

Kendal Town Council

Town Hall, Highgate, Kendal LA9 4ED
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Minutes of a meeting of the Allotments Committee held on Monday, 26 February 2024, in the Council Chamber at the Town Hall, Highgate, Kendal, at 7.00 p.m.

Kendal Town Council Members

Cllr G Archibald (Vice Chair)	Present	Cllr J Cornthwaite	Present
Cllr L Edwards	Present	Cllr A Finch (Chair)	Present
Cllr C Hardy	Apologies	Cllr L Hendry	Present

Co-optees

Jon Cox	Present	Chris Rowley	Present
Ros Taylor	Apologies		

Site Representatives present

Canal Head	Deborah Allison
Castle Drive	Liz Kelly
Castle Haggs	Gwen Tordoff
Castle Haggs Ext	Jon Cox
Crow Tree	Bryan Williams
Underley Road	Chris Rowley

In attendance: Chris Bagshaw (Town Clerk), Inge Booth (Democratic Services Assistant), Janine Holt (Council Services Officer) and Pierre Labat (Townscape Officer).

A25/2023 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Kendal Town Cllr C Hardy, from Co-optee Ros Taylor, and from Site Representatives Ali Paddle (Greenside) and Ros Taylor (Wattsfield).

A26/2023 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were raised under this item.

A27/2023 Exclusion of Press and Public (Public Bodies Admission to Meetings Act 1960)

There were no confidential items included within the agenda.

A28/2023 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

A query was raised on Minute No.A15/2023 (Co-option of Members) and on co-optees' entitlement to vote in relation to financial decisions. The Town Clerk explained that he was currently seeking clarification on this matter.

Resolved: To report once clarification received regarding co-optees' entitlement to vote in relation to financial decisions.

Resolved: To receive the minutes of the previous meeting of the Allotments Committee held on 25 September 2023 and to authorise the Chair to sign them as a true record.

A29/2023 Minute Action Sheet

The Committee considered a report on actions taken by officers on resolutions or recommendations made at previous meetings. Further details were sought in relation to Item Ref. No.7 relating to Minute No.A43/2022 (Town Council Allotments) of the meeting held on 27 February 2023. The Town Clerk explained that this item had been considered within Part II and suggested that, should Members wish to discuss the matter, a vote be now taken to exclude the press and public.

Part Two

At this stage in the proceedings, Members voted to exclude the Press and Public, due to the confidential nature of the discussion.

The Town Clerk reported that, under Minute No.A43/2022 (Town Council Allotments), the Committee had considered an issue relating to the management of the Town Council's allotment estate when it had been resolved to approach a suitable solicitor to seek to progress the proposal. He explained now how involvement of the Secretary of State would be required to move forward on the matter and how this issue was not deemed to be a priority, there being more pressing needs in terms of the Council's allotments estate. It was, therefore, suggested that this matter should be parked for the time being.

Part One

Members voted to move back into Part 1 for the remainder of the meeting.

Discussion continued on the format of the minute action sheet and the potential to change the "deadline, if any" column to "target date". Also discussed was the potential to retitle the "officer responsible" column, with this being a public document, although the need to allocate tasks to individuals being acknowledged. To this end, the need to review the document in its entirety was raised.

Resolved: To remove Item No.7 from the Minute Action Sheet.

Resolved: To carry out a review of the format of the minute action sheet.

Resolved: To note the report.

A30/2023 Review of Spend against 2023/24 Budget

The Council Services Officer presented a report reviewing spend against budget as at 16 February 2024, pointing out that approximately £5,000 remained, with around £1,500 earmarked for maintenance work.

Attention was drawn to an item on the action sheet regarding the installation of safe and uniform signage throughout the Council's allotments sites and the potential to allocate the remaining sum to this project. Some concern was raised with regard to the potential need for this money to be instead set aside for pest control, however, the Council Services Officer explained that this was an ongoing cost and could not be carried forward into the next year. It was pointed out, however, that the Committee had already resolved to move forward on the signage at a previous meeting and it was suggested, therefore, that the remaining 2023/24 funding be used to pay for this. Attention was further drawn to an item later in the agenda on the purchase of water troughs, for which the remaining funding could also be used. Further raised was the potential for a training programme of workshops for allotment holders and implementation of policies, which had been suggested by the Kendal in Bloom judges; the Chair suggested that this proposal should be put in writing to the Committee for discussion at its next meeting.

