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Briefing Note - Community Allotment Plot

For Finance Governance & Estates Committee 16th January 2025

Introduction

Hurstpierpoint Allotment Association (HAA) have approached the Parish Council with regards to setting up a "community plot" in the allotments in the current plot 26B. Their proposal is set out in Annex A & B. Further clarification questions were put to the HAA and these are continued in Annex C.

The plot has unfortunately had several neglectful tenants in succession, and has been returned in a poor state, suffering for a considerable amount of mareetail (*Equisetum arvense*) which is persistent.

The HAA hopes the project will help to address the issue of some long term allotment holders who are struggling to maintain their plot, but who rely on the allotments for their health and wellbeing and for the sense of community it affords. A community plot would allow these individuals to continue working on an allotment, while potentially freeing up other plots to reduce the waiting list.

The Committee is asked to consider whether to let Plot 26B to the HAA for them to manage as a community plot. The HAA would pay the annual plot fee.

Current Fees:

Rod fee 2024/25: 5 rods at £5.45 per rod = £27.25

Rod Fee 2025/26: 5 rods at £5.55 per rod = £27.75

Waiting List

There are currently 28 people on the waiting list and the current wait time is approximately 15 months.

RECOMMENDATION: The Committee is asked to AGREE to let Allotment Plot 26B to the HAA for them to manage as a community plot.

Further information following:

Annex A - Formal application from HAA

Annex b - Plot 26B "mood board" illustration

Annex C - Table of clarification questions and answers

Application from HAA

Context

The starting point of this proposal was trying to find a supportive way that would resolve the issue of having ~30 plots that were not meeting the % of cultivation as written in the Parish Council contract and on the other side of the balance having a waiting list for plots of over 40 people.

The committee discussed the various options ranging from do nothing, to strictly evoking the parish council process, but recognised that there is a human element involved in many of the reasons that the maintenance of plots becomes a problem.

The proposed project aims to establish a community allotment within the existing allotment site so that allotment holders who are no longer able to maintain their plots in line with the Parish Council contract, due to age, frailty or ill health, are able to continue to access the health, social and wellbeing benefits from spending time at the allotments. Evidence shows us that social connection reduces isolation and loneliness, which in turn has a positive impact on both physical and mental health. Gardening offers light exercise in an outdoor green space, both of which have been demonstrated to have a positive impact on both physical and mental health and wellbeing.

The community plot project and design would need to be established in line with priorities for funders which range from community benefit, supporting communities and sustainability and supporting nature.

The plot design offers an opportunity for those handing back their plots (due to age, frailty or ill health), but wishing to maintain access to a smaller more maintainable area to do that whilst benefiting from the hobby, exercise and time outside.

The proposed design (see appendix 1.) includes

- 9 raised beds - height suitable for seated gardening, spaced wide enough for wheelchair/frame access if required.
- 3 shared apple trees
- 1 shared raspberry bed
- 1 shared shed
- 1 shared polytunnel
- Wildlife supporting habitats
 - a dead hedge
 - log piles
 - composts
 - insect homes.
 - The use of pesticides and herbicides on the community plot will be prohibited.

Due to the indicative costs of the project, funds would be applied for by the committee from the National Lottery, which on review have historically funded many other allotment projects.

Those making use of the community plot will be offered the opportunity to make an annual (non-mandatory) donation to the project each year to cover the cost of the plot fees and as part of the contract of use of the community space.

Annual costs of the plot (pruning / general maintenance / rod fees) would be covered by the HAA from their subs and the monies raised from the plant sale each year.

Previous plot holders who are making use of the community plot would be offered the opportunity to 'rent' a single raised bed whilst also having access to the other elements of the plot. The arrangement would be subject to the same agreements and processes and a plot e.g. plot inspections and the opportunity to annually renew the agreement for as long as desired.

In years where there are insufficient plot holders leaving their plot and wanting to use the community plot, there is an opportunity to offer any remaining spaces to those on the waiting list. This could be on the basis of it being for

the remainder of the current year through to the time of rod fee renewal or the opportunity to take on a plot is offered. A more detailed process around this will be developed to support the association in managing the community plot.

Funding

To secure funding for the proposed project the committee intend to make an application to the National Lottery Fund in the range of £17-20k for the estimated costs of the project. The allotment association will cover the ongoing costs of the rod fees for the project, ensuring that the parish council continues to receive the rod fees for this space. The application information online indicates that Lottery funding will take a minimum of 16 weeks from submission of the application to the funding being available to start the project. It is intended that the plot will be available for use as early as possible in 2025, timelines allowing.

