

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Assets Committee
held at Bishopstoke Methodist Church
commencing at 7:45pm on 25th July 2023**

Present: Cllrs Francis (Chair), D McKeone (Vice Chair), Harris, Hillier-Wheal and Winstanley (from para 10.1)

In Attendance: Mr D Wheal (Clerk to Bishopstoke Parish Council)
Mrs A Luck (Assets Officer for Bishopstoke Parish Council)
Cllr Daly (Bishopstoke Parish Councillor)

Public Attendance: 0 members of the public were present.

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Public Session

10 Apologies for Absence

10.1 All Committee members were present.

Cllr Winstanley arrived at this point.

11 To adopt as a true record, and sign, the Minutes of the Assets Committee meeting held on 23 May 2023

11.1 The Minutes of the above meeting had been circulated prior to the meeting.

11.2 Proposed Cllr Winstanley, Seconded Cllr Harris, **RESOLVED** unanimously that the minutes of the Assets Committee meeting held on 23 May 2023 be adopted as a true record.

11.3 Cllr Francis suggested consulting with Dave Bowen Consultancy Ltd once the strategy for play areas has been drafted. Cllr D McKeone asked whether the type of play area and its age suitability could be added to the website. Cllr Hillier-Wheal asked for the Judges Gully play area to be included as being in Bishopstoke although not run by the Parish Council.

Action: Clerk – contact play area consultants for comment on the strategy, add information and Judges Gully to the website.

11.4 Cllrs Francis and Hillier-Wheal both offered to complete other areas of the bin mapping project. The Clerk committed to sending out any maps still needed.

Action: Clerk – send remaining maps to Cllrs.

12 Declarations of Interest and Requests for Dispensations

12.1 Cllrs Francis and Hillier-Wheal declared an interest in items 4 and 5 on the agenda.

13 To make the following decisions regarding allotments:

Whether to adopt a deposit scheme

What rate to set a deposit scheme at if adopted

Whether to adopt early intervention when plots become a seed and weed nuisance

How early intervention is managed

Whether to include a water supplement in future rents

What rate to set the water supplement at and how might plot holders mitigate that

13.1 A memo giving more information on the reasons for and possible options for each decision had been included with the supporting papers for the meeting.

13.2 Cllr Francis felt that a formal meeting with the allotment site representatives to get their views on the proposals would have been a useful precursor to these decisions. The Clerk noted that formal meetings are planned and informal contact regularly takes place. In addition, the deposit scheme had been proposed by the site reps the year before, and ways to prevent plots becoming a seed and weed nuisance were always required. Cllr Winstanley suggested any decisions could be taken in principle, subject to consultation with the site representatives and this was accepted by the Committee members.

13.3 The Clerk presented Cllrs with information showing the gap between the income generated by the allotments and the costs of running them, whilst also noting that the costs being presented did not include officer time, or stationery, but were limited to actual on site spending. Both water and plot clearance costs are substantial, and methods to reduce the Council's spend on these areas would be most important for bringing costs more in line with income. A deposit scheme encourages those thinking of leaving their plots to do so with the plot in good condition, and also makes a contribution to the cost of clearing the plot for those who do not. Reducing the time between a problem being spotted and a tenant who is not working their plot leaving the tenancy reduces both the growth of weeds and the opportunity for other rubbish to be dumped on the plot. A number of other local and national allotment sites had been researched for evidence regarding deposits and water charges.

13.4 Cllrs asked whether the deposits would be held in a separate account and would be indexed. The Clerk noted they would, and would not, respectively. Cllr Francis proposed that if a deposit were to be set then it be equal to one year's rent on the plot. Cllrs also asked whether this would apply to all plot holders, and whether there would be a discount for those on benefits. The Clerk noted this was intended for new plot holders only (plus those taking on extra plots) and whilst there is currently no discount applied for those on benefits that is certainly something that the Council could consider.

13.5 Proposed Cllr Harris, Seconded Cllr D McKeone, **RESOLVED** with Cllrs Francis and Hillier-Wheal abstaining to put in place a deposit scheme for new tenancies, with the deposit equalling the annual rent on the plot.

Action: Clerk – work with RFO to publicise deposit scheme and select an appropriate start date.

13.6 Cllrs wanted to ensure that tenants in genuine difficulty would not be penalised by being quickly removed from their plot. The Clerk noted that the Council has a long history of either giving extra time to, or helping in other ways, tenants who become unable to work their plot for a time. This will continue, and early contact with the plot holder will be key to ensuring that the plot does not become so difficult to manage that the plot holder is eventually unable to carry on permanently. A sheet giving details of what to do if a tenant is struggling with their plot is already included in the pack sent to all new tenants (and to all tenants in 2022). This information will also be included in rent letters going forward and placed on the allotment noticeboards.

