

Hurworth Parish Council

Allotment Holders Annual General Meeting

Minutes of the AGM held at

Hurworth Grange on 10th January 2018 starting at 7:00pm

Those present

Graham Wylie (Chairman), Margaret Williams, Richard Lawley, Dorothy Oughton, Tony Sayers, David Crisp and Peter Allan (Parish Clerk), eleven allotment holders and one observer.

Apologies for Absence.

None

1. Chairman's Opening Address

Graham Wylie welcomed the Allotment Committee and the allotment holders.

1. Review of the year

Margaret Williams read the annual review on behalf of the Parish Council.

1.1.a. ***Grange allotments*** - nothing to report

1.1.b. ***Strait Lane allotments***

There has been an ongoing issue at the Strait Lane allotment site and for information, there follows a precis of this unfortunate saga.

An allotment holder (ie:- the applicant) requested permission for a structure which is outside the permitted limits in size on the HPC allotments rules. This was rejected at the full council meeting which the applicant attended.

An appeal to the decision was raised, which was re-evaluated, and permission was again rejected, due to the size of the intended structure.

A formal complaint was made by the applicant to HPC. The Council held a formal Complaints Committee meeting, in accordance with the Council's procedures. The outcome was that the Council believed it had acted correctly, but to ensure this, they engaged a specialist lawyer. He confirmed that all the actions and decisions made, were legal and correct. The applicant was informed of this.

A full review was then demanded. The Council convened a Special Meeting and held a comprehensive Internal Review. The outcome of this meeting further confirmed the decisions which had been taken.

The Council was then threatened in public at a PC Meeting, stating that the applicant would 'go public' in an attempt to bring the Council into disrepute.

Consequently, an article was published in the local paper reporting that the Council were depriving 'friends' who are disabled from accessing the allotments. This is untrue, these 'friends' certainly have not been prevented from visiting the allotments, since one of them already has an allotment and the husband of the other also has an allotment.

A formal complaint was then submitted by the applicant to Darlington Borough Council stating that six named Councillors and the Clerk were not answering questions that had been asked and also not complying with the Council's procedures. An independent enquiry was carried out by DBC, and the Council and all the named people were totally exonerated.

The Council has not renewed the annual tenancy, nor upgraded the 'helper' status of the applicant on another allotment, as in their opinion, this privilege has been thwarted. The applicant not only breached both the Allotment rules and the etiquette which other allotment holders are entitled to expect when a shared facility such as having an allotment is there to be enjoyed by all. The applicant has been advised of this decision and has been requested to leave both the plots in question by 5th February 2018

The Council now consider this matter is now closed.

2. Moving forward

The Parish Clerk gave the following report.

I think that if this had been an Allotment Association, rather than the Parish Council, you would have been much less tolerant.

Individual councillors have been verbally abused, had threats that they could lose their houses and had vexatious calls made to their homes. Parish councillors are volunteers who offer their services to help the community and try to improve the quality of life for their fellow residents. To have suffered the abuse thrown at them is a disgrace and should never happen again.

Also if this was an Association you would, collectively, now be facing legal costs. The cost to Hurworth Parish Council to date is several thousand pounds of ratepayer's money. All this is because one self-centred person has tried to override the rules and ethics by which your allotments are managed.

In order to ensure that this does not happen again, the council and Allotment Committee have tightened up the rules, reduced the flexibility previously bestowed and put in a new Administration system.

The rules for Tenants and for Registered Helpers have been revised and every tenant and Helper needs to sign a new Agreement.

We all hope that this episode will soon be behind us.

2. Minutes of the AGM held on 22nd November 2016

The Minutes for the 2016 AGM were accepted, Proposed by Richard Lawley and Seconded by Tony Sayers.

3. Financial report for 2017

Graham Wylie read the Financial Report for the 12 months to 30th November 2017.

Allotment Accounts for the 12 months to 30th November 2017

Notice Boards	320.00
Grass Cutting strait Lane	340.00
Grass Cutting Hurworth Grange	160.00
Water for allotments	227.90
Skip Hire – Strait Lane	180.00
Nat Society of Allotments sub	56.00
Keys	9.00
Total Expenditure	1292.90

Refund of Bond	30.00
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There were no questions

4. Election of Committee for 2018

The following persons were elected to the Committee - Richard Lawley (HPC), Dorothy Oughton (HPC), Tony Sayers (Grange Allotments), David Crisp (Strait Lane Allotments), Peter Akers (Strait Lane Allotments), Brian Cooper (Strait Lane Allotments).

5. **Election of the Chairman**

David Crisp offered to be Chairman for the year 2017-18, and was unanimously elected.

6. **Changes to the Allotment Rules and regulations**

Graham Wylie read out the changes to the Allotment Rules, and the meeting accepted them without comment.

It was agreed that people of the Waiting List at Hurworth Grange can be offered plots at Strait Lane, if vacant plots become available and there is no Waiting List. Also, in the event of the Waiting List being totally exhausted, consideration may be given to providing a tenant to a second plot, this will be decided by the Allotment Committee on a case by case basis.

7. **Changes to the Allotment Administration**

Graham Wylie informed the meeting that there are some changes in the Allotment Administration to tighten up the management of the plots. There has resulted in all tenants being required to sign new Tenancy Agreements each year.

Also helpers on the allotments, other than immediate family, need to be registered and sign a registered Helpers Agreement. These will only be granted with the consent of the Allotment Committee.

8. **Allotment Register and Waiting list**

The Chair stated that there are currently thirteen people on the Waiting List.

There are a number of allotments becoming available in January 2018, and these will be allocated at the end of this month.

9. **Allotment rent for 2018**

The rent has been increased to £20 per annum, and it was confirmed that the council will continue to pay the water charges. Hurworth have the lowest rental charge in the Borough of Darlington.

10. **Allotment Association Update**

David Crisp reported that there are ten associate members. There is nothing further to report.

11. **Allotment Upkeep**

Tony Sayers reported that all the Grange allotments are in good order.

Graham Wylie reported that all the allotments at Strait Lane are in good order, with the exception of plot 10b where a concrete platform has to be removed.

12. **Requirements for 2018**

The chairman asked the meeting if they had any requirements for 2018, and there were no requests.

13. **Any Other Business**

The Chairman closed the meeting at 7:20pm