



NORTHCHURCH PARISH COUNCIL

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**Minutes of the Allotment Committee Meeting Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> July 2024 commencing at 7.00 PM, at Sunnyside Rural Trust New Road Northchurch HP4 1NJ**

**Members Present**

Cllr Capozzi, Cllr Neil Pocock, and Cllr Mark Somervail.

Lower Site Representative	Eileen Shovelton
	John Houston
Upper Site Representative	Paul Coleman
Sunnyside Rural Trust Rep	Catherine Jones
Proper Officer	Usha Kilich

**AC/01/24 Apologies for absence**

Resolved, proposed by Cllr Capozzi, seconded by Cllr Pocock to approve Cllr Dix's absence. Unanimously agreed.

**AC/02/24 Declaration of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest to record.

**AC/03/24 To approve the Minutes from 25<sup>th</sup> September 2023 (DRAFT Copy circulated)**

Resolved, proposed by Cllr Capozzi, seconded by Cllr Pocock that these Minutes be agreed as a true and accurate record of the proceedings and be duly signed by the Chair. Unanimously agreed.

**AC/04/24 Report from Upper Site Representative Paul Coleman**

**On Site management**

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

## **Management by Northchurch Parish Council (NPC)**

A significant development in recent years is the increased interest of our landlord in managing the allotments.

An NPC Allotments subcommittee meeting was held in September 2023 when NPC introduced new rules for operation of the allotments. Of note is (i) the requirement that at least 75% of a plot must be under cultivation for crops, (ii) a requirement for a plot holder expecting to be away for more than a month to be reported to NPC, (iii) if a plot holder wants to confer 'grandfather' rights for transfer of a plot to anyone other than a spouse or descendant then such an interest must be registered with NPC in advance and (iv) a monthly inspection by NPC.

Due to Data Protection Rules NPC does not disclose any information about the names of plot holders to NAA. This has caused difficulties when NAA wanted to assist in plot management.

NPC state a wish for all plots to be numbered. A plan was given to the NPC to facilitate navigation around the site.

NAA is asking that 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 of the new Rules.

## **Occupation and cultivation of plots**

At the moment all plots except No56, 84 and 86 are occupied. On a recent inspection NAA found nearly all plots receiving attention. An Exception was Plot 40b which we asked NPC to contact the plot holder and now cultivation has commenced.

The NAA is keen to facilitate the availability of plots for rent if they are known to be unoccupied. In future NAA will occasionally trim back growth to keep them tidy. At present this applies to plots 56, 84 and 86

## **Completed Maintenance works**

NAA is pleased that the following works have been completed. The main gate was widened and replaced.

The North East deer fence was substantially repaired during the year; this greatly reduced the ingress of deer. Plot holders adjacent to the fence are asked to keep a 2m margin to the fence for maintenance purposes. These measures have greatly enhanced the security of the site.

A large pothole at the entrance to the site was repaired.

The eroded shoulders of the entrance road were filled in, but it is unlikely to serve as a long term solution until better drainage is provided on New Road.

Plott77 was levelled and made available for rent. However there is a query about the continued presence of asbestos.

### **Proposed maintenance works**

NPC are hoping to arrange to do the following works:

Digging a soakaway to stop rainwater coming in from New Road and damaging the site road.

Provision of more speed bumps to control traffic speed.

A visibility mirror at the main entrance on New Road

Installation of dipping cisterns which facilitate use of watering cans if hoses are banned.(See below)

### **The proposed ban on hosepipes**

It is understood that NPC wishes to reduce water usage by asking tenants to use dipping cisterns instead of hand held hosepipes. The rationale behind this proposal is not clear.; it maybe economic and/or environmental reasons. NPC also wish to turn off the water supply to the Upper Site for the winter months which will be impractical since Sunny side [SRT] need a continuous water supply. This matter is causing distress to several ploholders and some may be forced to vacate their plots.

Clarification is sought from NPC as to basis for paying for supplies from Affinity Water.

The NAA has implemented regular water meter readings in co-operation with SRT. It has identified a water leak near Plot 74 which was losing 1.5 cum per day. At present the net Upper Site water usage is about 2 cu m per day. Steps have been taken to ask all ploholders to use water prudently. It is greatly regretted that NPC have not considered the HSE issues involved and several ploholders have difficulty using water cans. At the time of writing it is believed that NPC has conceded that a total ban on hoses is impractical.

### **The use of CCTV on the Upper Site**

A tenant of the Upper site has asked for permission to use CCTV to improve security. The NAA Does not think that CCTV is needed and considers it an intrusion of privacy and that permission for its use should not be given.

