

**HUNTINGDON TOWN COUNCIL****ALLOTMENT HOLDERS FORUM**

An Allotment Holders Forum was held in the Commemoration Hall, High Street, Huntingdon on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2011.

Present: Councillors A J Mackender Lawrence (Town Mayor) and C Hyams (Chairman) and approximately 50 allotment plot tenants.

1. **CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chairman, Councillor C Hyams, welcomed everyone present to the Annual Meeting of Allotment Holders and introduced the Mayor, the Town Clerk and himself to the forum.

2. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Mr & Mrs Fletcher (site representatives, Primrose Lane); Mr & Mrs Zientek (site representatives, Hartford Road); Mr & Mrs Smale; Mr & Mrs Turner; Mr Moody; Brian Gardner; and Nick Clifford.

3. **MINUTES**

Copies of the Minutes of the Allotment Holders Meeting held on 10th August 2010 had been published on the website and copies were available at the meeting. It was proposed, seconded and

**AGREED** that these were a correct record and they were signed by the Chairman.

4. **PRESENTATION OF PRIZES TO THE WINNERS OF THE BEST KEPT ALLOTMENTS COMPETITION 2010**

The Chairman invited the Town Mayor, Cllr A J MacKender Lawrence to present garden vouchers and trophies to the winning tenants in this years' competition. Cllr MacKender Lawrence congratulated all the ploholders on their endeavours, saying that he had been particularly impressed by the standard of cultivation at the allotment sites this year, in view of the difficult weather conditions that plot-holders had had to contend with.

Congratulations were expressed and prizes were awarded as follows in the form of National Garden Gift Vouchers:

Best Young Gardener – Daniel Bevan – Plot 1a, Sallowbush Road

Best Kept Allotment (1<sup>st</sup>) – Mr T Moody – Plot 32a, Sallowbush Road

Best Kept Allotment (2<sup>nd</sup>) – Mrs E Dighton – Plot 9, Primrose Lane

Best Kept Allotment (3<sup>rd</sup>) – Mr B Jones – Plot 35, Hartford Road

Best Newcomer (open to tenants who took on their plots after 1 September 2010) – Mr Brian Perrett – Plot 10b, Hartford Road.

5. **PRESENTATION**

The Town Clerk gave a short presentation to the Forum, aimed at illustrating various forms of self-management that might be of interest to an Allotments Association locally.

Allotment plot tenants were presented with some statistics, such as the number of plots, the number of tenancy agreements, the number of sites, the annual income derived in rents by the Council and the purpose for which it was applied. Income from rents, the meeting heard, was applied to supplying water and water points, hedges and fencing, gates, maintenance of haulage ways and communal areas, composting, waste disposal and tenancy administration.

The presentation covered the various types of allotment land, i.e. statutory, temporary and private, as well as different degrees of self-management and their arrangements, i.e. dependence, participation, delegation, semi-autonomy and autonomy.

Questions and discussion followed. Speaking on behalf of Hartford Road plot-holders, Mr Vaughan considered most people were ambivalent about the idea of self management and couldn't see what benefits it would bring. He asked whether grants might be available for more water points. Mr Ibbotson, of Sallowbush Road, said that having visited Hereford Allotments, he was convinced of the benefits, since the Allotments Association there had vastly improved the site facilities for plot holders.

A plot-holder from Hartford Road told the meeting that he elected a ward representative to represent his needs and that he was concerned that if the allotments were run by a small group, this might not be in his interest or be conducted fairly. Mr Ibbotson pointed out that plot-holders didn't currently have a vote on decisions about the allotments, but an association would give every tenant a vote.

A discussion about rents followed and it was suggested that details of the Council's expenditure on allotments could be published on the website.

*Clerk's Note: Allotments expenditure and income is published in the Council's estimates of income & expenditure, published on the website.*

Some plot-holders questioned the need for the Council to carry out maintenance work on the sites that could easily be undertaken by plot-holders. On hearing that there was a waiting list for plots of around 45 prospective tenants, it was suggested that better management of uncultivated plots would ensure plots were available to those willing to cultivate them.

In response to a question about the organisation of an Allotments Association, the meeting heard that there was likely to be an organisation per site, although membership of the Sallowbush Road Allotments Association was open to plot-holders from any site.

## 6. SITE REPRESENTATIVES REPORTS

**Sallowbush Road:** Mr Ibbotson reported that of the 74 plots on the site, only two were unoccupied; two were under notice to quit; and two would receive notice at the end of month unless a significant improvement was seen. This represented a great improvement in plot utilisation, cultivation and overall tidiness since the previous year, for which he thanked everybody for their efforts.

