



Parish Council

Allotment Working Group – Meeting Notes

Date	Tuesday 28th July 2026
Time	17:00 – 18:47
Location	Pinetrees Community Centre
Chair	Cllr John Ballman
Clerk	Andrew Briggs, Head of Operations

Present

- Cllr John Ballman (Chair)
- Cllr Sandra Absalom
- Andrew Briggs – Head of Operations
- Neil Jackson – Allotments Officer
- Mick Lucas – Churchward Avenue Allotment tenant
- Phil Nobbs – Rodbourne Farm representative
- Gary Moore – Redcliffe Street representative
- Lizzie Abrahams – Akers Way representative
- Jim Manley – Pickards Field representative
- Caterina Michienzi - Pickards Field representative

1. Welcome, Introductions and Previous Meeting

- Cllr Ballman welcomed attendees and noted the broad representation from different allotment sites.
- The previous Working Group meeting in January 2026 focused specifically on the revised Allotment Terms and Conditions.
- The revised Terms and Conditions had subsequently been approved by the Leisure and Recreation Committee, issued to tenants and were now in force.
- Allotment invoices had also been issued for the 2026/27 year.

2. Hops and Coffee Grounds Collection

- The collection and distribution of brewery hops continued to be well received and material generally moved quickly from the sites where it was delivered.
- The coffee-ground trial had expanded to several sites. Use varied between locations, with some sites using the supply quickly and Rodbourne Farm currently holding more than required.
- Members discussed the appropriate use of both products. Hops were principally used as mulch or dug into the soil, while coffee grounds were used in compost or in small quantities as a soil improver.
- It was emphasised that coffee grounds should be used sparingly. Excessive use could adversely affect soil and stored material could become mouldy.
- The group supported continuing the collections but considered that the process should be documented so that it did not rely on individual officer knowledge.

Action: Prepare simple guidance for tenants on the safe and effective use of hops and coffee grounds. Guidance should be circulated and, where practical, displayed on or near the collection bins. Review whether one coffee bin at Rodbourne Farm can be moved to a site with greater demand.

3. Waste Collection, Skips and Bonfires

3.1 Waste collection

- The Council had reduced reliance on skips by using large collection bags and the Council tipper at smaller sites. This had produced savings and had generally worked well.
- A mixed approach would continue, with skips used at larger or busier sites and bag collections used where practical.
- Contamination and fly-tipping within skips had reduced significantly compared with earlier years.
- Autumn collections were expected to be busier due to seasonal clearance work.

Action: Issue advance communication confirming the autumn collection arrangements, acceptable materials and how tenants can request assistance with a collection where necessary.

3.2 Bonfires

- A number of bonfire complaints had been received during the year. A recent fire at Pickards Field had required attendance by the Fire and Rescue Service and had continued to smoulder after it was believed to be extinguished.
- Members recognised that burning remained a practical method for disposing of invasive weeds and some untreated timber, but concerns were raised about smoke nuisance, fires being left unattended and the increased risk during hot and dry weather.
- The group supported a seasonal restriction rather than a complete ban. The suggested period for permitted bonfires was October to March.
- Bonfires should remain contained, use dry and appropriate material only, be supervised at all times and not cause nuisance to neighbouring properties.

Action: Prepare a tenant communication restricting bonfires outside October–March and reinforcing the existing safety and nuisance requirements. Review whether the seasonal restriction should be formally incorporated into the Terms and Conditions at the next review.

4. Development of Vacant Sites

4.1 Allington Road

- Allington Road was a small former allotment site that had been partly developed as a community garden. Six raised beds were in place and fruit trees had been planted, with the rear section retained as a wildlife area following earlier consultation.
- The site was being periodically maintained by the Council, but there was no established community group managing or using it. Previous expressions of interest had not progressed.
- Access, parking, security and the uncertain water supply were noted as practical constraints. A further local leaflet drop and renewed engagement with community groups were suggested.

4.2 Redlynch Close

- Redlynch Close had recently transferred to the Parish Council as freehold land. The site was being cut back but required a clear long-term plan.
- The site was close to the local academy and could potentially support school-based learning, horticulture, wildlife activity, youth engagement or a community-growing project.
- Access and parking were limited and any successful scheme would require a committed organisation or project lead rather than relying solely on periodic Council maintenance.

