

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
COMMUNITIES and HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

16 February 2021

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

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Key Decision

1 TONBRIDGE ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION - PROPOSED CHARGES

1.1 Summary

- 1.1.1 This report brings forward a proposed review of charges and concessions for allotments in Tonbridge by the Tonbridge Allotments and Gardens Association 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 its 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 A new ten year Formal Agreement with the Association was made in September 2019. The Agreement has a clause stating that 'When setting rent levels for the future, TAGA shall bear in mind the need for the Sites to be self-funding in all respects'. It is a desire for both parties to try and achieve self-funding as soon as possible and for TAGA to accumulate their own capital reserve.

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 2022 (the Association has to approve these at their own annual general meeting in Oct 2021 for the following year). The proposed charges are to raise annual rents per rod by one pound every year from 2022/23 to 2024/25. Currently the charge is £6 per rod.
- 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 proposed charges for a full 10 rod plot based on the proposals. The current cost for ten rods is £60.

	Proposed Annual Charge
2021/22	£60
2022/23	£70
2023/24	£80
2024/25	£90

- 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. By 2024/25 when the annual cost reaches £90 this still only equates to £1.73 per week.
- 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 current Tonbridge charges in relation to charges by other local authority providers is shown below. The current Tonbridge charges fall in the middle of a varying range of charges applied by others.

Location	Charge per annum for 10 rods including water - 2020/21
Maidstone	£60
Ashford	£70
Sevenoaks	£41.50
Tonbridge	£60
Tunbridge Wells	£100

1.4 Proposed removal of age concession

- 1.4.1 The Association has also proposed the removal of the 50% discount that is currently given to over 65 year olds. This concession for allotments is considered dated and several other authorities have already removed this (Sevenoaks, Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells, Medway and Thanet).
- 1.4.2 Currently there are 100 tenants out of 290 receiving this discount.

1.5 Legal Implications

- 1.5.1 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.

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.6.1 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 and these proposals will pave the way for the Association to be cost neutral in the future.

1.7 Risk Assessment

- 1.7.1 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.

1.8 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.8.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. It is the intention of the Association to cease the concession offered to over 65's giving all age groups the same equal charges.

1.9 Policy Considerations

1.9.1 Community, Healthy Lifestyles

1.10 Recommendations

- 1) It is **RECOMMENDED TO CABINET** that the proposed charges brought forward by the Tonbridge Allotments and Gardens Association as detailed in the report be agreed.

Background papers:

contact: Mike Harris

Nil

Robert Styles

Director of Street Scene, Leisure & Technical Services