

Allotments – Task and Finish Group

This brief report summarises areas for review with regards to the management and maintenance of the allotments within Chorley. The report highlights the current position on each issue and some suggestions of areas to explore

Members will want to consider these issues in light of the information they have gathered to date, on site visits; from other officers; and from representatives views expressed at the last meeting.

Standard Charges

We currently charge a figure of £39.50 per year. We currently have the following concession where OAP's are only charged 50% of the annual fee. The income generated from the annual plot fees is in the region of £6000. This figure is unlikely to cover the administration and management of the allotments, which includes an on site fresh water supply on some of the sites

For Consideration

- *Review of existing annual rental charges and consideration of increases above the line of inflation.*
- *Removal of the concessionary OAP scheme, phased or immediately*

Impact

- Increased income to reflect the cost of the Allotment service.
- Negative feedback related to the increase in costs.

Layout of New Sites

The last site developed had no restrictions on what could be allowed on the plots in terms of sheds and fences etc. This leads to a fairly informal arrangement where those on a plot have an open reign to erect what they want. This can lead to the sites looking rather untidy as the types of sheds and fences used are never uniform

For Consideration

- *Do we introduce rules or strict guidelines on fencing and have no or only a certain fence type.*
- *Consider restrictions on sheds and greenhouses, as above to do we only allow certain shed types and sizes*
- *How do we enforce non compliance on site*

Impact

- Sites look a lot tidier and are easier to maintain
- Potential negative feedback related to higher cost of running a plot for users

Layout of Existing Sites

As discussed above we need to consider whether to apply firm standards on the newly developed sites to ensure they are managed consistently. This point relates to whether we apply any agreed new standards to the existing allotments and how they are applied. In addition to this some of the established sites have plots which are much larger than standard plots and some people benefit from a large plot but pay the same as those with a smaller plot

For Consideration

- *Do we apply any new rules or strict guidelines on fencing and sheds to the established sites? Either as new tenants take possession or with existing plot holders*
- *As tenants vacate the larger plots do we carve the plots up to make them commensurate with the standard size?*
- *Do we write to those with larger plots and tell them we intend to reduce their plot size to address the waiting list, with them in occupation?*
- *Do we cease standard charges per plot and introduce charges which reflect plot size?*

Impact

- If it is introduced the sites will look tidier
- Large piece of work enforcing new regulations on the existing sites, along with the negative publicity surrounding the enforcement
- If we go with piecemeal we will operate a two tier system on the site, which will make enforcement difficult to administer
- New plots are made available which will reduce the waiting lists
- Negative publicity as established plot holders have their plots reduced
- Income increases and is based on size as opposed to a generic figure

Provision of Services (Water)

Currently the majority of the established sites have clean piped water on site. This is not controlled and is subject to abuse. In addition the high cost of the supply impacts on our overall running costs of the service. There is also the sustainability agenda which this current arrangement clearly does not support. On the newer sites we have tried to encourage the use of water butts to encourage plot holders to take a more sustainable approach. However the cost of the water butts has been met by CBC which again significantly increases costs.

For Consideration

- *Do we terminate existing clean water supplies on the established sites, to reduce costs and increase sustainability?*
- *Do we retain the on site water supplies, but increase plot charges to reflect the better facilities at these sites and attempt to cover the costs*
- *On newly established plots, do we provide the water butt and charge the tenant back, encourage them to buy their own or continue to provide them FOC.*

Impact

- We move towards a more environmentally friendly solution
- We attempt to cover our costs more by making charges commensurate with the quality of the offer
- If we remove all piped water we make considerable savings
- By making tenants fund their own water butt will make savings for the Council
- Negative publicity as a result of removing existing water supplies and imposing direct expense on tenants as they will have to provide the butts.

Waiting List Management

Currently we have around 400 on the waiting list. We have no fixed procedure for measuring the accuracy of the list or determining whether people still have a desire to wait for a plot. In a recent exercise we straw polled 100 applicants who have been waiting the longest to see if they are still interested. This resulted in around 40% saying they no longer want a plot and we subsequently took their names off the list. The onus is on us to continue to do this. Also the waiting lists are not area specific, therefore if you are next on the list you are offered the next available plot. For instance a newly developed site will be offered to those on the waiting list regardless of where they live. The plots are not first offered to those in the vicinity

For Consideration

- *The onus is placed on the applicants to ensure they are kept on the waiting lists. All those on the lists are to contact us at the beginning of the year to ask to remain on the lists. Those who we don't hear from are removed from the lists*
- *Instead of operating a single waiting list, several lists are held based on area. Plots are issued on an area basis.*

Impact

- Our waiting lists are more accurate and reflect actual demand.
- Our administrative costs are reduced as the onus is placed on to the applicants
- We could be accused of manipulating the waiting lists and those who forget to contact us fall off the list

- Issuing plots on an area basis could be deemed unfair, would need to be fully explored

Tenancy Agreements

Tenants when they take occupation of a plot are subject to a form of tenancy agreement. This agreement applies rules and conditions for those who are in occupation. However they tend to be loose and this results in subjectivity being applied when considering further action.

As a result of this it makes it difficult for us to tackle those who break the conditions and could expose officers.

For Consideration

- *Review the tenancy arrangements to include trigger points, definitive guidance on non compliance and to ensure that the agreements catch all and therefore protect the Councils position.*

Impact

- We are able to manage non compliance of conditions more effectively
- Those who abuse the conditions have the potential to be evicted and plots become available quicker