

Wednesday 10th January 2024

Trinity Centre

2:00pm

Present

Cllrs Briggs, Cooper, Griffin and Wood.

In Attendance

Olive O'Sullivan—Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Jessica Johnson – Project Manager Communities.

There were no members of the public or press present.

11 Apologies for Absence

Apologies received from Cllr Hatton.

Resolved to accept the apologies.

12 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Wood declared a non-pecuniary interest as a plot holder at The Boulevard allotments.

13 Minutes of the Meeting 6th September 2023

Resolved that the minutes of the Allotments Sub-Committee meeting held on 6th September 2023 be signed as a true record.

14 Matters Arising

No matters arising were reported.

15 Questions from Members

Cllr Wood commented that 7.6 H of the Allotment Rules state that weapons are not permitted on the Allotment Site and asked what actions would be taken against plot holders who break this rule.

The CEO replied that plot holders sign their agreement with the Town Council to say that they have been given a copy of the rules, that they will abide by them, and they understand that if they do not keep to the rules the Council may end the agreement and give them 28 days' notice in writing to quit the plot. The plot holder would be given a warning by the Allotment Association in the first instance and if the behaviour continued, the Town Council would issue a notice to quit.

16 Legal Transfer of the Sutton Coldfield Allotments from Birmingham City Council

The CEO reported that Walmley Ash Allotments had been transferred to the Town Council from Birmingham City Council (BCC) on Thursday 21st December 2023. This follows the transfer of Forge Farm earlier in the year.

The CEO reported she had met with the Town Council solicitors to review the remaining allotment sites for transfer and to discuss any potential issues or challenges at the sites. It was suggested that five sites would be prioritised in the next phase of transfers whilst work will continue in parallel on the more complex issues at the remaining three sites including access arrangements, easements and building ownership and maintenance. In order to try and progress the transfers more quickly the Town Council solicitors would be drafting the allotment transfer documents.

The Chair asked if discussions had taken place regarding future rent prices.

The CEO replied that notice of rent increase must be given outside of the growing season which runs from 1 April until 30 September and added that 12 months' notice is required if rent were to be increased. Therefore, discussions would need to commence on plot rental charges for 2026 as 2025 rent rates have already been agreed.

17 Allotment Works to Date

The CEO gave an update on works completed at allotment sites by ideverde under the current bill of quantities. This included continued works at Forge Farm Allotments.

The CEO reported that she had visited all the allotment sites and had met with allotment association representatives to discuss minor works required at each site. A programme of works had been identified to cut back overgrowth accumulated over a number of years, together with grass cutting, hedge trimming, filling in potholes, path clearance, and moss removal. Some allotment sites require further, more complex works, for which idverde may need specialist equipment and/or resources.

The Chair commented that the works completed on the sites demonstrated the Town Council's willingness to make improvements and added that some associations may wish to do their own clearance and encourage the plot holders to participate. The Chair asked if it would therefore be possible to provide a skip for each allotment association.

The CEO replied that the Town Council could reimburse allotment associations for skip hire if they wished to carry out a spring clean of their site.

18 Health and Safety Site Visits

The CEO reported that Health and Safety visits had been carried out at Walmley Ash and Falcon Lodge allotments in November 2023.

A key concern at the Walmley Ash site is poor visibility for drivers when exiting the site. This was due to a narrow entrance way with a high wall and fence either side. Discussions have commenced with the neighbouring properties on measures to improve visibility.

The CEO added that the Allotment Association at Walmley Ash is seeking £8,0000 funding from the Town Council to tarmac the pedestrian entrance which is currently grassed and is often muddy and slippery. The path is used by plot holders as well as Sutton Support Services, who rent a raised bed on the site. Some members of Sutton Support Services are wheelchair users and tarmacking the path would make the entrance more accessible. It is also hoped that tarmacking the entrance would also encourage cycling to the site. The CEO commented that the Association had sent through three quotes and specifications for the works.

The Health and Safety Report for Falcon Lodge Allotments highlighted the need for a major clear up of the site. This includes removal of general and garden waste as well as clearing the pathways and access routes to reduce the risk of trips and falls. Having visited the site to assess the scale of the works needed, idvere had quoted a sum of £5,112 to clear the site. Cllr Cooper asked if the allotment associations would continue to maintain the site following the proposed works.

The CEO replied that she would be meeting with Falcon Lodge Allotment Association to discuss future management and maintenance of the site.

Resolved to recommend to Amenities, Leisure and Community Services Committee an allocation of £8,000 from the Allotments Budget to Walmley Ash Allotments for tarmacking the pedestrian entrance and path to the communal area of the site.

Resolved to recommend to Amenities, Leisure and Community Services Committee that a total of £5,112 be used from Allotments Budget to fund idvere to conduct a full clearance at Falcon Lodge Allotments.



19 Chief Executive Officer Update

The CEO reported that the Town Council is looking to trial a new IT management system with Walmley Ash Allotment Association. The system would help with signing of agreements and collection of rents. If the trial proves successful, it could be rolled out across other allotment sites as they are transferred to the Town Council.

The Chair suggested that a Sutton Coldfield Allotments Consultative Forum meeting may be useful to help pair up associations who may be able support one and other.

The CEO replied that a date would be set in the coming months for a Sutton Coldfield Allotments Consultative Forum to update associations on progress of the transfers, maintenance works to be carried as part of the existing contractual arrangements with idverde and to encourage networking and sharing of best practice.

The meeting ended at 15:15pm.

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Signed

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Date