



Dear Allotment Plot Tenant,

1st September 2021

I am writing to inform you of a leadership challenge to the acting Committee which is currently being largely played out on social media. Whilst legitimate challenge is always welcome, I believe that for you to make a totally informed decision prior to the forthcoming AGM, you should be made aware of all the facts surrounding this challenge and be provided with a response to some of the comments and criticisms that have been made by a small group of tenants.

For some time, the acting Committee has been monitoring the worrying nature and direction of some of the posts emanating from the Facebook group Woodley Tenants Association and Friends that the elected Committee originally set up back in early 2018 but which is no longer under its control. Despite suddenly leaving the Committee and the post of Secretary in 2020 in the middle of their term, the Admin of this Facebook group, retained control of this group and developed it into a more independent forum with a much wider membership including both tenants and non-tenants.

Although in the past there has been a lot of positivity on this page, more recently it has been used as a space in which members are allowed and sometimes even encouraged to ask questions and discuss issues some of which, in my opinion, should have been immediately redirected to either WTC or the Committee. Unfortunately, a number of the comments have had the effect of undermining the position of the current Committee amongst some tenants and denigrating its past and current achievements.

As the Admin has declined to return the control of this group, the Committee has recently had the pleasure of launching the new Official Facebook group, Woodley Allotments Tenants Association at Reading Road which is managed by the Committee and fully supported by our landlords, Woodley Town Council. This Facebook group provides both a direct link to Committee members and is fully focused on the needs of all of our tenants; communicating useful allotment related information, providing news updates from the Committee and passing on all relevant information from Woodley Town Council. It is a safe place, where tenants' queries and concerns are dealt with swiftly by Committee members in a polite, friendly and healthy environment.

I would like to now focus on addressing a number of points which have been brought up and discussed by tenants and which the Committee believe require either a fuller explanation or additional clarification. I would also like to take some time to draw your attention to all the good work that has already been achieved by your current Committee as well as projects currently in the pipeline.

Hopefully this will all help to restore the balance and uphold the good reputation of the current Committee.

1) The AGM

There have been a number of comments made about the upcoming AGM; either that no date had been set for the postponed AGM or the new date was not being circulated widely enough to ensure that all tenants were made aware of the meeting.

Committee response:

Notes about the AGM have been sent out in the monthly newsletter which has been shared via all of our approved communication channels; via email, posted on our website and on our own official Facebook group page. We have



also seen that a link to the newsletter has been shared on the other Facebook group page, Woodley Allotment Tenants Association and Friends (WATA and Friends).

We understand there will be tenants who have chosen not to give their email addresses to the Committee or who are not currently on the internet. With that in mind we have put notices on the notice board by the main gate and on the main gate itself whilst, at the same time, also communicating this information directly with some tenants.

Despite what you may have read or heard, the Committee is working very hard to ensure that all tenants know about and can attend the upcoming AGM.

2) Plot inspections

There have been several posts on the Facebook group WATA and Friends concerning plot inspections and the letters that are sent out by Woodley Town Council. Some of these posts have included 'myths' about the Committee's role in this process.

Committee response:

As every tenant knows their Tenancy Agreement with Woodley Town Council (WTC) is a contract between the Tenant and WTC. The Committee is not involved at all in that contract. The Committee simply acts as an agent for WTC when asked to periodically carry out Plot Inspections.

As we have mentioned previously in Special Bulletins (SBs) and in the monthly newsletters, Plot Inspections are carried out to monitor the cultivation progress of plots and importantly how tenants are managing with their plots. We also look to identify abandoned plots – yes this does happen, but less so in recent years. We are mindful that any abandoned plots could be offered to people currently on a very long waiting list.

There are definitions of the expectations of plot cultivation within the Tenancy Agreement, one of which is clause 4 e) which reads *"The Tenant shall have at least 50% of the allotment garden under cultivation of crops and 70% worked after 12 months..."*.

Plots that do not meet the above criteria are reported back to WTC who then have the final decision on who receives a letter, written by and distributed by them.

After a standard plot inspection in June this year, it was observed that a small number of tenants had made little or no progress towards cultivation of crops for some 5 months and their plot numbers were included within our Plot Inspection Report given to WTC who then decided what further action needed to be taken and sent out letters. The action proposed by the WTC to terminate one tenancy shorter than 12 months has recently been successfully challenged by this tenant using clause 4e) and they have been allowed to remain on their plot.

However, it is now clear that there exists some confusion between clause 4e) and clause 4y ii) in the Tenancy Agreement that reads *"if by the 6th April in any year the plot is not adequately cultivated the council may re-enter the allotment after one month's previous notice in writing to the tenant"*. Thus, action could be initiated by WTC if they (WTC) felt that a tenant had not made satisfactory progress with their plots.



With this in mind and in the interest of making the position absolutely clear to tenants, we met with WTC a few weeks ago and they have agreed to review and change the wording of the tenancy agreement.

3) Warning and Termination letters:

There has also been quite a lot written about Warning /Termination letters on the other Facebook group WATA and Friends.

Committee response

WTC produces and distributes these letters. The Committee is in no way party to the creation or content of these letters but we do feed back your comments and concerns to WTC who have, in turn, modified both the content and tone. The latest copies that we have seen set out very clearly in a somewhat neutral tone why they have been sent and ask for feedback from the tenant as to any reason for the lack of progress. They also ask how WTC can help with any issue that a tenant has with their plot and what they would like to do, for example being given additional time to get their plot up to an acceptable standard, requesting a smaller plot if they decide it is too big, or perhaps (rarely) even choosing to release their plot to someone on the waiting list.