### ***Cllr Capozzi reported on the Upper Site Report received from Paul Coleman (PC).***

*PC reported that the asbestos on plot 77 is not classed as dangerous but will need to be removed. He had spoken to the asbestos removal contractor NPC employed to remove the other asbestos sheets who confirmed this*

*Only half of 77 has been let due to the soil being contaminated with the plastic sheeting having been piled on the lower end*

*Cllr Capozzi clarified any misunderstanding regarding the water meters on the site. There is one main water meter that supplies water to the site, from the main meter, the water flow is divided into two separate lines, each monitored by its submeter. This arrangement allows for the measurement of water usage from the main meter as well as from the two sub-meters individually.*

*Cllr Capozzi will arrange for the leak to be fixed; however, this will involve turning the main supply off and will need to be timed correctly. In the interim, capping the pipe as a temporary measure can be considered. NPC will ensure that all plot holders and SRT are informed of what measures the council will take.*

**AC/05/24**

**Report from Lower Site Representative Eileen Shovelton (ES).**

Thanks to everyone who has worked together to keep the Lower Site in excellent condition.

Thanks as always to Paul West who is generous with his time to guide new plot holders, advises plot holders on issues they may have, keeps contact with the Parish Council clerk for immediate matters, is diligent regarding security of property and people and frequently keeps grass pathways trimmed to make the Lower Allotments aesthetically pleasing and safe across the year.

***Current Conditions***

- ~ Most plots show abundant cultivation, only one or two show very little or no cultivation
- ~ Reasons for non-cultivation (acceptable), had been communicated to Northchurch Parish Council from plot holders on holiday (33A, 32)
- ~ Recently after regular checks, a minute water leak was detected and worked on (PaulW, Fred, JohnH), used their personal plumbing supplies (e.g. 'olives' etc), to secure the supply.
- ~ Explanatory signs for 'best use' of hose & tap were displayed and heeded.

***Letters from Parish Council to specific plot holders***

- ~ Letters were sent recently after site inspections to a couple of plot holders, (5A, 11B), to request attention/tidying is given to their plot, with reference to the 'conditions of cultivation' documents, supplied by NPC.
- ~ Concern regarding path adjustment by one plot holder (24B), ignoring Paul's guidance. Michela & Usha visited.
- ~ Concern regarding the pile of wooden planks (3), unused over last two years.

***Aspects of Site awaiting/ in process of resolution***

*(also refer to NAA May report (AGM), fwd to NPC in May)*

- ~ Ground, (plots 1 through to and including 8), has been and continues to be waterlogged.
- ~ Waterlogging of ground (1 to 8) after 8 months rain, changes quality of ground for cultivation.
- ~ Plot 7A became obsolete in 2023/24 due to excessively waterlogged ground.

*Question: Was plot holder (7A) offered another plot on Upper site?*

*Question: Has NPC thoughts on future use of land across plots 7 and 8 Do you anticipate strengthening of the main pathway will be needed?*

Question: *Could compensation be considered for those plot holders (1 to 8) e.g. be partially reimbursed for 2023/24 rental?*

- ~ Regular clearance of vegetation is required on banks of Bulbourne chalk stream which Paul West attends to regularly through the last year.
- ~ A plum tree (semi-dwarf) is overhanging and shading a plot (33B) near to the boundary at New Rd. It requires some branches being trimmed (raising canopy to allow light on the plot). A second dwarf fruit tree (33B), smaller, also overhanging, requires straightening (needs stake support). Paul West has communicated with plot holder and improvement is 'in hand'.
- ~ Paul West removed two rotting tree stumps(30B) in May, after honey fungus identified in December 2022 and November 2023. Crops grown this year on 30B (along the root system of decaying tree) will be monitored for quality.
- ~ Plots near entrance gate on North Road need a nearer water supply because the distance to existing tap makes it difficult to use hosepipe or watering can.

### ***Proposed Hose Ban by Parish Council – both sites***

This has created tensions and anxiety for plot holders. Consequently, a good number have communicated they are unlikely to renew rental for next year (Oct 2024-25) if it is confirmed, mainly because they cannot manage without a hose.

The NAA seek to improve the relationship with the Parish Council. Allotments are for 'enjoyment' and 'pleasure'. We regard them as 'green spaces' for the cultivation of crops, and/or the nurturing of flowers. They require a discipline of regular visits and tasks to maintain soil quality, grow and nurture plants, and fulfill a seasonal cycle of harvest and re-plant. All is supported by the cultivation guidelines document issued by the Parish Council in 2023, as a framework for inspections. We believe it would be 'motivational' for plot holders to know in advance, the week of Councillor inspection each month. We believe that plot holders would be 'enabled' by this.

