

BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK

KING'S LYNN AREA CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes from the Meeting of the King's Lynn Area Consultative Committee held on Monday, 28th September, 2015 at 6.00 pm in the Committee Suite, King's Court, Chapel Street, King's Lynn

PRESENT: Councillor A Tyler (Chairman)
Councillors L Bambridge, J Collop, Mrs S Collop (Vice-Chairman), C Kittow,
G McGuinness, P Rochford, T Smith and Mrs M Wilkinson

An apology for absence was received from Councillor I Gourlay, G Middleton and
T Wing-Pentelow

1 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 13 July 2015 were agreed as a correct record.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

4 MEMBERS PRESENT PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 34

Councillor Mrs E A Nockolds attended for items

5 CHAIRMAN'S CORRESPONDENCE (IF ANY)

There was no Chairman's correspondence. The Chairman did report that Councillor Rochford had enquired as to how to add items to the work programme. The Chairman had advised Councillor Rochford to contact either himself, the Vice Chairman or the Democratic Services Officer.

6 UPDATE FROM FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING (45 MINUTES)

The Chairman then invited Tony Hall, Chief Executive of Freebridge Community Housing to give a presentation to the Committee.

The presentation covered:

- Programme of Improvements for Tenants
 - Decent Homes Programme
 - Non-Trads Programme
 - Hillington Square – A place where people want to live
 - Empty Homes Scheme

- New development
 - Keeble Court, King's Lynn and Coronation Avenue, West Winch
 - Passivhaus – Terrington St Clement
 - Waterside, North Lynn
 - Lady Jane Grey Road

- Key Performance Indicators

- What has been achieved

- Future Plans and Changes in National Policy

The Chairman then invited the Committee to ask questions, which are summarised below.

Councillor Tyler referred to the area around some garages on Reid Way and asked whose responsibility it was for maintaining them. He added that if they were the responsibility of Freebridge, then how quickly would Freebridge respond, if an issue was raised in relation to improving the area.

In response, Tony Hall explained that Freebridge had related assets outside of the home and around the property itself. Feedback from the Quality of Life survey had suggested that some people were dissatisfied with the areas around them.

In relation to grass cutting, Tony Hall explained that Freebridge tried to have a good relationship with the County and Borough. He further added that there was still a legacy from the transfer of stock where there was still some land belonging to the Council which would be better placed with Freebridge and vice versa, and some parcels of land had been transferred and where in the process of transferring.

With regards to the garage sites, it was explained that Freebridge had a varying demand for these. Some sites had been redeveloped as infill sites and he referred to a scheme in Hunstanton.

He added that as well as the decent homes standard, he also wanted to look at street lighting, pathways, etc.

With regards to how quickly issues could be dealt with, he explained that this would be on the same basis as repairs. However the difficulty would be if the work needed to be put into the overall work programme.

He concluded that if any Member had any particular issue then please let him know.

Councillor Smith referred to the decency standard and asked what was it and how that level was decided upon. He also asked Mr Hall if he would live in a Freebridge property.

In response, Tony Hall explained that there were several Freebridge Houses that he would like to live in. In relation to the decency standards he explained that this was a low standard and the key issues were around bathroom/kitchen life cycle targets. However, Freebridge had gone far beyond the decency standard in relation to insulation and tried to find ways to ensure homes were as energy efficient as possible. He added that if there was more funding available, then they would like to do more.

In response to a comment from Councillor Smith, Tony Hall explained that skirting boards were classed as a decorative feature. Damp issues would have to be investigated but generally it turned out to be condensation. He added that people could not afford to heat their properties and ventilate it at the same time. If it was condensation, then tenants would be expected to wipe down walls, but it would need to be inspected.

Councillor Mrs Collop asked what the future plans were for the Blockbusters shop. It was explained that it was in the programme and the drawings showed retail at ground floor with residential above. It was in the programme for this year but there was also a need to make sure that the building did not deteriorate.

Councillor Mrs Wilkinson asked what happened at the Freebridge Board Meetings. It was explained that the Board Meeting was not a public meeting. Tenants were informed about what was happening through Streets Ahead. He further added that tenants could be met on a one to one basis in their own homes as part of the out and about programme. They could also give feedback from the compliments and complaints form. There was also a tenant panel. He considered that there was a healthy relationship and there had not been any call for meetings to be held in a different way.