Furthermore, the Committee has consistently asked the same questions about any help that tenants may need with their plots in many of its newsletters and Special Bulletins. In fact, during the main part of the COVID crisis a number of tenants informed us that they were self-isolating and consequently their plots were removed from the inspection. Other plot holders have contacted the Committee and asked for suspension from inspection for other very valid reasons including some recent 'Pingdemic' victims, all of which the Committee have agreed to.

Plot progress and subsequent inspections are not a hard & fast rule. If a new tenant takes on a plot in November, it is unlikely that any progress would be made, possibly apart from digging, over winter. However comes spring, we hope to see more progress, with evidence of new ground preparation/digging, planting and general plot maintenance.

I hope that you all understand the need for plot inspections. The Committee cares about how tenants are getting on with their plots and are here to support you in making your plot a success. We are happy to see tenants making progress and enjoying all the benefits that having a plot has to offer, although we would be able to support you even more if you are proactive in contacting the Committee and/or WTC if you have issues, and before you receive a letter from WTC.

4) Plot Disputes and other complaints.

Thankfully these seem to be declining – that is, the ones that have been reported to us and dealt with. Over the **past 18/24 months** we have resolved a number of onsite issues/tenant disputes and currently we are not aware of any disputes that have been reported either to the Committee directly or to WTC being left unresolved. This we feel is another example of doing what an Allotment Committee should be doing, i.e. looking after tenants, despite what is being said elsewhere.

What have we done as a Committee and what are we doing?

What else has the Committee been doing on behalf of tenants over the last 18/20 months since our last AGM and what is being planned for the future, if re-elected?



- Established a better working and good relationship with WTC, which is a big improvement to what it was under the previous Committee
- Supported tenants by helping the WTC enforce the conditions of the tenancy agreement (e.g. general concerns like speeding, dumping of waste.)
- Supported tenants by carrying out repairs to the roadways so that they are now in a much better state than they were. Over 30 tenants helped with this in 2019 & 2020. Not only did this bring about a great improvement to the roadways, it also helped to get people together and encourage a wider community spirit.
- Arranged for over 100 tons of material to be delivered to the site ready for this year's road repairs
- Supported the Launchpad project and continued to make regular deliveries of produce to the Reading Food Banks
- Produced and distributed a brand new joint Committee/WTC 'Welcome Pack' for new tenants. Also made it available to existing tenants. This has been much welcomed by both tenants and WTC
- Produced regular monthly newsletters to keep tenants up to date
- Produced Special Bulletins to keep tenants updated on specific important subjects
- Organised the erection of the Bee Hive Enclosure on the allotment site
- Arranged for pallets to be made available to tenants for use on their plots
- Continued to improve the general security of the site through the increased use of CCTV and perimeter fence repairs, reducing to almost nil the ingress of non-tenants and theft of produce
- Lobbied WTC successfully for improved gate security. New keys that cannot be easily copied are to be introduced for all tenants in 2022
- Set up a new Facebook Group which allows better monitoring of content and eliminates the use of abusive language and incorrect facts as portrayed by the other Facebook group (WATA and Friends)
- Arranging the upcoming AGM after an 18 month gap due to the Covid Crisis
- Helped a charity in the establishment of a plot
- Worked with a local school for site visits, raising the profile of the allotment site within the community and inspiring future generations
- Provided an ordering service to purchase trees, bushes and seeds to all tenants at reduced cost.

Other items in the pipeline include revisiting the creation of the Nature Pond at the front gate, which is dependent on some drainage work being carried out by WTC, sourcing a new Notice Board, improving the website and other communication avenues with tenants such as monthly topical meetings (at WTC offices).

The forthcoming AGM

As already widely communicated, this will be held on **September 21st at 7.30pm in the Oakwood centre** in Woodley. We will soon be publishing the final Agenda and hope that all of you that can attend will come.

Resolution to change the Constitution at the AGM

One of the agenda items concerns the Association Constitution. This document has not been reviewed since it was first created in 2013 and clearly the association has moved on since then with over 100+ new tenants joining the allotment site.



One of the Association members has proposed some changes to the Constitution which have been distributed via an SB for pre-AGM review. This seems to have touched a sensitive note with some tenants and consequently alternate change suggestions have been made by other Association members. The Committee believes that all suggestions for changes to the Association Constitution should be seen and considered so we have therefore published these as well via a Special Bulletin, again for pre-AGM reading.

Election of Officers at the AGM

The current Committee has been in office since the last AGM meeting in March 2019. Due to the COVID crisis this has meant that an AGM could not take place and therefore any elections for Committee Officers and General Committee members could not be held. These elections will be held at the upcoming AGM.

Not having Committee elections and the fact that the formerly elected Committee has continued in office as an acting Committee has caused some upset in certain circles. Over the recent months, I am at a loss as to how else we could have operated. I would like to give special recognition to all the current Committee members for their support and hard work during what has been a challenging time for all of us. A big thank you goes to **Brian Hughes, Kerri Evans, Mike McNamara, Barry Jackson, Teresa Buley and Tony Carter**, all of whom carried on in their Committee posts and worked tirelessly throughout even the worst stages of the pandemic.

My sincere thanks must also go to **Gill Germain** who answered our repeated calls for a new Committee Secretary after the last one left at such short notice. Due to us being between extended AGMs, I co-opted Gill into that job and it continues to pain me to know that certain individuals have chosen to make very hurtful comments about the fact that she is on the Committee and is carrying out Committee business in line with her role, temporarily like all of us until the AGM. In reality, I am only too pleased to be able to recommend her to you and to inform you of both her suitability for the post and the excellent job that she is currently performing on behalf of all tenants on the site.

In conclusion, I hope that 2021 has been a successful year to date with your allotment and that the present Committee can count on your continued support and attendance at the forthcoming AGM.

Many thanks

Scott Golding – Acting Chair

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