

Meeting of Belbroughton Parish Council Allotments Committee meeting on 21st November 2012 in the Barton Room at Fairfield Village Hall

Present: Councillors K Green, A Hood, and A Ince and Mrs M Rees (co-opted member)

In attendance: Katie Limm (Clerk)

339/12 Election of Committee Chairman

Cllr Hood was elected to Chair the Committee.

340/12 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr Jones. Cllr MacDonald's resignation from the Committee was noted.

341/12 Declarations of interest

Cllr Ince declared a disclosable pecuniary interest since her husband is one of the Council's allotment tenants. However the Council had granted a dispensation to enable her to take part in discussions regarding the allotments.

342/12 Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 25th March 2009 were approved.

343/12 Allotments Committee

The Committee noted that it had not met formally since March 2009, although twice yearly inspections of the allotments had been undertaken. It was agreed that whilst frequent meetings were not necessary it was desirable to have a formal Committee that could meet if required to discuss issues concerning the Council's agricultural land and to make recommendations to the Council.

The Committee also noted that its name and the term allotments did not properly convey the scale and nature of the Council's agricultural land holdings. Cllr Ince pointed out that the term reflected the fact that the land was held by tenants under Allotments legislation. However the Committee agreed to recommend to the Council that for greater transparency the Committee should be renamed the Agricultural Holdings Committee.

344/12 Information Requirements

The Committee considered what information should routinely be available to the Council about its agricultural land and tenants. The Clerk circulated a list of current tenants and the acreage they rented. Various hand drawn maps were available showing the location of the land and each tenant's holdings but some of the information was out of date. It was agreed to ask the Clerk to explore whether a new map could be drawn up to show all the agricultural land and its division into holdings.

The Clerk said that the tenancy agreements were made under the Allotments Acts 1908 and 1950 and that it would be prudent to establish whether subsequent legislation had any significant impact on the agreements. The Committee recommended that the Council's solicitor should be asked to review the agreements and advise the Council on any issues arising as a result of current legislation.

345/12 Allotments inspection

A number of issues had been identified on the recent inspection:

- i. a gate had been removed from the land accessed from the A491. This gave the tenant easier access but the Committee was concerned about the potential for fly tipping or access by travellers. The Clerk was asked to write to all tenants asking them to reinstate gates if necessary and to keep them closed. Tenants should be asked to contact the Council if this caused them any problems.

- ii. a footpath off Third Road, Wildmoor had been obliterated. The tenants should be asked to reinstate it but the Clerk was asked first to consult the footpath wardens about the route.
- iii. the tenant adjacent to the access track off Madeley Road had ploughed and rolled the land in a way that meant that water drained onto the track. The Clerk was asked to write to him about this.
- iv. the gate erected across the entrance to the footpath at Badgers Copse discouraged use of this path and the copse itself. The Clerk was asked to consult the footpath wardens about whether it would be desirable to have this gate removed.

346/12 Allotment rents

The last increase in rents had been implemented in September 2009. The current rent charged to tenants was £70 pa per acre. The County Council had advised that their rents were reviewed on a 3 year cycle and that rent increases of around 20% had been agreed for rents that were last reviewed in 2009. Their advice was therefore that the Parish Council should be considering charging about £85 an acre now.

The Committee noted that the current year had been a poor one for crops locally. Cllr Ince also suggested that the County Council provided better facilities for tenants in some cases, for example a water supply.

The Committee agreed in principle to recommend to the Council that it should propose a rent increase of £15 per acre phased in over 3 years with an increase of £5 from September 2013. The Clerk was asked to make further enquiries of the County Council about the facilities they provide for tenants.

The meeting closed at 8.55 pm.

Signed.....Chairman