An Allotment Association had been formed and had 25 paid up members. There were at least 20 others who had pledged to join and he appealed to those to apply for membership. He asked for the Council's support to encourage new tenants to join.

Mr Ibbotson asked for a date for the removal of the compost clamp on Sallowbush Road and whether it might be possible to change the date of the Annual Plot-holders' Forum to take place outside school holidays and therefore ensure good attendance.

**Hartford Road:** The Chairman read a report from Mr & Mrs Zientek, which said that 2011 had been a difficult one for cultivation, owing to the weather. During the year, all the plots on the Hartford Road allotments had been taken and for most the cultivation had been successful. A shortage of rain early on had caused problems and a very late frost had caught many plot holders' potatoes and some strawberry flowers, unseasonably early due to the hot spell, which had been by a long cool spell, with hail and high winds. Runner beans were growing well and harvesting was reaching its peak.

Mr Vaughan, on behalf of Mr & Mrs Zientek, said that his report would be given during the question session.

**Primrose Lane:** There was no report, since the position of site representative was vacant at the time of the meeting.

**North Street:** There was no report from the site representatives in attendance.

## 7. QUESTION TIME

The Chairman invited questions and comments from allotment holders on any matter relating to the service.

Rod Harding, of Primrose Lane asked whether any more allotment land would be used for burials. The Chairman responded that the Council had an obligation to provide land for cemetery use and that this matter would be receiving the Council's consideration.

Rick Vaughan, of Hartford Road said that plot-holders would require adequate notice in the event that sewer works associated with the Primrose Lane Health Authority Site development were going to affect the site.

In connection with the Annual Best Kept Allotment Competition, Mr Vaughan asked if some objective criteria might be published on what the judges were looking for in a winner. It was further suggested that there should be a first prize for each site awarded.

A plot-holder from North Street, Mrs Valerie Broome, complained that rubbish dumped in a spot on the site was an eyesore, particularly for cemetery users and asked if it might be moved. She mentioned that rubbish hidden in a hedge had been raked over a plot to make it level, which had then caused unnecessary work for the new tenants to remove it.

Mr Ibbotson asked whether Sallowbush II would be put back into use and when the composting piles on Sallowbush I would be removed. Mr Vaughan mentioned a similar problem at North Street. In response, the Chairman assured plot-holders that the composting piles would be cleared as soon as possible. The Town Clerk was able to advise that all new tenancy agreements contained a clause committing the plot-holder to remove all non compostable waste from the site and reserving a right by the Council to claim any costs in the event of non compliance.

Mrs Valerie Porter expressed a willingness to assist on the site with maintenance needs.

Mr Rod Harding, of Primrose Lane stated that the trees on the boundary between the site and the cemetery were causing more and more shade and asked whether some tree surgery might be carried out to let more light through. He claimed that having been asked to remove trees from his plot, he could see no reason why the Council shouldn't be obliged to.

Mr Brian Perrett asked for more water tanks on his site.

The Chairman told the meeting that feedback from this meeting would be communicated via the Newsletter and the Noticeboards at the Allotment Sites.

Mrs Terry Clark of Primrose Lane appealed to tenants not to leave the combination locks in code position when leaving and entering the site gates, in order to prevent the theft of produce.

Mrs Emma Heggie of Sallowbush Road mentioned that there were rabbits on the site. The Chairman acknowledged this subject as an emotive one and Mr Ibbotson told the meeting that the Council was legally obliged to managed rabbit numbers.

Gerry Myhill of Primrose Lane told the meeting that tenants should not hesitate to contact the local police in the event of theft or damage. Following a breakage to his shed window, the police had investigated and found the culprit. Parents were informed and had attended the police station with the culprit to face a reprimand. The Mayor reminded tenants that 0845 456 4564 was the best number to which incidents of vandalism and theft on the allotments should be reported and plot-holders heard about the Neighbourhood Forum as an opportunity to influence policing priorities.

Mr Vaughan asked about the likelihood of substantial plot rental increases and was assured by the Chairman that this was unlikely and certainly not a policy supported by him personally. Councillor Hyams assured the meeting that he was working closely with the Town Clerk to establish the actual cost of the service provision.

8. **CLOSE OF MEETING**

The Chairman thanked the Mayor and the plot-holders for their attendance, comments and observations and urged the to contact the Council Offices if any assistance was required.

**CHAIRMAN**