The intended works will include:

- the clearance of the plot
- repairs to the existing structures on the plot (polytunnel and shed)
- purchase and installation of
 - o nine 65cm tall, raised beds with liners
 - o substrate to fill the raised beds
 - o compost bins
 - o materials to create woodchip paths (which will suppress the marestail and enable easy hoeing off of any subsequent weakened regrowth)
 - o a bench

Also included in the funding application will be costs to improve site security. We are a rural village with minimal restriction of access to the plots which means that we are vulnerable to theft from the site. We would like to install solar/battery powered CCTV to support the local police to identify and convict perpetrators of theft and petty vandalism at the site. The application also covers costs for chains and locks and replacement signage on the gates to discourage unjustified access to the plots and make theft less appealing.

Proposed next steps

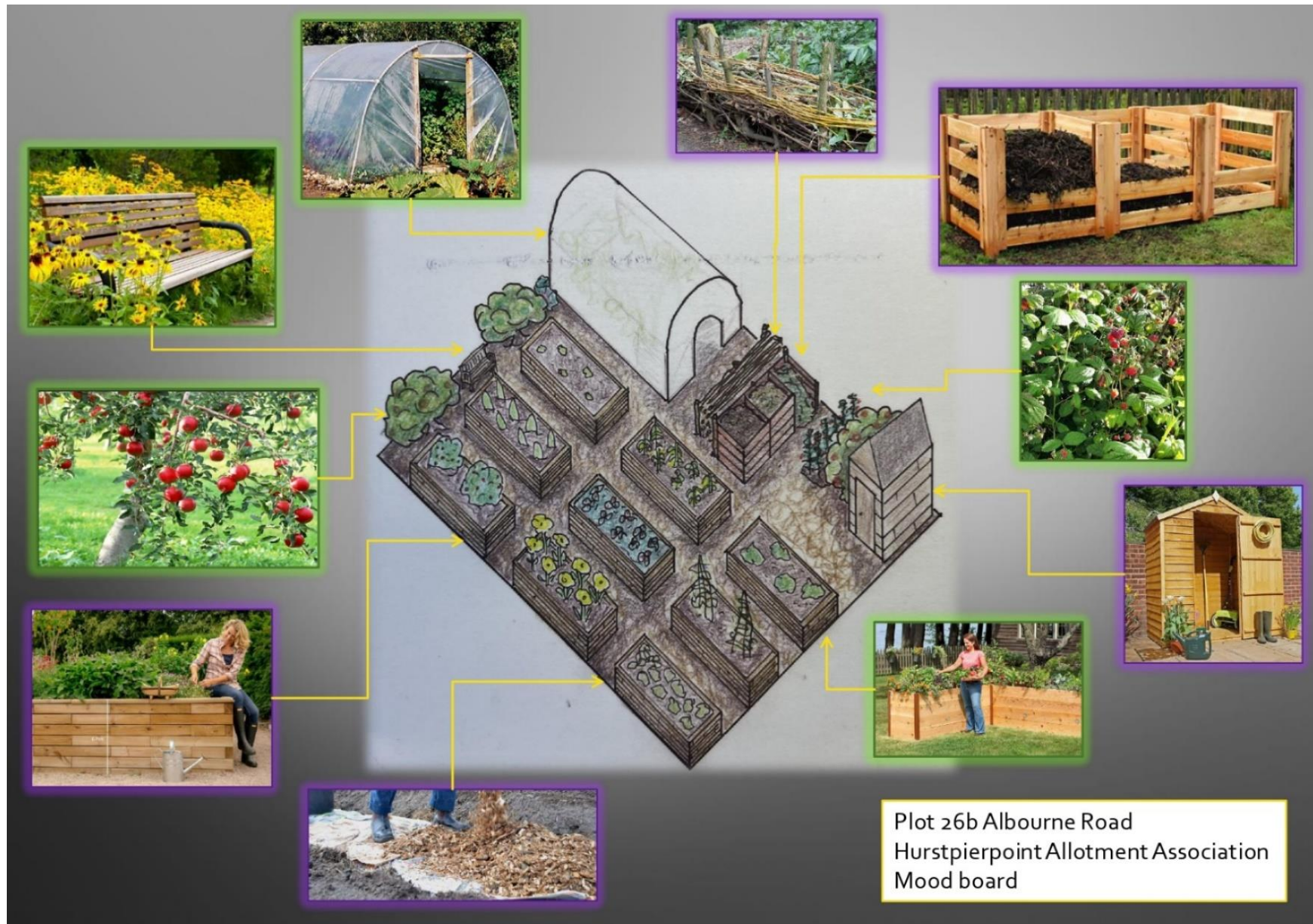
The HAA will:

- Survey the wider plot holder community to understand the appetite for use of the space and to promote the proposal.
- Develop and submit a National Lottery Funding application.
- Update the Parish Council at agreed milestones for the project.

Asks of the Parish Council:

- Does the Parish Council endorse the project proposal?
- Please confirm the following:
 - o When the HAA would be expected to begin paying the rod fees for plot 26b?
 - o How would the process for the HAA being responsible for the rod fees work? i.e. can the association/committee be the named keeper? or must there be a named individual for the agreement to take place?
 - o How frequently or against which key project milestones the Parish Council would like to be updated of progress.

Mood Board



Clarification Questions & Answers

An initial set of questions were sent to the HAA by Parish Council office staff for consideration. Below is a table with these questions and the responses.

Parish Council Question	HAA Response
Can the HAA supply any idea of the numbers of plot holders who would be willing to give up their plots to work on this community plot? There is a concern that as the proposed plot will be “lost” to potential future tenants, there needs to be evidence that this will indeed free up additional plots. ? Will these be available to individuals already on our waiting list?	In next steps and before the application for funding we intend to survey plot holders to understand the level of interest and the time scales in which plot holders see the facility as useful for themselves. HAA would be grateful of the PC support to start the dialogue with plot holders and will share a survey for this purpose in due course.
If any larger plots are given up, will consideration be given to breaking these up and offering as two smaller plots to reduce the waiting list further, or does the HAA feel there is still sufficient demand for the larger plots?	HAA intend to continue working with the PC to establish a process whereby plot holders can apply to move to a bigger/smaller plot. This will free up larger plots for those who are able to manage them and make smaller plots available to those who would prefer a smaller space / first time allotment holders to enable them to have a workable space. As is already the case with the current process, consideration to splitting plots will be given as part of this process and if necessary.
CCTV: a. Would the HAA be responsible for the CCTV and supplying any footage to the Police/Parish Council if required? b. Will they provide a CCTV Policy, stating that the footage will be only accessible by named individuals and only reviewed when an event has occurred, footage will only be supplied to the Police and Parish Council if required and all GDPR will be followed c. Where would any warning signs for the CCTV be placed?	a. Yes b. Yes - we would be grateful to see anything that you have that we could use as the basis of our policy 3. Warning signs will be placed on all gates & notice boards.
Please confirm that it would be the HAA who would carry out the set-up works on the plot, assuming funding is granted.	Yes
Who will be responsible for monitoring the health and safety aspects of the plot and arranging repairs to wooden structures as they age and degrade and maintaining walked surfaces?	HAA
Who would organise the works on the plot?	HAA

Parish Council Question	HAA Response
If the plots become unused and overgrown who will maintain it, and if it is not used to its full potential for an extended period, will it be opened to people on the waiting list again?	Raised beds will be maintained by a combination of people on the waiting list & persons not able to maintain a full plot. Any unused plots would be covered by the HAA to ensure any raised beds are received in good condition when first allocated to people. The process for setting this up will be defined after a successful funding application and before implementation / opening of the community plot.
Raised beds: We like the idea of having plot holders for individual raised beds, and agree these should be monitored as the larger plots are to prevent them becoming overgrown and unused but wanted to clarify: a. Who would be responsible for these inspections? b. What would the balance of raised beds for “private” use verses “communal use” be, and how would any produce be shared out? (Rather than all nine be private could four or five be communal spaces)? c. Legalities of “sub-letting/rights” will need to be discussed by councillors, as part of this please clarify if the private beds will be chargeable? If so, how will this, and any relevant waiting list, be managed	a. HAA in line/at the same time as the existing inspection process. b. 100% for 'private/individual use' c. HAA will pay the rod fees for the plot as a whole. Private beds will be chargeable by the allotment association to the allotment association. Costs will cover the rod fee that the HAA pay to the PC and surplus will be paid towards any ongoing maintenance costs for the community plot.