

Notes of a Meeting with LBM Allotment Societies on 12 January 2011 held at Paddock Allotment.

Allotment Society Members

Mike Deeprise, Jean Hancock, Ruth Whitehead - Paddock
Hilary Pereira, Kay Prior, Robert Jude – Martin Way
Joyce Pountain – Sustainable Merton
Ruth Barber – Phipps Bridge
Heather Fenton, Bill Bailey, Fred Taylor – Cottenham Park
Jeremy Riggs, Kerrigan Smith – Western Rd
Frank Friedlos, Ian Burgin – Havelock Rd
Peter Rhind – Haslemere
S Cornell, Peter Obermuller, Howard Watson – George Hill
Terry Bhachu – Eastfields Rd

London Borough of Merton:

Doug Napier (DN)
Francis McParland (FM)
Danny Lovelock (DL)
Simon Woods (SW)

After introductions, DN outlined the background and context to the meeting: severe budget cuts and a wish to devolve future responsibility for the management of the Borough's allotment gardens to local societies/groups, individually, or as a federation of sites.

DN made it clear that there were going to be one third less staff and 40% less budget in future years.

DN reported that Council officers had previously met with representatives from The Paddock to discuss self-management based upon their long experience of such, dating back some 20 years. The Paddock has indicated that were happy to assist other societies in any way they could.

Issues/Things to be taken forward:

Various representatives raised questions, which are summarized below;

What would LBM want?

Current agreement with Paddock gives 92.5% of tenancy income to society and 7.5% to LBM.

Would all plots count?

So long as they had been paid for, yes.

Could self-managed societies have access to LBM waiting list?

Yes, current list is site specific.

How would day- to- day management be done?

Paddock explained they could still contact LBM for advice such as good contractors but would manage them themselves.

Most groups agreed that they wanted to know what the likely budget would be and what help the Council would give to fledgling societies and what the water costs were, who would do the evictions and who would remove the rubbish.

SW explained that societies would need to be smarter about their waste removal.

DN explained that key numerical information would be sent to societies prior to the next meeting in February.

How much time does each Paddock member spend on society business?

That depends upon the time of year, up to one day per week. The annual forum usually sees no more than 40% of people turning up. Membership of the local society at The Paddock is compulsory, with society membership fees being paid with the plot fees.

Are there problems getting people to be on allotment committees?

Yes. Most members tend to be older too as the younger ones seem to have less time to commit.

What happens with aggressive tenants? Would the Council be an arbitrator?

The Paddock manages aggressive tenants quite successfully. The Council could serve as an arbitrator. This would be considered by LBM officers.

DN said that buying back services from LBM could be possible for self-managed societies.

Could the Council write to all plot holders to advise them of cuts and tell them it would be in their interest to attend committee meetings?

This could possibly be done in the future.

What would happen if a self-managed site fails?

LBM, as landlords, would have to consider implications.

Actions

LBM to provide societies with the following information:

- Full breakdown of each site income & costs including water costs

- List of what LBM would be prepared to do in future for self-managed societies
- List of what LBM would expect self-managed societies to do in future
- All to be done at least one week prior to the next meeting in February
- Jacqui Phelps to arrange next meeting, in February at The Paddock if possible

Allotment societies to:

- Consult with their members about the principles of self-management
- Feedback any concerns or issues about self-management not already identified to LBM