

Minutes of Allotments Working Group Meeting

Thursday 13th August 2009. 6.30pm Civic Centre

Present

Mike Armstrong (In Chair), Michael Cranston, Sue Stokel-Walker, Louise Hetherington, Honor Cooper, John Tucker, Peter Whewell, Donald Robinson, Hugh Smith, Stu Gilhespy, Steven Coates, Peter Horrocks

Also in Attendance

Lisa Grabham of the City Council's Research Department

Apologies

John J Brown,

Survey

Lisa Grabham had already done some preliminary research on-line into allotment demand and was aware that there was an unfulfilled demand for the service. She outlined several possible methods of actually and scientifically establishing exactly what that demand was in the City and a lively discussion took place over the merits of each method. It was eventually decided that a response driven mini questionnaire in CityLife magazine would be backed up by on-street interviews with a 1100 person sample of face to face street interviews throughout the city would be the best options available to us. The cost of this would be c£2000, half of which SSW offered to fund from her research budget within Leisure Services, the remainder would be paid for by the allotments budget, The preliminary outline surveys would be circulated to the members of the AWG by e-mail to speed up the process before the next meeting with the actual tasks to take place in October/November. The Chairman thanked Lisa for her presentation.

Minutes

Accepted as a true record

Matters Arising

The group's chairman has been offered a meeting with the Leader of the Council on the questions raised last month by the representatives of Denton Bank allotments, this will take place in early September. An outstanding quotation for a fence at Chelmsford Grove will be chased up.

Budgets.

A balance on the NAWG account of £3715 was presented and accepted by the group. Allotment budget funds stand at around £53,000. There had been substantial expenditure on rat control this year, MC reported that he had investigated the possibility of outside contractors providing a cheaper service but this was not feasible. The question of further expenditure at St Anthony's allotments was raised, The site's future is still not fully decided, MA will take up a watching/acting brief as an area rep for this site to try and keep members up to speed on developments in that area.

AOB

The booklet 'Your Association, Your Committee' will finally be ready for distribution this coming week. It will also be made available on the website in pdf format to enable a wider circulation to be achieved. Members queried the lack of progress in the final stages of the Allotment Strategy produced some time ago by this group. SSW will ensure that a draft copy of the latest version is circulated by e-mail to all members of the group. Its progress via a scrutiny panel towards consideration by the Executive will also be expedited by SSW. Two potential sites for allotments in Gosforth were highlighted by JT, one was the disused football pitch next to Beaumont Terrace allotments and the other was open land adjacent to the old people's bungalows in the St Cuthberts Walk/ Church Avenue area of South Gosforth. SSW will ask the Terriers Dept to investigate the ownership of these land parcels. MC has also established another possibility in the area of the disused boxing club in Cowgate. Preliminary talks have already taken place between Dave Roberts, the neighbourhood response manager and MC. This will need to be progressed by MC's successor as a matter of urgency. SSW told the meeting that Nigel Hails, Director of Neighbourhood Services, would like to attend the next meeting of this group, he will be welcome. Joint Council/Freemen inspections of all Freemen sites are planned for September, all Freemen sites will be told in advance of the dates involved. LH would like to spend some of the group's funds on prizes for the raffle at the show, agreed that she could use her discretion. MA Asked all sites to try and collect as much spare produce etc for sale at the show this year, plants would also be welcome gifts. DR asked if the show venue would be staffed from 8am onwards on the Saturday of the show, confirmed that it would be open at this hour!.

SSW told the group that recruitment for Michael's replacement was already underway, and a candidate will hopefully be soon found among the staff of Leisure Services Department.

The Chairman thanked Michael Cranston on this, his last group meeting before his retirement from his position as Allotments Officer. Over the past four and a half years, our relationship had blossomed into an excellent joint partnership. Michael was presented with a gift from the group (which he declined to open in case it was all drunk). He replied with his thanks for the group's co-operation over his term of office and stated that in his belief, the allotments in the city were the best in the region, and that in addition the ploholders of Newcastle were second to none in their skills as gardeners.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 7.45pm.

Next Meeting Thursday September 10th at 6.30pm in room 701.

Website www.newcastleallotments.co.uk