In response to a question from Councillor Mrs Wilkinson, it was confirmed that the Board Members were paid. It was explained that Board Meetings were held monthly together with other training events. It was also confirmed that the allowances were published in the annual accounts.

Councillor Miss Bambridge stated that she had put a note in the Members' Bulletin regarding being on the Board and suggested that the current 2 board members could also submit an article.

Councillor McGuinness referred to the Decency Standard and asked if it was the same as 10 years ago.

In response, Tony Hall confirmed that it was and added that it was more beneficial to agree standards locally. Freebridge were trying to make properties as affordable as possible and were working with tenants to reduce energy costs.

Councillor J Collop stated that he was happy to hear about the plans for the Blockbuster shop in view of all the money which had been spent on the bus station, and hoped that the works would be carried out as soon as possible.

He asked whether the Committee could have a tour of the former Zoots site and Hillington Square as he would like to look at the standard of those properties. In response, Tony Hall explained that the Planning Committee had been on a tour on Monday 21 September. He added that he would be happy to take the Committee on a tour.

In response to a question from Councillor Tyler in relation to anti-social behaviour, Tony Hall explained that Freebridge generally worked together with other organisations as part of a team dealing with anti-social behaviour.

Councillor McGuinness referred to the redevelopment at Hillington Square, and asked what the timeframe was for the rest of the redevelopment works.

Tony Hall explained that a paper would be presented to the Board next week on how to proceed and then to talk to the tenants. He added that the plans would have to be reconsidered given the financial constraints.

The Chairman thanked Tony for an interesting and useful presentation.

7 **ALLOTMENTS (45 MINUTES)**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Mrs Nockolds, Portfolio Holder to the meeting.

The Committee received a presentation from Sarah Moore, Operations Manager on Allotments.

Sarah explained that an allotment was:

‘By definition an allotment was: an area of land leased either from a private or local authority landlord, for the use of growing fruit and

vegetables. In some cases this land will also be used for the growing of ornamental plants, and keeping hens, rabbits or bees. ‘

In managing allotments, local authorities were also governed by the following national legislation:

- The Land Settlement Facilities Act 1919
- The Allotment Act 1922
- The Allotment Act 1925
- The Town and Country Planning Act 1947
- The Allotment Act 1950

The Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908 – this placed a statutory duty on local authorities to provide allotments appropriate to demand and they were traditionally managed by the lowest form of government and therefore the allotments which fell within the unparished areas of Kings Lynn were managed by the Council.

Advice and guidance could also be sought from the National Society of Allotments and Leisure Gardens, of which the Council was a member. They held regional forum meetings which allowed officers to get together and exchange ideas and advice, but importantly they were attended by the Societies legal officer who was there to offer legal advice in any difficult or challenging cases.

From March 2014 the management of allotments was moved from the Property Services section to Public Open Space section.

At present there were 14 sites across Kings Lynn, 4 of which were managed by allotment associations, the remaining 10 were directly managed by Public Open Space.

Of these, one site was rented from NCC, the rest were Council owned

There were 476 plots within those 10 sites

There was a waiting list of 90 people, and the Council received on average 2 allotment applications per week

In October 2014, allotments were subject to an internal audit, and the service was reviewed in order to guide future actions required to help to improve the service.

It was noted that improvements could be made to the back office administration and management.

One of the priorities highlighted was the need for an allotments strategy, which would set out the direction and future of the allotment stock, however as there were a number of day to day management operations to improve, it was agreed that this would be delivered during 2016.

A risk assessment had been developed that would be available to tenants and officers alike to cover the range of hazards that could be associated with allotments, such as machinery/ tools, bonfires, personal and public safety.

The waiting list was inherited from Property Services and detailed residents that had made allotment applications as far back as 2010. The recommendation was to bring the waiting list up to date by contacting the residents to ensure that they were, still interested, still in the area and had not been allocated a plot elsewhere.

Consideration had been given to making the eligibility criteria clearer, specifically to ensure that the applicants were residents within the unparished area of Kings Lynn, (those outside of this area, would be eligible for a plot within their own parish), over 18, did not have an outstanding debt with the Council, and were not already allotment tenants of 2 plots or more.

