

WARBOYS PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Allotments Committee** held on 15th March 2016 at the Parish Centre, Warboys.

PRESENT

Councillor J A Parker, Chairman

Councillors Mrs M P Bucknell, Mrs J M Cole, Ms L A Gifford, Mrs J E Tavener, G C M Willis and Dr S C Withams.

Ms H Backhouse and Mrs F Dykstra (Allotments Association).

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs M H Harlock and Mrs A R Wyatt.

13/15 MINUTES

Upon being moved by Councillor Dr Withams and seconded by Councillor Ms Gifford, the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 26th October 2015 were signed as a correct record by the Chairman.

14/15 MEMBERS INTERESTS

Ms Backhouse and Mrs Dykstra declared disclosable pecuniary interests as tenants of allotments from the Parish Council, as a result of which it was

RESOLVED

that a dispensation to speak but not vote be granted to Ms Backhouse and Mrs Dykstra on matters appearing on the agenda.

15/15 MATTERS ARISING

The Committee noted that all of the matters arising from the Minutes of its meeting held on 26th October 2015 had either been undertaken or would be dealt with under the following Minute.

16/15 ALLOTMENTS

A report was submitted by the Clerk, together with the notes of the liaison meeting between representatives of the Committee and the Allotments Association held on 19th November 2015 (copies of which had been circulated to all Members). The Committee was informed that a further liaison meeting between the representatives of the Committee

and the Association had been held on 29th February 2016, the outcome of which had been summarised in the report submitted.

The Committee was reminded that sums of £1,500 and £1,200 respectively had been included by the Council in the budget for 2016/17 to improve the roadway at the allotments and install a steel container for storage purposes. The Clerk reported that a quotation had been obtained from a roadways company to undertake the surfacing work at the allotments at a cost of £1,850 plus VAT. Members of the Committee had inspected work undertaken by the company elsewhere in Warboys and had been impressed by the standard of the work undertaken. Although the quotation was higher than the provision made in the budget which had been based on road planings being spread without the use of specialist equipment, the Committee felt that acceptance of the quotation would result in a more professional and longer lasting result.

The Clerk reported that the roadway company had suggested that it would be preferable if the storage container was installed prior to the laying of the roadway to avoid any potential damage by the vehicle delivering the container. Members were informed that quotations would be obtained for the purchase of a container and that a local company, Manchetts Transport, had offered to supply sleepers to be laid underneath the new container.

The Committee was advised that, at the most recent liaison meeting with the Association's representatives, the latter had requested the installation of a security fence along the eastern boundary of the allotment plots. The Association's representatives had reported that there had been a proliferation of thefts at the allotments but had been unable to provide information about the frequency or type of incidents involved. The Committee's representatives at the meeting had acknowledged the problem but pointed out that access to the allotments would still be available through the gate and from the A141. They had also drawn attention to the fact that, irrespective of height, an intruder could climb a fence and that the length of the boundary meant that the fencing would be costly with no guarantee that it would have the effect desired by the Association.

Under the circumstances, the Association had undertaken to ask tenants to keep a log of thefts and report any incidents to the Police. It had been agreed that no action would be taken at the present time but that the Association could ask again if they felt that there was sufficient evidence of an ongoing problem and this could be considered for inclusion in the budget for 2017/18.

The Committee endorsed the action taken at the liaison meeting and also pointed out that if a fence were to be erected on the eastern boundary of the current plots, it might have to be moved in the future in the event of further demand requiring additional land being required for allotments.

Members also noted that a request had been made by the Association's representatives at the liaison meeting for the keeping of chickens on an allotment plot and a shed so they could be secured overnight. They had drawn attention to a section in the Allotments Act 1950 which stated that, notwithstanding any provision to the contrary in any tenancy agreement, it was lawful for the occupier of any land to keep hens or rabbits and erect such buildings or structures on the land as reasonably necessary for that purpose. However the hens or rabbits could not be kept for commercial purposes nor if they were prejudicial to health or a nuisance.

The Clerk pointed out that the Council's current tenancy agreement stated that tenants should not erect any building on a plot without the prior written consent of the Council and should not keep animals including bees and chickens without the prior written consent of the Council. The Council had been opposed to the keeping of livestock at the allotments in the past on the basis that the food used to feed chickens etc. would attract rats and could lead to complaints from other tenants.

In terms of sheds, the Clerk suggested that these could be difficult to regulate. Tenants erecting their own sheds from miscellaneous materials could result in an unsightly appearance whereas if tenants were restricted to new sheds, this could still create a problem involving their removal when a tenancy ended. In the event of a tenant not removing a shed, this would have to be dealt with by the Council and if tenants sold sheds to incoming tenants, there was no guarantee that the new tenant would want to buy it. As delays could occur in re-letting a plot if there were no names on the waiting list, further problems would arise in the sale of sheds to new tenants.

As these points had been made to the Association's representatives at the liaison meeting, the latter had agreed to contact tenants before the Committee meeting to obtain the views of other plot holders on the subject. Ms Backhouse reported that 5 out of the 21 tenants who had responded had been opposed to the idea because of the potential problem of rats, foxes and the possible escape of the hens which could damage their crops.

Councillors Mrs Cole and Dr Withams mentioned that they both kept hens in their gardens and raised concerns about the welfare of hens kept at the allotments which would have to be let out each morning and secured in a roost each evening. They pointed out that to have adequate exercise, the hens would require a large run and that the ground could become bare and muddy if the run was too small for the number of hens kept.

Members were reluctant to agree to the proposal and under the circumstances, Ms Backhouse agreed to the deferral of the matter until the next meeting. In the interim, the Clerk was requested to obtain the views of tenants and to ascertain the situation in other parishes.

The Committee was informed that a skip load of soil improver had been ordered and would be delivered at the allotments on 24th March which would enable the tenants to help themselves over the Easter weekend.

At the liaison meeting, the Association's representatives had also mentioned that the taps at the allotments tended to leak when hosepipes were being used. It was reported that, under the circumstances, the Handymen had fitted replacement taps during the past week.

Ms Backhouse reported that plot holders had met subsequent to the liaison meeting and had a list of issues that they wished to raise with the Committee. However the Chairman reminded the Association's representatives of the arrangements agreed with them at the previous meeting whereby such matters should be raised at the liaison meeting so that the issues could be investigated and then discussed by the Committee. Ms Backhouse did display a notice board that one of the tenants had constructed for use at the allotments to which the Committee had no objection.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the quotation in the sum of £1,850 from D Watt Roadways Ltd. be accepted for improvements to the roadway at the allotments;
- (b) that the Clerk be requested to obtain quotations for the supply of a storage container for use by the tenants;
- (c) that no further action be taken with regard to the request for the erection of a security fence at the present time;
- (d) that consideration of the request for the keeping of hens and a shed in which they would be kept be deferred to the next meeting and in the interim, the Clerk be requested to obtain the views of tenants and ascertain the position in other parishes;
- (e) that no objection be made to the installation of the notice board displayed at the meeting at the allotments; and
- (f) that the Association's representatives be reminded of the need to raise matters at the liaison meeting with the Committee's representatives prior to the meeting of the Committee in future.

There being no further business, the meeting was declared closed.

Chairman.