

## ASHFORD ALLOTMENT SOCIETY COMMITTEE

### Minutes of the Allotment Society Committee Meeting 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2015, Committee Room 1, Civic Centre

#### 1. Chairperson's Comments

*'Clearly the review document has dominated today's meeting; and rightly so, with further ongoing discussion and debate between Ashford Borough Council, the Committee and members of our Society. However, I must also comment that we have other important events on which to focus.*

*The Plot Judging will be taking place in 3 weeks' time, using the agreed formula as last year, but with simplified categories. Our Annual Summer Show will be on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> July at Kennington Junior School and the Hospice Fête is on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> August. Please think about how you can best support each event.*

*Our trip to Sissinghurst did not raise sufficient interest for a group 'behind the scenes' visit, so those interested spent an enjoyable day walking round the spectacular gardens in full spring bloom.*

*I will be arranging a further trip for September, to a local Garden Centre, as I do not feel we would get enough interest at this stage for a trip further afield involving a coach.*

*Whatever the weather, I trust all plot holders are able to continue to enjoy their allotments and I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at our future events'.*

#### 2. Trading Store Bulk Buying Manager's Report

Geoff Button reported that sales to the end of May 2015 totalled £4,513.95. The bank balance for No.2 Account totals £2,739.26, but there is a pending query regarding the possibility that £800 has been paid into Account No.1. Geoff will be resolving this as soon as bank statements become available for both accounts.

#### 3. Treasurer's Report

Brian Stamp reported that following difficulties with Santander in transferring signatories, a new bank account is in the process of being created with Lloyds. Cheque book and paying-in book are promised imminently. No bank statements are available from Santander and none yet available from Lloyds.

#### 4. Show Secretary's Report

The Chairperson reported that much activity is going on in the background to make this year's forthcoming Annual Show to be held at Kennington Junior School on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> July a success. A Judge has been appointed and other activities such as teas and cake baking are being planned. Further information will be forthcoming. Please check the notice boards.

## 5. **Publicity Manager's Report**

Gilda Puckett submitted the following report ...

- I was away when the survey came out. I've done nothing since I got back but respond to angry, upset and tearful tenants. The council's handling of the review has caused deep and widespread distress, and I have found it very painful responding to the many tenants who genuinely believe they will be forced to give up their plots due to increased rents. I have tried to reassure them but they believe the survey.
- I told the council when I'd be away. No-one from the council has at any point asked me to put anything on the website to let people know about or explain the survey; I only found out about it as a plot holder.
- I've been leaned on not tell people about this meeting. Plot holders have in the past been urged to attend these committee meetings, - and to not tell tenants about the meeting in the present circumstances would be wrong.
- Many members have expected and urged me to contact the press. I would like to confirm that I have not done so, at the request of Penny Winston. When I was approached by the paper, I told them that I was unable to give them a statement as we did not yet know the council's proposals, nor had I had a chance to speak to the committee. I confirmed that many people were very upset, and that the survey had not been distributed to all tenants as promised, as these were both facts. I referred the journalist to Penny and copied her into my email. People have since told me that they went to the paper in order to make sure older plot holders with no internet knew what was going on. Even now many plot holders out there still don't know.
- To my disquiet I have been criticized for not stopping people from going to the press. It is not part of the role of the publicity manager to tell private individuals that they cannot speak to the local paper. I've been criticized for being too much on the side of the plot holders, and have been under pressure to do things I am deeply uneasy about; things which seem to be motivated only by fear of upsetting the council.
- I was very disappointed in the statement from the chair. There is only one logical way the survey could be read, and I haven't come across anyone who felt it could be interpreted any other way. Though I asked them to and offered the use of the website, no clarification was put out by the council. The survey has not been properly distributed and promises have been broken. If the plot holders are angry and vocal, this is because their concerns have been dismissed, and they've been deprived of a proper voice. The committee should be supporting the plot holders and asking the council to put things right. Instead it has been a case of blame the victim. Plot holders have been accused of scaremongering when the only scaring here has been done by the council in wording the survey as they did.
- My priority has been to support and inform plot holders, and to give them a means to be heard. The only thing I've heard from them is outrage at the council's actions. To reassure them I've drawn their attention repeatedly to the

letter from Julie Rogers which says Question 4 is a mistake. To my astonishment I've been criticized for doing this too.