Action: Clerk – amend rent letters to include information on contacting the site representatives or Council if a tenant becomes temporarily unable to work their plot, add this information to allotment noticeboards too.

13.7 After discussion, Cllrs agreed that the simplest way to reduce the length of time it takes to remove tenants who have abandoned their plots would be to include the termination date in any letter requiring action from the tenant, effectively removing a second, termination only, letter from the system. All letters will give one month notice for work to be completed after which the tenancy will be ended if the work has not been completed.

13.8 Proposed Cllr Winstanley, Seconded Cllr Harris, **RESOLVED** with Cllrs Francis and Hillier-Wheal abstaining to amend the process for dealing with unworked plots by including a one month termination date in any letter requiring action from the tenant, effectively removing a second, termination only, letter from the system.

Action: Clerk – work with RFO to incorporate the change to standard allotment letters and procedure.

13.9 With regard to water charges the Committee considered that the proposed scheme may be too complex to administer and after discussion agreed that it may be more appropriate to adopt an “in arrears” scheme whereby the water usage for one year is included retrospectively in the rent for the next year. Any scheme would not be introduced immediately but would wait for discussions with site reps to take place before a final decision on what form the scheme would take is made.

13.10 Proposed Cllr Winstanley, Seconded Cllr D McKeone, **RESOLVED** that the Council should charge for water used at the allotments, with the exact method and start date being a matter for a future meeting following discussions with the site representatives.

Action: Clerk – arrange a meeting with site representatives to discuss water charges and include the item on a future Assets Committee agenda.

14 To set allotment rents for the period 1st October 2023 – 30th September 2024

14.1 A memo outlining the income and expenditure at the allotments since 2012 had been included with the supporting papers. The Clerk again noted that all the measures being discussed at the meeting, including a potential rent rise, were aimed at closing the gap between income and expenditure, but not requiring that the allotments effectively pay for themselves. Each measure taken would have a small impact on that gap leading to an overall significant effect.

14.2 Cllrs asked the Clerk to ensure that the reasons for the rent rise, if agreed, are included in the next rent letter. Cllrs also asked the Clerk to investigate extending the discount scheme to include those on benefits.

Action: Clerk – investigate what the qualifying benefits might be for inclusion in the discount scheme and add that to a future agenda.

14.3 Proposed Cllr Harris, Seconded Cllr Winstanley, **RESOLVED** with Cllrs Francis and Hillier-Wheal abstaining that the rent for 1st October 2023 to 30th September 2024 be set at £10 per rod, with the discounted rate set at £6.50 per rod.

Action: Clerk – inform the RFO and include the information in the rent letters for this year.

15 To approve the final design for the Bishopstoke Cemetery gates and sign

15.1 The design and specifications for the Cemetery gates and sign had been included in the supporting papers for the meeting.

15.2 Proposed Cllr Francis, Seconded Cllr Hillier-Wheal, **RESOLVED** unanimously that the Council go ahead with the new gates and sign for Bishopstoke Cemetery.

16 To receive the Clerk’s report, including all areas delegated to the Committee

16.1 The Clerk’s report was included with the document pack for this meeting and was noted. In addition it was noted that the bench at Glebe Meadow play area has been repaired, and that following a meeting with the new Local Area Manager it had been agreed that the cemetery extension and allotments at Sewall Drive would be the prime asset transfer being worked on.

16.2 Cllr Harris asked whether there was any progress on the bus shelter repairs at Spring Lane and why it had been washed given its damaged state. The Clerk informed the Committee that we are awaiting a response from the companies contacted for repairs and the Parish had not instigated any cleaning of the shelter. The Clerk also detailed efforts to ensure both regular cleaning of, and rapid response graffiti removal from, the parish bus shelters. Cllr Francis suggested these efforts could be publicised in the newsletter.

Action: Clerk – include bus shelters in a future newsletter.

17 Date, time, place and agenda items for next meeting

17.1 The next meeting of the Assets Committee will take place at 7:30pm on Tuesday 26th September 2023 at the Bishopstoke Methodist Church. The Clerk reminded Cllrs that if they wished to add items to the agenda they should ensure the item, with any supporting papers, is with the Clerk by September 19th.

There being no further business, the Chair closed the meeting at 9:10pm

Chair's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Clerk's Signature: _____ Date: _____