



To: Councillors Bird, Burrows, Catlin, Clarke, Lamb, Makepeace, Maples and Sains

A meeting of the Allotments Working Party in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Lewes, on 27 January, at 10am which you are summoned to attend.

Laura Chrysostomou
Town Clerk
12 January 2023

AGENDA

1 Filming of Council Meetings

During this meeting, the public are allowed to film the committee and officers only from the front of the public gallery, providing it does not disrupt the meeting. Any items in the exempt part of an agenda cannot be filmed. If another member of the public objects to being recorded, the person(s) filming must stop doing so until that member of the public has finished speaking. Please switch mobile devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

2 Apologies for absence

3 Members' declarations of interest

To notes any declarations of personal or prejudicial interests in items to be considered at this meeting.

4 Question Time

Members of the public are welcome to attend this meeting of the allotments working party. Questions regarding items on the agenda may be heard at the start of the meeting with the Chair's consent. A period of 15 minutes is allocated for this purpose. Questions or requests to address the working party must be submitted to the Town Clerk by noon the day before the meeting.

5 Minutes

To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2022 (attached pages 3 to 5)

6 Chairs announcements and urgent items

To receive any announcements from the Chair of the working party

7 Officers' reports

5.1 Allotment show

(Report AWP001/2022 attached pages 6 to 7)

- 5.2 Sheds – Highdown Road
(Report AWP002/2022 attached pages 8 to 9)
- 5.3 Water supply at Church Lane
(Report AWP003/2022 attached page 10)
- 5.4 Plot Management
(Report AWP004/2022 attached pages 11 to 12)

How to contact us

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**LEWES
TOWN
COUNCIL**

Minutes of a Meeting of the **Allotments Working Party** held in the **Yarrow Room, Town Hall, Lewes** on **Thursday 30 June 2022** at **11.00am**

Present: Cllrs M Bird, R Burrows, J Lamb, I Makepeace, Dr W Maples and S Sains

In attendance: Town Clerk, Town Ranger and Customer Services Officer

1. Election of Chair:

Cllr Burrows was elected Chairman of the Committee for the 2022 to 2023 municipal year.

2. Apologies: were received from Councillors Catlin and Clarke who were unwell.

3. Member's Declarations of Interest: Cllr Dr Maples declared an interest in that she is a Council allotment tenant.

4. Minutes: The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 February 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

5. Allotment Show:

5.1 The Town Clerk (TC) informed the meeting of feedback received following Allotment Working Parties (AWP) held in January and February this year and the Allotment Symposium which was also held in February. It had been suggested at the symposium that the Allotment Show rules be reviewed as they were archaic. As the show was only two months away TC suggested that minor changes be trialled this year which could be reviewed next year following feedback from the show.

5.2 The Customer Services Officer (CSO) apprised the committee of the origin of the Allotment Show. It was first held in 2006, hosted by the then Mayor, Councillor Milner and was a Mayoral event. The current schedule had been created by the Mayor's Secretary and had changed slightly over the years. The show had become a Council event in 2010 and had grown significantly.

5.3 The Ranger reported that tenants had requested the show was held earlier in September when the produce from the allotments was at its best. The Ranger went on to explain that the show had always been held on the third Sunday in September because of conflicting dates. Due to a cancellation, The Allotment show can now be held on the first Sunday in September.

5.4 The current format of the show is staging from 9 to 11am, judging from 11am to 2pm and a reception from 2 to 4pm. With the availability of both large rooms, it was suggested that between 11am and 12.30pm an "Allotment Question Time" be hosted where new or novice tenants could ask questions and get advice from more experienced allotment tenants with a Councillor from the Allotment Working Party (AWP) in the Chair. A seed swap stall could be in place as well as representatives from Wildflower Lewes.

5.5 A question was raised regarding Allotment Site Representatives and that they could be involved with the question time. However, to date, only two applications had been received for the role, but this would be promoted again when the allotment show information was sent to tenants.

