

## ALLOTMENTS REVIEW

<b>Head of Service:</b>	Ian Dyer, Head of Operational Services
<b>Wards affected:</b>	(All Wards);
<b>Urgent Decision?(yes/no)</b>	No
<b>If yes, reason urgent decision required:</b>	n/a
<b>Appendices (attached):</b>	None

### Summary

This report presents a review of all allotments in the borough and sets out recommendations for the future of council managed and self-managed sites.

### Recommendation (s)

#### The Committee is asked to:

- (1) Note the status of all allotment sites in the borough**
- (2) Note that the current agreements for the three self-managed allotments sites are due to expire in December 2022 and agree to issue new agreements for the next five years from date of expiry as set out in section three of this report.**
- (3) Agree to a formal consultation with all council-managed plot holders to gauge interest in the remaining council-managed sites becoming self-managed as set out in section 4 of this report.**

## 1 Reason for Recommendation

- 1.1 Allotments perform a vital role in the health and wellbeing of our residents. The demand for allotments remains high and officers are working to ensure that an efficient system for managing our allotments sites is in place following the recent restructure of departments.
- 1.2 There are three self-managed allotment sites in borough. These sites are well-managed and popular with residents. This recommendation sets out a proposal to retain the current arrangements by offering the three self-managed sites the ability to renew their leases when they expire their current term.

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- 1.3 There has been an expression of interest from one of the existing council managed sites to become self-managed. Due to the reasons set out in section four of this report, officers recommend that a formal consultation of all plot holders on council managed sites is undertaken to gauge interest in self-management. The results of this consultation will be brought to the autumn meeting of the Environment and Safe Communities Committee for further discussion (in line with the new committee terms of reference where allotments will be transferred to Environment and Safe Communities Committee).

## 2 Background

- 2.1 Allotments in the borough continue to be a popular pastime and provide residents with a range of positive mental and physical health benefits.
- 2.2 Recent organisational changes and the effects of the pandemic temporarily disrupted the Council's ability to manage the waiting lists, deal with enquiries, carry out non-cultivation inspections and allocate plots.
- 2.3 Fortunately, we are now in recovery and there is a clear path forward. Officers have now set out the following timetable with the aim of reducing waiting lists and allocating plots.

<b>March 2022</b>	Water to all sites turned back on
<b>April 2022</b>	Non-cultivation inspections
<b>April 2022</b>	Resurrection of twice yearly Allotment Forum meetings
<b>April 2022</b>	Resurrection of plot allocations

- 2.4 The waiting list for allotments currently stands at 391 people and whilst the waiting list varies from site to site, the average length on the list is 18 – 24 months.
- 2.5 Although the waiting lists are currently higher than usual, this will dramatically reduce in spring due to the non-cultivation inspections and the resurrection of plot allocations being undertaken.
- 2.6 A review of all our administration procedures is underway which will result in a more efficient way to deal with all aspects of allotment management.

## 3 Self-Managed Allotments

- 3.1 Following a decision of the former Leisure Committee in 2011, there are three self-managed allotment sites in the borough. These are Kingston Road, Hesse Grove and Park Avenue West.

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- 3.2 Following a report to the Community and Wellbeing Committee on the 9 October 2017 it was agreed to offer the three self-managed sites new leases to continue under a self-managed arrangement, on the condition that the societies accepted updated terms which were set out in the report.
- 3.3 The three allotment societies agreed to these conditions and new leases were issued by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council. The current leases run for a five-year term from 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2022.
- 3.4 The self-managed leases contained a clause which allowed a two-year extension to the term if this was indicated by 31 January 2022.
- 3.5 Towards the end of 2021, all three of the allotment societies approached officers to indicate that they wished to take up the option to extend the term by two years.
- 3.6 After discussion with the Legal team, the advice was that the Council should not rely on the provision to extend the lease.
- 3.7 The mechanism to extend the lease would be through a renewal lease by reference or a reversionary lease by reference, neither which is straight forward.
- 3.8 In the interest of both parties, the current legal advice is to enter a new 5-year lease when the current term expires.

## **4 New Requests for Self-Management**

- 4.1 Officers have recently received a request from Epsom Common Allotments, which is one of the largest council-managed allotment sites, to become self-managed.
- 4.2 Epsom Common Allotment society first requested the possibility of becoming self-managed in 2013, and a vote was conducted amongst their plot-holders to progress this.
- 4.3 Under the criteria for self-management set out by the Leisure Committee in 2011, sites wishing to join the Self-Managed scheme must be able to demonstrate the following.
  - At least 75% of the current plot holders support the application to join the Scheme, which will be based on the agreements with the existing three sites. It is recognised that the division of responsibility for maintenance will differ slightly from site to site as conditions dictate, but will be used as a guideline for those sites wishing to join the scheme
  - The site forms a properly constituted Management Committee consisting of Chair, Treasurer, Membership Secretary and at least 3 other plot holders.