The plots were allocated on a first come first serve basis, where the applicants that had been on the list for the longest got offered the next available plot. They were given 14 days to accept/refuse the plot, and were informed that refusal would either take them off the list, or place them back to the bottom of the list whichever they preferred.

It was recommended that a livestock register be compiled in order to improve two way communications between authorities and tenants in the case of any livestock epidemics, or other issues.

To ensure that tenants were using the allotments appropriately, an inspection regime had been developed along with specific criteria

Cultivation level – it was a requirement that a minimum of 60% of any plot be cultivated, this included areas taken up by, greenhouses or polytunnels, and the area under fruit trees. Also, that the remaining area was kept mown or tidy, free from weeds, debris and litter. Tenants could often complain about a neighbouring plot holder that allowed their weeds to grow up and shed weed seed.

Structures – the structural soundness of any buildings that tenants had placed on their plot tried to be assessed. Conditions varied greatly, from brand new sheds, to homemade tin shacks.

Fences/hedges – a check was carried out to ensure that the tenants were adequately maintaining their bordering hedges or fences, keeping them to a restricted height of 4ft.

Hazardous Materials – a check was made for the presence of hazardous materials such as asbestos and barbed wire, and for other materials which could be hazardous to the soil condition, such as carpet and tyres

Livestock – a check was undertaken to ensure that any livestock appeared to have the basic needs of food, water and shelter, fulfilled and checked for signs that they were regularly attended.

It was found that whilst, on the whole most tenants used the allotments to grow fruit and vegetables there were a number of plots that were being misused, these varied from being uncultivated, used as storage or for other reasons.

Where vacating tenants left their allotments in bad conditions, attempts were made to at least remove the debris and waste left on the plots so that new tenants could at least start to cultivate unhindered. Also over growth was cut back and fence/hedge boundaries were checked, reinstating boundary lines with post and wire where required.

- Tenants in breach got a warning letter – Notice to Tidy 28 days to comply
- Then sent a Notice to Cultivate - 28 days to comply
- Then a Notice to Quit – 28 days to clear and vacate

There was a question on whether the Council tried to recuperate costs from the out-going tenants when items such as these were left behind.

It was recommended that a rule book be compiled that would make it clear to tenants what they could and could not do on their plots, and to explain and formalise the back office procedures.

The rule book was still currently in draft form and would be circulated as part of a consultation plan to tenants by November of this year. The rule book had been compiled by looking at the conditions and rules applied by other eastern area allotment managers, including Hellesdon Parish Council, Norwich City Council and from guidance developed by the National Society.

The rules denoted the appropriate use for an allotment and aimed to ensure that not only tenants were clear on what could and could not be done, but also enabled officers to be able to challenge and evict tenants efficiently should the rules be breached in any way.

In creating this document, the tenancy agreements would need to be revisited to ensure that they referred to the 'rule book', making the two documents work in conjunction with each other.

As tenancy agreements only legally last for 12 months, it was aimed to complete the rule book consultation by February, with an agreed version, and develop the new tenancy agreements by April 2016 for issue to all tenants.

It was likely that tenants would not always read a full rule book, so it was aimed to adopt a similar approach to Sheffield, where tenants got

an illustrated handbook, which read easily and highlighted the most important points.

In short the rule book will cover:

- Waiting list and eligibility
- Cultivation – and what it means
- Structure size
- Tenancy and breach of tenancy
- Anti-social behaviour including visitors
- Visitors
- Dogs
- Fences/hedges
- Bonfires
- Livestock and bees

The Allotments Act 1950 required that an allotment must be let at 'rent that a tenant is reasonably expected to pay', which is not particularly helpful. However our current rental charge was £0.07 per sq metre which equated to £17.50 per year for a standard plot of 250m².

This rent had not been reviewed or increased since 2001 when the charge was £0.063 per sq metre or £15.75 per year

According to the DCLG guidance 'growing in the community' factors that could be used to assess how reasonable allotment rents were:

- Rents in other neighbouring areas
- Charges to users for other recreational or leisure activities

A comparison showed that the Council's current charge for the allotments was extremely low, when compared to a neighbouring council and to leisure charges.

The service was currently subsidised via a special expenses charge of circa £20,000 per annum paid by council tax payers, and the total rent received from the directly managed sites was £8300.