5.6 Another idea was to have a glut food swap, a glut recipe book and to have a caterer working with allotment tenants on glut food ideas to provide food at the show. Officers would explore this idea but given the imminent date of the show this may have to be

trialled next year.

- 5.7** The meeting then discussed feedback from tenants and councillors about the principal of the allotment show and the rules being archaic. It was noted that the show should not be about having perfectly formed fruit and vegetables when the idea of an allotment was to grow food for eating and that the Town Council's aim is to encourage eco-friendly practices on Council-owned Allotments.
- 5.8** The show rules were then considered. The meeting noted that currently the criterion for judgement is not provided to allotment tenants. Officers would ask the judges if this was available electronically. It was agreed that officers would explore obtaining a reference copy of the RHS Horticultural Show Handbook to be kept at the Town Hall. Councillor Burrows offered to draw up a summarising document from this.
- 5.9** The meeting then discussed the schedule of classes, and the following amendments and additions were made:

Amended classes

- Class 6 – change four to three carrots with approval from external judge that this can be done within RHS judging rules.
- Class 8 – change four to three parsnips with approval from external judge that this can be done within RHS judging rules.
- Class 12 – omit “coloured” so the class will become ‘four potatoes.’
- Class 16 - the word “box or similar container” be added so the class will become ‘a trug or box or similar container of mixed vegetables, at least four types.’
- Class 17 – the word “box or similar container” be added so the class will become ‘a trug or box or similar container of mixed fruit (which may include nuts) at least four types.’

Additional classes

- Organic trug or box or similar container of vegetables (two items to be judged by taste)
- Organic trug or box or similar container of fruit (two items to be judged by taste)
- Organic Heritage variety trug or box or similar container (vegetables and/or fruit) (two to be judged by taste)
- Best tasting organic tomato
- Best tasting organic runner bean
- Best tasting organic carrot
- A vase of culinary herbs, three varieties
- Novices – a point of pride class – first time entrants to the show

All the above additional classes will be judged by members of the Allotment Working Party together with all the novelty classes on the existing schedule.

- One squash
- Any fruit not in schedule
- Three sweet peppers (any colour)
- Six chilli peppers

- 5.10** The Ranger then added that as part of this year's show it was proposed to invite tenants to take part in the National Butterfly Count which is held from 16 July to 8 August. Tenants could be directed to their website to download a chart and record for a fifteen-minute period the number of butterflies on their plot. Their count is then submitted to the Butterfly Trust if they wish to take part in the national event, and to the Council where a prize would be presented at the allotment show for the highest count.

- 5.11** At previous allotment shows the Ranger has judged the best kept plot. This year tenants could be sent a ballot paper asking them to vote for first and second best kept plot at their own allotment site. The Ranger would visit and take photos of the best plots at each site

and display these at the allotment show where the prize would be awarded.

5.12 The meeting then discussed how many classes each tenant could enter and whether there should be a set limit for fairness and to try to encourage more entrants to the show. It was agreed that five classes would be free to enter with a charge for each class after that. Charges for other shows in the town be investigated by officers when setting a charge.

6. It was **resolved** that:

- 1) Delegated authority be given to the Town Clerk to finalise the format of this year's allotment show to include hosting the Allotment Question Time and Community Stalls.
- 2) The Common Cause Glut swap be promoted to allotment tenants.
- 3) One member of the Allotment Working Party sits on the Allotment Question Time panel.
- 4) Officers contact the external judges to request an electronic version of the judging criteria.
- 5) Officers explore obtaining a reference copy of the RHS Horticultural Show Handbook for reference at the Town Hall.
- 6) The schedule of classes be amended as set out at 5.9 above.
- 7) A butterfly count award be introduced to coincide with the national count.
- 8) Ballot papers be sent to tenants in order for them to vote for the first and second best kept plots at their own allotment site.
- 9) Delegated authority be given to the Town Clerk to investigate entry fee and class charges from other gardening shows held in Lewes.
- 10) Numbers attending the Allotment Question Time in 2022 be monitored with a view to having an outside caterer to provide lunches at the 2023 show enabling the town hall to remain open all day to allotment tenants

The meeting ended at 12.33pm

Signed.....

