

Allotment Stakeholder Panel Meeting

12 September 2012

Held at Watford Town Hall

Present:

Councillor Keith Crout (Chair) (KC)	Portfolio Holder for Community Services	
Lesley Palumbo (LP)	Head of Community Services	Watford BC
Paul Rabbitts (PR)	Parks and Open Spaces	Watford BC
Kathryn Robson (KR)	Partnerships & Performance	Watford BC

Watford Allotment Holders

1	Welcome, apologies and introductions	Action
	<p>KC opened the meeting and welcomed those attending. He invited the Group to introduce themselves.</p> <p>He explained that the Panel had been established to look at the issues that are important to allotment holders and that agreeing the purpose of the Panel was central to achieving this. He then invited Lesley to introduce the agenda item on the Terms of Reference.</p>	
2	Terms of Reference for the Group (Lesley Palumbo + Group)	
	<p>Lesley asked the Panel whether people were happy with the draft Terms of Reference that had been previously circulated.</p> <p>An allotment holder commented that the Terms of Reference indicated that everyone on the Panel is on the same side, which is how it should be.</p> <p>Another allotment holder noted that the Terms of Reference referred to the Allotment Strategy. She wondered how many people had actually read the current draft Strategy in order to understand what was being proposed. She wondered if it could be circulated. LP said that the Panel could decide collectively what information it needed and this would be circulated as and when identified. She commented that the Panel would identify and then focus on issues that would then be reflected in the Strategy – that is a key part of the Panel's role.</p> <p>The allotment holder then asked whether the Panel could raise other issues and broaden discussions. LP said this was the aim of the group work that was next on the agenda.</p> <p>An allotment holder asked whether the Terms of Reference might be affected by the draft Allotment Strategy. In some respects the Strategy would need to be considered before the Terms of Reference are finalised. LP commented that as the Panel develops, the Terms of Reference can be reviewed as it progresses and can</p>	

	<p>be on the agenda whenever members feel it is appropriate.</p> <p>KC asked whether the draft Allotment Strategy could be on the agenda for the next meeting.</p> <p>LP concluded the agenda item by saying that the purpose of the evening was to establish dialogue and identify the key issues. She said this would be supported at the meeting through Paul Rabbitts providing an initial overview of the current state of play with regards to the Allotment Strategy and then it would be over to the Panel to work in groups on key issues to be taken forward.</p>	KR to note
3	<p>Allotment Strategy overview</p> <p>(Paul Rabbitts)</p>	
	<p>KC invited PR to lead this agenda item.</p> <p>PR started by looking back on the previous work done on the draft Allotment Strategy. He said the previous Strategy had been developed in 2002 and so it was clear when he came into post circa 18 months ago that it was time to review it. The 2002 Strategy had a policy element as well as associated action plans (some of the actions had been achieved and some not).</p> <p>The review of the Strategy had been supported by consultation with all allotment holders in the summer of 2011. There had been a good response to the consultation and this had helped inform the drafting of the new Strategy. PR also commented that there had been a number of meetings with site supervisors to engage them in developing the draft new Strategy. In addition, it had been sent out for comment. Thirteen responses had been received and overall this feedback was positive.</p> <p>PR then outlined the key issues that had emerged from the consultation and feedback:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. *Waiting lists – how to tackle effectively 2. Toilet facilities – how they could be delivered 3. *Non cultivation 4. Investment – how to achieve this – need a strategic approach 5. *Quality – what does this mean – what are / should be the quality standards 6. Disabled facilities 7. Promotion of allotments to the wider community 8. Two tier maintenance 9. FAQs – need updating 10. Bonfires 11. Self management 12. Role of site supervisors <p>* = denotes the top three issues</p> <p>An allotment holder commented that there seemed to be an anomaly in the draft Allotment Strategy in that the council says there is a good level of allotment provision but is looking to decrease provision in future.</p> <p>PR said this was not the case and there was nothing in the Strategy to indicate that this was a council policy – it isn't.</p> <p>A comment was made that the draft Strategy is already out of date to some extent given that work started on it in mid 2011 – things have already moved on and this needs to be reflected in future revisions.</p>	

4	What are the issues the Group needs to address (Group)	
	<p>KC invited LP to introduce the workshop session. The session involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dividing into three groups – to be facilitated by LP, PR and KR. • Each group to discuss and capture the key issues affecting <u>all allotment holders</u> that they would like the Stakeholder Panel to work with the council on. • The facilitator to capture the key issues and then discuss which were the key priority actions that need to be addressed in more detail. <p>The detail of these sessions is captured in Appendix A.</p> <p>Following the group work, the Panel came back together to discuss the feedback and to agree the main priorities to take forward. These can be summarised as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards to be considered and agreed relating to a range of issues such as security / fencing, clearing empty plots • FAQs and tenancy agreements to be reviewed as part of the revised Allotment Strategy • Non cultivation, which remains a significant issue, to be addressed consistently • Promotion of allotments to the wider community – including promoting take up and greater access for the community • What investment is available to be identified and what can this achieve • Overall need to consider the consistency of how rules and regulations are applied across allotment sites and to consider greater flexibility in how allotment issues are managed 	
5	Feedback from Farm Terrace Allotment Group meeting on 29 August 2012	
	<p>KC invited LP to lead this agenda item. LP explained that the first Farm Terrace Group meeting had taken place on 29 August 2012. She commented that the work and the issues emerging from the two groups would need to be linked in future although each has its own agenda and a separate focus.</p> <p>LP asked the Panel members who also attended the Farm Terrace Group to feedback their views on the meeting to the Panel.</p> <p>One allotment holder said that there were no plans available to view at the meeting and that Group members would need to see plans in order to comment. He acknowledged that the Group did provide a forum for Farm Terrace allotment holders to be listened to, which was helpful although people are very worried about the future.</p> <p>LP said that the update that Tom Dobrashian, Programme Director for Watford Health Campus, had given the Farm Terrace Allotment Group had informed people that Kier Property had been selected as preferred bidder for the scheme. Over the</p>	

