

**Allotment Liaison Meeting, held on Tuesday 5th December at 6:00 pm
in Meeting room 1 of The Spetchells Centre**

PRESENT

Cllr Russ Greig (Chair), Cllr Andy Gill, Paul Muto, Jean Phillips, Sarah Eden (taking notes)
(arrived at 6:45 pm)

1. Apologies

Cllr Gerry Price, Cllr Angie Scott, Cllr Eileen Burt, Cllr Chris Cuthbert, Cllr Yvonne Ritchie, Chris Newton, Peter Kerry, Julia Cooper

2. Meeting held on 6th June 2017

The meeting report was received as a true record. The only matter arising that was not on the agenda was the steps at Castle Road Allotments. Paul Muto advised that the Friends of Prudhoe Woods had built steps into Castlefields Woods and along with Derek Tulip and Essity Apprentices, there may be some scope for more volunteer work but this was his first hearing of it.

Boundary hedges (on the agenda in June) were raised later in the meeting although not as a matter arising.

3. Allotment Management Committee

Chair	Lenny Outerside
Vice-Chair	Peter Kerry (resigned)
Acting Treasurer	Chris Newton (resigned)
Vice-Treasurer	Amanda Airey (resigned/moved away)
Secretary	Paul Muto & Dave Gray

Paul Muto described that there were allotment holders who were active on the committee but who do not wish to take on roles. Paul Muto reported that Karen Cumberledge may take on the role of Treasurer and Julia Cooper could be shifted into a role.

It was agreed that Paul Muto would look at the constitution to see which roles were obligatory.

In response to Cllr Russ Greig's question about the role of Secretary being shared, Paul Muto described that this was necessary as the role took on two distinct areas. The Correspondence Secretary deals with letters and the Allotments Secretary maintains the lists and allocates allotments.

In response to Cllr Russ Greig's question about staffing the hut, Paul Muto replied that the hut would be busy again in January when rents are due and stock is required. Paul Muto confirmed that only Committee Members are trained to work in the hut and there is a rota.

4. Vacant Plots

Paul Muto stated that there were 3 vacant plots at Castledene with interest in 2 and 1 vacant plot at Redwell but there was interest in this.

Hedge maintenance and aging allotment holders were described as the main reason that plots are given up. Sarah Eden advised that hedge maintenance was raised at the meeting in June, but it was concluded that this was not a major problem.

Paul Muto disagreed and stated that maintaining hedges is an issue for some allotment holders and that once they become out of hand it is a bigger job and the plot is then given up or they are evicted. Cllr Andy Gill asked what would happen in that situation. Paul Muto said that the main reason for eviction and warnings is hedge maintenance and that often they will deal with the hedge after the plot holder has left as otherwise it would be difficult to let. Sarah Eden questioned why someone would be evicted from a plot for not maintaining their hedge or forced to give it up as the hedge is too much for them, then the hedge is cut back after they have gone; could the PGA not deal with the hedge and allow the existing plot holder to stay?

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Cllr Andy Gill agreed that it seemed a nonsense that a plot is left due to the hedge and then the problem is dealt with by PGA afterward. Cllr Andy Gill also noted that some allotments are without hedge boundaries so there is no uniformity, those without hedges are at an advantage. Cllr Andy Gill asked if those with hedges were assisted financially and concluded that he would support a programme of boundary hedge maintenance that was not the responsibility of allotment holders but the of Prudhoe Gardeners Association/Prudhoe Town Council.

Paul Muto explained that in his opinion the solution is to spot the problem before it gets out of hand, or ask tenants to pay a deposit that would then be retained if plots were left below an acceptable standard. It was agreed that a deposit would be an administrative burden and it would be difficult to set an acceptable figure, as well it being unlikely that a deposit would pay for any restorative measures.

Paul Muto also mentioned that old sheds and structures on plots are an issue and costly to deal with as more often than not skips have to be hired. Paul Muto outlined the following system of inspection/warning but acknowledged that letters are not being sent out so action is not taken, then it is past the point of being easy to put right:

April Inspection – to ensure that allotments are being worked and if not that action letters are sent out when allotments looks untended.

Mid-late August – pre-Town Show inspection that would result in warning letters being sent out.