The Chairman thanked Sarah for the presentation and then asked the Committee for any questions, which are summarised below:

Councillor Tyler added that he knew that allotments were important to people in the area, and asked what the biggest problems were and what was the positive aspect?

The Operations Manager explained that the biggest challenge was getting people interested in what they were able and not able to do. The positive side was some of the individual sites and the sense of community and explained that in North Lynn a group of people met up every Saturday morning, had breakfast and shared ideas, etc.

Councillor Rochford asked whether the Committee could have a copy of the draft rules. He also commented that he did a tour of allotments and clearly some were not being used for the purpose they were let, and asked whether the Council could enforce against those.

The Operations Manager agreed to send out a copy of the draft rules and welcomed any feedback from the Committee. The Operations Manager explained that enforcement could take place but it could take up to three months to evict a tenant. She added that she would be happy to help groups of people set up allotment associations.

Councillor Collop referred to special expenses which were incurred in the running of the allotments as King's Lynn did not have a Parish Council to run them. He added that it cost the Council a lot of money to run them and considered that the running of allotments should be reformed. However, if they were to be reformed then he considered that it should be done properly. He thought that allotments were good but that the Council was not charging enough. He added that Associations were run well but thought that they charged more.

The Operations Manager explained that she had been unable to clarify how much associations charged as this depended on a number of things. She did plan to have an Allotment Forum this year.

In response to a question from Councillor Collop regarding who made the decision to put allotment charges up, the Executive Director explained that the Committee's views were required in relation to this issue.

The Portfolio Holder explained that she would welcome a decision from the Committee in relation to any increases in rents for allotments. She added that it was costly for the Council if they had to go and clear a site. She further explained that the rents had not been increased in line with inflation. There would need to be a 12-month notice period given if there were to be any rent increase. She informed the Committee that South Wootton Parish Council currently charged £25.00 per year.

The Executive Director suggested that a report be prepared on the issues raised and some further work undertaken in relation to costings and presented to the next meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Smith referred to an increase from £17.00 per year to £72.76 and stated that any increase of that nature needed to be undertaken in stages, as he considered that people would give up their allotments due to the rent increase.

Councillor Miss Bambridge stated that, whilst she was not against the rent being increased, she did consider there was a limit as to what it could be. She stated that residents of South Wootton who had an allotment paid £25.00 but it would be a big leap to increase to £70.00.

She added that allotments also gave a health and exercise benefit, which should not be ignored.

Councillor Collop added that the rents for allotments could be increased then the Special Expenses paid by all residents of King's Lynn could be reduced. He added that people living in King's Lynn did not always know what their money was being spent on.

Councillor McGuinness stated that it would be helpful in the report if information could be included on the impact of having to carry out remedial work. He also asked about bonfires and whether there was any guidance which covered this, and used an example of a parcel of allotments in South Lynn which was surrounded by houses, where bonfires were lit regularly.

The Operations Manager explained that she was proposing that bonfires be banned in the summer months.

Councillor McGuinness added that it would be useful to look at those sites which were surrounded by houses individually.

In response to a question from Councillor Smith, the Operations Manager explained the process undertaken when letters had to be written to people when action was required to tidy up their allotment. She added that in most cases, when the first letter was sent, this normally prompted a response from the individual, where she could then assess the situation and whether there was a need to carry out any further action.

Councillor McGuinness also asked whether there was a baseline in relation to the state of the allotment when handed to a person. In response, the Operations Manager explained that a photograph was taken on the day the allotment was offered to a person.

The Chairman thanked Sarah for the presentation and attending the meeting.

AGREED: (1) That, a report be prepared and presented to the next meeting in relation to increasing rents for allotments.

(2) That a copy of the draft rulebook for allotments be sent to the Committee for their comments.

The Walks

Councillor Collop raised the issue of litter in the Walks following a Friday evening, which appeared to be coming from the two retail units near the crossing.

The Operations Manager explained that she was aware of the situation and would monitor the issue. However, this tended to be more of an

issue when the weather was better. She explained that the Friends of the Walks had made a connection with the retail units and asked them to help with the litter picking. She added that the bin at the bottom of the Walks was often full and emptied on a regular basis. She would look at installing another bin at that end of the Walks.

8 **REVIEW OF THE 2015 EVENTS PROGRAMME (30 MINUTES)**

The Committee received a presentation from Martin Chisholm, Business Manager on the Review of the 2015 Events Programme.