### ***CCTV***

The NAA Committee understands that to date, use was in breach of Data Protection law.

Question: *Has the Parish Council agreed to CCTV on the Lower site?*

Question: *Will the Parish Council allow a plot holder to place a CCTV camera at their own discretion?*

NAA Committee asks that all the Parish Councillors, (temporary/permanent) and Clerk, to guarantee they take comprehensive Equality, Diversity & Human Rights training asap (2024/ 25), and if possible, extend the training to both Site managers.

*Councillor Capozzi asked ES to clarify her comments above. ES responded by suggesting that the Clerk and the Councillors should undertake comprehensive training in Equality, Diversity, and Human Rights. Councillor Somervail noted that there are existing policies specific to Councillors, the Clerk, and Allotment Holders.*

*ES expressed a desire for policies that cross-reference other relevant policies. NAA claimed that the Allotment Rules had changed, to which Councillor Capozzi clarified that the rules had not changed but had been refined and repetitive sections moved. Councillors adhere to a Code of Conduct that includes Equality and Diversity, among other policies affecting staff, councillors, and the community.*

*It was agreed that in October 2024, the tenancy agreement will reference all council policies available on the NPC website. Councillor Somervail also noted that the allotment policy already cross-referenced the complaints policy.*

*Regarding training, ES recommended that all councillors and the clerk should participate in training on Equality, Diversity, and Human Rights, which NPC will follow up on.*

*NAA Committee ask the Parish Council to consider adjustments to point 9 (Harassment & Equal Opportunities section), in the 'Allotment Rules Policy' document, to include themselves, their initiatives, their dialogue with plot holders.*

*We believe that these suggestions can improve understanding of and dialogue with potholders.*

*Cllr Capozzi addressed the email received from PC, ES followed by Anne Smiths' email on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2024 regarding the working party and risk assessment.*

*PC inquired when NPC formally requested nominations for the working party. Cllr Capozzi referred to the minutes from the 25<sup>th</sup> of September 2023, noting her appreciation of NAA's efforts to implement changes in water usage and stating that these changes should benefit allotment holders. PC believed the working party would include Cllr Pringle, Lollie, ES, and Cllr Capozzi. When Cllr Capozzi mentioned that no one had come forward, it was assumed that the NAA did not want to be part of the working group.*

*Cllr Capozzi clarified that the informal meeting with Lollie, Cllr Capozzi, ES, and Cllr Pringle in a pub did not constitute a working party. A proper working party requires an agenda, invitations to members, and minutes taken. An email circulated to NAA members on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May 2024 explicitly stated that NPC had not received responses from working party members and requested those interested to inform NPC. The meeting between Eileen, Lollie, and Cllr Capozzi was postponed due to an official complaint lodged with Dacorum Borough Council's Legal Director against Cllr Capozzi, accusing her of discrimination. The Legal Director at DBC determined that Cllr Capozzi could not be accused of discrimination if no actions had been taken.*

*It was agreed that NAA would nominate members for the working group, which will document problems, mitigate issues, and reach conclusions. The primary goal is to remove hosepipes from the allotments. If the working party concludes that some hosepipe use is necessary, NPC will consider this. Once NPC knows whom to invite, it will set a date, time, and place for the meetings. NAA will hold a meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup> of July 2024 to invite members to join the working party, which will address water usage challenges and solutions for*

*the allotments. The working party will include three or four councillors, three members from NAA, and a representative from SRT.*

*Additionally, the risk assessment needs to be thoroughly reviewed.*

*PC suggested that NPC consider examining Potten End's Allotment Association, noting their willingness to discuss their management practices with the Councillors. PC proposed that NPC could reduce its involvement if the NAA steps up and is granted more responsibility.*

*PC also mentioned that Tring Town Council manages its allotment efficiently. In response, Councillor Capozzi noted that the councillors make decisions and have implemented water butts at Tring TC.*

***Cllr Capozzi reported on the Lower Site Report received from Eileen Shovelton.***

*The Clerk will write to plot three plot-holders*

*Cllr Capozzi is in the process of responding to issues on plots 24a and b, by way of compromising the situation*

*The plot holders of water-logged allotments from 1 to 8 will be contacted to ask how they feel about the situation. They will be given the option to move to another plot (If available) as a priority. The option to reduce these plot to half-plots and reduce the rent is an option.*

*Plot 7a will be given first refusal to move to another plot*

*The future use of plots 7 and 8 need to be considered, Cllr Capozzi suggested another site visit to determine plans*

*Compensation for plots 1 to 8 will be considered*

*Installation of a tap near the entrance gate on New Road will be considered depending on the layout of the water pipes and the cost to do this.*

**AC/06/24**

**Clerk to report on the waiting list**

There are only three people on the register, one is potentially looking at plot 84, and another at 56.