If warning letters are sent they should be followed up to ensure improvements are made; Paul Muto acknowledged that this often did not happen due to the administrative burden and archaic systems they use (this is discussed later).

5. Town Show

Cllr Russ Greig described that the show was really good and well attended but asked about the future of the show as there was presently no-one willing to take it over.

Paul Muto agreed that they had not found a committee member or allotment holder willing to take on the show and admitted that the reality was that if someone did not come forward the show would not happen.

Cllr Russ Greig questioned why there was reluctance and what was considered the most burdensome thing to do as part of the show. Paul Muto explained that he had never been involved but he understood that planning started in January and as well as seeking sponsorship there was judging to arrange and printing the programme. It was agreed that the Prudhoe Town Show is an important event for allotment gardeners and for the town and Paul Muto stated that he hoped people would realise that it relies on volunteers and come forward.

6. Stoneyflat Parking

County Cllr Gordon Stewart raised a resident complaint regarding the continual parking of a van on the grass adjacent to Stoneyflat Allotments. Sarah Eden acknowledged that this was not the first time a complaint had been made and there were also unresolved issues from residents of The Copse. Cllr Russ Greig agreed that the grass is being churned up and it looks unsightly but also sympathised with allotment holders as there was no parking available. It was discussed that accessibility is an issue if plot holders are carrying heavy items.

Paul Muto stated that they could agree to ban parking on the grass altogether but that would not help with accessibility issues. It was discussed that there were no double yellow lines so vehicles could unload from the side of the road.

Jean Phillips reminded the meeting that previously a permeable parking mesh has been suggested to protect the grass and allow parking. Sarah Eden confirmed this was the case and as far as she was aware the cost of having a dropped kerb installed by NCC was the stumbling

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block. Sarah Eden added that she was aware that there may be other requests for dropped kerbs in West Wylam from a mobility point of view. Cllr Russ Greig agreed that there was no dropped kerb in this vicinity to allow safe crossing by anyone in a wheelchair or driving a mobility scooter.

Cllr Andy Gill suggested that the priority would be speaking with both Karbon Homes and NCC, as well as liaising with NWL as there are water systems in this area. Cllr Andy Gill did not think there would be an issue with NWL but in view of the bus stop being where it is, this may present an issue. Cllr Russ Greig stated that as well as a parking area the bus stop could be made safer. **It was AGREED to recommend this course of action to the Council.**

7. Administrative Assistance

Paul Muto raised interest in purchasing an Allotment Management programme that would maintain lists, send out invoices and warning letters etc. in a bid to overhaul the whole system and reduce the administrative burden for managing the allotments.

Cllr Russ Greig asked if the thought was that the Town Council took ownership and maintained the records or if the PGA would prefer a laptop to do it themselves. Paul Muto described that he could see the benefit of warning letters being sent out from the Town Council as they may have more impact but that there was also a legacy to maintain and the PGA was not keen on dissolving their responsibilities. Sarah Eden commented that regardless of whether it was an old system or a new system, Paul had identified that they were struggling to get people to carry out the administrative tasks and would it not be preferable if some work could be brought into the office. Paul Muto responded that if the administration was a less onerous task then someone may be more willing to take it on.

8. Budget

Cllr Russ Greig summarised that in the budget allocated at the start of the financial year, including £2,200 carried over from 2016/17 only £1,283 had been spent, 25% of the budget available.

It was AGREED that the following should be committed for the present financial year:

£100/month	Web-based soft management system
£350	Hedging at Redwell Allotments
£350	Hedging at Castledene Allotments
£500	Replacement raised beds at Redwell Community Allotments
£500	Clearing footpath and entrance to Castledene Allotments
£800	x1 Noticeboard for Redwell Allotments and x1 Noticeboard for Stoneyflat Allotments

Cllr Russ Greig raised the water usage being significantly higher at Castledene Allotments. Paul Muto responded that there was double the number of allotments but it could also be a leak as flexi pipes have not been installed there.

With regards to the new costs for Edgewell Allotments, Sarah Eden advised that Cllr Andy Gill and herself were looking to compare metered against unmetered at the earliest opportunity.

2018/19 Budget - £3,000

End of meeting