	<p>next few weeks Kier would be starting work on their plans, which would include developing a masterplan and working on the economic viability of the Health Campus overall.</p> <p>The Farm Terrace Group has been set up in advance of these plans being finalised in order to identify issues to feedback to Kier.</p> <p>Another allotment holder commented that the Farm Terrace Allotment Group had asked for clarification of what is a LABV (local asset backed vehicle) and what Watford FC is hoping to achieve from the Health Campus.</p>	
7	Next meeting	
	<p>KC informed the Panel that notes of the meeting would be circulated. He asked whether people would prefer the full version of the Allotment Strategy to be circulated or the summary. It was agreed that the full version would be circulated.</p> <p>KC thanked people for attending and closed the meeting. The next meeting is:</p> <p>26 September 2012 – 7.00pm – Watford Town Hall</p>	

Allotment Stakeholder Panel – 12 September 2012

Feedback from Workshop session

Group 1 – Facilitator - Lesley Palumbo

Issues raised:

- What level of commitment does the council have to allotments?
- Standards – need to revisit
- FAQs – need updating – two tier maintenance system
- Clearing empty plots – needs consistent standards
- Value given to different parks and open spaces;
 - Nature reserves
 - Parks
 - Allotments
- Non allotment holders are important but recognition that allotment holders are a small percentage of the population
- Concern about the undervaluing of:
 - the heritage of the sites
 - environmental benefits – wildlife, nature
 - community benefit of allotment interactions
- Need someone at member level who is a ‘champion’ of allotments and advocating for them
- **Investment**
 - £50k Willow Lane, perhaps £100-£200k from other sources, S106 money.
 - Council is not being clear about what money is available
 - When drawing up list of improvements, officers currently not involving site supervisors and allotment holders about where money should be spent.
Process should be:
 1. Establish infrastructure standards
 2. Costing improvements for each allotment site
 3. What investment is required and where would it come from
- Farm Terrace
 - Watford FC offered to give £10k as recompense for loss of allotments and then £10k was match funded (2007). This was to help provide a community building / toilet / storage office / container and water plumbing. Toilet was put in, in 2012. No key is available.
- Time taken to achieve what is promised

Group 1 – Facilitator - Lesley Palumbo

- FAQs – review them and use this group to develop the ‘rules and regulations’
- Tenancy agreement needs review and this group should be involved
- Standard of maintenance
- Maintaining the level of allotment provision, no reduction across the borough
- How can allotments contribute more to engaging with the local community:
 - Volunteers and schools
 - Enabling allotment holders to engage more with the community and raising the profile of ‘growing your own food’
- Enhanced rent too high – revisit the two tier system in the light of the review of standards
- This group could be the forum to work through to identify the consultation needed

Group 2 – Facilitator - Paul Rabbitts

Issues raised:

- Dealing with non-cultivation
- Half plots – 5 pole – some would like bigger
- More inspections – not enough ‘council’ monitoring – officer time allocation
- Pre-letting preparation – could more be done to get them ready for new tenants
- Maintenance issues
- Enhanced + standard – Wiggshall experience
- Promotion of allotments
- Investment:
 - Fencing / security
 - Toilets
 - Green fencing
 - Weed suppressant
- Outsourcing concerns – what will be the impact
- Self management

Group 3 – Facilitator - Kathryn Robson

Issues raised:

- each allotment site has different priorities – need to identify for each site and then they need to be brought together in one document
- can one size fit all?
- security – an issue common to all – external parties gaining access to sites. Callowland has issues because of its size, location and current fencing. Oxhey Grange is not so bad or Garston Manor (represented in the Group)
- inconsistent application of regulations by the council and inflexibility e.g. areas of grass on an allotment / size of sheds
- non cultivation – not common across all sites. However, weather can impact – not necessarily not cultivating but might look like it. **NEED FLEXIBILITY ON HOW NON CULTIVATION IS DEALT WITH.** For example, Garston Manor visually looks like 10% non cultivation but many probably do have tenants. Is council consistent across all allotment sites
- Standards – such as the number of cuts – Callowland is helped by the Probation Service, which helps maintenance levels. Is there consistency across allotment sites
- Polytunnels – should they be allowed but limit the size
- Sheds – flexibility about where they are located on a plot
- Finance / investment – need for investment in allotments – where would investment come from (S106 money / other council capital investment)
- Availability of water butts
- Bonfires – they do happen - should they be allowed - if so how would they be managed
- Promotion of allotments – needs to be more effective but important that people understand the time and effort needed – people tend to under estimate what it takes to be an allotment holder
- Second plots – policy needs to be looked at. Agreed that people on the waiting list should be given priority but then people who are interested in taking a plot should be considered. Better to be cultivated than left uncultivated.
- Site supervisors – role is clarified in a job description. Tasks do get delegated but the main job of a site supervisor's main job is showing people around. Is the role clear
- Self management – is it wanted?

Group 3 – Facilitator - Kathryn Robson
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Enhanced standard – probably not something allotment holders want – needs the commitment from a group of tenants to make it work – this can be difficult to achieve