



Watford Borough Council

Town Hall • Watford • Hertfordshire • WD17 3EX

Tel 01923 226400 Fax 01923 278100

DX 51529 Watford 2

Website www.watford.gov.uk Email enquiries@watford.gov.uk

Enquiries to: Kathryn Robson

Phone no: 01923 278077

Our reference:

Your reference:

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Email: kathryn.robson@watford.gov.uk

Dear Paddock Road allotment holder

Paddock Road Allotments Investment Programme

As you are aware, Watford Borough Council has recently carried out significant engagement on all its sites earmarked for improvement (except Wiggenghall and not Farm Terrace until the outcome of the Secretary of State's decision on its future is known). There have been drop-in sessions and opportunities to feedback directly to the landscape architects who are supporting the council deliver this area of work and we are now close to finalising the plans. There has been a considerable amount of feedback received, with many tenants sharing their views and we soon hope to have the finalised plans available on the council's website for all to view.

However, engagement at both drop-in sessions has shown that there is divided opinion amongst allotment holders in relation to one area of the improvements initially proposed at Paddock Road. This relates to the security of the site and whether to install fencing to enhance security. Initial ideas proposed the erection of a substantial 2.0m high fence along the footpath that crosses the site, adjacent to the footpath and accesses Attenborough Fields. This has raised substantial debate among allotment holders on the site as well as generating letters in the Watford Observer.

We have received a range of representation from Paddock Road allotment holders. Some argue that security is a significant issue at the site, which would be mitigated by security fencing. However, other allotment holders have argued that Paddock Road has exceptional and special characteristics due to the open nature of the site and its proximity to the surrounding countryside. This allows local people to use the site and enjoy the views, open space and simply observe and engage as part of the local community.

The council has listened carefully to the arguments and reviewed the feedback it has received. It is clear that there is no single solution that will satisfy both sides of the fencing issue and so we have come to a decision based on a number of considerations:

- The Paddock Road site does have special characteristics by way of its open character and views across to Attenborough Fields and surrounding green belt. It sits well within this environment and enhances what is a wonderful offer to the local community in terms of open, green space and access to nature and wildlife

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- Paddock Road is used, and enjoyed, by the local Oxhey village community who informally do use the site without causing any problems and have done for many years. To erect fencing and gating that would establish a 'gated area' just for allotment holders' use would create a physical divide in the community, which we believe would raise significant local objections. It has been important to take into account the wider community in coming to any decision on fencing at the site
- Removing what has been a community amenity for so many years would have an impact on local residents and we feel we would need to engage with them to find out what their view is on taking this step. Not only would this be time consuming but would still not resolve the matter to everyone's satisfaction. Ultimately, we would be no further forward than we are now
- Paddock Road allotments are adjacent to the Oxhey Village Conservation Area. The council's Senior Planner (Design & Conservation) has highlighted that, whilst a 2m high security fence could be erected, it would not be in keeping with the overall character of the area
- The future of the neighbouring depot site has yet to be decided and we still use the depot for storage and chipping of green waste. Should the Secretary of State for the Department of Communities and Local Government approved the deregulation of Farm Terrace allotments then Paddock Road has been identified for expansion in order to re-provide the allotment land appropriated for the Watford Health Campus scheme. This will mean the site might be changing in the foreseeable future and the council needs to retain its current flexibility in order to accommodate potential future needs
- The actual effectiveness of installing the length of security fencing being proposed must be questioned on a site that is configured like Paddock Road. Whilst it may 'seal' one boundary, persistent thieves or vandals will find a way in, despite the site being bounded by mature hedges and field boundaries. Our experience is that determined people will circumvent the new proposed fencing, negating the effect of it. Clearly we cannot and would not want to secure the whole site with security fencing

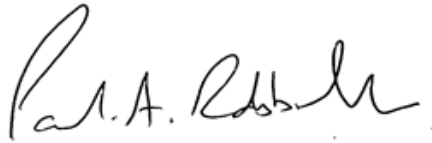
Taking all these factors into account, therefore, we are proposing that the present fencing is replaced with fencing of a similar style to that surrounding the reservoir. This would mean 1.5m high vertical bar fencing to the upper side of the footpath, crossing the site. In addition, we will replace the chestnut pale fencing near the gate with post and rail agricultural style fencing to match what is currently used. We still propose to have a gate across the main entrance which can be locked at night as happens at present.

We acknowledge that this decision will not meet the expectations of all Paddock Road allotment holders but we feel it is the right one given all the factors that have had to be considered.

In coming to the decision, we did consider a ballot of all current Paddock Road allotment holders. Given the differing views held on the issue of fencing and, importantly, the need for the council to take into account the broader picture in terms of Paddock Road as an amenity for the wider community, we did not feel a ballot would provide an effective resolution.

The next stage is to select a contractor to carry out the improvement works through an open and competitive tender process. At the moment the predicted start date is March / April 2014. We will be asking the contractor how they propose to deliver improvements across a number of sites and they may choose to do it site by site or all sites simultaneously. Once we have a programme of works we will, of course, let all allotment holders know.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul A. Rabbitts', with a stylized, cursive script.

Paul Rabbitts
Environmental Services Client Manager