

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL  
COUNCIL MEETING – 15 MARCH 2023

COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO. 14 QUESTIONS – QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

Notice of the following questions have been received in accordance with Council Procedure Rule No 14:

1. Question to the Leader, from Deborah Ronchetti

“Longcroft Allotment Association sites are run on behalf of Welwyn Hatfield Council and receive services and maintenance from the Council. Why were their charges just £11.04 per 25m<sup>2</sup> in 2022/2023, and what increases will plot holders there be subjected to for the 2023/2024 period?”

2. Question to the Leader, from Marco Ronchetti

“How do the Allotment plot rental charges at the Longcroft Allotment Association allotments compare with the new charges being imposed on Council managed plots across the Borough, and what are the new charges for the Longcroft Allotment Association allotments for the period 2023/2024?”

3. Question to Councillor Stephen Boulton (Deputy Leader and Executive Member Planning and Resources) from Gillian Rose

“Within the Budget setting 2023-2024 you referred to cost recovery for discretionary services and higher than inflationary proposed increases to mitigate the impact of inflation and to protect the impact on front line services.

The Medium-Term Financial Strategy & Financial Governance Framework 2021/22 – 2023/24 stresses the importance of raising income to recover costs of services through fees and charges. It also states that fees & charges will increase with inflation unless there is a clear reason for an alternative approach. (Annex B8).

Allotment charges within this budget (2023/24) are set to increase by 200%. (Well above inflation) As stated by the Allotments Act 1950 increases should be “reasonable and fair”. Given the significant welfare benefits of allotments and having regard to the Allotments Act 1950 can you explain how this is reasonable and fair?”

4. Question to Councillor Nick Pace (Executive Member Governance, Public Health and IT) from Helen Turner

“The council recognises and promotes the mental and physical wellbeing benefits of owning an allotment. These benefits obviously represent a saving for the council. How do the savings from these benefits compare to the costs of running the allotments and wellbeing services?”

5. Question to Councillor Terry Mitchinson (Executive Member Leisure and Community) from Salv La Monica

“Section 10(1) of The Allotments Act 1950, states “Land let by a council under the Allotments Acts, 1908 to 1931, for use as an allotment shall be let at such rent as a tenant may reasonably be expected to pay for the land if let for such use”. According to the Facebook group “WelHat Allotment Community”, 137 tenants believe the rate rise is unreasonable and none of use have been presented with clear and factual evidence to detail why such an increase is justified or reasonable, apart from anecdotal, inconsistent and unreferenced responses from council staff. Please can the council justify clearly and with evidence why the council believe a 200% increase (without consultation) is reasonable in order to cover the exact running costs of the boroughs allotments which, the act also states, should not be run at a profit and should also be charged and subsidised inline with other leisure services.”

6. Question to the Leader, from Martyn Imlach

“Is the proposed 200% increase in allotment rents compliant with the Allotment Act 1950 in light of the following legal precedents:

Howard v Reigate and Banstead BC (13 November 1981) Judgment, Counsel’s interpretation was that a Local Authority will be in error if, in setting Allotment rents, the Local Authority decides to increase rents by a percentage which is disproportionately greater than the percentage by which the Local Authority has increased, or proposes to increase, charges for other recreational activities.”