



NORTHCHURCH PARISH COUNCIL

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**Minutes of the Allotment Committee Meeting Monday 25 September 2023 commencing
at 7.30 PM, at Sunnyside Rural Trust New Road Northchurch HP4 1NJ
The Meeting started at 19.41**

Members Present

Cllr Capozzi, Cllr Neil Pocock, and Cllr Lyndsey Abercromby.

Lower Site Representative Eileen Shovelton

Upper Site Representative Paul Coleman

NAA Chair Daniele Fornelli

Sunnyside Rural Trust Rep Matt Felix

Proper Officer Usha Kilich

AC/01/23 Apologies for absence
RESOLVED, proposed by Cllr Capozzi, seconded by Cllr Pocock to accept
Cllr Godfrey's absence of apologies for the reasons stated in the email.
Unanimously agreed.

AC/02/23 Declaration of Interest
Cllr Abercromby declared an interest as an allotment holder. Cllr Abercromby
refrained from any decision-making, however, did contribute to the overall
discussion on the items.

AC/03/23 To approve the Minutes from 15th September 2022 (DRAFT Copy circulated)
Cllr Capozzi informed members that the Minutes could not be approved due
some amendments in regard to the Upper Site report. Once the Minutes
have been amended, they will be approved at the Full Council on 16th
October 2023.

AC/04/23

Report from Upper Site Representative Paul Coleman

A significant development is the increased interest of our landlord in managing the allotments effectively. This is greatly appreciated.

During July all the plots were inspected by NPC with NAA in attendance. This results in some plot-holders being warned to keep their plots in cultivation. It would have been useful if the NAA had been advised of the plots subject to the written warning so that they could assist in policing the rules.

Most plots are now in some kind of cultivation. However, Plots 77/78 and Plot 43 remain unattended and NPC is asked to progress disciplinary measures against those plotheolders.

Cllr Capozzi informed members that NPC will write to allotment holders regarding uncultivated plots, any correspondence exchanged between NPC and allotment holders will stay with NPC and will not be shared with NAA. NPC welcomes plot-holders making direct communication with NAA. NPC will ensure that members are aware that NAA is approachable and willing to help. Cllr Capozzi has organised for SRT to remove items from plots 77&78, she has informed the tenant of this. The tenancy will not be renewed from October 2023 for plots 77&78 as well as plot 43. NPC will continue to monitor allotment sites, with occasional help from NAA.

Main gate

Although reported a year ago the main gate has not yet been replaced. In fact it sustained further damage during the last week and can not be locked anymore. Replacement work is expected soon.

Minor gate

The NAA will arrange for the minor gate to be chained shut.

NE Fence

Plotheolders 66 to 80 (except 77/78) have now a 2m strip next to the fence so that tree surgeons and then fencing contractors can secure that boundary. Work is expected to start soon. When the work has been done all concerned will have to police the rules (*inter alia*) to keep the fence intact and deerproof

Cllr Capozzi said plot 80 has a compost box (crate), apart from that NPC is happy that all the other allotments have cleared 2m strip for the Tree Monkey to start their work.

Site management

Ken Woodward continues to do an excellent job maintaining the Upper Site public areas.

Proposed changes to operating rules

The NAA has considered the draft new Rules, Dispute Procedure, Conditions of Cultivation and NPC Welcome letter.

In broad term the NAA accepts the proposed documents with the following provisos:

Further clarification is needed of treatment of deposit monies to protect tenants interests.

The post of honorary Site Manager should be enshrined in the Rules and his/her duties described. They would include being advised by the NPC of any notifications made by tenants as per Paragraph 7.

The Dispute Procedure is acceptable.

The Conditions of Cultivation are acceptable *except* that Paragraph 2. Requiring 75% cultivation appears to be unworkable. Whilst the intention is understood, this condition is unusual and impractical and needs review.

Cllr Capozzi informed members that the current rule states 60% of cultivation must be carried out, however, under the new Conditions of Cultivation 75% of cultivation must be carried out this includes the greenhouse/shed area.

Other matters

The lock combination was changed in October 2022 and overnight camping has ceased.

NAA is offering manure sourced from Dunsley Farm Tring for £40 per load.

