

Allotment Stakeholder Panel Meeting

26 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, introductions and matters arising	Action
	<p>KC opened the meeting and welcomed those attending. He invited the Group to introduce themselves as there were some new members attending.</p> <p>The Group were asked to consider the notes of the last meeting and any matters arising.</p> <p>An allotment holder asked about the questions they had raised following the previous meeting and whether these would be answered. KR confirmed they would be although she acknowledged that people might not be able to respond quickly given current workload.</p> <p>The change of date of the next meeting was raised and it was queried whether Karen Kenney from the National Allotment Society was being kept informed of the change. KR said she was. LP commented that there would be further discussions on future meetings at the end of the session.</p> <p>An allotment holder said that they felt the strategic points from the discussions (particularly with reference to Lesley Palumbo's group) should be taken forward as actions. This was agreed.</p>	KR to note
2	Allotment service / quality standards (Paul Rabbitts / Lesley Palumbo / Group)	
	<p>KC invited PR to present the agenda item. PR's presentation introduced the theme of the 'model allotment' and what this might mean for Watford. He commented that there had been a lot of useful information and comments following the first meeting and the workshop session. This would inform the Allotment Strategy but it would be helpful for the Panel to look at some of the issues raised against the 'model allotment' to see how they might impact on the strategy.</p>	

Following an enquiry from a Farm Terrace allotment holder, PR confirmed that the keys were being sent out as requested.

- **Site huts / trading sheds**

PR said these were frequently set up through self management. An allotment holder asked whether these would be standard provision for Watford sites and would the council, therefore, fund them. PR said that each site would have its own specific needs. If site huts / trading sheds were seen to be important to a site then the council could help facilitate establishing them. It was not envisaged they would be a priority but they needed to be considered as part of what might constitute a model allotment

- **Toilets**

PR presented examples of toilet provision. He said there would always need to be consideration of what is affordable. An allotment holder from Cherry Trees confirmed their toilet provision was working well.

- **Access**

PR commented that this varies from site to site. An allotment holder queried whether access included provision for people with disabilities. PR said this was the case.

- **Water supply**

Again needs differ between sites but all agreed access to water was important and is currently better on some sites than others.

- **Sheds / greenhouses**

Allotment holders confirmed that this was an area where there seemed to be a lack of consistency and a great deal of variety.

Sheds and greenhouses have to be appropriate to the site. Councillor Mills outlined her experience of erecting a 4 x 6' greenhouse which had to be plastic. It had blown away during a period of strong winds. She asked how allotment holders were expected to erect a greenhouse if they have to be plastic and, therefore, flimsy. PR said that the council, in discussion with allotment holders, would need to look at what is appropriate.

- **Polytunnels**

PR said this was another area where discussions were needed as to what is acceptable.

- **Paths and roads / fences and hedges**

These are different across the sites and need to be appropriate to the sites. PR commented that biodiversity can be improved through, for example, hedge planting.

- **Other issues**

PR mentioned other issues such as black plastic coverage for vacant plots, plot numbers, signage and noticeboards.

- **Community use**

How can we enhance community use of allotments and use them to help build

community spirit?

An allotment holder asked about bar-b-ques. PR said that this would be part of the FAQs and would be part of the discussions on rules / FAQs that was on the agenda.

Group discussion – led by LP

LP introduced the group discussion on this agenda item and posed the following questions to frame the discussions:

- **what does a model allotment for Watford look like**
- **what is the standard**
- **what investment is needed to bring allotments up to standard**
- **can we afford the standard**
- **does one size fit all**

An allotment holder said that maintenance standards needed to be included in the discussion. LP said that it was important to consider investment first, then there would be a need to discuss maintenance standards but it was a separate workstream and would impact on rental charges. She made a note of maintenance standards raised.

LP suggested that the Panel consider each of the elements of the model allotment.
(Also see Appendix A for flipchart notes)

Toilets

An allotment holder said that there was an issue as to how these are maintained – who cleans them etc.

LP asked whether toilets were a site by site decision.

An allotment holder said that he did not think toilets were necessary. LP asked the Panel how many people felt toilets were necessary. About a third of Panel members said they felt they were not necessary. An allotment holder said there needed to be individual consultation site by site on the need for toilets. The Panel felt this would be the best approach. LP said that it was helpful that the Panel had raised issues such as who cleans the toilets and what happens about vandalism as this would need to be part of the consultation.

