

ALLOTMENT REVIEW – NOVEMBER 2020

HISTORY

There are currently 118 plots (117 + 1 shed plot). This number has varied over the years due to large plots being split to accommodate an increasing wait list and the requirements of some allotment holders for a smaller more manageable plot. The number still varies as plots have been given up, numbers on the wait list have dropped and existing plot holders may increase the size of their plot by taking on formerly split adjacent plots.

This has led to a huge variance in size ranging from 46 sq metres to 400 sq metres. To add to the discrepancy, it appears that plot holders “merging” what were classed as small plots were told they could take on the additional plot “at no additional charge”. We can only assume this referred to that particular year and that the intention was to charge for a “large” plot at the next renewal. Unfortunately this was not made clear at the time and is not the interpretation of the plot-holders who seem to think they are entitled to “two for the price of one” and have insisted on paying the rate for a small plot for what is now a large plot!

To further complicate things, the small and large plot sizes have always been quoted in “rods” which these days means absolutely nothing to most people and when the plots were measured most did not fall within the stated “rod” measurements anyway.

This, in addition to complaints regarding the increase in rates from September 2020 and various issues regarding control of rats, deer eating crops due to the lack of fencing etc. has prompted the current review.

ISSUES & PROPOSED ACTION

- **Plot sizes**

To ensure that all plot holders are charged a fair rate for the size of their plot it was decided the only way to do this was to measure each plot – this was done by the grounds staff and Deputy Clerk. We now have an accurate record of each plot size and can update this if plots are merged or split. This exercise highlighted the huge discrepancy in plot sizes and has provided the information needed to determine a fair rate.

Action:

Introduce 4 plot sizes:

Mini (up to 50 sq mtrs)	4 plots
Small (51 – 100 sq mtrs)	16 plots
Standard (101 – 200 sq mtrs)	93 plots
Large (over 200 sq mtrs)	5 plots

- **Charges**

For years rates have been disproportionately low and recent increases have, of necessity, been higher than the rate of inflation to cover costs. To ensure plot holders are charged a fair rate, we compared our rates with those of Chineham and Hook, being the most local. This has highlighted how generous the Old Basing rates are, particularly Concessionary Rates for over 60's which are not offered at the other two sites.

Action:

Apply current rates to the small and standard plots and introduce new rates for the mini and large plots. Allotment holders will then pay a rate more in keeping with the size of their plot.

On this basis charges from September 2021 for existing plot holders will be:

Mini plot: £30.00

Small plot: £40.00

Standard plot: £55

Large plot: £70.00

A concession of £10.00 off the normal rate will be applied to those over 60.

New allotment holders to be offered plots based on the above rates.

Increase the non-parishioner levy from £10.00 to £15.00 from 1 April 2021 with a further £5.00 increase the following year.

The above rates are still considerably less than those currently charged by both Hook and Chineham.

Allotment holders will be offered the option of paying in two instalments – September and June to spread the cost.

Allotment holders will be made aware of the changes as soon as possible. This will give them plenty of time to decide whether they wish to relinquish or reduce the size of their plot when the new rates are applied in September and manage it accordingly in the interim.

- **Security & Deer-proof Fencing**

There have been instances of crops being “stolen” or eaten by deer or rabbits and sheds being broken into. The only means of addressing this is to erect a 6ft high fence or hedge and lockable gates. The problem was raised in 2014 and quotes for fencing obtained to surround 3 sides of the allotments (the 4th side has hedging and fences backing on to residents’ gardens). The quotes at that time were £11,212.90 (ex VAT) for green chain link fencing and 2 gates or £12,070.40 (ex VAT) for mesh fencing & gates, both 1800 mm high. At the time funds were not available.

Action:

Look into the possibility of obtaining grant funding to cover the cost of suitable fencing/hedging.

- **Maintenance & Pest Control**

The grounds staff are only responsible for cutting the main grass areas leading into the allotments and cutting back surrounding hedges. They are not responsible for cutting the grass pathways between plots – these are the responsibility of individual plot-holders as it is not possible to get the grass cutter between plots particularly as some plot holders have encroached on to the adjacent grass pathways.

Plots are cleared when given up – this may involve just strimming or may need more extensive clearance requiring a skip.

Both grounds staff have accredited pest control training and bait boxes are positioned at various points on the allotments. These rarely attract rats as compost bins and vegetables provide rich pickings. Wasp nests are also dealt with when necessary.

Action:

Maintain cutting regime and continue monitoring pests.

- **Costs**

Water is one of the main costs, particularly repairs to leaks which may go unnoticed for a considerable time. In addition, Castle Water has reduced the abatement from 90% to 40% on water going to aquifer; as all water on the allotments goes to aquifer this has had a considerable impact on water rates. A water sub-meter has now been installed and regular meter readings will enable us to assess usage.

Skip Hire – a major cost leading to an increase in 2019 in the refundable deposit to £75.00 for new plot holders. This does not, however, cover the actual hire cost which is in the region of £200.00 per skip. Many plots now being relinquished are those taken on prior to a deposit being required and may have many years of accumulated items that the plot holder is too infirm to remove; this cost then falls to the Parish Council.

Total expenditure on the allotments over the past 10 years is £18,327.17.

The expenditure schedule does not include the following costs:

- Provision of water (only repairs to leaks)
- Grounds staff time (including annual and other interim inspections)
- Office staff time (day to day management, annual rent renewals, inspections)
- Wear & tear on machinery

Action:

Refer back to Castle Water at the end of this year requesting a review of the abatement.

SUMMARY

We now have a much clearer picture of the size of plots and can prove to a plot holder querying the fees that these are fair in relation to the size of their plot.

The new Edge software enables information for every plot to be easily managed electronically.

Costs have been reduced marginally this year by sending most renewal letters electronically and by using electronic banking.

A previous Facilities Management Committee meeting agreed changes to the procedure regarding Allotment Agreements and the Rules & Regulations. We will be introducing a standard form of Agreement and separate Rules & Regulations booklet. This will ensure all allotment holders sign the same Agreement. Both documents will be produced electronically and available on the Parish Council website.

Attachments to this review:

- Rates schedule from 2007 – 2020.
- Comparison with Chineham and Hook.
- List of expenditure from 1 April 2010 – 31 March 2020.