

## **ASHFORD ALLOTMENT COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> June 2024 TESCO COMMUNITY ROOM. CROOKSFOOT**

Present: Brenda Raggett – Chairman and Westrees, Jo Perkin - Bulk Buying Manager, Lisa Harrison - Membership Secretary, Heather Ahern - Publicity and Musgrove Farm,

Clare Pitt - A.B.C., Annette Woodhouse – William Road

Also present: David Woodhouse and Christine Harrison.

**1. Apologies** Carol Ridings – Secretary, Jonathon Goodwin – Website Manager, Mark Cole – Henwood, Jill Fuggle – Treasurer and Repton Manor, Gwen Protheroe - Christchurch/Jemmett

### **2. Chairmans Opening Remarks**

Welcome Claire Pitts from ABC.

Brenda would like to propose Christine Harrison as Vice Chair, nominated by Lisa, seconded by Heather.

### **3. Report from the Allotments Officer**

Claire Pitts joined ABC in December 2023 and deals with Waste, Cemeteries and Allotments.

The Cemeteries and Allotments Officer is Kevin Smith. The decision was taken prior to Claire joining to make this position office based. Jo asked how Kevin will keep an eye on the allotments. Claire said that allotments have not been a priority because of the problems with the new waste contract. However, now those issues have calmed down all allotments were inspected last week by another member of the team – Carol – and non-cultivation letters have been sent out. Brenda asked why site reps did not get told the inspections were being carried out. Claire was unaware that this is usual procedure. Claire is aware that allotments have stalled due to ABC vacancies, but is confident that once Kevin has settled into the role things will improve going forward.

Brenda also mentioned that some plots have been tidied due to the recent email sent, but are never usually worked. Plots will be reinspected in 4 weeks. Vacant plots will be offered next week. Brenda asked if reps could be told about any new tenants. Annette would like to reassure the tenants on her site that plots will be let.

Systems are in the process of being digitalised and there is now an allotments database. Christine mentioned that when she worked at ABC as an allotments inspector there was a database. Claire said this system was out of date and allotments are now on a council wide system. Renewals will be a year from when plots taken, and will no longer all be done in September. Heather asked if there will be other ways to pay rather than online, as some people are not good with IT. This can be done over the telephone. Claire will be contacting anyone without a registered email address to try and obtain one.

Christine asked if tenants can be made aware that they are members of Ashford Allotment Society. Claire can send an email introducing the Allotment Society.

Heather mentioned that Kevin does not reply to emails, which Claire will take up with him.

Claire is happy to be guided by the committee, she has had no handover and will now get on with letting plots. Any too overgrown can be cut prior to letting. Her aim going forward is to get vacant plots filled and uncultivated plots taken back due to the huge waiting list. Heather asked if photos of uncultivated plots can be sent. Claire is happy for emails to be sent.

Annette asked how many plots someone can have, Claire will look into this.

Lisa asked if there could be a co-worker/buddy system, when people on the waiting list could opt to become a co-worker to someone struggling with their plot. Claire said they could maybe look into trialling this at one site.

Annette asked if people on the waiting list can see what position they are. This should be possible on the new system. Brenda mentioned that Carol had told her of a friend who was 20<sup>th</sup> on the list last year, and currently that position has not changed. Claire said that this is because they have not let any plots. Going forward people should be able to access any necessary information on the My Ashford App.

ABC do not have lots of money in the budget for allotments, but can look at how we proceed next year. Christine said there is never enough money for allotments. Claire feels that ABC is trying to move to a healthy society, and allotments are a part of that. Christine pointed out that allotments need to be brought into the 21<sup>st</sup> century as they have such a wide range of benefits.

Heather mentioned that the previous allotments officer, David Johnson, was looking into a rainwater harvesting system for sites. Claire thought this would be a great idea, but again would be dependent on budgets.

Annette asked if the council still send the booklet regarding allotment rules when plots are let. Claire said it will be a PDF if they do. Annette asked if it would be helpful for someone from the Society to go through the paperwork. Claire said she would rather get the plots let first.

#### **4. Minutes of the last meeting**

Agreed.