The presentation covered the range of events provided and numbers of people who attended.

The Chairman thanked Martin for the presentation and asked if the Committee had any comments/questions which are summarised below:

Councillor Tyler stated that the events appeared to be received well, and asked if the events provided was something that other towns of similar size to King's Lynn did.

In response, the Business Manager explained that events such as GEAR, the Olympic Torch and the Classic Car show were very successful events in bringing people into the town.

In relation to the luminaire display, it was confirmed that currently officers were looking to have a Xmas display on some buildings.

In response to a comment, the Business Manager explained that the 60% of the fee from the spitfire trail was going towards the Mayor's Charity.

Reference was to niche markets within the town and it was explained that these tried to be put on when events were taking place.

It was reported that the footfall on the 40s day was up by 50-60% and for the Mods and Rockers event was up by 70%.

The Business Manager explained that Sunday events produced the strongest increase in footfall. He added that the niche events were not always as successful.

The Executive Director explained that some basic research was carried out to see what worked in other places. He added that a lot of work and effort went in to the planning of the events. In relation to the luminaire light show he was aware that people did come to King's Lynn specifically to look at them. He added that Xmas would be a unique selling point as not many places had the light shows with sounds and lights.

Councillor Rochford referred to the Heritage Open Day and highlighted that a lot of restaurants were closed, and suggested that businesses should be encouraged to keep open longer on Sundays when events were taking place.

The Business Manager also expressed disappointment as the events were publicised.

The Business Manager also explained that a report would be presented to the Joint Panel Meeting in due course.

Councillor Mrs Nockolds, Portfolio Holder, explained that a report would be going to the Town Centre Partnership and to a Panel meeting. The Eastern Daily Press also did a report on the events and the media in general was also helping to promote events.

Councillor Collop stated that there must be a budget in order to be able to provide these events. The Executive Director explained that there was a Town Centre Promotions budget of £150,000. Councillor Collop asked if he could have a breakdown of finances and it was explained that this would be included within the Panel report.

The Executive Director explained that there were a lot of good things happening in King's Lynn for example redevelopment of the Tuesday Market Place and Saturday Market Place, bus station, riverfront – all of which had helped to lift King's Lynn. He added that if you could attract people to visit King's Lynn then they felt that it was a good place to visit.

The Business Manager asked that if any Member had feedback on any of the events, then please email him.

Councillor McGuinness referred to car parking promotions, and asked whether the lost revenue from less car parking spaces had been taken into account. In response the Business Manager explained that there was parking capacity at weekends within the town centre, although it might be that people had to look for them. He added that revenue would only be lost if someone then went to another town.

The Executive Director explained that parking revenue was up and car parking charges had not been reduced.

In response to a comment from Councillor McGuinness, the Business Manager explained that consideration was given to trying not to clash with other events taking place. He stated that the Classic Car event did clash with an event at Sandringham, but there were still enough people at the event.

In relation to advertising, Councillor Smith stated that as you drove past King's Lynn there was nothing to tell you that an event was taking place in the town. He asked whether a sign could be erected before the event took place.

Councillor Smith also asked whether traders were given any ideas and cited shops in Sheringham which took part in the 40s weekend.

The Business Manager explained that the Town Centre Partnership did have a good working relationship with the Vancouver Quarter. He added that it was not easy for the peripheral streets which did not open on a Sunday.

In relation to signage, the Business Manager explained that it was governed by regulations, however consideration could be given to the use of temporary signage in the future.

Councillor Tyler pointed out that a lot of shops participated in the Halloween event, which was put on most years.

Councillor Miss Bambridge added that the issue of promotion was raised at the Town Centre Partnership where it was explained that signs could not just be erected and planning permission needed to be applied for. She added that not all traders were part of the Town Centre Partnership.

The Portfolio Holder explained that the Town Centres Manager did go round to each shop individually to tell them about forthcoming events.

The Chairman thanked the Business Manager for his presentation.

AGREED: That Members of the Committee would email the Business Manager feedback on any of the events which had taken place.

9 **COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee noted the Work Programme.

10 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting of the Committee was Thursday, 7 January 2016 at 6pm in the Committee Suite, King's Court.

The meeting closed at 8.30 pm