



THE FEDERATION OF
EDINBURGH AND DISTRICT
ALLOTMENTS AND
GARDENS ASSOCIATIONS

Management Committee Meeting
7.15pm on 9th June 2015 at Southside Community Centre

Present: Peter Wright - Lady Road (**PW**) (President) : Ernie Watt - Cambridge Avenue (**EW**) (Secretary) : Dave Roberts - Restalrig (**DR**) (Treasurer) : Maureen Edwards - Lady Road (**ME**) : Jon Gray - Warriston (**JG**) : Neiria McClure - Claremont Park (**NMcC**) : Rik Hart - Warriston (**RH**) : Stuart MacKenzie - Inverleith (**SMcK**) : Brian Bleakley - Midmar (**BB**) : Jake Booth - Carrick Knowe (**JB**) (observer) : Liz Grace - Midmar (**LG**) (observer) : Alison Hewitt (Warriston) (**AH**) (observer).

1. Apologies: John McKinlay - Craigentiny (**JMcK**) : Rosy Naylor - West Mains (**RN**): Willie Aitken - Carrick Knowe (**WA**) : Gilbert Clark - Midmar (**GC**) : Ian Woolard - City of Edinburgh Council Allotments Officer (**IW**).

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting: The Minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

3. Matters Arising - Management of Council Allotments: **PW** introduced the main item for discussion. The City of Edinburgh Council wants the allotment service to break even by 2016/17. The latest figures show that annual expenditure currently runs at £101K. There is a £24K shortfall. He suggested the main areas where additional income could be found are in the Repair and Maintenance budget and the concessions policy.

He noted that with an ageing population, the proportion of ploholders over 60 and claiming a 50% reduction will grow. There is a good argument for a nominal concession. Many other services give 10 to 30% discount. Allotments in Musselburgh and Dundee, which are self-managed, do not grant concessions.

PW said that at the most recent Strategy meeting Cllr. Hinds suggested that FEDAGA may consider managing the Council's allotments. It was **AGREED** that this would not be viable as FEDAGA would have to transform itself into a charity, elect a board of directors and become an employer. There was no enthusiasm for taking on this kind of responsibility. Other existing organisations, such as the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens may be candidates for taking on such a role.

At this point **PW** had to leave the meeting as he had another engagement. **SMcK** took the Chair.

RH said that during the rent campaign it became apparent that the majority of members strongly considered that the agreement of 2009 to raise rent incorporated a period of 5 years from 2015 when no further rises would be applied. It was **AGREED** that the headline rent for a plot must remain as it is, in line with the 2009 deal. **ME** said that our policy should be reasonable. Allotments sit on valuable land and the committee should adopt a realistic approach.

SMcK said that the good news was that the proposal to raise rents by up to 500% had been defeated. However, this outcome required the Council to review the situation. To

break even, they need to raise an extra 25%. There was a wide-ranging discussion on how the extra income could be raised without breaching the terms of the 2009 deal.

It was **AGREED** to further consider the measures collated by **SMcK** and listed as an appendix to these Minutes.

Telferton planning proposal: **DR** said that Avant Homes, who own the land the allotments occupy and are seeking to build houses there, are holding exhibitions of their plans for the public in the area tonight and tomorrow afternoon. The Planning Committee again rejected their application to rezone the land for residential use. It is likely Avant Homes will again appeal to the Government. The position of the site association is to strongly resist the initiative.

Venues for August and September meetings: As the Southside Community Centre will not be available on 11th August and 8th September it was **AGREED** to hold these respective meetings at Inverleith and Midmar.

4. Allotment Officer - Report and Actions: **IW** had submitted the following report:

1. Victoria Park allotment now fully open, however ongoing problems with the water supply. There was some problem with compaction reported.
2. A further new allotment site has been proposed for Lochend, with a mixture of raised beds and "on the ground" plots. Scheduled for autumn.
3. First class repair on the collapsed wall at Pilrig Park.
4. A further fire was reported at Saughton Mains with 2 huts burned down and opportunist thieves stealing purses from plots. Urgent attention was required here to prevent further repeats and an order for painting the top of the fence and posts with anti climb paint will be starting soon. The site committee have also planted thorny plants on certain parts of the fence and more is required.
5. Site inspection continuing with site standards still good despite recent poor weather.
6. Problems with some trade waste being reported.