#### **5. Bulk Buying Managers Report**

Nothing to report. Jo was in hospital last time the trading store was open, Brenda and Lisa opened the store on that occasion. Is there anything Jo should look at ordering in? Lisa – Strulch, Heather – wide environmesh, Annette – potato bags or pots. Jo said the problem with the current supplier is that there is no list of products or prices. Lisa asked if we could look into other suppliers. Heather would like seed

and potato orders to return. Lisa mentioned autumn onions, shallots and garlic would be good to stock. Jo will look into all suggestions.

## 6. Treasurers Report

Jill is struggling to get the accounts fully in order. It was a while before she was able to have access to the floats for various reasons.

Float 1 – We did not know the whereabouts of the key, but once found she checked the float and found it to be £40 less than shown in previous figures.

Float 2 – This was used several times before Jill was able to check it. No-ones fault. Jill is in the process of starting an accounts ledger to move forward but need a starting point. The committee agrees that Jill can start the ledger from May 24.

The changing of signatories is still ongoing but hopefully we can sort this soon. Brian has now given Brenda all the necessary forms for this.

### As of 31/5/24

#### Account 1

Bank	£2911.42
Float (£40 missing)	<u>£ 162.89</u>
Total	<u>£3074.31</u>

#### Account 2

Bank (as at 26/4)	£5022.70
Card payments	£ 407.55
Cash deposit	£ 256.50
Float (as at 9/6)	<u>£ 179.29</u>
Total	<u>£5866.04</u>

Less small transaction charge for card machine – not yet known

## 7. Website Managers Report

Jonathan has sent a document outlining his ideas for digital membership cards for next year onwards. Not everyone had had chance to look at this as yet. Heather has raised the fact that you can get 10% off at Ripley's garden centre on production of a valid membership card. Both Annette and Jo felt that the website is still out of date.

## 8. Publicity Managers Report

There are issues with the noticeboards falling to pieces. Would like to publicise the Ripley's 10% discount. Lisa will include in emails.

## 9. Membership Secretary's Report

The Trading Store currently has 50 members.

Lisa ran a poll on Facebook and sent an email to all on the mailing list asking their opinions regarding falling membership. The results are as follows:

Do Not Wish to Pay a Membership Fee	9 votes
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Benefits and Value Unclear	9 votes
Unwelcoming	7 votes
Expensive	5 votes
Location Inconvenient	5 votes
Stock and Prices Unknown	3 votes
Would Like Delivery	3 votes
Unaware of the Trading Store	3 votes
Opening Hours Inconvenient	2 votes

As such, the Trading Store Membership Fee needs to be discussed at the next meeting. Brenda and Lisa tidied and rearranged the store to make it more welcoming. Brenda has purchased some lights to brighten it. Price and stock lists have been regularly emailed and added to Facebook.

## **10. Site Rep Reports**

### **Westrees**

Brenda mentioned the trees at Westrees need cutting, which Claire says will be done after nesting season. Padlocks at Westrees also need changing, which Kevin should be in the process of doing. One of the plot holders is convinced that the land will be sold for housing. Claire said that part of the planning conditions of allotment sites is that they can only be sold for use as allotments, not housing. For instance, there is currently an empty allotment site in Vicarage Lane that they are looking at turning into a community garden, as it cannot be used for anything else.

### **Musgrove**

Heather has an issue at Musgrove Farm with some plot holders using hosepipes, and wondered if ABC could produce signs in other languages. There is also an issue with foxes. Claire said that maybe when the plots are all being worked, and sheds being used, the problem may resolve itself. Many plot holders were angry with the email recently sent from ABC regarding unworked plots and fly tipping. They felt it was very accusatory.

### **William Road**

The fly tipping issue seems to have stopped. Annette and David have produced their own noticeboard, signs and put up a post box so tenants can contact them. Annette posted on Facebook to ask if anyone could deliver wood chippings to site. A tree surgeon has done so, and is happy to continue. Regarding the car parking issue, Annette contacted Cllr Charles Studdards who came to the site. As a result, Jame Laidlaw from ABC has arranged for some type 1 MOT subbase material to be delivered for this purpose.

### **AOB**

Date for next meeting to be arranged.