The Clerk reported that no one is prepared to take plot 56 in its present condition, however, SRT has been given the go-ahead to clear the plot. The estimated cost to clear plot 56 is £140

Plot 84 has been offered; the Clerk will know if the person wishes to take on the plot or not

NAA would like to evaluate potential plot holders to see what experience they have in maintaining an allotment before one is offered. Please refer to NPC's comments on this below.

**AC/07/24 Chair's Report**

**Updates since the last meeting:**

- a. Entrance gate on upper site has been installed
- b. Hedgerow reduction on upper site carried out

- c. Deer Fence was installed. SRT will maintain the area around the fence.
- d. Car park ditch has been filled. Herts County Council is aware of the problem on New Road in terms of washaway, they will be resolving the issue over time.

**On-going matters:**

- e. Plot number signs - there are still some number signs that need to be installed.  
PC said while not all sites are numbered, it is easy to see where you are on the allotment by working backward from a plot that is numbered. Cllr Capozzi said it is part of an agreement to display the number of the plot. Cllr Capozzi advocates for a more proactive numbering of plots. There is a budget set aside.
- f. Plot 56 is in bad condition, NPC will pay around £140 to tidy it up, and 50% of the costs are to be passed to the previous tenant.
- g. Inspections will be carried out regularly
- h. Water leak on upper site
- i. Flooding on lower site – noted
- j. Wood chippings on the path alongside the deer fence (from plots 50/51)  
NPC has written to the plot holder to help move the wood chippings at the rear of the allotment by the new fence to suppress the weeds. NPC has not received a reply. PC does not think wood chippings are the best solution to suppress the weeds, he suggested using weed killer by obtaining approval from the plot holder. It was agreed that wood chippings will remain on plot 50/51.
- k. CCTV on plot 68 – there will be no CCTV cameras on **any** of the plots. The lower sites will be asked to have the CCTV taken down. NPC welcomed the idea of CCTV on the upper site as it captured images from the main entrance, however, the camera has now been removed. John Houston reported that after last year's burglary, the Police installed a CCTV camera on the lower site, they are no longer there.
- l. Clarification on communications with Tenants – NAA role with NPC  
  
PC restated his desire for NPC to allow members of the NAA to meet prospective tenants to assess their commitment and experience. Cllr Capozzi responded that NPC welcomes anyone who wants to take on an allotment plot, regardless of their experience. If subsequently the tenant does not adhere to the allotment rules then the necessary process will be followed. Those who express interest in taking on an allotment will be offered a plot, starting with the next person on the waiting list. NPC has noted that some plots have not been cultivated over time, requiring NPC to pay SRT for cultivation.  
  
PC mentioned that NPC wrote to the holder of plot 54 two weeks after they acquired it, and although the Clerk was aware of the issues, the plot holder

resolved them without informing the Clerk. Cllr Capozzi addressed ES's comments regarding NPC's site inspections and providing a schedule of inspection dates. Cllr Capozzi explained that she has significant personal and professional commitments. Consequently, NPC will inspect the allotments as necessary. The purpose of inspections is not punitive but to assist and maintain the allotments at their best.

PC stated that some allotment holders have used derogatory terms to describe the Council and claimed NPC has forced holders off-site. Cllr Capozzi clarified that each October, allotment holders receive a rent agreement outlining cultivation rules, and no member is treated differently. If a plot is neglected, the holder receives a warning letter. PC also mentioned complaints about the Council's behaviour from allotment members, to which Cllr Capozzi suggested directing such members to the Clerk or a Councillor. She reminded members that the agreement is between the Council and each allotment holder, not with NAA.

PC informed the group that, with Ken Woodward's assistance, plots 56 and 84 will be managed until they are let. Plot 86 is not vacant, and NPC is aware of the situation. The occupier has been informed that SRT might provide interim assistance, which will be paid for by the allotment holder.

It was agreed that communication between the representative and the Clerk should remain open, with the representative informing the Clerk of any issues on the allotments, and the Clerk following up with an official email.

**AC/08/24 Upper Site Sunnyside Rural Trust Report**

There was no report, however, it was pointed out the water issue is now being concluded. Paul Coleman will continue to carry out the water meter reading.

**AC/09/24 Future projects at the allotments:**

- a. Additional speed humps on the upper allotment road
- b. Water saving and installation of water butts, and water troughs on both sites
- c. Review of maintenance requirements on the lower site
- d. Visibility mirrors opposite upper site entrance
- e. Replacement of the lower part of the deer fence

**The meeting concluded at 20.41**