

**Report of Liaison Meeting with the Prudhoe Gardeners' Association,
Tuesday 7 March 2017 at the Spetchells Centre, Front Street, Prudhoe, at 6.00pm**

Present

Prudhoe Town Council: Cllr G McCreedy (in the Chair), Cllr A Gill, Cllr Mrs N McGee (arrived 6.10pm); Mr R Whinney (Allotments Officer)

Prudhoe Gardeners Association: Mr P Kerry (Vice-Chair), Mrs C Newton (Treasurer / Show Secretary), Mr A Newton, Mrs J Phillips (both members of PGA Committee)

Apologies for Absence were received from Cllr Mrs J McGee (Chairman of the Council), and Mr Lenny Outterside (Chairman of PGA).

Finance — the financial report was received. The PGA noted that rather than paying over all of the rent receipts to the Council, before receiving back the one-third agreed between the two bodies, they now deducted their running costs along with the one-third amount, before paying the remainder to the Council. This was accepted as a more practical way of proceeding. At the suggestion of the Allotments Officer, it was agreed that the PGA should request the Council to make any VAT-able purchases on the PGA's behalf, as this would enable VAT to be recovered and make the budget go further. It was understood that this option did not apply where the PGA was, for example, purchasing items such as fertiliser for sale at the PGA Hut.

Rents and Lettings — the PGA reported that while there had been a few complaints regarding the rent increases that had taken place incrementally over the previous three years, the PGA Committee were of the view that the full charge of £47.50 was a reasonable sum. In terms of lettings, there were 6 no. plots to let at Castle Dene of which 3 had recently been vacated. The Council agreed to contact a local business to quote for cutting back hedges on plots to be let.
Other matters:

- It was agreed to investigate the construction of a stepped access on a common path at the Castle Dene allotments, up to 50 yards in length, with the possible involvement of unemployed young people from the East Centre;
- It was agreed to investigate using spare fence posts located behind the former cemetery chapel to shore up the fence at CD39;
- Increased rents were not felt to be causing plot holders to give up their allotments. The viability of sub-dividing specific allotments was always a factor to be considered, because many gardeners found full-size plots too much to manage: three full-size plots had been sub-divided at Edgewell recently.

Allotment Management — the current officers of the PGA were as follows: Lenny Outterside (Chair); Peter Kerry (Vice-Chair); Christine Newton (Treasurer – stepping down at the AGM in April); Alan Newton (Stores – stepping down at the AGM); Amanda Airey (Secretary); Dave Gray (Minutes Secretary). A nominee had been found to take over as Treasurer; Mr and Mrs Newton were ready to continue to serve on the Committee and assist new post holders in their respective roles. Mr Kerry offered the huge thanks of the PGA to the Newtons for all of their work not only for the PGA but also for the Town Show, which was a major activity in terms of planning and organisation. Cllr McCreedy asked that it be formally recorded that the Council much appreciated the work and support of the Newtons over the years on behalf of the allotments and the Town Show, and this was agreed.

The PGA representatives stated that the Management Agreement was proving to work well. Whilst it was noted that the Tenancy Agreement had upset some plot holders, because it required each to maintain the boundary fences to their allotment, the Committee welcomed this as providing clarity on what was a major concern. The Allotments Officer noted that the Tenancy Agreement was the model document recommended by the National Allotment Society:

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it had been adopted because it stated the rules clearly, making it easy for the Committee to apply them.

Allotments Investment for 2017-18 — the following had been noted:

- Steps at Castle Dene (as above);
- Fence posts at CD39 (as above) – the plot holder had requested a reduction in rent for the plot on the basis that the leaning fence reduced the area available for cultivation;
- Compostable toilets
- Electricity for the allotments was stated to be a 'no-no' by the PGA representatives;
- Parking was an issue at Stonyflat. It was agreed to approach the relevant parties (NCC and Isos) once again to see if anything could be done to make the grassed area of land immediately west of the site accessible for the parking of motor vehicles. The nearby westbound bus stop might well be critical in influencing what, if anything, could be done.

Risk Management — it was noted that the PGA inspected the allotments in respect of their cultivation twice a year. It was suggested and agreed that the risk assessment should be reviewed, and later also agreed that the Allotments Officer would arrange with Mr Newton to carry out the risk inspections at the same time as the April cultivation inspection. The date for the inspections would be arranged following the PGA's AGM.

Jobs — the PGA agreed to (1) request that the plot holder at E28 (Edgewell) be requested to cut back the brambles which had grown through from the allotment into the adjoining garden of an elderly householder, while (2) it would be checked to see if the fence at E26 required new posts to maintain stability.

Water consumption — the PGA had requested a meter reading in respect of the meter at Stonyflat. Meanwhile, at Castle Dene, water consumption had reduced significantly following an approach by Mrs Newton to an individual connected with a business located adjacent to the allotments. The PGA AGM would be reminded of the need to conserve water. The Allotments Officer stated that he would encourage Northumbrian Water Limited to liaise with the PGA regarding their 'Rainwise' initiative and any potential offers, such as water butts, that might be available. The Allotments Officer also advised that the Council expected to seek tenders for water supply to the allotments when the market was opened up to competition in 2017.

Any other business — (1) the PGA representatives reported that planning for the Town Show was in progress. The Chairman of the Council would be invited to present the awards at the Show (2) regarding vandalism, the PGA strongly encouraged the reporting of suspected instances to the police, and that a crime number be obtained (3) the soil analysis at Stonyflat, carried out with the help of Dr Julia Cooper following concerns as to contamination after the December 2015 floods, had come back negative, but had provided very useful information regarding soil composition at the site (4) the Allotments Officer noted that he was intending to attend a forum of allotments officers in Morpeth later in the month.

Date of Next Meeting

The date for the next meeting was agreed as Tuesday 6 June 2017, at the Spetchells Centre, commencing at 6.00pm. The meeting closed at 7.05pm.