4.3 Pride in Place and community partnerships

- The Penhill Pride in Place programme was identified as a possible route for support. The Parish Council did not control the funding but could submit the sites as potential projects for consideration by the local board and residents.
- Possible partners discussed included the academy, TWIGS, food banks and organisations supporting young people, mental health and people with disabilities.

Action: Present Allington Road and Redlynch Close as potential community-growing and skills projects through the Penhill Pride in Place process. Explore interest from the academy and suitable community organisations, and consider a renewed local volunteer leaflet drop for Allington Road.

5. Allotment Best in Show

- Both rounds of judging at Rodbourne Farm had been completed, with the second judging visit taking place on 24th July 2026.
- Despite the difficult growing conditions, most plots were considered to be in fair condition and the exercise had again been positively received.
- Results were being compiled and would be announced in September 2026.
- Awards would be presented at the Council's Pride of the Parish ceremony in early 2027.
- The competition was considered a useful way of encouraging cultivation, improving site appearance and strengthening engagement between tenants.
- For very large sites such as Pickards Field, future judging may need to be divided into sections to remain manageable.

6. Works Under Review

- The annual allotment income was approximately £24,000–£25,000 and was ring-fenced for allotment services and improvements. Core costs included water, waste collections and the current tree survey and mapping work.
- Members were reminded that not all improvements could be delivered in one year and larger schemes might require an earmarked reserve built up over several financial years.

6.1 Pickards Field water troughs

- Existing troughs were running dry during periods of peak demand. A proposal had been obtained for four additional troughs, positioned to improve coverage across the site.
- The group supported progressing the troughs as the most achievable improvement within the current year, subject to final budget availability and confirmation that the existing water supply could support them.

Action: Progress the proposal for four additional water troughs at Pickards Field, subject to final budget and technical checks.

6.2 Pickards Field entrance track

- The entrance track was deteriorating due to regular traffic, including heavier delivery vehicles serving the on-site shop.
- The quoted improvement cost was significant. Members supported postponing the full track scheme while beginning to build an earmarked reserve.
- The Council would approach SALGA to discuss a possible joint contribution or a more durable shared solution, given the traffic generated by the shop and deliveries.

Action: Open discussions with SALGA regarding a contribution to the entrance-track works and identify a suitable long-term specification. Consider earmarking any available year-end allotment budget towards the scheme.

6.3 Other access and parking matters

- The beech hedge at the Pickards Field entrance restricted visibility of pedestrians, cyclists and e-bikes using the adjoining path. Selective reduction was requested to improve the sight line.
- A parking-area improvement at Kiln Lane had also been quoted, as the existing woodchip area became difficult to use during wet weather.
- At Akers Way, additional parking space and levelling of a rough section of track were raised. Officers confirmed that a parking quotation had previously been obtained and agreed that the track could be reviewed by contractors.

Action: Review the Pickards Field entrance hedge, Kiln Lane parking proposal, and the Akers Way parking and track concerns as part of the works programme.

7. Tree Survey and Mapping

- The tree survey and mapping programme approved by the Leisure and Recreation Committee was underway across the allotment estate.
- All allotment sites had been supplied to the appointed contractor, although some sites contained few or no trees.
- The current commission covered inspections, mapping and reports. Costs for any recommended tree works would follow once the reports were received, expected within approximately two months.
- Allotment land was held freehold and the Parish Council was responsible for trees within those boundaries. Urgent safety work might require support from the wider corporate budget if the ring-fenced allotment budget was insufficient.
- Unless urgent for safety reasons, most tree and hedge works would be programmed outside the main bird-nesting season, generally in the autumn.

Action: Circulate or report the survey findings and prioritised works once received, with costs and proposed funding arrangements.

8. Any Other Business

8.1 Site gates and security

- Akers Way tenants raised the practicality of repeatedly opening and closing the gate during busy summer watering periods.
- The Council's standing position remained that gates should be closed and locked after entry for site security, tenant safety and protection of tools and produce.
- It was acknowledged that tenants might agree practical arrangements locally, but the Council would retain the formal requirement and would not introduce a general open-gate period.

8.2 Unauthorised play structure

- A treehouse/play structure erected on an allotment plot was raised. Officers confirmed that the matter was already being dealt with and the structure would be required to be removed.

