

Clerk's Note: Proposed Allotment Rent Rise for March 2019

Public Consultation

Following a Council decision in December 2017 to increase the rent of allotments to £50 for a full plot/£25 for a half plot with effect from March 2019, the Council received representations from Allotment Holders protesting the scale of the increase. The Council decided to launch a public consultation in April/May 2018.

The public consultation was carried out by: (a) Discussion as an Agenda item at the Annual Parish Assembly in April; (b) Publication in the Drayton Chronicle; (c) Posting on the Drayton Village Website parish council pages; (d) posting on Families in Drayton Facebook page asking for comments to be sent to the Clerk directly, (discussion on Facebook being deemed inappropriate by the moderators); (e) email to the village list (250 families); (f) placed on village noticeboards

A small number of responses were received by the Clerk, by email. These were mostly from existing allotment holders, but three were from villagers without allotments. All the responses were opposed to the increase, based on its scale, and there were no responses supporting the increase.

History of Allotment Rent Increases

The allotment rents were re-based in 2009 when the rents were set at £10 for a full plot (1 pole/perch/rod = 250 sq. m) and £5 for a half plot. RPI inflation since 2009 would put this up to £13 and £6.50 respectively.

A further review and re-basing was undertaken in 2013 when the charges in surrounding parishes were examined for comparison. A rent rise effective for March 2014 (which increased the rent that had been applicable since March 2009 by 20%) increased the rent of a full plot from £10 to £12, and it was agreed that in future the rent would rise annually by RPI. Rather than increase by pennies each year, several years might elapse before the increase is rolled up so that sensible rounded amounts are collected.

In November 2017 the Clerk recommended:

Allotment Charges. These were last reviewed in 2014 and increased rents were charged from March 2016 (1 year's notice required). Annual charges are £15; £7.50; or £11.25, depending on plot size. Inflation was 1.2 % in 2015, 2.5% in 2016 and 3% in 2017, so a 7% increase wef March 2019 is recommended with charges of: £16; £8; £12.

The Finance Committee decided that in view of the increasing village population (expected to be an extra 300 families within the next 3 years) and the waiting list/time for allotments already emerging, the rent should be re-based to £50 for a full plot/£25 for a half plot, with intermediate charges as appropriate.

Comparison of Allotment Costs

Existing charge £15 for 250 sq. m = 6p per sq. m.

Clerk's recommendation £16 for 250 sq. m = 6.4 p per sq. m

Re-based charge £50 for 250 sq. m = 20p per sq. m

In national research by the University of Leicester in Nov 2011 (see <https://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/press/press-releases/2011/november/researchers-dig-out-huge-variations-in-allotment-charges>) it is stated that:

“The statistics, which have been published online, demonstrate the huge differences in allotment rents between different local authorities which range from one penny per square metre to 55p/sq. m. An average allotment plot is about 250 square metres and costs 15p/sq. m.”

If the average plot of 250 sq. m price of 15p were updated for inflation it would be 17.35p or £43.37 for a 250 sq. m plot at today’s prices.

The Eastleigh Case

A case relating to Eastleigh in 2013 has been cited in argument against the proposed increase. However, the judgement turned on discrimination against allotment holders since the Council unfairly increased allotment rents but not other costs for recreation in the same proportion. The Council lost the case and faced over £10,00 in costs. Drayton does not have any other recreational charges.

Uncultivated plots

It has been argued that there are untended plots and that if these were better policed then there would be no shortage or waiting list. The Allotment Warden reports (8th May 2018): “Re the apparently untended plots I emailed you about recently, I noticed that the [plot holders] were treating their plot (B3) with weed killer over the weekend. I have just rung [another allotment holder] again and he has decided to give up the plot he recently took on (A5b) so I will offer it to the next person on the waiting list who does not already have a plot. If she wants it, that will leave two people on the list (one couple who relinquished in March 2018 but who wish to take on a lot again next year and the other who wants a half plot near their existing one).”

Policy Decisions

The Council needs to decide:

- Does it wish to keep to its decision to charge £50 for a full plot/£25 for a half plot wef March 2019 or amend this charge?
- **Should there be any differential changes in the charges?**
e.g.:
 - should non-Drayton residents pay more? There are currently two allotment holders with three allotments who live outside Drayton, in Abingdon. There is a clause in the tenancy agreements requiring tenants to vacate their allotments at the end of the year if they move out of Drayton, but some Abingdon tenants have been allowed to hire allotments when there was no waiting list. Burials for non-Drayton residents are charged at 3x the Drayton rate
 - should tenants be charged more for extra allotments over the first/250 sq. m plot(s)?
If so how much more?
 - should there be an entry charge to join the waiting list?
 - should there be any subsidy for the retired and/or unemployed? (this would require additional personal data to be collected and stored)

NB: A year’s notice for any changes is required given in March so such policy changes (other than any reductions in charges) may only take effect from March 2020.

David Perrow, Parish Clerk, May 2018