

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

15 DECEMBER 2020

QUESTION NO. 1

Tommy Johnson to ask the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities:

Scours Lane Allotments

I've been on the allotment waiting list for Scours lane, for well over 7 months now, I'm fully aware the waiting list is or was over one year, but what I can't understand as a very good friend of mine has a allotment at scours lane and has had it for many years there is and has been numerous vacant allotments at scours lane? I've assisted him at he's allotment and can see well over 20 vacant allotments or allotment which aren't being maintained. Could I request one of these empty or un maintained allotments?

REPLY by the Chair of the Housing, Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee (Councillor Davies):

I invite Councillor Rowland, the Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by the Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation (Councillor Rowland):

Thank you, Mr Johnson, for your very timely question about plot lettings at Scours Lane allotments as we are addressing allotments later on in this evening's meeting.

I understand from officers that there are currently 23 vacant plots on the site. Of these, 10 are being considered by those on the waiting list following an offer letter, and 10 offer letters are pending. The Council sends out offer letters only when there is certainty that plots are not being worked. In 2020, there have been cases of tenants' shielding, so each untidy plot has had to be followed up with extra care this year.

You are currently 96th on the waiting list for a plot at Scours Lane. You applied for an allotment on 5th March 2020. When you contacted Customer Services on 24th June requesting information about your position on the waiting list, you were advised your position was 112th. You have therefore moved up 16 positions in the past 5 months. There is currently a 2 year wait for a plot on Scours Lane. Since lockdown there have been 97 applications for plots at this site alone. The Council is aware of the huge increase in demand, and will continue to allocate vacant plots as quickly as possible to applicants in the order in which they appear on the waiting list.

The allotments report and next steps being considered this evening is a substantial bit of work that I am pleased to bring forward as it expresses the Council's sincere interest in improving our allotments offerings overall and to improve the efficiency of lettings. As I hope you have noted, we will be discussing moving forward with a self-management model in the coming year for some allotment sites (Scours Lane being one of those). One of the benefits that has been realised by self-management models on allotment sites where it has been introduced around the country, is a reduction in the time taken in noting that a plot is not being worked, checking that it is no longer required and offering it to the next person on the waiting list.

I am hopeful that in this coming year as we take these proactive steps in the way we manage Reading's allotments that this work will allow persons such as yourself to become

an active allotment holder sooner. The benefits for both yourself, your family and our environment are obvious.