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- The Management Committee meets at least 3 times a year and holds an AGM to which all Plot holders are invited and have voting rights.
  - Any agreement will be based on the present lease agreements with the Self-Managed sites except that the initial lease would have to be co-terminus with the dates for the existing sites, so the first term may be shorter.
  - To maintain and manage a waiting list of interested parties wishing to take up allotments on the site. To ensure that there are no selection criteria applied to the waiting list, other than those of order of application, and a timely response to any invitation to take up any vacant plot.
- 4.4 Unfortunately, Epsom Common Allotment Society did not manage to achieve the 75% in favour of the transfer to self-managed and the process halted at this point.
- 4.5 Epsom Common Allotment Society were disappointed by this result as many plot holders did not respond to the call to vote and the non-responders were counted as 'against' voters.
- 4.6 In the report to the Community and Wellbeing Committee of 9 October 2017, when the new terms and conditions for self-managed allotment sites were discussed and agreed, there was also a motion to prevent any further sites becoming self-managed due to the loss of income this would incur to the Council which would impact on the Council's financial ability to manage the remaining sites.
- 4.7 The 2017 report stated:
- “The Council managed allotments are as follows, Alexandra, Epsom Common, West Ewell, Barn Elms, Elmstead and Lane End. In 2017-18 the budget target income for these sites is a total of £29,000. It is proposed that due to the scale of economies needed for running these sites (both administration and operational staff) that the Council does not offer self-managed agreements for any of these sites in the future.”
- 4.8 Whilst the above is still true today, officers are aware that the self-managed model is popular amongst well established allotment societies and can be highly successful.
- 4.9 It is recommended that to fully explore a sustainable approach to self-management, that a formal consultation exercise is carried out amongst all council-managed allotment plot holders to gather their opinions of how allotments sites should be run in the future.
- 4.10 The results of this survey will provide the basis for a recommendation on the future of self-managed sites which will be presented to members at the autumn meeting of the Environment and Safe Communities Committee.

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### 4.11 Risk Assessment

Legal or other duties

### 4.12 Impact Assessment

4.12.1 - none for the purpose of this report

### 4.13 Crime & Disorder

4.13.1 - none for the purpose of this report

### 4.14 Safeguarding

4.14.1 - none for the purpose of this report

### 4.15 Dependencies

4.15.1 - none for the purpose of this report

### 4.16 Other

4.16.1 - none for the purpose of this report

## 5 Financial Implications

5.1 The budgets for the gross expenditure of the allotments service for 2022/23 is £49,788, and for the gross income is £35,135. This represents a subsidy of the service by the Council of £14,653.

5.1 Of the gross expenditure costs, £35,343 relates to an apportionment of fixed overheads that would not be saved should all Council allotments become self-managed. Therefore, the financial impact of all allotments becoming self-managed would be an annual net cost to the Council of £20,690.

5.2 In addition to the revenue impact, there is likely to be a capital requirement to address works which may be required ahead of handing the sites over for self-management. The funding of these costs would need to be quantified and identified. There would also be a cost of consultation, for which a budget has not been identified.

5.3 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** Any decision to agree to allotment sites becoming self-managed will require a detailed analysis of the capital and revenue costs to the Council and budgets identified to cover any net cost as a result of the proposal.

## 6 Legal Implications

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6.1 As set out in section three of this report and if members wish to renew the self-managed leases the Council will need to enter into new leases which should be from the date of expiry of the current lease agreements for a new 5-year term.

6.2 **Legal Officer's comments:** as set out in 6.1 above and in section three of the report.

## 7 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

7.1 **Council's Key Priorities:** The following Key Priorities are engaged:

- Green and Vibrant
- Safe and Well
- Effective Council

7.2 **Service Plans:** The matter is not included within the current Service Delivery Plan.

- **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:** Well-managed allotment sites have a positive impact on the environment.

7.3 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:** None for the purpose of this report.

7.4 **Partnerships:** This report builds on the strong partnership in place with allotment societies across the borough.

## 8 Background papers

8.1 The documents referred to in compiling this report are as follows:

### **Previous reports:**

- Update on Allotment Services and Future Options – Leisure Committee 28 March 2011
- Self-Managed Allotments – Community and Wellbeing Committee 19 October 2017

### **Other papers:**

- None