Cherry Trees allotments have toilet facilities. These are well used and much appreciated once they were installed. Maintenance is low. Farm Terrace also has a toilet (a composting toilet) and this is used.

Councillor Crout asked whether it was known if people are put off by lack of toilets.

Councillor Mills said that on some sites where there are no toilets people go home. A Wiggshall tenant said that the facilities on the site were used depending on whether people lived near the site or not.

An allotment holder commented that toilets are likely to be seen as desirable but NOT essential – that is why there needs to be consultation.

LP said that it was the conclusion of the Panel that toilets are not a priority but need to be considered site by site.

An allotment holder commented fencing was more of a priority than toilets.

Access / paths and roads

An allotment holder said that there needs to be a proper surface for vehicles. PR said that each site would need to be looked at on a case by case basis.

An allotment holder asked what DDA compliance actually meant – what is reasonable. LP said that reasonable is what can be achieved – you cannot be expected to do more than this.

Councillor Mills said Chester Road now had an issue of manoeuvrability as it was not possible to turn a vehicle on the site – turning circle is now an allotment.

Another allotment holder commented that maintenance of grass paths was impacting on access.

LP said there clearly needed to be a site by site assessment to audit access / paths and roads.

Water supplies

An allotment holder said they had been very frustrated by the lack of cooperation from the council when a request was made to turn the water supply on early in 2012. It was needed because of the early hot / dry spell.

PR agreed there needed to be a degree of flexibility in this matter.

Some sites were happy with their supply of water butts – others were less so. The Panel asked if there was a standard in terms of the number of water butts per allotment site. Someone commented that it was 1 outlet per 6-8 poles / plots but Watford was deficient.

LP commented that the council needs to look at each site – it was more complex than just applying a standard.

An allotment holder said there needs to consistency as to the size of the water butts.

Another commented that the issue of water supply had been made worse as plots have become smaller and there are more allotment holders overall – increasing the individual demand for water.

It was also noted that sheds were a good means of collecting water and that allotment holders with sheds should all be encouraged to collect rain water.

An allotment holder from Garston Manor said that there were butts on the allotment but water pressure is very poor. The supply pipes are too narrow. This is the same on Oxhey Grange.

Fences and hedges

An allotment holder commented that hedges needed to be kept under control. On some sites they are growing up and blocking light.

Farm Terrace is well fenced and, therefore, secure.

Briar Road is not well fenced or secure. The boundary is private owners' back garden fences and they are in a bad state of repair.

	<p>The Panel agreed that allotments that have fences that are garden boundaries are an issue.</p> <p>Brightwell reported that its fencing is terrible and that the allotments are subject to break ins.</p> <p>The Panel agreed that perimeter fencing is the highest priority.</p> <p>An allotment holder raised a crime prevention officer report on Callowland that highlighted fencing. She thought this might be useful to revisit.</p> <p>Other issues raised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ potholes on the road into Paddock Road ▪ community allotments ▪ lack of communication between allotment holders e.g. thefts on sites are not always shared – issue of how information is shared between allotment holders – could website / new media be used to better advantage. For example, to set up an initiative like ‘Allotment Watch’ ▪ keys are not handed back when someone stops being an allotment holder – could the council change locks? Cherry Trees asks for a hefty deposit for a key and the lock used was chosen because it is difficult to get key cut for it ▪ Noticeboards – taken down on Oxhey Grange – seemed to be a policy decision. PR said noticeboards would be supplied soon ▪ Plot covering for vacant plots ▪ Skips – to be added to maintenance issues ▪ Car parking ▪ Welcome packs ▪ Encourage open days ▪ Managing sites for conservation and biodiversity. 	
3	<p>FAQs and Tenancy Agreement</p> <p>(Lesley Palumbo + Group)</p>	
	<p>As the previous agenda item had over run, KC suggested that this was taken as a group exercise and to see how far the Panel could progress the item at this meeting.</p>	