NMcC reported that the cost of the wall repair at Pilrig Park was £1466, which was considerably less than expected. It was noted that **IW** was to make enquiries if the adjoining householders were liable. **ACTION - EW** to enquire. It was further noted that the Strategy meeting had been told that small wall repairs like this would likely come from the Repair and Maintenance budget, but larger ones would be funded from elsewhere. **DR** enquired if **PW**'s letter on the urgent need for a wall survey had been replied to. It had been acknowledged, but no substantial response had yet been received. It was **AGREED** that **PW** write to follow this up. **ACTION - PW**.

Spending Priorities: **NMcC** had met with **IW** to discuss progress. There was a problem with getting all the required jobs to match up. **IW** had supplied costings and he believed that all requests could be completed within budget. **NMcC** will circulate the current spreadsheet for confirmation and it is hoped this year's priorities can be signed off at the next meeting. **ACTION - NMcC**.

5. Consideration of Reports - Secretary's Report: **EW** had circulated a Report detailing all correspondence over the month. He noted a proposal for allotments to be included in Edinburgh Doors Open Day in September had been received, but this came too late for registration. However, it may be something for site associations to consider for next year.

Website and Newsletter: Newsletter articles arising from a visit to Gardening Scotland had been submitted by **SMcK**. **EW** proposed that a piece detailing the Council's intention to have the Allotment Service break even in 2 years time should be included, giving members the latest proposals and asking for further suggestions. The links section of the website had been reviewed and expanded. **DR** suggested a piece on a flatworm survey.
ACTION - EW.

Treasurer's Report: **DR** said rebate cheques had been sent to all site associations participating in the potatoes and onions scheme. It is anticipated that cheques for membership fees will be issued next week. **ACTION - DR.** The current account balance is £8520.51 and the bond is £4508.06. The total uncommitted fund stands at £12,352.08.

Trading Report: **SMcK** said he is anticipating figures from Kings Seeds relating how much each site ordered enabling him to calculate the rebates. This will be added to the cheques about to be issued by **DR.** **ACTION - SMcK and DR.**

Site Reports: **EW** said Cambridge Avenue will stage an Open Day on 20th June from 12 to 3pm.

ME said members had re-roofed the communal hut at Lady Road.

RH reported a few unsatisfactory plots at Warriston and he would be meeting with **IW** on Friday when he makes his next inspection to ensure the correct ploholders are identified.

SMcK said there were still rabbits at Inverleith and with more lush vegetation they were now less likely to be trapped.

Strategy Report: Already dealt with: see Management of Council Allotments.

SAGS Report: **SMcK** reminded the meeting that the SAGS Conference and AGM will take place in Dunblane on the 20th of June. It is believed that all of SAGS' proposals to the Community Empowerment Bill consultation will be accepted by the Government.

6. Any Other Business: **ME** will represent FEDAGA at the Southside Centre AGM on 27th June. **ACTION - ME.**

7. Date of Next Meeting: Tuesday 9th June.

Appendix

10 PROPOSALS TO HELP THE COUNCIL ALLOTMENT SERVICE TO BREAK EVEN.

PROPOSAL 1 - Businesses fortunate enough to have over-demand for their product should look to increase production of the product. It's a fact: Edinburgh needs more allotment sites - both for its citizens and to generate more income.

We suggest land be found and converted to allotments to reduce the waiting lists in the city. Obviously not as simple as it sounds but with huge areas of greenbelt land taken up by golf courses which, we understand, are declining in popularity, there must be potential to find space. Perhaps some land on each of the six City of Edinburgh Council (CEC)

courses could be found. Similarly, bowling greens could be investigated - another pastime with fewer participants.

It would obviously require an initial investment to create these sites. Significant grant money is available for such projects. For example, the Climate Change Fund offers grants of up to £150,000 per year to support community-led projects that will reduce carbon emissions. The National Lottery lists 13 organisations willing to fund environmental projects.