It is understood that NPC wishes to reduce water usage by asking tenants to use dipping cisterns instead of hand held hosepipes. Before any change is implemented further review is needed of the way water is used on the site as this proposal will cause severe inconvenience to some tenants.

Cllr Capozzi informed members that NPC is looking to see how the conservation and usage of water are going to be reduced, allotment holders will have to change their habits, and the usage of water currently is not sustainable. Cllr Capozzi asked NAA to come up with ideas and work with NPC to achieve this and welcomes a further review. One solution may be to have more taps along the concrete path. The solution will have to work for the allotment holders and, at the same time reduce the usage of the water. Cllr Capozzi proposes to have the solution by Spring 2024. Mr Colman said there is an RHS paper that indicates the usage of water on an allotment, it is considerably less than the upper site allotment uses at the moment. Ms. Shovelton suggested that the Upper Site and the Lower Site communicate with each other in terms of the structure and how things are done on the two sites. Daniele Fornelli suggested that NPC investigate to see if there is a leak. Cllr Capozzi mentioned that this can be done by turning off all the water points.

AC/05/23

Report from Lower Site Representative Eileen Shovelton

1. An NPC inspection of Lower Site took place at start of May, although there has not been feedback from NPC direct to Eileen or NAA yet regarding findings specific to the Lower Site or issues to be resolved.
2. As always, NAA wish to thank Paul West for the continuous support to plot holders and for the upkeep of the site. We appreciate Paul's passion for keeping the site orderly and fruitful, updating me about site matters and suggesting possible actions.
3. Plot holders with Paul West, relocated a shed from a plot left side of New Road gate onto a plot to the right of the gate successfully. This came about after regular visits from NPC Councillors this year, adopting a 'solution-focussed' approach. It has given a calmness to plot holders, as it now complies with rules for number of buildings per plot whilst it gives a neighbour a safe place for their gardening tools. This celebrates the kindness and willingness for plot holders to work together for the best solution for all.
4. Arson and Break -in occurred overnight mid-summer leaving some plot holders needing repairs to sheds and locks, as vandals looked for fuel. The Fire brigade was called and dealt with fire to trees and one shed. A horrid affair. Police were eager to see footage from a surveillance camera on-site, but the view was not clear enough. This led to requests for more cameras on-site.

Can NPC tell me if they have any documents about the placing of surveillance cameras?

Has NPC sanctioned any cameras on the sites?

Is it law that placing of any surveillance cameras should have a sign to inform the public?

Cllr Capozzi informed members that NPC does not have any documents about placing surveillance cameras. NPC has not sanctioned any cameras on the sites. Allotment holders may install cameras at their discretion. Cllr Capozzi informed members that it is a law to place a sign informing the public about a surveillance camera. The sign can be placed on the gates.

5. The canal-side gate, gate post and the small gate on New Rd were renewed, July – December 2022. Both were organised by John Houston and supported by Paul West Bob Farrer and Keith Cassidy. NPC reimbursed John. Tesco Northchurch donated £50 for the small gate, organised by Paul West. THANK YOU all. The story can be read in June NAA Newsletter which was emailed to members.
6. St. Mary's school plot was 'covered' over with weed-stop for winter, after mulching with compost. Children were chaperoned to the Lower Site by school staff after the Easter break, to develop their gardening skills by

sowing seed and placing bulbs for crops again this year. Paul West was always available for their visits and generous with his time.

However, it is understood the NPC and the school may in due course be more focussed on the issue of traffic congestion and child safety on New Road around school 'drop off' and 'pick-up' times. We ask to be included in discussions of any developments as it may affect access to one of the Lower Site gates.

Cllr Capozzi informed members that NPC is in communication with Councillor Terry Douris about implementing 20 mph, as well as the school can put cones stopping the parent from parking on zig-zag lines. If anything changes, NPC will inform NAA.

7. Overgrown trees were cut back in the SE corner of the lower site, very quickly on request, by NPC allowing for immediate access and cultivation for a new plot holder in summer.

CONGRATULATIONS!!