	<p>One allotment holder asked whether enhanced maintenance is to be scrapped. It was not clear what allotment holders were supposed to get for their enhanced rent. She understood it was skips / more frequent grass cuts. If these are not being delivered then should allotment holders paying for an enhanced service receive a rebate. This needs a dialogue. Another allotment holder agreed that the enhanced rent at Wigenhall needs to be reviewed and possibly the site would return to the 'general standard'.</p> <p>An allotment holder asked whether the FAQs should indicate that the cost of renting an allotment will go up each year. LP said that rents were looked at year on year as part of the council's budget setting process. Therefore, it might differ year on year. She commented that the council is having to look at cost recovery across all its services to better understand the real cost of a service and how much it might be subsidised. This would apply to allotments – what is the real cost to the council against the requirements of allotment holders. She also informed the Panel that annual bills for 2012/13 would be sent out in October.</p> <p>Concessions An allotment holder pointed out that the FAQs should say that people need to notify the council if they have a change in circumstances in relation to a concession.</p> <p>The Panel felt this was a helpful suggestion.</p> <p>An allotment holder asked why pensioners were not included as a concession. LP said that Watford BC has a concessions policy and that this did not include pensioners. The allotments complied with the overall policy. She said that facilities such as the leisure centres were run externally and it was up to the companies that run them to decide on concessions from a business perspective.</p> <p>At this stage in the meeting, it was clear that there would not be sufficient time to discuss the FAQs and Tenancy Agreement in any great detail.</p> <p>It was agreed that an additional meeting be set up in November that would focus on FAQs and Tenancy Agreement.</p> <p>KR to circulate Tenancy agreement.</p>	<p>KR to arrange</p> <p>KR to note</p>
4	Feedback from Farm Terrace Allotment Group meeting on 19 September 2012	
	<p>LP updated the Panel on the previous Farm Terrace meeting. She informed the Panel that the Farm Terrace Group had requested a representative from West Hertfordshire Hospitals Trust (WHHT) to attend the meeting to articulate the Hospital's requirements in relation to the Health Campus site. This had prompted a great deal of debate and discussion and resulted in the following being agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 October (or nearest date that can be arranged) – to be a Farm Terrace Group meeting to look at the constraints of the Health Campus site to understand how this impacts <i>this has now been arranged for 11 October</i> 16 October – Sustainability Workshop on the Health Campus – two Farm Terrace Group members had put their names forward to attend 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 24 October – Joint meeting – with Kier attending to present their vision for the Health Campus. There will also be an opportunity for the Allotment Stakeholder Panel to report back on where discussions have got to and how the Panel wants to go forward 	
5	Next meeting	
	<p>KC closed the meeting and thanked people for their attendance and contribution.</p> <p>The next meeting is:</p> <p>24 October – 7.00pm – Park Inn - Watford</p>	<p>All to note the change of venue</p>

Allotment Stakeholder Panel – 26 September 2012

Feedback from Model Allotment session

Facilitator - Lesley Palumbo

Toilets

Issues raised:

- not necessary – 5 Panel members voted toilets as necessary (30% of Panel reps) / 8 (50%) voted them as necessary
- Site specific
 - Individual consultation
 - Site to decide
 - Who maintains, cleans, supplies
 - Vandalism / misuse
- Cherry Tree toilets – well used / maintenance low – less than half an hour per week
- Farm Terrace has toilets
- Desirable but not essential – **but undertake a site by site consultation**

Water supply

Issues raised:

- comes on too late – April - Oct
- No flexibility
- General feeling that there needs to be more water butts
- There exists a standard which should be aspired to but look at site specific
- Standard size of provision (larger capacity)
- Encourage plot holders to collect rainwater
- Supply pipes and water pressure issues (Garston Manor and at Oxhey Grange)

Access and Paths and Roads

Issues raised:

- Entrance to access roads – needs to accommodate emergency vehicles where necessary
- DDA compliance
- Ability for vehicles to manoeuvre
- Consider site by site
- Paddock Road – mowing issue
- Pot holes to be filled

Fences / Hedges / Security

Issues raised:

- Security issues
- Fences from back gardens can be security issues
- **Highest priority for investment but on a site by site basis**
- Lock changes - need higher quality locks (can't copy keys) + high deposits

Other issues

Issues raised:

- Grow the community allotment approach
- Lack of communication between allotment holders
- Lack of sense of community
- Information signposting / website / share resources and support each other
- Technology – make better use
- Allotment Watch – pilot Lower Paddock Road?
- Noticeboards
- Encourage open days – to schools etc

Other issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plot covering• Car parking• Welcome packs

Maintenance / management
Issues raised: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Making use of natural security e.g. bramble hedges• Conservation / biodiversity• Mowing regimes• Skips