Date.....

Lewes Town Council

Non- Confidential

Working Party: Allotments Working Party

Date: 27 January 2023

Report Number: AWP001

Report by: Town Clerk

Subject: Allotment show

1. Summary

- 1.1 The working party is asked to consider the report which includes feedback following the revised allotment show held on 4 September 2022 and what format the event should take next year.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Working Party is recommended to:
1. Consider the report and discuss the potential format for the allotment show in 2023.
 2. Agree the date for the next allotment show.
 3. Otherwise note the report.

3. Background

- 3.1 The show attracted entries from 18 plot holders who submitted a total of 130 pieces of produce to show. This figure was slightly disappointing and down on previous years. Plot holders generally claim it has been a difficult year with exceptional weather extremes and trouble with pests.
- 3.2 This year an entry fee was introduced of 50 pence per entry after the first five entries. There were no comments from entrants on the entry fee.
- 3.3 We trialled an ask an expert forum in the break between set up and show time which was hosted by the Allotment Working Party chair Councillor Burrows and a panel of experts from the Haredean and Highdown allotment sites. The forum attracted 18 keen allotment tenants who enjoyed a lively and informative debate and made good use of the expertise of our knowledgeable panel of four experts. Questions included how best to grow beetroots, sprouts, when to prune fruit trees and what fruit and vegetables can be grown that need minimal watering.
- 3.4 If the ask an expert panel is held next year then timings will need to be considered.
- 3.5 The additional eight classes added this year of an organic nature were not particularly well supported, two of those with no entries at all. One tenant

commented that with the new agreement it's all organic so the organic classes could be dropped. Similarly, children's classes only had one entrant.

- 3.6 There was a suggestion that cucumber and rhubarb could be added as categories. Wonkiest vegetable was also suggested a category.
- 3.7 It was suggested that 'top tips' and criteria for entries be shared with the publicity.
- 3.8 The 'best kept plot' was judged by the plot holders, rather than the town ranger, for the first time, but again this had a very poor response with only a handful of votes cast across all sites.
- 3.9 There was feedback that marketing of the allotment show could be improved ahead of the show, with information on the Town Council's website. There was also the suggestion of an A Board outside on the day.
- 3.10 It was suggested that a board with the prize winners be displayed in the assembly room.
- 3.11 Total income from donations to the Mayors charity tins on the café tables and from entries was £48.
- 3.12 Should this year's show have a glut food swap and have a caterer working with allotment tenants on glut food ideas to provide food at the show.

Lewes Town Council

Non- Confidential

Working Party: Allotments Working Party

Date: 27 January 2023

Report Number: AWP002

Report by: Town Clerk

Subject: Provision of sheds at the Highdown Road allotment site

1. Summary

- 1.1 The working party is asked to consider permitting the provision of sheds at the Highdown Road allotment site. Sheds and structures are permitted at other town council allotment sites, although consent for any new structure is required from the Council before being installed.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To consider and decide whether to permit the provision of sheds at the Highdown Road allotment site.

3. Background

- 3.1 This document should be considered in conjunction with the notes in the Allotment Service Tenancy agreement, section 12, Structures.
- 3.2 Lewes Town Council are responsible for 6 allotment sites across the town.
- 3.3 Historically, the Highdown Road site was within a designated AONB which is the reason no structures were permitted. That designation has been superseded by the National Park and the restriction no longer applies.
- 4.4 The Council has been approached by several plot holders over the years asking for structures to be permitted.
- 4.5 It is worth noting that the site is overlooked by residents living on Highdown Road.
- 4.6 It is hoped that if sheds are permitted the site will be tidier because people would have somewhere to safely store their tools and equipment. The working party could consider additional rules relating to the size of structures on this particular site and possibly a uniform style or colour.
- 4.7 Security needs to be considered and if structures are permitted then tenants would need reminding that the Council does not accept any responsibility for theft from plots. It is an open access site so the risks are hard to quantify.