We suggest the use of the allotment waiting list to identify people in specific areas where greenspace is available, encourage them to form communities, apply for that funding and create their own allotment sites. The CEC could realistically charge rental in future years.

PROPOSAL 2 - With the above in mind we suggest an annual charge for people to be maintained on the waiting list. If the CEC are actively pursuing space for allotments then it seems fair that prospective allotment holders pay for that effort on their behalf. It also ensures that prospective plotheholders are committed to taking a plot.

Similarly, the implementation of a joining fee could be investigated - recognising the prior investment in allotments over the years.

PROPOSAL 3 - A significant amount of time is spent by the Allotment Officer inspecting allotment plots to ensure they are well kept. Warning letters are sent out, occasionally an eviction takes place, all at the expense of the CEC. This cost and time is increased when councillors are involved in appeals.

We suggest implementing a similar system to parking penalties in the city. If Environmental Wardens were trained in what an acceptable allotment plot looks like they could replace the Allotment Service in this task. Fines would encourage improved use of allotments, raise funds for the city and reduce the workload of the Allotment Officer.

PROPOSAL 4 - New allotment sites created over the past few years have mainly consisted of smaller raised beds as opposed to the traditional 250 square metre plots. Most people are happy with this smaller space. We suggest the creation of raised bed areas on existing allotment sites. A typical "standard" plot could be converted into at least 8 raised beds.

An annual charge of £25 for each raised bed would generate £200 a year - double the current rent.

The beds could be offered to new allotment holders where they can build up the skills required to manage a larger plot. This would further improve allotment quality by ensuring people know what they are letting themselves into before getting a larger plot.

PROPOSAL 5 - Building on the above, we should ask current plotheholders if they would like to reduce the space they have and perhaps take a raised bed or two instead. This would be of particular interest to older people beginning to struggle with the necessary physical effort involved.

☒ **PROPOSAL 6** - Significant money has been spent by the CEC on the creation of raised bed type “allotment” sites. We believe we could help build new sites more cheaply.

If the CEC put aside land, build a water supply and erect a perimeter fence it could then provide the means for new allotment holders themselves to build their own raised beds. Wood and top soil could be supplied so that plotters put in some effort themselves and therefore feel a sense of ownership and value on their smallholding.

We don't have access to figures for recent allotment builds but believe significant savings could be made.

Similarly, existing allotment sites require occasional maintenance. The budget set aside for this is currently £20K. Allotment holders have many and varied skills and are quite capable of performing some routine maintenance themselves. If a register or “skills database” is set up then allotment holders themselves could be called upon to perform some maintenance and therefore save money from the budget.

☒ **PROPOSAL 7** - Improve the Allotment Service by allocating extra administrative help for our current Allotment Officer. Much of the future strategic improvements cannot be made whilst one person is responsible for all aspects of the Allotment Service.

Help could even be provided by volunteers from the allotments themselves. Social Services have a thriving volunteer service, why not Parks and Greenspace?

☒ **PROPOSAL 8** - The present very low allotment turnover means an increasingly older allotment community. As a result, as people reach 60 the allotment income will reduce year on year as full rent payments are replaced by a half price concession.

Is a 50% rent reduction still appropriate? Other organisations offer a 10-30% reduction to the over 65s. Should the discount rate be reduced? Should the age threshold be increased?

☒ **PROPOSAL 9** - We understand some smaller spaces on some of the ‘raised beds’ type allotment sites are not being charged an annual rent. We recommend a minimal charge for these small plots. Whilst this will not raise a great deal of revenue it does seem a fair approach to take.

☒ **PROPOSAL 10** - A key to the allotment site gate is issued when a lease is taken out by a new plot holder. At present there is no enforced return of the the key at the end of a lease. Indeed, we suspect a lot of the pilfering of crops on sites is due to this lack of control of keys. We suggest a deposit (say £25) is left at the time a plot is taken which is returned on termination.

This could be taken further to increase the deposit to pay for clearing of an unkempt plot in the event of an enforced lease termination. If a plot is in an acceptable condition on termination, the deposit would be returned. Any additional costs to clear excessive rubbish from such a plot should be borne by the former plot holder.