

## **Alderley Edge Parish Council Statement - Councillor Mike Williamson**

The Parish Council voted on three Motions on Monday 11 March to set the tone for the future of the village, principally based on the Allotments, how they will be affected in future and how they will impact on major facilities within the village.

The major project of the Parish Council is the construction of a new Medical Centre, followed by a refurbished Festival Hall; central to a refurbished Hall, is parking.

In order to provide extra car parking capacity, the Parish Council passed a Resolution stating that they would seek approval from the Communities Minister to move the 16 Allotments from Heyes Lane to a new Statutory Site at Lydiat Lane which could provide 60 Allotments. Permission from the Minister would allow the provision of a new car park with an entrance on Heyes Lane. This car park would serve the Festival Hall, and the village, during the day, and increase bookings capacity during the evening.

The Parish Council has not able to progress the car park issue before the March Council meeting because the lease transfers were being processed slowly by Cheshire East. This made it difficult, under Data Protection Rules, to obtain details of Allotment Holders from either Cheshire East or the Allotments Society. Those details were released on February 1st, when Cheshire East recognised that the leases had been signed by both parties. The Parish Council then sent a letter on February 14th to current Allotment Holders and Waiting List, asking them to indicate that they were willing to continue as Allotment Holders, and if they would support a new site at Lydiat Lane. The Parish Council also listed the 3 Resolutions for the March meeting.

During the Parish Council Meeting of March 11th, the Director of North West Allotments Society pointed out that the Allotments Act 1908 made it a Statutory Duty for local authorities to provide Allotment land, if more than 6 ratepayers wanted an Allotment. The waiting list is currently 29, and yet no person or organisation had triggered the Statutory Duty clause - not Cheshire East, not Alderley Edge Allotments and Garden Society, and not the North West Association of Allotment Garden Societies.

The first sign that this issue was to be addressed were the discussions by the Parish Council to obtain the site at Lydiat Lane for the purpose of both transferring the Heyes Lane allotments, and also creating extra plots to satisfy the waiting list.

The Parish Council, in creating extra allotments, is the only body willing to comply with the law, and has been robustly attacked and vilified in the process. The motivation for Lydiat Lane has been scurrilously attacked by AEAGS; never once has AEAGS sought to have allotment land increased in Alderley Edge, in fact quite the reverse. AEAGS has operated the Allotments to the disadvantage of the waiting list, by encouraging occupation of multiple sites by favoured allotment holders. During the process of taking the Allotments back from Cheshire East, the Parish Council has had to endure ridiculous attacks on its integrity from the Allotments Society. The Allotments Society has conducted a campaign of misinformation, and they have been given both credence and credibility by Officers at Cheshire East Council.

During the Public Speaking time at the Parish Council meeting of March 11th, the Council was attacked by 3 Speakers.

The first speaker stated that an attack on Allotments was an attack on the fabric of the village.

The second speaker stated that the Parish Council was not regarded as Trustworthy by the Allotment Holders, because they had paid 3 sums of money without authorisation, for Advice from Counsel, Legal Fees and train travel. The Parish Council, because they were not trustworthy, were not fit to manage the Allotments.

The third speaker stated that the Parish Council had breached the Data Protection Act by using data of Allotment Holders, without their permission.

What is the truth?

The Allotments Act 1908 has been ignored by both Cheshire East and the Allotments Society. The Statutory Duty to provide Allotment Land where the demand exceeded 6 ratepayers has been ignored. Cheshire East and the Allotments Society were tasked with keeping within the 1908 law, and they both signally failed; they allowed a fiefdom to be operated where some Allotment holders had 2, 3 or even 4 plots and yet there were waiting lists of ratepayers, keen to exercise their right to an allotment.

The attacks on the Parish Council have to be seen in this context.

The first speaker on March 11th said the Parish Council decision to move some allotments attacked the fabric of the village. In fact, the Parish Council has brought forward plans to increase Allotment land, the number of Allotments, and to provide a Medical Centre to serve 7,000 patients at no cost to the public purse. The Community Hall will be refurbished, providing better facilities for the 5,000 annual users of the Hall. The Chairman of the Allotments Society, the first speaker, is being hypocritical in pleading special rights, when his Society broke the 1908 law and abused the rights of waiting list taxpayers.

The second speaker attacked the trustworthiness of the Parish Council, because of its expenditure. In fact, the Legal Fees for Advice were approved by the Chairman of the Council, the Chairman of Finance and the vice Chairman of Finance, before the expenditure was committed following Council procedures. The Invoice was properly listed in the quarterly list of payments. There was a minor oversight, in that when the list was presented, there should have been a retrospective notice for approval by Councillors - but the invoice was on the list approved by Councillors.

Legal Fees for work done by the Solicitor handling the Hall transfer were a part of the approved budget; in fact, the Solicitor has written off some Fees caused by third party delays.

The travel expenses were claimed under the Chairman's expenses approved as part of the annual budget process. The second speaker, the vice Chair of the Allotments Society, has been a party to the breaches in the 1908 law; had he divided his time equally between looking at Parish Council Affairs and administering his own Society Affairs, then perhaps he could have corrected the gross injustice which has been perpetrated upon the waiting list taxpayers.

In terms of trustworthiness, the Parish Council feels slighted by a person who has failed to provide a duty of care to the local taxpayers. Allotment land is not given to be operated as a private preserve; it is given so that as many taxpayers as apply can exercise their rights.

The third speaker claimed to be a former employee of the Information Commissioner's Office, and an expert on the Data Protection Act. He accused the Parish Council of breaches of the Act.

The Parish Council phoned the Information Commissioner's Office, and explained that they had written to Allotment Holders, using information provided by Cheshire East. The Parish Council also explained that even though the information had been supplied by

Cheshire East, it had transpired, after the letters had been sent, that the final act of lease transfer had not taken place. The Parish Council asked if a follow up letter should be deferred. The Information Commissioner's Office confirmed that the Data Protection Act had not been breached, and that the Parish Council could proceed with a reminder letter.

Alderley Edge Parish Council will move forward quickly to deliver the improvements which the village needs.

Ends