It was proposed that the Committee might agree with the Council Services Officer's suggestion, on the proviso that, with the Chair or Vice-Chair's agreement, officers use some of the money for other enhancements, such as water troughs. Attention was drawn to a number of other enhancements and repairs required on various sites, it being suggested that a list of outstanding jobs should be created for consideration by the Committee.

The Town Clerk proposed that the Council Services Officer circulate a list of planned work for site representatives to look at and add to. Officers could then calculate costs and make sensible use of what money remained, for example on troughs or signage. Moving forward, he felt that it would be a good idea to bring the list of planned renovations and maintenance schedule to the next meeting of the Committee in order to prioritise of works and to be able to budget effectively.

Members were keen to ensure that ongoing work was not delayed and the need was, therefore, repeated for the Chair or Vice-Chair to give agreement regarding the potential use of the money for troughs and signage. Also suggested was the potential for a press release regarding the water taps at Greenside, which had been very successful. The Townscape Officer, however, explained that the plan now was to move forward with water troughs.

Resolved: A list of planned renovations and maintenance schedule to be circulated to site representatives for inclusion of any additional items prior to presentation to the next meeting of the Committee.

Resolved: With the agreement of the Chair or Vice-Chair, officers to allocate the remainder of the 2023/24 allotments budget to signage throughout the Council's allotments estate and to the purchase of two water troughs, as outlined at Minute No.A31/2023 below.

Resolved: To note the report.

A31/2023 Townscape Officer Update

The Townscape Officer presented his report, hard copies of which had been circulated at the start of the meeting.

- Water Troughs - These had proved to be successful at Canal Head and officers were keen to extend the scheme to other sites, for example, Castle Hags, using different and less expensive containers. The troughs were effective at reducing hosepipe use. The Townscape Officer suggested that two troughs could be placed on Castle Hags using the existing water pipe. The cost would be £130 for two troughs plus plumbing

connection. The Council Services Officer informed the Committee that the troughs would need to be purchased and installed by Easter 2024.

The Townscape Officer answered questions, saying that the troughs would not take long to set up and explaining that once it could be established whether they were successful, the scheme could be extended so people did not have as far to walk. He pointed out, however, that water troughs would not be appropriate on all sites. He stressed the fact that the intention of the scheme was to change the manner in which things were done and, whilst not saving the Council money, would hopefully save water.

During conversation, the Chair suggested that there was a need for the Allotments Committee to meet more frequently during the growing season, potentially in April, June and August and then back to every three months. The Town Clerk explained how it would be difficult to include any additional meetings within the Council's Calendar of Meetings, however, undertook to try to factor these within the 2024/25 Calendar.

Resolved: To try to factor in additional meetings of the Allotments Committee within the 2024/25 Calendar, in April, June and November.

- Compost Bins at Canal Head – The Townscape Officer reported that he would be moving the compost bins from Sedbergh Road to Canal Head due to the track being more accessible for the transfer of green waste and the bagging of the compost. The site at Canal Head had more space and did not require access from a busy road.
- Community Allotment – Officers were proposing to experiment with a community allotment plot at Canal Head, where the drainage had initially been poor. The idea would be to bring people together and demonstrate how beneficial growing vegetables was. It would increase the number of residents on a plot providing help and support for each other. There was space on the plot for a shed for communal tools. The initiative would be developed through an open day in April.

A suggestion was raised for classes to be provided at the site. Also suggested was the potential to use instead the triangular section of the site as opposed to a plot which could be paid for, especially with the waiting list at Canal Head being so large. The Town Clerk pointed out that there was £68,000 in the Allotments Reserve and that it would be appropriate to use some of this money to expand and fence off the triangle, also referring to the possibility of using one of the plots which had been written off due to poor drainage for a polytunnel for the community allotment. It was suggested that the feasibility of doing this be investigated and that the Chair and Vice-Chair be authorised to make a decision on the amount required. Attention was drawn to the successful community garden opposite Queen Katherine School and the need to liaise with that group and others looking for community gardening opportunities. Stressed was the importance of appropriate management in the longer-term. The Council Services Officer, however, explained that the Council's aspiration was more around raising the profile of allotments and to provide a space for those people who remained on the waiting list for a plot. She also stressed the need for current allotment holders and site representatives to be on board with the scheme.

