

Witney Town Council

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PRESS RELEASE

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For immediate use

PROVISION OF ALLOTMENT SITES IN WITNEY

Witney Town Council has long been an advocate and champion of allotment sites dating back to the 1930s – and longer if you consider the implementation of the original burgage plots in the 12th century!

This support is demonstrated today by the number of allotments the Council owns and maintains and the long-standing and very popular Allotment Holders' Cup, awarded annually to the best kept allotment in Witney. We also encourage gardening etc through the enormously popular annual Schools in Bloom Challenge in which every school in Witney currently participates.

The facts are: the Council currently maintains 168 allotment plots spread over 4 sites: Lakeside: 85 allotments, Hailey Road: 45 allotments, Newland: 33 allotments and Park Road with 5 allotments. There is currently a waiting list with 198 applicants. All allotments are rented to **Witney residents only**, and each plot is subsidised by the Council at a figure of £40 per plot per year. The Council has a running programme of improvement and refurbishment and this year we hope to install water at the Newland site and have recently completed a large amount of tree work and provision and refurbishment of sheds at Lakeside.

When the Madley Park development was first being considered, a plot of land was designated for use as allotments and its ownership was earmarked for the Town Council. This was about 10/15 years ago. The District Council completed soil tests on this site 3 years ago and it was found to be contaminated and unfit for use as allotments unless about £100,000 was spent on the site which the Town Council did not have. The developers therefore offered to purchase the site from the District Council and the Town Council were recompensed at a figure of £400,000, as they were in a position to decontaminate the soil suitable for use as gardens for residents. Witney Town Council agreed to this and immediately commenced a search for a new plot of land.

This is proving to be a problem as a site (we are looking for around 10 acres) in the correct location, with suitable access for both transport and utilities and designated by the District Council and Government as suitable land for allotments is almost impossible. Currently landowners are really not interested in the Town Council's dilemma: those with land are not keen to sell when there is the prospect of developers paying top money for land whereas the Town Council cannot. The Council's designated land agent, Mark Baker of Wilson's Commercial, who has been actively searching for a site said: "I have been looking on behalf of the Council for three years now and am aware that the original brief was for around three to four acres but that has now increased, due to popularity of allotment demand to around 10 acres which could be on two separate sites, of course. It is a very challenging brief but one which I am determined to bring to a successful conclusion so if there are any landowners out there who feel they could help – please contact me! Ideally the site should be towards the north of the town with good access for both road and utilities".

The £400,000 is currently earmarked in an interest bearing account and shown on the Council's accounts as a sum for allotment purchase, preparation and maintenance.

No allotment sites have been discarded or dispensed with during this process – our chief aim is to **increase our allotment holdings**. A site of 10 acres would give us a vastly improved stock of allotments. Each allotment, dependant on the size of the overall site is sized according to the individual overall plot, in poles and perches.

The Council is also investigating other ways and means of increasing “allotment” allocation by looking at “Adop-A-Garden” schemes with collaboration between committed individuals or groups, interaction between schools and allotment holders etc.

ENDS

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

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