



NORTHCHURCH PARISH COUNCIL
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**Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of Northchurch Parish Council
Monday 18th September 2023 at 7.00 pm
at Social Centre Bell Lane HP4 3RD**

Those present: Cllr's Mark Somervail (Vice-Chair), Neil Pocock, Gordon Godfrey, Lyndsey Abercromby and Parul Dix.

Cllr Godfrey arrived at 19.04

Also present were two members of the Northchurch Allotment Association (NAA), (Paul Coleman, and Eileen Shovelton), and one member of the allotment Julie Keyes (Julie Keyes arrived after the Chair's report).

EX/13/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

To receive and accept apologies for absence
RESOLVED, proposed by Cllr Dix seconded by Cllr Pocock to accept the apologies of absence from Cllr Capozzi for the reasons stated in the email.
Unanimously agreed.

EX/14/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To declare an interest linked to any item on the agenda.
Cllr Abercromby declared an interest in the items from EX/17/23 a to b during which time Cllr Abercromby took the seat with the members of the public and did not take part in any decision-making.

EX/15/23 Public Participation

Paul Coleman noted that allotment holders had not been given a chance to see the proposed changes to allotment rules and rent before the meeting. He also noted that these matters had not been discussed in a meeting of the Allotments Committee.

For that reason, Cllr Somervail allowed NAA to make the following points:

- PC noted that some councillors had never had an allotment and only had recent experience running the allotments. He asked if any councillors had been on the National Allotments Society's (NSALG) training course.
- PC argued that potholders should be allowed to comment on proposed changes as it affects them.

EX/16/23 Chairman's Report

Nothing to report.

EX/17/23 Financial Matters

- a. Cllr Capozzi proposes to approve the following amended documents:
- i. Allotment Rules
 - ii. Allotment Conditions of Cultivation
 - iii. Allotment Dispute Policy and to accept the new allotments "Welcome Letter

In the absence of Cllr Capozzi, Cllr Somervail proposed to defer the item for the Allotment Committee to discuss and implement changes. All in favour.

The following points were noted:

Cllr Somervail highlighted the main changes to the rules. (See below).

- NAA expressed concern that these rules were being brought in without consultation.
- NAA felt that the deposit was too high and would prevent access for people with low income or benefit
- It was suggested by NAA that the deposit be limited to 1 year of rent
- NPC members informed members that the Council had incurred considerable costs to clear allotments that had been abandoned with rubbish left behind. The cost was far in excess of the £75 being proposed, however, these issues were partly due to inadequate management in the past.
- Potential allotment holders facing hardship may be able to apply to DBC for a grant
- The 75% cultivation rule is too strict, some members use their plots as leisure gardens. The 75% does not include sheds/greenhouses, NPC can be flexible in interpreting this rule
- Cllr Somervail pointed out that the allotments are for the cultivation of produce and, NAA pointed out that the National Allotments Society is called the National Society of Allotments and Leisure Growers. Cllr Somervail informed members that the Allotment Act only mentions fruit and vegetables plus certain animals with permission of the Council.
- During certain parts of the year the allotment may be covered in a weed suppression sheet.
- Cllr Somervail informed members that double plots are unlikely to be given to anyone in the future as there is a waiting list
- While there was a concern raised by a member of the allotment regarding not receiving emails due to being made redundant, Cllr Somervail stated that NPC is bringing in the requirement to notify NPC of any changes to contact details.

All the above points will be raised and discussed at the Allotment Committee Meeting.

- b. Cllr Capozzi proposes to accept the allotment rent for October 2023
In the absence of Cllr Capozzi, Cllr Somervail proposed to accept the rent charges, seconded by Cllr Godfrey. Unanimously agreed.
RESOLVED, proposed by Cllr Somervail seconded by Cllr Pocock to accept the allotment rent for October 2023. Unanimously agreed.

Cllr Somervail informed members that the allotment rent is published on NPC's webpage.

Cllr Somervail pointed out that the allotments cost a lot more than the rent brings in.

This year £10k for tree surgeon, £5k for fence, £5k for gate. The rent is only £3k. For comparison, the total budget of the council is only £75k. Admittedly these high costs were partly due to past mismanagement.

- c. Cllr Capozzi proposes to approve engaging Landreeves as Chartered Surveyor to assist with new tenancy lease for the Sunnyside Nursery plot.

In the absence of Cllr Capozzi, Cllr Somervail proposed to approve engaging Landreeves as a Chartered Surveyor to assist with a new tenancy lease for the Sunnyside Nursery Plot.

RESOLVED, proposed by Cllr Somervail, seconded by Cllr Godfrey. Unanimously agreed.

- d. Cllr Capozzi proposes to discuss and implement the increase of Precept for 2023/24 by 12%.

In the absence of Cllr Capozzi, Cllr Somervail proposed to withdraw the motion until the next F&GP meeting. All in favour.

EX/18/23

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Monday 16th October 2023 Meeting at 7.00 pm Social Centre Bell Lane Northchurch HP4 3 RD.

The meeting concluded at 20.05.