



Alton Allotment Association
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20th October 2015

Cllr. Matthew Bayliss
53 Lenten Street
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Dear

Re: Open Spaces Committee Meeting – 28th October 2015

Members of our Association attended two successful meetings on Wednesday 7th October 2015. The first was the inaugural Allotment Advisory Sub Committee (AASC), the other was our own Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM).

Taking the outcome of the EGM first, I am pleased to inform you that our proposal to match the date on which the Association would collect its fees, to the date when the Council collected their rents, was approved unanimously.

The AASC had a similar positive outcome, with the recommendation by those present to adopt a set of "Terms of Reference", which I believe will help to cement the improving relationship between our organisations. I trust that these terms will be ratified by your Committee.

The AASC also considered the following :-

- Allotment Association Renewals;
- Maintenance Contract;
- Plot inspections for 2016; &
- Budget Considerations.

The Allotment Officer, Samantha Brown, and I discussed drafting a joint renewal reminder, to be issued when the plot rents fall due, and in line with our EGM proposal, which I trust your committee will approve.

Routine grass & hedge cutting by Association volunteers has not been as successful as we would have wished. Volunteers have come forward, only to drop out due to increased commitments at home or in their workplace. Mike Penn has continued to carry out the work at Borovere, submitting his claims to us, which we have then forwarded to the Town Council for payment. We have recently recruited and trained another volunteer for Spitalfields/Wooteys, but due to the lateness in the cutting season, he is unlikely to have an impact until next year. We will of course, continue to identify other volunteers for the remaining sites. Ultimately, with insufficient voluntary manpower, the responsibility of conducting the routine maintenance will fall back onto the Council.

Plot inspections have worked better this year, with swifter enforcement action being taken. It has resulted in less complaints from those who maintain neighbouring plots to the necessary standard, and enabled those waiting, to be allocated a plot. We would hope that the process of plot inspections, interpretation of the standards required and the enforcement action might be reviewed by the AASC at a future date, to clarify the responsibilities of the plot holders.

We feel budget considerations, while the last item of business, are the most important issue. We are aware that on Wednesday 2nd December, members of the Council will be attending a Budget Workshop. No doubt a representative of your Open Spaces Committee will be attending to present its suggested budgets. The Alton Allotment Association believes that it is vital the Open Spaces Committee successfully lobby for a significant increase in their Improvements and Maintenance expenditure.

In our letter to you, dated 1st July 2015, we highlighted outstanding points of concern to our members. They included :-

- Additional standpipes at the Wooteys Site;
- Site security.

The Association understands that, similar to the delayed remedial work at the Hawthorns site car park, progress on providing additional taps at Wooteys may have been held up by "budget restraints each year". We have therefore submitted a proposal through the AASC for our volunteers to carry out the trench work and, in collaboration with a skilled water engineer, install an extra 3 standpipes at the northern end of the site. We would respectfully request that Alton Town Council grants permission, in principle, and subject to meeting Water Regulations, for the Association to carry out this project before the next growing season. The cost to the Council should not exceed £800.

There was a significant breach of security last year when the perimeter fence at Wooteys was compromised, our Association shed broken into, and several valuable items of machinery stolen. We appreciate the attempts that have been made so far to repair the breach in the fence, but remain concerned for the general security at this site. We understand that a Right of Way (Footpath 26C) exists, which leads to the point where the break-in took place, and that a vehicle had been driven along this leafy, secluded footpath, enabling the removal of our heavy machinery. Would the Council enter into discussions with the Highway Authority, Hampshire County Council, with a view to them providing bollards or other anti-vehicle measures at the junction of this path and Edward Road?

It has come to our attention that the galvanized gates, one near Edward Road, and the other at Spitalfields Road, are in need of repair / replacement. The older, rusty gate adjacent to Edward Road is also insecure due to the condition of the wire mesh, and consideration should be given to its replacement.

The Association has not been idle in making improvements where it can for the security of its equipment. A large metal ex-sea container has been installed and secured with a high security, controlled-key, padlock. Our remaining machinery, which had been stored by the Town Council at its depot has now been relocated to the container. The Association is grateful to the Town Council for the kind assistance of Ty Smith, with the transportation of the container and our machinery.

During conversations with Council officers over recent months, other areas of concern have been mentioned, which include:-

- Overgrown trees at various sites;
- Broken lock at Whitedown shed

There are a number of large trees which border various allotment sites. One boundary is between Spitalfields / Wooteys and the cemetery. We understand that the EHDC owned cemetery is maintained by external contractors, who operate a 'rolling programme', and that previous requests from Alton Town Council to have overhanging branches lopped, have not been successful. Nevertheless, if an individual property owner was in the same situation, they would be fully entitled to remove any foliage in a direct line above their boundary themselves. We would therefore request that the Town Council engages tree surgeons to carry out this work. There are other large trees that need similar treatment. They are the large Eucalyptus tree by plot SP02, the Willow by plot WH24, and several overhanging trees along the northern boundary at Whitedown.

The main shed at Whitedown has a broken mortice lock, possibly as a result of "anti-social" activity. We understand that this lock has been in this condition for some time, and prevents those Whitedown plot holders without a shed of their own, of leaving any items securely.

In conclusion, the Alton Allotment Association appreciates the improved working relationship with the Council, and applauds the progress made so far, as demonstrated by the formation of the Allotment Advisory Sub Committee, and a willingness to improve the car park at Hawthorns. However, we believe that due to historic low levels of funding for improvements and general maintenance, a backlog of issues has built up to unacceptable levels. If allotment holders are obliged to maintain their individual plots to a suitable standard, while their rents have been increased, then surely they have a right to expect their landlord to increase its investment in the towns infrastructure to a suitable standard.

Yours sincerely

John Pritchard
Chairman
Alton Allotment Association
Promoting allotment gardening in Alton