

**Minutes of the Gertie Gale's
General / Committee Meeting**

19th November 2019

Present

Committee Members:

Stuart Armstrong (Chair)

Les Curwood (Lettings Officer)

Alan Harrison (Site Manager)

Zoltan Kekesi (Secretary)

Vice Chair & Treasurer – Vacant positions

Tenants:

Gilli Shorey, Kathleen Saunders, Michelle Cochian, Brina Jones, Robert Baylis, Mary Salter, S. Hill

Portishead Council: Ben Aldridge, Robert Cartwright

Apologies

Ian Cameron, Roger Howard, Stephanie Blundell

Chair welcomes attendees and opens the meeting.

1. Administration

Apologies: Apologies read out by the Secretary.

Minutes of last meeting: No comments or amendments made to minutes of last meeting, minutes signed by Chair

Chairman quickly introduces the current committee members and the council representatives that have attended the meeting.

Chairman explains that Portishead Town Council is attending the meeting to understand more about Gertie Gales allotment, its association and how the allotments are currently run with the intention of helping with any issues at the allotment. The council is not planning to deal with the daily matters of the allotment nor take over running the allotment.

Chair confirmed again that the committee has the vacancies of Vice Chair and Treasurer. Chair confirms that he continues to cover the position of treasurer so the allotments can continue to function. The committee positions were advertised to all members recently, and there are 5 people who said they would be interested to help on the committee. This will all be followed up further in the new year to achieve a full committee again for 2020/2021.

2. Matters Arising

Discussion on proposed new tenancy agreements

As we all know we have had issues on the site on various occasions due to, people not following the rules of the tenancy agreement that they have signed or due to situations that have occurred because the current rules are not being clear or detailed. The committee has carried out considerable research into understanding the regulations and the law across the U.K. with regards to allotments.

Improving the tenancy agreement is more complex than first thought and needs careful planning and communication as well as heavily involving Portishead Town Council. The new tenancy agreements are therefore being delayed being introduced to the tenants until April 2021. The plan is that in 2020 the Council and the Committee will draft new agreements which will then be sent to the tenants and we all work together to compile the new agreements.

Main areas to regulate and discuss:

Trees on plots, ponds, sheds, poly tunnels, objects on plots, cultivation ratio of plot, responsibility of areas around the allotments – is it the council or the committee or the tenant's responsibility?

Discussion on uncultivated plots

There are fewer uncultivated plots than in previous years but there are still too many plots that need improving. The committee are dealing with the situation and will not be offering automatic renewal of plots to tenants where their plot needs considerable cultivation. Discussions are ongoing with certain tenants about the current state of their plots.

Update on hedges and trees around the allotment

The ownership of the bordering hedges and trees around the allotment is complex. The farmer's side is maintained by the farmer and is generally cut back when necessary. The farmer has been asked to cut his hedge back again before March. Portishead Council are also organising cutting back the hedge at the front of the allotment as well.

Portishead Town Council have agreed to cut the trees on the farmers side and the trees at the bottom of the allotment in the left hand corner. These trees should be cut before April 2020.

Some of the trees on the cemetery border are being cut back in October 2020 and the rest of the trees and hedge on the cemetery side Portishead Town Council are discussing with North Somerset Council to sort out.

North Somerset Council are also intending to repair the metal fence between the allotment and the cemetery as this fence is a Health & Safety issue.

Confirmation regarding the water supply and leakage

The water system is definitely no longer leaking as confirmed by the water meter readings. The water supply is now shut off for the winter period.

Update on disappearance on crops and youths hanging around the allotment

Some thefts of crops were reported earlier this year. Similar cases also happened at North Weston allotments. There is no clear solution to stop these thefts. The only thing we can do is to shut/close the gate each time it is opened, lock the shed at all times and being conscious when seeing any unusual people around the site.

Communicating with plot holders

The committee tries to inform everyone about issues, events, changes via email. The notice board on the side of the shed is also used for communicating with those who do not have access to email or don't use their mailboxes regularly. These practices of emails and using the notice board seem to be the best way of communicating with the tenants.

There has been an occurrence that a tenant has asked the committee not to communicate via email or letter with them and asked their personal contacts deleted from our database. As per the GDPR law we have complied with this request. This causes us a problem issues next years bill to them but going forward Portishead Town Council will have to deal with the tenant.

Plot lettings update

Lettings

Since September there have been a few changes

4 tenants have given up their plot or given up half their plot, and there have been 3 lettings.

One full-plot is vacant with a viewing booked for Friday.

There are currently 110 plots, that is 47 full plots and 63 half plots.

There is 1 person on the waiting list and 4 existing tenants wanting to expand from a half-plot to a full-plot.

Site inspection

Last site inspection on Tuesday 12th November checking on the condition of the plots.

Despite all the rain since September, overall the plots are generally in a good condition, especially those of very new tenants who have done a lot to clear their plots of weeds.

Thank you to those tenants.

82 – ok (at least reasonable condition)

22 – could be better (half done or being cleared) out of:

5 – half done (dug and or part cultivated, the rest weeds)

17 – could be better (dug and cultivated but lot of weeds)

5 – plots are overgrown with weeds and they may not have their tenancy renewed next year

1 – vacant (full plot)

Financial report

There is little activity in relation of finances at this time of the year. The finances are still healthy with £1,550 between the current and savings bank account.

We saved £200 by cutting the grass fewer times than planned. However, the committee have removed 42 tyres from the site that has cost £126 to dispose of at the recycling centre. We wish to

thank all those who helped us and removed the tyres from their plots which in some cases was a big effort.

The water loan will be fully repaid in May 2020 which will mean there being £350 additional money from 2021 annually.

The committee will discuss at a future date liability insurance for us all and this would cost £200-£250 a year.

Many tenants mention the need for a compost toilet, a lighter lawnmower as well as another shed at the bottom of the allotments and all of these are being looked into in future years.

Regular pest control is a very possible cost for 2020 as we have experienced a lot of issues by the increasing population of moles and rats. Again, this is currently being investigated.

There are currently ongoing discussions with Portishead Council to reduce our annual rent to the council, so we are more in line with other allotments in Portishead. A solution is hopeful soon.

Further thoughts regarding insurance on the allotment

The site itself is insured by Portishead Town Council as it is their land, however their insurance only covers the Town Councils liability in relation to the land, fences and the gate. Any issues other issues / liability at the allotments is the responsibility legally of the committee and the tenants.

It would be sensible to purchase liability insurance that would protect us against claims and this is being investigated for future years.

Thoughts on 2020 rent amount and collection (inc. Council's rent for 2020)

As we all know Gertie Gale's annual rent to Portishead Town Council is higher than other sites in Portishead. There are ongoing discussions with Portishead Town Council about a possible rebate or reduction on rent for future. It has been agreed that there will be no past rebates due to the amount of work Portishead Council have undertaken at the allotments over the last year, however there is a possibility that the rent paid to the Council could be reduced in the future.

The rent amount the tenants will pay for 2020/2021 will be discussed and agreed at the AGM in January before the bills are sent out to all tenants in February. The current thoughts by all is to keep next years annual rent by the tenants the same as this year at £35 for a full plot and £17.50 for a half plot.

Date of next meeting

The AGM is planned to be held also at The Albion 7.30 on Sunday 26th January at 7.30. An agenda will be sent out very early January after the Christmas break is over, and everything is back to normal.

3. Any Other Business

None