

YACIO Site Secretary Meeting

3 March 2025

7:00-9:00pm

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

DRAFT MINUTES

Chair: Tony Chalcraft

Minutes: Nick Smith

Attending: Tony Chalcraft [TC], Dean Fawcett (Howe Hill), Gary Flakes (New Lane, Holgate), Matthew Gray (Hob Moor), Mary Harlington (Green Lane), Rob Eastman (Scarcroft) [RE], Adam Myers [AM], Sarah Penn (Hospital Field) [SP], John Shirbon (Strensall) [JS], Colin Smith [CS], Nick Smith (Admin) [NS], Jane Thurlow (Carr), Lisa Turner [LT] (Wigginton Terrace), Heather Whittaker [HW].

1. Welcome

TC opened the meeting and welcomed those present.

2. Apologies

Apologies for absence had been received from: David Brinklow (Hempland), Helen Butt (Holgate), Janet Cordingley [JC] (Fulford Cross), Janet Devlin (Admin), Norah Godfrey (Glen), Sarah Harrison (Low Moor), Warwick Ivel (Bootham), Andy Maycock (Scarcroft), Amanda Kent (Low Moor), Phil Renshaw (Bootham), Christine Robertson (Low Moor), Simon Wild (Trustee).

3. Minutes and Action Points from Last Meeting

3.3 Maintenance

Timing of hedge cutting.

Action: Trustees to decide the timing. Closed.

3.4 Administration

Reports to Site Secretaries be made at a consistent time each month.

Action: Administrators. These are routinely prepared on the 14th of the month or the next working day thereafter. Closed.

Admin will routinely inform Site Secretaries when Letters 1 or 2 etc have been sent out.

Action: Administrators. This is now standard practice. Closed.

Simplify Waiting List reports. When time permits in the new year review the format and content to simplify as much as possible.

Action: Administrators. To be carried forward.

4. YACIO's view on electric fences.

Action: Trustees to consider a policy. After a further discussion it was decided that electric fences would not be permitted on YACIO's allotments. Closed.

Can items left on plots by departing tenants be used to raise funds?

Action: Trustees to consider. To be carried forward.

Can rabbits be kept on YACIO's allotments?

Action: Trustees to consider. The decision can be made by Site Secretaries on a site by site basis.

How much help can we give to tenants when preparing their plot e.g. if the plot has large trees?

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

5.1 Plot Letting

The draft paper provided was discussed.

Action: Trustees to review for any amendments following discussion and then approve. Approved and to be adopted. Closed.

5.2 Repeat Non-Cultivation

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

5.4 Health and Safety letters.

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

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.

Action: Trustees to consider. It was agreed that current terms in the Tenancy Agreement were sufficient but could be used more actively. Closed.

2025 Meeting Dates

Action: Admin to confirm in due course. See item 8. Closed.

- 6.2 Agenda item 6.2 Hedge and Grass Cutting Review 2025 was brought forward as CS has to leave soon. A proposal was previously circulated.

The Strensall hedge can be removed from contractor's responsibilities. Remind Colin in the autumn.

A row of plots at Scarcroft have a bramble hedge growing into the plots (the other side is OK).

Action: The Site Secretary will send an email to tenants re their responsibilities.

This led to a discussion on the adequacy of deposits as a deterrent to leaving plots in a mess. The cost of clearing plots far exceeds the value of the deposit. The process of asking site secretaries if the plot is tidy enough to return the tenant's deposit was queried, and this was confirmed as policy, which we should use routinely. It may be possible and appropriate to ask for a deposit for a structure, as these can be very expensive to dismantle.

If we see 'rubbish' building up we should send a letter promptly highlighting that rubbish is getting to an unacceptable level and should be cleared.

Action: Trustees to investigate extra deposits for structures.

An additional related issue is to decide an approach to allowing Wendy Houses on allotment plots. Different views were aired, from the inappropriateness of having play equipment of any form on a plot to the potential value in helping allotments to be manageable for families with younger children. If we need to incentivise tenants to clear such items when they no longer have a need or leave their plot this really means taking an upfront fee. Concluded that such play equipment should be handled as structures are, with an upfront fee and permission requested in writing specifying size, materials etc. It was confirmed that trampolines are not permitted.

Action: Trustees to give further thought and decide policy.

4. Trustees' Reports

4.1 General

TC described the ongoing position with the hoped-for new lease. The previous lease expired at the end of November, and we are hoping for clarity by the AGM. AM

reported previous experience with other organisations is that this seems to be the way that the Council works. We may now have to exert pressure via local councillors to our concern that we don't have clarity.

4.2 Finance

LT reported that we made a £10,000 loss for the first time this year, as was expected. As income is based on rents received which is predictable and has little flexibility we will have to tighten up on something. The major issues (potential costs) of trees and drains are unpredictable and need close monitoring.

