

Kingston Action Group Proposed Community Allotment

Ref: KPC Meeting 9 September 2020 Appendix 2

The Proposed Kingston Community Allotment

1. Introduction

This discussion document, prepared by the Kingston Action Group, sets out the basis on which the Group intends to lease the allotment from Lewes District Council and manage it on behalf of the local community. It covers:

- a description of the allotment
- the lease itself including the cost and terms
- how the allotment is to be brought back into a state in which it can be cultivated
- potential users (and uses)
- the potential benefits to sections of the community which it may over time afford
- insurance
- potential future costs beyond the lease
- the management of the allotment and its future governance

2. The Kingston Allotment

The allotment lies next to and behind the garage adjoining No 9 Gow's Croft, off The Street, behind the bus turning area. The only access is by a latched gate.

The area of the plot is 10 rods – equivalent to around 250 square metres.

The site is owned by Lewes District Council (LDC). It is not known when it was last used but it has certainly been neglected for many years and is very overgrown.

It is not possible to discern any underlying beds or paths due to the overgrown nature of the site. The sole water supply is a water butt draining a neighbouring garage roof.

3 Lease of the allotment

LDC was approached by a member of the Action Group about the possibility of a lease early in 2020. A lease was offered in July, though with effect from 1 April 2020. We are currently in correspondence with LDC with a view to altering this date, to no earlier than 1 October.

Once we have signed the tenancy agreement, we are obliged – if the agreement begins after 1 June – to “accomplish a state of reasonable cultivation” within 12 weeks of the beginning of the agreement. The usual restrictions on the use of

allotments apply. As tenants, we would not be allowed to plant hedges, erect fences or buildings without the permission of the Council. We are not allowed in any circumstances either to sublet any part of the allotment, keep animals on it, extract minerals etc.

Either party may end the agreement giving 12 months' notice in writing. However, LDC may terminate the tenancy with only one month's notice if we have failed to observe the rules.

The lease costs £70 a year. In an e-mail from Estelle Dye of LDC dated 14 May, it was made clear that there would be no charge for the first year. Thereafter, we would hope that the KPC would meet this cost – a very modest one for a project of benefit to the community. The Group's own income is minimal. It is currently £234 per annum, derived entirely from the sale of lottery tickets to those who have nominated the Group as a "good cause". However, this is precarious as the current supporters may cancel their Direct Debits at any time.

5. Utilisation of the allotment

5.1 Summary of potential uses of the allotment

In its current state the allotment is of little use to anyone, although it may be relatively rich in wildlife having been almost completely undisturbed for many years. The presence of wildlife is a factor that needs to be taken into consideration from the outset and the Action Group strongly favours a policy which rules out the use of any poisons on the site, especially as it is hoped that children will make use of the plot.

With only a little imagination it's possible to envisage a range of potential uses for this area.

- Growing vegetables, flowers or fruit
- A communal area for quiet enjoyment by local residents
- In conjunction with Iford and Kingston School, a space to promote gardening activities and appreciation of the natural environment by children.
- A site for growing wildflowers to be transplanted elsewhere in the village
- A site to which villagers may bring apples for pressing annually

More specific arrangements will have to be agreed in the future by users under detailed management proposals.

5.2 Preparing the allotment for use

Restoring the allotment to a state in which it can be adequately cultivated is undoubtedly a huge challenge which must not be underestimated and it has to be acknowledged that this task may in the end prove beyond us. That said, if we are able to enlist enough voluntary support in clearing the site initially, maintaining it may prove less difficult.

5.3 Insurance

We believe that volunteers doing preparatory work on the site may be covered by the KPC's existing insurance policy but would appreciate KPC's clarification of the position. If this is indeed the case, how might this policy need to be extended to cover other users at a later stage?

6. **Community Benefits**

The many possible benefits to the Kingston community (or perhaps communities) are suggested by the list of potential uses at 5.1 but include:

- Social interaction between different generations and so better social cohesion
- Less isolation for some people living alone
- Healthy exercise
- Greater volunteering

All in all, the greater the number of people drawn into the project and the wider the age span, the more substantial the benefits are likely to be. If the allotment is a success, it could even lead to the revival of the village flower and produce show. The very fact of its existence as a community project will add weight to our entry to the Parishes in Bloom contest.

7. **Initial Management of the Allotment**

Initially, it will be for the Action Group to organise clearance of the site, perhaps concentrating efforts on half of the area to begin with in order to ensure that there is something to show for the first efforts. This may involve the use of a rotovator.

Weeds may be suppressed with weed mats (the Action Group has many of these – bought to assist planting flowers beneath the hedge on the green) or perhaps even old carpets.

8 **Financial considerations**

8.1 Costs beyond the lease

While there are certain to be other costs in the future and while we would hope that the KPC will be willing to contribute to these, we are not yet in a position to estimate them with any accuracy. At the same time, we would not of course expect the KPC to offer us a blank cheque. We envisage some costs being met by the Group itself through external funding sources or by raising subscriptions from allotment users. We could also perhaps make use of the KPC's own grant scheme when this is agreed.

We would be happy to discuss various options with the KPC for their contribution, including a maximum annual sum for basic running costs.

In the medium to long term, one-off projects like buildings (e.g. a shed or a greenhouse) will be beyond the Group's means and are likely to depend on some level of support from the KPC or from external sources. We also hope to get support in kind from villagers in the form of donations. We have already been gifted a water butt and two compost bins.

9 Future Governance

The Action Group will remain in ultimate control of the allotment as the leaseholder.

After a period of time, as – hopefully – different interest groups become involved (including Iford and Kingston School, perhaps the WI, perhaps a village gardening group) an overall management group will need to be formed enabling all the stakeholders, including Kingston Parish Council, to participate in the running of the site and manage most of the day-to-day issues including:

- the completion of clearance of the site
- a site plan outlining different functions, including paths, for different areas
- sources of finance or help in kind, including from our local garden centre and perhaps grant schemes which promote community gardening with an educational aspect
- obtaining support in kind from local residents e.g. donations of tools, compost bins or other items
- composting
- water supply
- the possibility of the construction of a shed or a greenhouse or both
- the construction of raised beds
- the delineation of separate areas of the site for use by groups or individuals
- policy towards the use of poisons
- health and safety considerations, with particular reference to the use of the site by children and what might be called “pandemic protocol”, to include risk assessments
- security
- insurance
- regular bulletins in The Kingston News
- contributions from users towards costs

10 Next steps

In the immediate future we need to:

- obtain the approval of the KPC to their underwriting the cost of the lease and to their agreement to discuss some form of other annual financial contribution when the costs have been identified
- resolve the issue of the start date of the tenancy agreement with LDC
- clarify the insurance position
- begin clearance of the site