

## SOUTH SWINDON PARISH COUNCIL

### ANNUAL ALLOTMENT HOLDERS MEETING

#### REPORT OF PARISH COUNCIL

I would like to thank you for attending the second Annual Allotment Holders Meeting. The Parish Council plan to hold one of these meetings every year around this time to give allotment holders an opportunity to speak directly to Parish Councillors and for Councillors to hear your ideas and concerns.

As you know, the Parish Council took over the management of the allotments from 1 October 2017. I don't think that the Parish Council was under any illusion that this was going to be easy, there have definitely been some hurdles to get over in the first year.

The first one was moving the record across from the Swindon Borough Council system to the Parish Council system. The 2 different databases were not compatible and the data all had to be input manually. It also became apparent that there were gaps and missing data for some of the sites. This took a couple of months to sort out and we would like to thank all those allotment holders for bearing with us and sometimes supplying information again in order for the Parish Council to get the records correct.

Due to all this work, the allotment invoices were not issued until just before Christmas last year to cover the period from 1 October 2017 to 30 September 2018. I am pleased to say the Parish Council has been far better organised this year and invoice were sent out a couple of weeks ago. I know that a lot of allotment holders have already paid and I thank you for this. It is also pleasing to see so many payments now being made direct into our bank account which makes it far easier for our staff.

The invoices will need to be paid by the end of October 2018 and if, for any reason, you are not going to be able to pay on time, please let the Parish Office know. Otherwise non-payment can mean that you will lose your plot.

Whilst talking about invoices, I should also speak about fees. At the Annual Plot Holders Meeting last year strong feelings were expressed that the new fees being introduced by the Parish Council giving a discount to parishioners was unfair to people that lived outside the parish.

The fees for non-parishioners for last year were held at the same as the Swindon Borough Council rate for the previous year, but notice was given that non-parishioners would have to pay double the fees of parishioners for this year. Following the Annual Plot Holders Meeting last year, the Allotment Working Party met and recommended that the increase for this year be smaller and this was agreed by the Council. The fees for a full plot have increased by £9 and £4.50 for a half-plot per year.

The situation that we find ourselves in where some allotment holders are not parishioner is one that was imposed by Swindon Borough Council when setting up the parishes. A number of Parish Councils do not allow non-parishioners to have plots, but South Swindon Parish Council did not want to do that. However, non-parishioners do not pay any Council Tax to the Parish Council and that is the reason they are not receiving a discount.

The Parish Council has made a start on improving the allotment sites, but this is going to be a big task and will probably take another couple of years to complete. The Parish Council employed a Parish Ranger in January 2018 and took on another one in June 2018. I imagine that you have seen the Parish Rangers on site as they have spent a lot of time this year clearing plots and the sites in general. The Parish Council has also been using the services of an outside company to help with plot clearance and the rotavating of plots for new tenants. We do appreciate that people have had to wait for new plots to be made ready, but we are in the hands of the company in respect of the time they can give the Parish Council. This seems to be improving and plots are being turned around quicker.

The Parish Council is keen to have every allotment site in good order and fully used and is working towards this goal. A number of sites now have waiting lists. I am sure you will appreciate that this is going to take time, but you have our commitment to see this completed.

A new Parish Services Officer, Patrick, has also joined the Parish Council and he will be working on regular inspections of plots and making sure uncultivated plots are dealt with quickly. Some of you will know that Ruth has left and the allotments are now looked after by Tracey and the finances are dealt with by Jake.

The Parish Council has drawn up a new Tenancy Agreement and most of these have been returned signed. There are still a few that have not been returned and a second copy was sent out with the invoices. If you could get these back to the Parish Office as soon as possible.

The Parish Council does rely on allotment holders to be their eyes and ears. If you see something that needs attention then please bring let us know. This can be done by contacting your site rep, one of the 3 Allotment Working Party reps or directly to the Parish Office by email or phone.

I would like to talk about a couple of issues that we have had on site during the year. One concerns a theft of tools from a shed on an allotment. Anything that is owned by allotment holders and left on the allotments it your responsibility and is not the covered by any Parish Council insurance. If a theft should occur, then the Parish Council would encourage you to report it to the Police.

This is probably a good moment to mention gates. Only allotment holders have keys to the gates, but there is little point in having locked gates when they are left open for other people to enter the sites. Please remember to shut the gate after you enter the site and keep everyone secure.

There has been some wasps nest found on allotment sites and a solitary bees nest. The Parish Council will deal with wasps' nests, but the advice received about the bees is to leave them and they would not be a danger.

Allotment figures (on separate sheet)

That concludes my report.

If you have any questions, then can I ask you to hold them until the last item on the agenda this evening.