8.3 Water use and filling private tanks

- Concerns were raised at more than one site about tenants filling IBC tanks, wheelie bins or large numbers of containers directly from communal troughs during peak demand, leaving insufficient water for other tenants.
- The Terms and Conditions contained a fair-use principle. Members agreed that large-volume filling should not disadvantage other tenants and that consideration should be given to quieter periods where storage containers were being filled.
- It was also noted that the historic 25 mm water pipes limited flow and refill rates, particularly at large sites such as Pickards Field.

Action: Issue a general fair-use reminder covering communal water supplies and large-volume filling. Review individual reports of deliberate or unreasonable use and consider whether further site-specific controls are necessary.

8.4 Community and memorial plots at Pickards Field

- Concerns were raised about community and memorial plots being held in an individual's name, creating uncertainty over ownership of donated structures, equipment and produce if the named tenant left or a dispute arose.
- Members supported community facilities being held for the collective benefit of the site and not becoming the personal property of one individual.
- Officers agreed to confirm the current tenancy arrangement for the plots recently taken on by SALGA and to review how community and memorial areas should be documented in future.

Action: Check the tenancy and asset arrangements for the SALGA community plots, and ensure future arrangements clearly protect Council and community ownership.

8.5 Tenant welfare and handling of disputes

- A tenant described the significant personal and mental-health impact of a longstanding site dispute and felt that support and communication from the Council had been disproportionate.
- Officers apologised that appropriate support had not been offered to all affected parties.
- Tenants were encouraged to continue reporting incidents, as officers could not act on matters of which they were unaware. The need for clearer communication and feedback on case outcomes was acknowledged, subject to confidentiality.

Action: Review the support and communication provided during allotment disputes and confirm an appropriate route for reporting and receiving feedback.

8.6 Greenhouses and polytunnels

- The group discussed whether an existing glass greenhouse could be relocated between plots. The officer preference was that legacy glass structures remain in situ until removed from the site because dismantling and moving them introduced additional risk.
- Possible mitigation such as safety film was raised, and it was agreed that the specific request would be discussed separately rather than decided at the meeting.
- Members also raised concerns about poorly secured polytunnels and the condition of older glass structures. A renewed site structure inspection was suggested.

Action: Consider the individual greenhouse relocation request separately and review whether a condition and security inspection of legacy greenhouses and polytunnels is required.

8.7 Plot surrender, non-payment and cultivation

- Members asked for greater clarity and speed where tenants verbally indicated that they wished to surrender a plot, failed to pay or did not cultivate.
- Officers confirmed that surrender must be received in writing, whether by form, email or letter, before the plot can safely be reallocated.
- The cultivation enforcement process was operating but could occasionally be delayed by limited officer resources. Approximately £1,000 of around £25,000 bill remained outstanding at the time of the meeting.
- The need for reasonable discretion in cases such as illness was acknowledged, but members agreed that there must also be clear final cut-off points so vacant or unused plots could be offered to people on the waiting list.

Action: Review the current payment, surrender and cultivation timescales and ensure that reminders and final deadlines are applied consistently. Investigate the specific Churchward plot raised at the meeting.

8.8 Surplus produce collection

- The annual surplus-produce collection for the Night Shelter/Dorsey Baptist Church had not yet been arranged due to recent leave.
- The established text-message process would be restarted and collection arrangements confirmed shortly.

Action: Confirm and publicise the 2026 surplus-produce collection arrangements.

9. Summary of Agreed Actions

No.	Action	Lead
1	Hops and coffee guidance and redistribution review	Officers
2	Publish autumn waste collection arrangements	Officers
3	Issue seasonal bonfire and safety communication	Officers
4	Submit Allington Road and Redlynch Close through Pride in Place and approach potential partners	Head of Operations / Ward Members
5	Announce Best in Show results in September 2026 and arrange award presentation	Officers
6	Progress four Pickards Field troughs, subject to checks and budget	Officers
7	Approach SALGA about Pickards Field track costs and consider an earmarked reserve	Head of Operations
8	Review other access, hedge, parking and track matters raised	Officers
9	Report tree survey results and costed priorities when received	Head of Operations
10	Issue communal-water fair-use reminder	Officers
11	Confirm ownership and tenancy arrangements for community/memorial plots	Officers
12	Follow up tenant welfare support	Head of Operations
13	Review greenhouse relocation request and structure-inspection requirements	Officers
14	Review payment, surrender and cultivation timescales and the Churchward case	Officers / Finance
15	Confirm surplus-produce collection arrangements	Allotments Officer

Meeting closed: approximately 18:47.