- i) Winner 2023 potato comp – Paul West (plot 9), 19 lbs from 3 seed potatoes. Thank you, John Houston, for running the annual competition and delivering the seed potatoes to those who wished to be in it. The weighing was completed end of August with 4 witness' present. The refusal of NPC to give us people's names with plot numbers (referencing GDPR), meant that seed potatoes could not all be delivered directly, and a few were left with other plot holders, (to pass on). We shall continue to ask NPC for a way through this as it does not enable us to function fully in a supportive way with members and across both sites, e.g., sadly, we have not delivered newsletters and other messages through letterboxes of those not on email, for the last 2 years.

Cllr Capozzi mentioned that 95% of the allotment holders communicate with NAA, therefore, NAA have the information they need.

- ii) CONGRATULATIONS!!
NAS magazine (no.4 2022) included article from Jean and Bob Farrer, (plot 14).
- iii) PRYVIT!!! - VITAYEMO
Welcome to 3 generations of family from Ukraine, Hello!!! Welcome.
- iv) Condolence cards were sent to families of 2 plot holders who passed away between '22 – '23

FUTURE Activities

~Eileen asked Usha at the Council to keep us informed of any projects (e.g., biodiversity / food / well-being), which we may wish to support. Usha welcomed the idea, -but nothing sent yet.

~The NATIONAL ALLOTMENTS WEEK: annually in August. The theme this year was SOIL HEALTH. In light of renewed interest in the allotments, could NPC support us in holding events linked to 'soil' / cultivation/biodiversity/conservation?(for Summer 2024?)

- AC/06/23 Clerk to report on the waiting list
The Clerk informed members that there are 6 people on the waiting list. The information will be updated on the webpage
- AC/07/23 Chair's Report
- i. Update on October 23 rent fees, NAA annual fee, and a new deposit payment for new tenants – At the EOM on 18 September the new charges for the allotment were approved. The deposit will be recorded on the Allotment Software which identifies the cost centre for the allotment deposit.
 - ii. Update on works at the allotments: -
 - a. Entrance gate on upper site – The entrance gate will be installed in late October or early November 2023. The height restriction sign which is bent will be fixed.
 - b. Hedgerow reduction on upper site – due to start next Tuesday 2nd October 2023 (weather permitting).
 - c. Deer Fence – Tree Surgeon will cut the hedges/trees, and the installation of the deer fence will commence soon after, however, there might be a time when there is no deer fence in between the jobs which should not be a problem.
 - d. Plot number signs – During the meeting on 10th July NAA suggested allotment holders would instate the numbers, as this has not been done, NPC will go ahead and install allotment numbers. NPC will start with the upper site. Those who already have a sign will be offered to change over to the same sign as NPC will install.
- AC/08/23 Cllr Capozzi proposes to approve the following amended documents:
- i. Allotment Rules
 - ii. Allotment Conditions of Cultivation
 - iii. Allotment Dispute Policy
 - iv. The new allotments "Welcome Letter"
- RESOLVED, proposed by Cllr Capozzi, seconded by Cllr Pocock to approve the stated documents with some changes, amended policies/letters will be circulated. Changes made to Allotment Rules Policy, following clauses amended/deleted, 8.5 deleted, 7.9 amended, 4.2 and 4.3 amended. Unanimously agreed.
- AC/09/23 Cllr Capozzi proposes to approve the introduction of the 2-tier deposit scheme for new tenants
RESOLVED, proposed by Cllr Capozzi, seconded by Cllr Pocock to implement £30 for half plot and £60 for full plot deposit from October 2023. Unanimously agreed.
- AC/10/23 Upper Site Sunnyside Rural Trust Report
No report, however, SRT will be happy to support NPC and NAA with any future projects.
- AC/11/23 Future projects at the allotments:

- a. Soakaway outside the upper allotments – NPC will be working with HCC
- b. Additional speed humps on the upper allotment road – NPC will look into this
- c. Installation of water butts, and water troughs on both sites – discussed in the earlier report
- d. Review of maintenance requirements on the lower site – NPC will review what the lower site requirements are for 2024/25.
- e. Visibility mirrors opposite upper site entrance – Cllr Douris has allocated funds for the project.
- f. Allotment gate on the lower site – to liaise with lower site members to find a permanent solution.