

**Golders Green Allotment Association**

**The future management of the site**

**Paper on the self-management issue prepared by Jeremy Balcombe  
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## What are we being asked to do?

Make a collective decision on the future management of our allotments.

Barnet Council have decided that all the allotment associations within the borough are to be asked to take over the management of each site. Whilst there may be a political agenda to this decision it would seem that the main driver is the need to reduce council spending.

We therefore, as an association, have to vote to choose what we want to do:

### Either

**Transfer to self-management** and take over the running of the association including being responsible for allocating individual plots, collecting subscriptions and keeping the site and its boundaries in good order. We would not own the site but would lease it from Barnet Council for a set period and for a peppercorn rent.

or

**Keep the existing arrangements** but pay a significantly increased rent to Barnet. Initial estimates suggest that increases will immediately be 3-5 times greater than current and likely to continue to rise over the next few years.

## What are the key factors we should consider when coming to a decision?

### Timing – why decide now?

Barnet have set out a timing plan which will see some allotment associations moving to self-management within the next 6 months. We are not one of them. After a botched attempt to raise rents across 2011/12, Barnet will undoubtedly follow the correct legal procedure for 2012/13 and notify allotment holders of a sharp increase in rents. This will be designed to force associations to confront the self-management option.

The Federation have been negotiating to produce a model lease agreement that can be used as a template for individual associations to agree specific arrangements. Given the political dimension to the situation we would be in a better position to agree a lease that gave us more benefits if we were able to make a decision by April 2012. In other words if we are going to move to self-management we should get on with it sooner rather than later.

### What does self-management mean?

- Rents would be set by the Association, with all income used to manage and maintain the site.
- Subject to the terms of the lease we would be responsible for organising and managing the site
- Maintenance and repair work would be our responsibility.

### What are the advantages of self-management?

- All rent money is retained by the Association with rents set by us and not the Council.
- We organise and run the site as we see fit.
- We maintain and repair the site when we want using contractors we have chosen.

- We have security of tenure for at least 38 years, and possibly longer.

### **And the disadvantages?**

- Being responsible for repairs and maintenance including fences, gates, road, water system and trees.
- Having to build up a contingency fund to deal with larger costs.
- No Council to fall back on when things go wrong.

### **What are the advantages of staying with the Council?**

- No significant additional responsibilities.
- The Council will continue to be responsible for repairs and maintenance.
- Large repair jobs would be down to the Council.

### **And the disadvantages?**

- Rents would increase significantly to pay the full costs of the sites remaining in Council management.
- As the Council reduces its costs their allotment budget will be reduced substantially so items like repairs will inevitably be delayed and we wouldn't have any funds to fill the gap.

### **What factors should you consider as you decide how to choose?**

- As a self-collect Association we already carry out c90% of the administrative responsibilities. The Council actually plays little part in the general day to day management of the site and moving to self-management would make little administrative difference.
- Our site is in good order and we may be able to negotiate any immediately necessary remedial work as part of any move to self-management.
- Maintaining boundaries in good order could be a significant cost. The Association is in the process of clarifying both ownership and responsibilities of our boundaries.
- Our financial situation is reasonably healthy and, although it is inevitable that rents will rise, whichever route we choose, moving to self-management will mean we would be in control of any increase. It is also true to say that any increases under the self-management option will be significantly lower than if we stay under the Council.
- We currently have an insurance policy and the Association is in the process of clarifying what changes, if any, would need to be made under self-management.
- Our constitution would not need to be changed.
- Being totally dependent on our own resources will require more people to volunteer. However this would be true whichever option we choose. The majority of plot holders will see little

difference in the day to day usage of the site, particularly if they are not involved of the Association's activities or administration.

- If we choose the self-management route we will collectively have to be more aware of the implications of issues like security, water usage and maintenance. We will have signed a lease with its attendant responsibilities.
- If we choose to remain with the Council it is inevitable that rents will increase sharply and the Council's reduced spending will impact on their ability to carry out maintenance and repairs in a timely way. It is likely that allotment maintenance will be contracted out to a third party in the future.
- Indications are that the majority of Barnet allotments will move to self-management. This will mean that the smaller number of remaining associations will inevitably suffer a poorer and more expensive service.

## **What happens next?**

- A simple majority of members is required to decide.
- We need to call an EGM so that all members of the Association can raise concerns and queries, as well as discuss the pros and cons of self-management.
- A vote will then need to be taken and a majority decision reached.