- I will not criticize the plot holders when they are right, nor will I make excuses for the council when they are wrong. If this interpretation of the role of publicity manager is unacceptable, then when the post of publicity manager falls due I will be seeking to have recruited a replacement.
- The chair asked me if this meant I was resigning, and I made it clear that I was not.

## 6. Trading Store Membership Secretary's Report

As of 1<sup>st</sup> June 2015, paid-up membership of the Ashford Allotment Trading Store was as follows ...

### 6.1 Membership Numbers

<u>2013</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2015</u>
48	92	100*

\* Figures based upon up-to-date new membership and some previously available information.

### 6.2 Membership Revenue

<u>2013</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2015</u>
£192.00	£368.00	£400.00*

### 6.3 Membership Summary

All available information and member details, etc. inherited from previous membership lists have now been consolidated into one new Membership Register. This new register is held by the Membership Secretary.

Opportunities are being taken to update missing membership details and paid-up annual fees, etc. as and when members appear during Trading Store opening times. A 'New Member Form' is now being used to collect new member and updated member details and this has been received well. This exercise has been extremely useful to help identify missing membership cards, outstanding payments, duplicates, etc. The Membership Secretary would like to thank all customers of the Trading Store for their excellent co-operation and patience for completing the forms and while the details are being updated.

Even during its short life, the new membership register has identified a random assortment of missing membership cards, unused membership numbers and also a significant number of members who appear to be no longer using the Trading Store. It is therefore proposed to cleanse the data at the end of the year, then revise the existing membership 'yellow card' system with a view to its replacement in 2016 with personalised 'credit card' style membership cards. This will enable the existing membership system to start again 'from scratch'.

Note: Following the Membership Secretary's Report a question was raised regarding the provision of bulk deliveries directly to allotment sites. This question was immediately passed onto the Bulk Purchasing Manager who advised that bulk deliveries possibly could be arranged, but there may be difficulties coordinating dates and times and having somebody available on-site to receive the bulk goods.

## **7. Site Representative's Report**

### **7.1 Henwood**

The tenant of Plot 8B has been spraying again (weed killer) and the tenant of Plot 9B has had his carrots killed. There have been previous issues with this plot regarding spraying. The plot, the paths and some other areas have been sprayed and the general appearance has now been spoiled. The general feeling is that plot holders would like action taken, but this would require photographic evidence or witness statements that strong weed killer is being abused.

### **7.2 Bybrook Cemetery**

Plot 4 - No work has been undertaken on both sides of this newly split plot. Eileen has sent non-cultivation letters out.

New tenants are very keen and working well on their plots.

### **7.3 Musgrove New**

The water leak on Musgrove New has been repaired.

## **8. AOB**

Christine Green proposed that the Allotment Committee acts a conduit for grant funding. This was Seconded by Tony Fagg and was carried unanimously by the Committee. Christine Green will look into the surrounding issues and will report back in September.

Eileen Law suggested that it might be to everyone's advantage if the Committee acted as a conduit for such funding via Ashford Borough Council.

Brian Stamp believes he is paying for 5.25 perches, but is not sure how this has been determined.

Eileen Law agreed to clarify.

Steve Clements advised the Committee of the forthcoming Detling (Kent) Show on 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> July and that the National Allotment Society have a stand for which around 6 volunteers per day are being sought to talk to people about allotments and to hand-out literature. Mileage, meals and car parking would be reimbursed.

Several members showed an interest in volunteering, so the Chairperson agreed to obtain details from Steve Clements and suggested it would be a good way to promote allotments and also gain free entry to the show.

Several general questions were raised from members concerning the Council's intentions for historical and unused allotment sites located around the Borough.

Julie Rogers stated that she could arrange a land search, and also stated that several new allotment sites are being developed such as Stanhope and the forthcoming Chilmington development. Parish Councils are being encouraged to take on any new provision and this has proven successful on sites such as Great Chart Community Allotments.

Tony Fagg added that the Park Farm allotments are being managed under Parish Council administration.

There being no other business, the Chairperson declared the meeting closed at 8.27pm and thanked all those present for their attendance.

**9. Date of Next Meeting**

DATE OF NEXT MEETING TO BE CONFIRMED (September).  
(Open Meeting to be scheduled towards end of July).