

THE POTENTIAL FOR THE DEVOLVED MANAGEMENT OF DUXFORD PARISH ALLOTMENTS

Introduction

At the last allotments committee meeting the subject of devolving the management of the allotments to its members was raised. There was a mixed response but it was felt that there was sufficient interest to take the idea further.

Over the last few years the responsibilities of the parish council have increased this together with the problems of recruiting new members has increased the pressure and work load on the present members and the Parish clerk. During that time too the take up of allotments has reduced, the number of vacant plots is increasing, with an increasing number of elderly plot holders having to relinquish the tenancy.

The Parish council recognise the importance of providing allotments for its residences and the need to keep the plots fully rented and cultivated but also understands that the time constraints on the allotment committee councillors does not always allow sufficient time to fully explore and promote the benefits of this important community asset. The Parish council also recognises the important work that has been carried out by DAS (Duxford Allotment Society) for its members.

The proposal

There are many different models for devolved management of allotments but in the first instance it is proposed to:

1. Create a Duxford Allotment Management association affiliated to the NSALG consisting of all tenants of the Duxford allotments.
2. Devolve the day to day running of the allotments to the association which would include maintaining the allotments according to the guidelines set out by the NSALG, Make regular inspections of the allotments and promote the benefits of allotments to the local community.
3. In the first instance the Parish council would continue to collect rents for the allotments, maintain the boundary hedges and 2 main tracks into the allotments, Maintain and pay for the water supply to the allotments. The council would retain 30% of the rent to cover these cost the remaining 70% would be passed to the association for their use. At a later date if requested by the association these duties could be passed over to the association together with 100% of the rent.
4. The full scope of the association's responsibilities would be agreed once the association has been formed.

The Pros and cons of devolved Management *

Many Councils now devolve the management of allotments to its members and its has been proven that such allotments are better run, maintained and have a higher uptake than those run by the Council and provide benefits both to the Council and allotment holders. Below are extracts from the NSAGL regarding the pros and cons of devolved management.

To the Parish Council



Pros

1. Release the Members of the Allotments committee enabling them to perform other duties within the Parish.
2. Reduce the hours and cost of the Parish clerk.
3. Empowerment of local people
4. Lower cost of service provision
5. Improves image of council
6. Easier to deal with an association than individual plot-holders
7. Can attract external funding
8. Problems dealt with promptly-on site
9. Better public relations

10. Better community spirit
11. Future of sites more sustainable

Cons

1. Risk of mismanagement (either through fraud or incapacity) –council left to pick up the pieces, land is still a council asset
2. Could increase demand for plots that council can't meet
3. Less control over demise of site
4. Disempowerment
5. Loss of income from rents –offset against less management costs etc.

To the Allotment holders



Pros

1. Pride in achievements –sense of community and friendship on site promoted
2. Improved relations with local authority
3. Increases morale on the site
4. Prompt decision making
5. Maintenance work is carried out more quickly when undertaken by the people who care most about the site
6. Access to other funds –extra resources for investment e.g. rent, grant funding
7. Improved sites raise profile –leads to greater take up of plots

The Parish Council would still appoint an Allotments officer to liaise with the association and mediate when asked with any disputes between allotment holders and the association.

Cons

1. Is dependence on commitment and capabilities of volunteers
2. Enforcing rules
3. Risk of conflicts
4. Legal liabilities –health and safety, adequate insurance essential
5. Understanding rights and responsibilities
6. Balancing finances
7. People moan at you –you become the local authority.
8. Can be hard work and time consuming unless responsibilities are shared

Time Scale

Stage 1 now to January 2018

Present the proposal to the allotment holders at the next meeting of the allotment committee. Write to each individual allotment holder providing them with the pros and cons of devolved management and get their comments.

Stage 2. January 2018 – May 2018

If approved the Parish Council will fund the initial creation of the Management Association elect the Chairman, Secretary, and Treasure and any other members required set up bank account and agree the rule of the association.

Stage 3. June 2018 – Sep 2018

Agree with the council the scope of the devolved management and responsibilities to be taken over by the Association

Stage 4. 1st October 2018

Sign the agreement and hand over the devolved management of the allotments to the Association.