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Town Clerk – Laura Chrysostomou

Notes of the Meeting of the Allotments Working Group meeting held in The Fleming Room, The Manor House, Church Street, Littlehampton on Thursday 30 May 2024 at 6.30pm

Working Group:

Councillor O'Neill - Chair

Councillor Tilbrook

Councillor Wiltshire

Co-Opted Members:

Mrs Oliver, Chair, Littlehampton Allotment and Leisure Gardens Association, (LALGA)

Mr Oliver

Ms King

Mr Simmons

In attendance:

Juliet Harris, Assistant Town Clerk

Felix Gillett, Community Resources Officer

2024 to 2025

1. Evacuation Procedures

The evacuation procedures were noted.

2. Filming of Council Meetings, Use of Social Media, and Mobile Phones

The procedures were noted.

3. Apologies

There were apologies from Mr Farquhar, Mr Lovegrove and Mrs Burke.

4. Declarations Of Interest

Councillors O'Neill and Wiltshire declared personal interests across the agenda as Members of Arun District Council. Councillor Tilbrook declared a personal interest across the agenda as his daughter was an allotment holder.

5. Notes of the Last Meeting

The Notes of the meeting held on 18 January 2024, were confirmed as a true record, and signed by the Chair.

6. Public Representation from Community Resources Committee Meeting

- 6.1. The Group had before it details of the representation that had been made to the Community Resources Committee in February, previously circulated. The representation covered three

principal areas, namely representation on the Working Group, site management and the Town Council's Allotment Strategy. There was a wide-ranging discussion of these points beginning with representation of allotment holders on the Working Group.

6.2. Allotment Holder Representation

The Assistant Town Clerk explained that over the years the Town Council had relied upon allotment holders coming forward to fulfil roles both as co-opted members of the Group and as site representatives as an ongoing process. It was acknowledged that both roles came with responsibilities and the Town Council did as much as it could to support those who took on these roles. Ideally there would be one representative from each site and that whilst LALGA had a good level of membership across all the sites, membership of LALGA was not a requirement. The Working Group Chair emphasised the importance of the Group and said that the Town Council welcomed wider engagement with allotment holders. The Group went on to discuss communications and it was agreed that LALGA would publicise site representative vacancies alongside the benefits of LALGA membership.

- 6.3. It was agreed that the Town Council's Site Representatives Role description be shared with LALGA to facilitate this. In terms of communication, the notes of these meetings were always published with the Community Resources Committee agendas, and it was accepted that this could be improved. It was agreed that the Council would look to create a space on the Allotments section of the Town Council's website so that they were easier to find and look at ways to make the newsletter and other information available through the website and using social media. This could include translations to help those for whom English was not their first language. It was also noted that the District Council may have some resources that could help with this, and that Google had a translation function which could be useful. These would be investigated alongside better noticeboards at the sites.

6.4. Site Management

It was understood that there was some frustration among allotment holders about how the sites were managed. This was particularly in reference to the smaller sites where there was a perception that they did not get the attention that the larger sites did and that they were underrepresented. This had led to it being suggested that the smaller sites explore self-management. The Assistant Town Clerk explained that the Town Council had a duty to make provision for allotments where there was a demand for the service. How that was achieved was not prescribed and she acknowledged that parish councils had adopted a wide variety of management arrangements to meet this obligation. Several examples of how this might be achieved were discussed and this highlighted the variations in the sites particularly in terms of maintenance requirements.

- 6.5. It was noted that should any of the sites wish to pursue an option of self-management, the first step would be to present a proposal to the Working Group with a view to making a recommendation to the Community Resources Committee. The Assistant Town Clerk explained the Town Council had a clear role as landowner and was the custodian of the sites on behalf of local council taxpayers. Therefore, any proposals must include clear information regarding the rationale for the request, governance, and accountability. Councillors were also encouraged to visit the allotments to gain a better understanding of site-specific issues.

7. Allotment Strategy and Action Plan

- 7.1. The Group proceeded to consider the Allotment Strategy Action Plan, previously circulated. The representation sought the sharing of more information by the Town Council in relation to budgeting and prioritising maintenance work. This was against the backdrop of the increased fees which had prompted questions among allotment holders. The Assistant Town Clerk

emphasised that the Strategy was the Town Council's statement setting out its aspirations and the methodology for management of the sites. Acknowledging that the detailed budget information in the Strategy needed to be updated, she confirmed that expenditure would be reported to the Working Group going forward.

- 7.2. In terms of the Action Plan itself, whilst steps had been taken and works were planned, this was not evident, and it was acknowledged that this needed to be updated to better reflect the current priorities for maintenance which had been highlighted by allotment holders. The Co-opted Members emphasised their willingness to help with this review and it was agreed that this would be the focus of the August Working Group meeting. Ahead of this and to provide context for the review, the Community Resources Officer (CRO) would share a working draft of the Allotment Strategy Action Plan highlighting information, current plans for the sites and aspirations as a starting point.

8. Allotments Handbook

The CRO reported that the handbook was almost complete and would be published soon. This prompted a brief conversation about the Tenancy Agreement which the Co-opted Members favoured reviewing soon. This was noted.

9. Reports of Allotment Sites

It was noted that because of unexpected staff shortages, maintenance and inspections had fallen behind. Whilst site reps had been updated regarding waiting lists and maintenance issues, it was acknowledged that this had impacted the time it took for plots to change hands. The CRO reported that he was working closely with the Amenity Team to manage the backlog and was keeping site reps updated regarding terminations and new starters.

9.1. Fort Road

There was nothing to report.

9.2. Howard Road

There was nothing to report.

9.3. Kingley Gate

There was nothing to report.

9.4. Mill Lane

There was nothing to report.

9.5. Trinidad

The Site Representative reported that allotment holders were very frustrated at the ongoing rabbit problem at the site. Stating that the rabbit population needed to be controlled he asked that this be prioritised as the amount of produce that allotment holders were losing had reached unacceptable levels. This was discussed further, and it was noted that individual allotment holders had tried many ways of protecting their crops with limited success. It was also noted that the inability to access the vacant site on the neighbouring land on the northern boundary severely limited the ability of the Town Council to deploy pest control. There was however a strong view among the Co-opted Members that this should be

prioritised and the CRO undertook to investigate options, including enhanced fencing using the reserve, for consideration alongside the Strategy and Action Plan review in August.

9.6. Worthing Road

The Site Representative was concerned about the deterioration in the main thoroughfare through the site. Stating that the ruts and potholes urgently needed repair he suggested the repairs needed to be more robust and prioritised. This was noted for investigation. It was also reported that LALGA may wish to extend the Trading Hut. In response the Assistant Town Clerk reminded the Group that expansion would have to be balanced with the primary objective of the use of the land which was for cultivation and that any proposal would need to demonstrate a clear need and benefits.

Potential Bee Project

The Working Group heard from two allotment holders who outlined an idea to introduce beehives at the site. It was noted that whilst the introduction of bees had benefits in terms of pollination and biodiversity for cultivation, the introduction of bee hives would have to be carefully planned. The idea of planting an orchard on the vacant land on the east of the site, that had become available following the completion of the link road, was also thought to be an ideal position should a scheme come forward. The Assistant Town Clerk confirmed that detailed plans would be required so that this could be carefully considered.

10. North Littlehampton

There was nothing further to report.

11. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held on Thursday 22 August 2024.

The meeting closed at 8.35pm.

Chair