

SHEPTON MALLET TOWN COUNCIL

Meeting	Open Spaces Committee, Item OS4.6
Date	28 th July 2020
Author	Paula Robertson, Allotments Officer and Charlotte Starkie, Town Clerk
Subject	Allotments Officer's Report

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update councillors on activity related to allotments that has occurred since the meeting in February 2020.
- 1.2 To consider the waiting list and an amendment to priority being given to those who do not have an allotment.
- 1.3 To consider the creation of a support fund for those who were impacted by Covid-19 and could not visit the allotment.
- 1.4 To consider changes to the issue of contract as an efficiency measure
- 1.5 To consider and agree to revised and increased allotment fees.
- 1.6 For 2 councillors to be nominated to judge the allotment awards

2.0 WAITING LIST/INSPECTION

- 2.1 There are currently no plots available. We have been advised that one will become available at Hitchen Lane on 01/10/2020 but this has already been offered to the first person on the waiting list. We currently have a waiting list of 19 (three of which are current plot holders).
- 2.2 It is proposed that a policy be adopted whereby priority is given to newcomers and existing allotment holders who wish to have an additional plot will remain at the end of the waiting list until all new applicants have been allocated a plot.
- 2.3 An inspection took place w/c 13/07/20 and several plots were identified as not being up to standard. The plot holders have been contacted by email appreciating that Covid-19 might have affected their ability to attend their allotment.
- 2.4 A reply has been received from three plot holders, two of whom advised that they had been shielding and were unable to attend and another who has now given up their plot which has been allocated.

3.0 CHANGES TO CONTRACT/FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- 3.1 In order to save on costs, and to adhere to environmental principles as well as be aware that lock down reduced access to our physical office (and we could yet be struck by a second lock down) it is proposed that the existing tenancy agreements are amended to remove the need to send by recorded delivery, and to inform allotment holders, at the time of receiving the invoice that the contract be issued by email and the council to receive an email accepting the terms and conditions of the agreement will be acceptable. Payment of the invoice will also be deemed to accept the terms and conditions. Plot holders will also be encouraged to pay electronically, but

with a facility for those who need to pay in person. Those allotment holders without an email address will still receive documentation through the post.

This will save approximately £300p/a which can be used for:

1. A support fund to assist allotment holders who have suffered hardship through lockdown;
2. Give a discount for next year to those who have had to shield;
3. Anything left over could be put towards refreshments at a presentation evening.

4.0 ALLOTMENT FEES

- 4.1 The invoicing of all allotment plots will take place during September/October. As it is necessary to give one year's notice to allotment holders for any increase in fees, a decision needs to be taken as to whether an increase is viable. Costs are always increasing and additional water supplies will incur further costs.

The annual income from the allotments for 2020/2021 will be £1857.

Option A

The proposed fees are in line with the charging structure of another council in the district.

Option B

This pricing structure equates to 50p per week for a small plot, 75p per week for a medium plot and £1.00 per week for a large plot.

Plot Size	Agreed Rent 2019/2020	Agreed Rent 2020/2021	<u>Option A</u> Suggested Rent 2021/2022	<u>Option B</u> Suggested Rent 2021/2022
Small	£15.00	£16.50	£20.00	£26.00
Medium	£21.00	£23.00	£28.00	£39.00
Large	£35.00	£38.50	£45.00	£52.00

5.0 S106 APPLICATION (S106 application number - 2012/0842 - £20,916.77)

- 5.1 The application was made to Mendip District Council to consider supporting the costs for the planned improvements to the allotment sites. A complaint was subsequently made, in relation to wildlife vandalism, to the S106 officer about an element of the application. That application was withdrawn and resubmitted, (less the matter that has caused the complaint) to move the project forward and the council is waiting to hear. The matter in relation to the water supply that caused the complaint will be considered again in due course.

6.0 DEVOVLED MANAGEMENT

6.1 At a previous meeting the council asked for the officers to consider moving the management of the allotments from the town council to a devolved management system, where they are managed by volunteers within the allotment community. Due to the lockdown restrictions, it has not been possible to progress the meeting regarding devolved management. Once further easing allows public meetings it is anticipated that this information meeting, with a guest speaker from the National Allotment Association, could be combined with an awards evening for the annual allotment awards

7.0 ANNUAL ALLOTMENT AWARDS

7.1 The allotments are inspected, usually mid to late August each year, by councillors to give awards for the best kept plots, with runners-up, highly commended and best newcomer at each site. A criterion exists and councillors are asked to use their judgement to make the awards. The awards are usually given at a council meeting in the autumn. It is proposed that a proper awards night be created, as above (para 5.1) be used to showcase, in photography, the best of the allotments.

Town Plan Reference:

Allotments	Continue to maintain and promote the allotment sites to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to grow their own
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8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 For Councillors to note the report and to
1. Agree to accept a policy that whilst there is a waiting list for allotments, that priority is given to those who do not hold an allotment as per paragraph 2.2
 2. Agree to support fund as a result of the change in distribution of invoices and agreements as per paragraph 3.2
 3. Agree to a fee increase as per paragraph 4.1
 4. Nominate two councillors to undertake the annual allotment inspections by the end of August 2020.
 5. To agree to hold an awards evening with a guest speaker, and consideration for devolved management, subject to Covid-19 restrictions.