4.8 It should be noted that the Lewes Organic Allotment Project (LOAP) have had a structure on their plot at the site for many years which was permitted as an exception due to the needs of their users.

Lewes Town Council

Non- Confidential

Working Party: Allotments Working Party

Date: 27 January 2023

Report Number: AWP003

Report by: Town Clerk

Subject: Church Lane allotment water supply

1. Summary

- 1.1 The Working Party is asked to consider the provision of a water supply at the Church Lane allotment site.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To consider and agree whether to provide a water supply at the Church Lane allotment site.

3. Background

- 3.1 Lewes Town Council have responsibility for managing six allotment sites across the town.
- 3.2 At five sites, tenants have free access to an unlimited supply of fresh water via taps or troughs.
- 3.3 The Town Ranger has been approached by a plot holder requesting the council consider the provision of a water supply at the site.
- 3.4 Church Lane has never had a water supply, presumably because of its proximity to local houses and that most plot holders were residents in the nearby dwellings and therefore could supply their needs from their own personal garden tap and a hosepipe over the wall.
- 3.5 There is no difference in the rent charged to these plot holders and there are six plots on the site.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 Southern Water, the company with the permitted resources to provide this service can carry out the work at a cost of £682.93 plus VAT. A water trough would need to be attached to the new supply with an additional cost of approximately £300 plot VAT.
- 4.2 The new supply would be on a water meter as at all other sites and the council would be charged accordingly for ongoing water usage.

Lewes Town Council

Non- Confidential

Working Party: Allotments Working Party

Date: 27 January 2023

Report Number: AWP004

Report by: Town Clerk

Subject: Allotment Plot Management

1. Summary

- 1.1 The Working Party is asked to consider plot management at the six council managed allotment sites in the town.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To consider the Council's process to manage allotment plots and whether improvements can be made to ensure plots are utilised to maximum effect.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Chair of the Working Party (Councillor Burrows) and the Town Ranger conducted a tour of plots across all sites during the summer with a view to improving the way we manage the sites in accordance with the tenancy agreement.
- 3.2 The main issue that is apparent across all sites is the area of land that could be considered to be uncultivated within plot boundaries. Given that we have long waiting lists for most sites (typically around three – five years) it would be good to try and adopt a management strategy that can maximise usage.
- 3.3 However, consideration to the cost and practicalities of achieving this makes it a difficult and sensitive issue to improve upon.
- 3.4 Currently the tenancy agreement states at 6.2, that new tenants must have a minimum of 50% of their plot cultivated within two years and 75% thereafter during the main growing season. The working party is advised to consider whether the two year period to achieve 50% is appropriate. It may also be useful if a clear definition of what is meant by cultivation is given in the agreement, in particular relating to 'wildflower areas' which are common but not acceptable.
- 3.5 The Council does encourage people to 'give up' any land they aren't actively using every time a tidy up letter is sent and also at tenancy renewal time. However, take up of that offer is very low, and often if people do offer to reduce their plot they only want to give up a piece of land that has difficult

conditions (eg, under trees or full of rubble or rubbish) or inappropriate access.

- 3.6 The working party may want to consider a review of the whole inspection, notification and eviction process but it really isn't easy given that in 2022 only six evictions were sent, of which three went to appeal and two were subsequently withdrawn. Of all the notification notices that are sent out, a large majority of responses relate to illness, injury or spending time assisting an elderly relative. While the Council does not wish to seem unsympathetic we might want to consider if these are valid reasons to overlook the normal inspection and notification routine.
- 3.7 All these issues are commonly raised at the annual Allotment Manager's forum which the Allotment Services Officer and Town Ranger attend and with the exception of newly constructed sites managed closely with a rigorous set of rules in place from the start, there are no easy solutions.