elected at the first meeting for a period of twelve months from amongst members of the Forum. Notwithstanding this, the position of Chair will be held by a city councillor for the first twelve months.
2. A Deputy Chair will be elected by the forum to act on their behalf in case of absence.
3. It is the responsibility of the members of the individual allotment sites to elect delegates to represent their views at the forum.
4. Where no association exists, the Forum may invite a 'shadow delegate(s)' to join until such time as a site delegate(s) is elected.
5. Meetings will be held quarterly in the first year and the frequency may be reviewed thereafter.
6. The Chair may call extraordinary meetings where necessary.
7. Meetings will be arranged and venues booked by Exeter City Council.
8. Notice of the meeting will be sent to delegates at least four weeks prior to the meeting and delegates wishing items to be included should present them to the City council prior to the circulation of the final agenda.
9. A final agenda will be sent to all members of the forum at least one week prior to the meeting. The agenda will not include "any other business"

10. Members agree to provide apologies if unable to attend.
11. Member unable to attend may send a deputy in their place providing they have notified the City Council in advance.
12. All discussions and decisions made will be recorded in summary format as minutes and will be signed by the Chair after the agreement of the Forum has been obtained that they reflect a true record of the decisions taken.
13. Delegates are responsible for reporting back to the tenants of their site, posting the minutes on the site notice board, association website etc. if available.

Code of Conduct

- All members must adhere to the Terms of Reference.
- All members shall be open and honest in their dealings and show respect for other members.
- Apart from in point 13 above, members of the forum shall not claim to or seem to represent the forum officially in dealings with the press or other organisation. The Chair will serve as the single point of contact for external matters relating to the forum.
- All speakers will address themselves through the Chair.
- Only one person shall speak at a time.
- Each member wishing to speak on an issue will indicate and the Chair will pick each in turn at his/her discretion.
- All members shall be polite and courteous to one another.
- All speakers will keep to the subject under discussion.
- No member shall raise individual issues unless as a means of illustrating a point.
- No personal political references shall be made
- If a member does not abide by the code of conduct, the Chair will warn that if they break the code of conduct they may be asked to leave the meeting.
- The Forum will not tolerate any racist, sexist, or other discriminatory remarks.
- Any member who consistently breaks the terms of reference or by virtue of their misconduct brings the Forum into disrepute, may be expelled by the Chair.