Resolved: To note the updates.

A32/2023 Allotment Statistics Report

The Council Services Officer presented a report which showed that the waiting list currently stood at 123 individuals. The list had increased by 12 individuals since the last meeting. 43 plots were vacant, details of which were provided within the report. Nine plots had been let since the last meeting. The Council Services Officer added that the deadline for annual payments had passed. Further, she said that she had offered out sites again on the previous Monday, when only four had been taken up. She felt the current situation to be of some concern and that there was a need to look at the process of allocation of allotments, with a need to be proactive and to develop a vibrant allotments community.

In response to queries, the Council Services Officer explained in detail the current process with regard to allocation of plots, individuals being emailed with a two week deadline to take up the offer. Whilst some felt that this was too short a timeframe, others felt that a quicker process was required.

The Town Clerk informed the Committee that the waiting list normally worked very effectively, however, drew attention to current challenges, particularly around the cost of living crisis. He suggested that a better view could be taken when considering the state of the list at the next meeting. He pointed out that the biggest concern with unlet plots was the time taken to bring them back into production and that plots not let by April would become a problem.

A suggestion was raised for the Council to make better use of its site representatives who were more able to use a personal approach. In addition, the need for a transparent method of selection of site representatives was stressed.

Resolved: To take a better informed view on the process of allocation of plots following presentation of the allotments statistics report at the next meeting.

Resolved: To consider the process of selection of site representatives at a future meeting.

Resolved: To note the report.

A33/2023 Site Representatives

Chris Rowley, Underley Road Representative, was pleased to see that a number of plots had been let on the site.

Jon Cox, Castle Hags Ext Representative, sought progress in relation to the fence lines on this estate. In response, the Town Clerk reported that he had visited the site and drew attention to the outstanding question of whether the Town Council should commit to fencing a site which was not in its ownership, also explaining that allotments holders had no security of tenure on any site. He pointed out the work which had been carried out by Westmorland and Furness Council, with some new fencing on the top side and the planting of a mini woodland. A lengthy discussion ensued, during which the Town Clerk suggested that costs for fencing should be sought, although explaining how this would make a huge dent in the Allotments Reserve of £68,000. Jon Cox further drew attention to encroachment of nettles from without the site and the problems with rabbits, also stressing the fact that current allotment holders would leave, with some already having done so. The Committee recognised how this was an untenable situation, with these allotment holders renting plots of no value, and it was suggested, therefore, that Westmorland and Furness Council's view should be sought in writing. The Town Clerk raised the potential of the fall back position of the Town Council installing post and wire fencing. Also raised was the potential for the installation of new gates with a rabbit proofing layer and asking Westmorland and Furness Council to look at mowing its own boundary which, it was felt, would make a difference.

Resolved: The Town Clerk to approach Westmorland and Furness Council seeking their position in relation to the Castle Haggs Ext and to report back to Committee.

Brian Williams, Crow Tree Representative, reported that a mess had been left behind following work on the new gas main to Ford Terrace. The Council Services Officer undertook to look into the matter.

In response to a query from the representative regarding access to leaf mould at the cemetery, the Council Services Officer explained that, following problems which arose in the previous year, this was possible by arrangement with the cemetery to self collect. She undertook to provide contact details.

Resolved: To look into the matter of the mess left behind at Crow Tree following work on the new gas main to Ford Terrace.

Resolved: To pass on details regarding the relevant person to contact regarding collection of leaf mould at the cemetery.

The Council Services Officer further undertook to address the issue of the internal path within the Crow Tree site.

Resolved: To address the issue of the internal path within the Crow Tree site.

Deborah Allison, Canal Head representative, expressed thanks for the clear up next to the rubbish tip at Canal Head. In response to a query, the Council Services Officer explained that the compost area would be sited on the last bit of the Canal Head site. The representative expressed concerns regarding rabbits and raised the potential for the replacement of a number of wooden gates on the older allotments. The Council Services Officer explained that this was a matter for allotment holders themselves, although suggested that the Council would help if it could.

Resolved: To check on the old wooden gates at Canal Head.

Resolved: To note the verbal reports from Site Representatives.

The meeting closed at 8.52 p.m.