JS reported that there should be £60,000 of Section 106 money still with CYC which could be helpful developing Strensall allotments.

Action: JS will follow up and try to find where this is held.

4.3 Other Trustees

HW raised concerns about the impact of Avian Flu on allotments with poultry. Some tenants have already reported concerns about how other tenants are managing current Avian Flu restrictions.

Action: Site Secretaries with poultry on their sites will raise any concern with the plot holder in the first instance.

4.4 Administration

Management of waiting lists was raised and discussed. The following will be part of the process for managing waiting lists:

- If S/S do not receive a reply to a plot offer then the applicant will be removed from the waiting list for that site only.
- If an applicant moves address and asks to transfer their allotment application from one (or more) sites to other(s) the receiving Site Secretary will be asked for their agreement.

Site Secretaries reported how few responses they get to an offer of a plot, often contacting 20 or 30 applicants to find 1 or 2 tenants. A discussion followed on how we could proactively address the length of the waiting lists. Contacting applicants by email has been tried previously but leads to an overflowing inbox. Nevertheless this may be tried again in the future on a site by site basis when we are confident that we have capacity to manage responses.

NS reported issues with sending invoices - what should have taken minutes took many hours to send invoices, and many more hours dealing with the queries and responses received. We believe that we are over the worst (busiest) of this issue.

It was suggested that sending screenshots of how to pay invoices on-line may reduce the number of queries we receive on this topic.

Action: Admin to consider this for 2026 invoices.

4.5 AGM

TC reported the plan for the forthcoming AGM, on Saturday 22 March 2025 at Clements Hall. This will follow the same format as previously, i.e. the formal meeting followed by a break and then an open forum for questions and feedback from tenants.

5. Reports from Site Secretaries - issues of relevance to other sites. Site specific issues can be sent to contact@yorkallotments.org

5.1 HW described the recent break in at Bootham Stray site. This was the most extensive and planned theft that we have experienced, with damage to 80 sheds and thousands of pounds' worth of tools taken. A second smaller incident occurred a week or so later targeting those plots previously omitted. The importance of reporting every single incidence of theft was stressed - police action is number-driven so the greater the number of reports the greater the attention allotments receive.

5.2 SP reported that she is standing down as Site Secretary at Hospital Field, and is following up with possible replacement candidates. Tenants that have taken on overgrown plots were commended. Two big trees are to be taken down, with York Council paying for most of this.

5.3 Apiary plots.

The issue of how to let apiary plots was raised. LT replied that this is through application as for any other plot. Contact Admin who will check what is needed.

Action: Admin to determine what evidence is needed to let an apiary plot.

5.4 NS summarised site reports that had been submitted in advance (Bootham Stray, Hempland Lane and Glen), which reported similar issues, and which also sent thanks to CS and the maintenance team for their work.

5.5 Hedging: JS offered that the Strensall path-facing hedge could be omitted from the contractor's tasks. The opportunity to use volunteer working parties for such tasks was raised. This could be a cost saver, and be especially valuable as finances become more challenging. Some sites do have such activities.

5.6 RE asked for clarification on the total size or number of plots one tenant can hold. TC explained the decisions made recently and will send a copy to RE. He also

confirmed that this is not being applied retrospectively, and cannot apply across a household.

Action: TC to send a copy of the plot holding guidelines to RE.

6. Issues for Discussion/Decision

6.1 Site Security - nothing to add to discussion 'Bootham break in' at 5.1 above.

6.2 Hedge and Grass Cutting Review 2025 (see document circulated) was covered at 6.2 above.

6.3 Beginning to think about trees (see document circulated)

Please let AM know your thoughts and suggestions on the subject, perhaps prompted by the document circulated on 1st March. We don't know how big the issue is, so do let AM know if there is a problem tree on your site, whatever the reason. It may be possible to recoup some cost of tree management by selling the timber.

Action: JS will send a recommendation re possible sale of timber to AM.

In summary, we are not anti-tree, but there are lots of young trees coming up on sites and we must make sure they don't get out of hand. Saplings establishing on boundaries is something we need to monitor and manage.

Site Secretaries were asked that when letting plots to please look at the plot boundary as well as the ground, and highlight boundary maintenance responsibilities if appropriate.

Action: Site Secretaries.

Relevant content of the tenancy agreement was discussed, and confirmed that the content regarding fruit and other trees is deliberate.

It has been noted that some tenants like to weave willow into bed edges. Do we need a willow Policy?

Action: Trustees to consider.

7. Any Other Business

Policy re Wendy Houses (see under 6.2).

8. Remaining 2025 Meeting Dates

Monday 30 June provisionally at Scarcroft site, to be confirmed.

Monday 20 October at Priory Street Centre.