YACIO Site Secretary Meeting

**YACIO Site Secretary Meeting**

**21 October 2024**

7:00-9:00pm

Denham Room, Priory Street Centre, 15 Priory Street, York YO1 6ET

Chair: Tony Chalcraft

Minutes: Nick Smith

Attending: David Brinklow (Hempland), Helen Butt (Holgate), Tony Chalcraft [TC], Roger Coffin (Hospital Fields), Janet Cordingley [JC] (Fulford Cross), Janet Devlin (Admin), Dean Fawcett (Howe Hill), Gary Flakes (New Lane, Holgate), Norah Godfrey (Glen), Matthew Gray (Hob Moor), Warwick Ivel (Bootham), Andy Maycock (Scarcroft), Adam Myers [AM], Claire Pickard (Scarcroft), Sarah Penn (Hospital Field), Phil Renshaw (Bootham), Christine Robertson (Low Moor), Graham Sanderson (Scarcroft), John Shirbon (Strensall), Colin Smith [CS], Nick Smith (Admin), Jane Thurlow (Carr), Lisa Turner [LT] (Wigginton Terrace), Heather Whittaker [HW].

Apologies received from Sarah Daniel (Wigginton Road), Mary Harlington (Green Lane, Acomb), Sarah Harrison (Low Moor), Simon Wild.

1. Welcome

TC opened the meeting and asked everyone to introduce themselves and their role here as there are several new faces.

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were reported.

1. Trustees’ Reports

3.1 General

TC introduced 2 new Administrators and asked for thanks to the outgoing Administrator to be recorded, having seen YACIO through its first 7 years.

Changes in Administration arrangements were reported, including employing 2 part -time Administrators routinely covering Mon, Tues, Thurs and Fri. One aim is to provide better telephone cover, so the current answering service will be stopped. It is intended that the new arrangement is cost neutral.

Lease. The current lease expires soon. Whilst the City Council appears not to be in a great hurry we don’t foresee any problems, and are planning on that basis. The issue is expected to be presented to the Council Executive, possibly in the autumn. We hope the lease will be for a greatly extended period, which will require us to improve our planning and budgeting.

A new lease should be clearer on physical boundaries and maintenance responsibilities, and we may need to follow up with the Council regarding maintenance of adjacent areas, such as at Strensall.

3.2 Finance

We are now in the last quarter and expect to show a loss this year. This is a new situation for us. Whilst this was budgeted for, the discrepancy may be greater than originally expected, due to the amount of work required on trees and hedges. This work can be unpredictable but has been necessary, though we believe it has been exceptional and won’t be needed to the same extent in future years.

We still have plots to clear and can re-let more but this will not raise income in 2024. For the future we will look for additional ways to generate income.

3.3 Maintenance

Around £30,000 is budgeted for planned maintenance each year, plus £10,000 for unplanned work.

The final grass cut has been done for 2024, and CS is now happy with the contractor’s performance.

The contractor is keen to start hedge cutting before the end of the year but may have to wait until the new financial year.

Action: Trustees to decide the timing.

There was general support for the current contractors so we hope to retain them for next year and beyond.

3.4 Administration

The arrangements for calling Admin were described. In brief there is one new number which may be taken by a different Administrator depending on the day of the week it is used. Voicemail is available for other times.

It was requested and agreed that reports to Site Secretaries be made at a consistent time each month. Recent instruction has been ‘after the 14th’.

Action: Administrators.

It was requested and agreed that Admin will routinely inform Site Secretaries when Letters 1 or 2 etc have been sent out.

Action: Administrators.

It was requested that Waiting List reports be simplified so that they can be more easily viewed and/or printed. Site secretaries should be able to amend or delete columns to suit their needs if they have access to Excel, however when time permits in the new year we will review the format and content to simplify as much as possible what is sent.

Action: Administrators.

It was reported that we will be invoicing electronically next year for the first time.

1. Reports from Site Secretaries - issues that may be of relevance to others

Drainage.

Several sites reported drainage problems, some of which are due to the streams they drain into either being high as a result of being deliberately held back or not themselves being dredged, have old land drains that are no longer effective, or some were not drained when established. It is difficult to know what can be done.

Electric fences.

A question was raised about YACIO’s view on electric fences inside a plot to protect chickens from foxes.

Action: Trustees to consider a policy.

Departing tenants leaving items on site.

