

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
COMMUNITIES and HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

26 February 2019

Report of the Director of Street Scene, Leisure & Technical Services

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1 TONBRIDGE ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION - PROPOSED CHARGES

1.1 Summary

1.1.1 This report brings forward a proposed review of charges for allotments in Tonbridge for Member approval.

1.2 Background

1.2.1 In general, allotments across the borough are provided and managed by the relevant Town and Parish Councils. Allotments in Tonbridge are, in part, provided by the Borough Council.

1.2.2 The Borough Council own 7 allotment sites in Tonbridge providing community use for approximately 270 tenants. Allotment provision is seen as an excellent opportunity to promote both mental and physical well-being at an accessible cost. In a survey undertaken by the National Allotments Society their members also commented on the social and community benefits that allotments provide. To ensure a community focussed and cost effective service for its sites in Tonbridge, the allotments are managed and maintained on the Council's behalf by the Tonbridge Allotments and Gardens Association. The Association is a well organised, not for profit community group and has a very positive relationship with the Council.

1.2.3 Currently the Council pays the Association an annual sum of £5,100 to manage and maintain allotments in Tonbridge on the Council's behalf. This encompasses all functions related to allotment management including the administration of payments, managing day to day operations (including any dispute resolution) and day to day upkeep and repairs to the sites. The Council does, however, consider applications for additional financial support from the Association for larger capital improvement projects that in previous years have included improvements to disabled facilities and the provision of storage facilities/sheds. The current arrangements are considered to be a very efficient and cost effective approach to the management of these Council facilities.

1.2.4 The Director of Central Services is currently reviewing the Formal Agreement with the Association. The current Agreement requires any proposed change in charges proposed by the Association to be approved by the Council prior to implementation. The last increase in allotment charges was considered and approved by the Communities & Housing Advisory Board on the 10 June 2015 and implemented on the 1 October 2015.

1.3 Proposed Charges

1.3.1 The Council has been advised that the Association has considered current charges and is proposing revised charges to be implemented from the 1 October 2019. The charges proposed take into account increases in water and equipment servicing and are shown below:

- Increase allotment rental charge by 50p to £3.50 per rod per year
- Increase the charge for water by 50p to £1.50 per rod per year

1.3.2 A typical full allotment plot is measured at 10 rods, with half plots (5 rods) also available. The table below shows the current and proposed charges for a full 10 rod plot based on the proposals.

	Current Annual Charge	Proposed Annual Charge
Allotment Charge	£30	£35
Water Charge	£10	£15
Total*	£40*	£50*

*A current discount of 50% is given to those over 65 years of age. Currently 36% of tenants benefit from this discretionary rate.

1.3.3 Whilst the proposed increases may appear high in terms of a percentage, they do represent a relatively small financial cost increase across a full year. It is considered that the proposed allotment charges still represent extremely good value, and it should be noted that the charges have not been increased since 1 October 2015.

1.3.4 In addition to the above, (as previously agreed by Members), a separate annual charge of £15 is made for those opting to rent a shed.

1.3.5 For Members information a comparison of the proposed Tonbridge charges in relation to charges by other local authority providers is shown below. The proposed Tonbridge charges fall in the middle of a varying range of charges applied by others. It is worth noting that none of those shown offer any discretionary rate to those over 65 years of age.

Parish / Borough	Charge per annum for 10 rods including water	Discount
East Peckham	£32	None
Hadlow	£50	None
Maidstone	£60	None
Mereworth	£40 per parishioner. £60 non-parishioner	None
Sevenoaks	£35	None
Tonbridge	£50 (proposed for 2019)	50% for over 65s
Tunbridge Wells	£100 (from 1/4/2019)	None

1.4 Legal Implications

- 1.4.1 The Formal Agreement between Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council and the Tonbridge Allotments and Gardens Association requires any change in charges to be approved by the Borough Council prior to implementation.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.5.1 The Borough Council currently provides the Association with an annual sum of £5,100 to manage allotments in Tonbridge on its behalf. Additional financial support for the Association for larger capital improvement projects at the sites is considered on a case by case basis. This is considered to offer excellent value for money.

1.6 Risk Assessment

- 1.6.1 The Association has an obligation to ensure that provision on site is suitable and safe for users. All users are required to adhere to a formal tenancy agreement.

1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.7.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act, with no perceived impact on end users. It is the intention of the Association to retain the concession offered to over 65's.

1.8 Policy Considerations

1.8.1 Community, Healthy Lifestyles

1.9 Recommendations

- 1) It is RECOMMENDED TO CABINET that the proposed increase in charges for Tonbridge Allotments as detailed in the report be agreed and implemented with effect from 1 October 2019

The Director of Street Scene, Leisure & Technical Services confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

contact: Mike Harris

Nil

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