

Community, Leisure & Recreation Committee

Title:	Stones Close Allotments
Date:	18 July 2023
Contact Officer:	Cassie Pinnells, Community Services Manager

Purpose of the Report

1. To agree the ground rent for 2023-24 and to receive the annual inspection report.

Background

2. The Stones Close Allotments are managed by the Stones Close Allotments Society (The Society). This arrangement is formalized through the 4-year Partnership Agreement approved in 2019 and will be reviewed at the Policy & Resources Committee. Within this agreement two conditions call for the Council to review the ground rent and undertake an annual site inspection to ensure the asset is being well maintained.
3. To clarify, The Society undertake: - the day-to-day maintenance requirements, enforcing the rules, collection of rents, site improvements, overseeing plot allocation, plot monitoring, running (fuel) & replacing lawn mowers for site upkeep, provision of portaloo facility, water station provisions, insurance, society memberships, direct payments and run fundraising events.
4. The site has 165 plots, since the annual inspection, there are now four plots vacant plots due to the allotment holders not keeping the plot cultivated, there is currently no waiting list. The retired committee members have prepared the four plots for reallocation already.
5. The pricing of 11p per square metre, (with the average plot costing £13), has remained the same since The Society took over in 2011, with the ethos for supporting the community, keeping costs affordable with 50% of members retired and on fixed incomes, and families using the allotment to grow food and feed themselves. The Chairperson informed me that a teacher pays for one allotment to enable LWS students to use the plot twice a week for extra-curriculum activities and a mother pays for her teenage daughter through her pocket money to manage a plot. By keeping the rents affordable this encourages the members to take pride in the site and work as a team to undertake repairs and work on plots that require preparation for reletting. Apparently, some plot holders have moved from the Kingsey Road Allotments due to price increases.
6. The Society Chairperson reported that the financial years run from October to September spanning two financial years. This year the water rates have risen dramatically, the site is classed under "business rate" with an estimated cost of £1,500 from last year's costs of £1,200. The portaloo comes with additional monetary responsibility, with a voluntary donation of £2 suggested to members, however, due to not being able to insure the equipment, a reserve of £2,000 is required in case of damage with a replacement charge from the hire company.
7. Within the Partnership Agreement the site security is shared by the Council and The Society, in the past the main gate has been replaced with the costs shared by each party.

Ground Rent

8. The ground rent is currently set at £300. It is not possible to compare this fee with other allotments in the county, as the responsibility of the site management is controlled by Parish & Town Council Officers undertaking the roles that The Society provides.

9. The Council has always been keen to support the development of this type of community activity and has not previously looked to accept anything other than a nominal fee. If the Committee inclinations are to consider increasing the ground rent in line with CPI the rate in April was 8.7% which would equate to an increase of £26. The Society has Chairperson has stated that they would not pass this increase onto the plot holders but absorb the costs and undertake additional fundraising.
10. There have been no significant alterations or developments in the responsibility between the two parties, and no change to the overall area that is rented to tenants.

Annual Inspection Report

11. The annual inspection has been completed with the findings summarized in Appendix 12b. The site is well managed.
 - a. The site plan has been checked and updated. Appendix 12c.
 - b. A copy of the insurance policy has been received.
 - c. A copy of the accounts has been received.

Risk Assessment

12. Society is strong both in membership and financial stability ensuring there are reserves in place for site maintenance. The site is well maintained and on inspection there are no issues for concern. There are no obvious risks arising from this report.
13. Environmental impact: The site is thriving, enabling their members to grow their own fruit and vegetables and flowers. This site assists with reducing the carbon footprint, encourages bees and butterflies and is an enjoyed leisure activity to enhance their health and wellbeing. Water is harvested on site to aid the water consumption costs. Within the agreement there are controlling measures for bonfires limit, rubbish accumulation and management of chemicals on site.

Resource Appraisal

14. An annual rent of £300 is received from the Allotment Society. It is suggested that whatever rent is collected from the site is held in an Ear Marked Reserve to support any costs arising from the Council's obligation to provide and maintain a secure boundary to the site.

Legal Powers: Small Holdings & Allotments Act 1908, s23

Recommendation:

The Committee is asked:

- i) To agree a ground rent for Stones Close Allotments for the financial year 2023-24.***
- ii) To note the attached inspection report.***