It was reported that departing tenants often leave materials on their plots, and amongst typical plastic ‘rubbish’ some are items of value, such as tools, polytunnels, greenhouses or sheds. Options to use these to raise funds were discussed.

Action: Trustees to consider.

Rabbits.

The question of whether rabbits could be kept on allotments (as pets rather than a source of meat) was raised. The Allotments Act (1950) section 12 does permit this (though bye-laws may amend this). Views on this differ from site to site.

Action: Trustees to consider.

Support for tenants.

A question asked how much help can we give to tenants when preparing their plot e.g. if the plot has large trees? In principle, if something is preventing uptake of a plot by new tenants we will try to help them if we can, but this is on a case by case basis, and we need to be cautious about setting a precedent. Offering a first year discount is one option, or if there are several challenging plots on a site might organising a volunteer working party help?

In the case which raised this issue, JC to liaise with AM.

TC suggested that in the long term we could develop a clear policy or produce guidance which might have a basic level of service for new tenants or a higher and chargeable level for those who would prefer more help.

1. Issues for Discussion/Decision

5.1 Plot Letting

Discussed the draft paper provided.

Confirmed that applicants' locations are checked on application and on being offered a plot. The intention is that plot holders live within the York Council boundary, i.e. pay Council Tax to the City of York Council.

If the paper is adopted the rules will not apply retrospectively.

It was confirmed that Site Secretaries do have some discretion in organising plot sizes e.g. splitting a plot (if so please inform Admin the system can be updated).

Action: Trustees to review for any amendments following this discussion and then approve.

5.2 Repeat Non-Cultivation

Following discussion it was concluded that we really need a way to manage plots and plot holders who repeatedly fall short of required cultivation standards, both those who fall back after a short term improvement or where standards fall repeatedly over years. It was also felt that the wording of ‘Letter 2’ could be improved for those within repeatedly unsatisfactory cultivation standards, perhaps an alternative would be useful e.g. a ‘Letter 2b’.

LT suggested that Letter 1 should be used, followed by Letter 2 including for repeatedly low standards e.g.across years. Nevertheless Admin will be reviewing standard letters next year.

Action: Considering the views expressed Admin and Trustees to review and agree a way forward, likely a minor revision to the current one.

5.3 Site Visits

I missed the conclusion to this brief conversation.

5.4 Health and Safety Issues (3 attached papers - unfenced pond, shed disrepair, animal and livestock welfare)

The 3 papers and proposal were discussed, including the likely greater risks on unfenced sites. Propose that letters regarding the issues be sent via Admin, in a similar way to non-cultivation letters. Amendments to the letters are: change reference to Site Secretary to YACIO in the last sentence, add reference to fence height, and delete the ‘cost of living’ sentence.

H&S will issue letters in conjunction with Site Secretaries, and actions must be proportionate to risk.

Note that if any hazards are seen between H&S inspections we must act. The relevant letter can be triggered at any time at the Site Secretaries’ discretion.

Agreed in principle.

Action: HW to amend letters then the system to be implemented.

5.5 New Tenant Information

It was suggested that we should spell out what new (and current) tenants need to do, e.g. keep weeds off fences. Although much is in the Tenancy Agreement it was felt that this is often overlooked.

Action: Trustees to consider.

5.6 Bonfire Issues

This is a recurring issue across several sites. As with non-cultivation we need a simple letter (conversations with relevant tenants may already and have often occurred) making clear that they are in breach of their tenancy followed, if a recurring issue, by a letter informing the tenant that their tenancy is at risk. We do have the opportunity to ban all bonfires if the situation, such as a drought, warrants it.

It was agreed to keep the situation under review.

5.7 Community Composting

We have been approached by City of York Council with a suggestion that, as an alternative to residents paying a green bin charge, that we take green waste and compost it. Although fine in principle both Trustees and Site Secretaries consider that practical problems make this unsuitable.

5.8 Avian Flu (Norah)

It was confirmed that it is the tenant’s responsibility to obtain a Registration Number, but they do not have to report it to us.

1. Any Other Business
2. Scrap metal collection. Nick at Low Moor has organised the collection of scrap metal from site on an agreed date. The scrap metal dealer was helpful, and this went well. Other sites may want to do the same.

More waste was reported as being tipped at Bootham, likely as a result of green waste charges.

1. 2025 Meeting Dates

The meeting confirmed the same sequence for these meetings as 2024, i.e. one in February, one on-site in summer, and in Autumn. The current venue will be used again.

Action: Admin to confirm in due course.