

BLYTH TOWN COUNCIL
Environment Committee
Thursday 27 February 2025
Decision Report

Recommendations Allotment Fires

The Committee RESOLVE to consider the request to change the current policy. Should the change be agreed this would allow the burning of allotment waste 365 days a year as requested at the previous meeting by Blyth Small Holding & Allotment Association. This would include caveats and a trial period.

Ward

Kitty Brewster, Cowpen, Isabella, Plessey, Wensleydale & Newsham

Risk Management

There would be no impact on financial budgets if there was a change in policy. There is no legal restriction on the Council changing policy if they wish to.

Objective

To review existing policy as part of the democratic process following representation from Blyth Smallholdings and Allotment Association (BSHAA).

Crime Prevention

There would be no Crime Prevention implications to consider with regard to this matter.

Report

Members of BSHAA, who attended the last Environment Committee meeting, requested to have the same rights regarding allotment fires as neighbouring Town Councils, as Blyth now shares the same MP (Blyth and Ashington Constituency), though this has no bearing on Blyth Town Council policies.

Ashington and Newbiggin by the Sea Town Council's have a policy in place that allows allotment fires throughout the year. The caveat being that no fires are permitted on a Saturday, Sunday or bank holiday and if a fire takes place the plot holder must be in attendance at all times.

The current Blyth Town Council policy, was adopted following the local government re-organisation, in 2009, from Blyth Valley Borough Council.

The current Town Council policy has worked well and is incorporated into the current tenancy agreements and was also incorporated into the new tenancy agreements with the Allotment Associations.

Again, the current policy has worked well and there have been very few instances of nuisance fires that have been reported to Blyth Town Council (BTC) or Northumberland County Council's Environmental Enforcement Team (NCC). When issues have been raised, NCC and BTC have worked together to resolve these incidents. Incidents have only resulted in tenants being advised of the existing policy, without the need for warnings to be issued.

Enforcement Officers, of NCC, have been consulted regarding a possible policy change. They have recommended that changes are not made to restricted burning policies that are long established.

The National Allotment Society, of which BTC and BSHAA are members, have forwarded information. They would recommend members banning allotment fires and encourage allotment tenants to compost more and be more environmentally friendly to reduce the environmental impact that a fire can cause. Composting from an allotment plot during the summer and autumn growing season will produce a rich compost within 12 months to replace nutrients back naturally and can be mixed back into beds and pots reducing the need for fires. There are, however, a number of items from allotments which are more difficult to compost such as rotten wood, certain vegetable crops, brambles etc.

Should any discretions occur, then, as with current practices, NCC would only serve a warning if they could prove that the tenant was the source of the nuisance smoke. However, these circumstances have not been an issue previously.

If, as now, the perpetrator was not discovered the penalty would be served on the Landowner i.e. BTC. If nuisance fires continued the penalties could be up to £5,000.

Should members agree to change the current policy, members would also have to consider when fires would be allowed, including set days and the hours that fires were allowed, to ensure the policy was not being abused. The penalties for breaches would need to include the need to highlight the possibility of termination of tenancy.

This is the first and only time BTC have received a request for the current policy to be reviewed and we have received no other requests from tenants. In discussions with the Newsham Association, they have indicated that they would prefer for the policy to remain as it is now. However, the Secretary of the BSHAA has informed us that he has received 90% verbal requests for this policy to be changed from tenants on their respective sites.

Certainly, allowing burning during the summer months will result in the disposal of drier waste and reduces the need for road usage to transport waste to the nearest waste or landfill site for disposal.

BTC need to further promote composting across the sites and ensure that any fires only contain allotment waste.

Should fires be allowed 365 days per year or as on the Ashington sites, Monday to Friday only and not Bank Holidays, then plot holders will need to consider their neighbouring plot holders as well as nearby residents when, as example, the wind is blowing towards properties.

The use of small sized fires contained within fire bins, that are available, would also be encouraged.

Should members agree a change in policy they may also consider doing so on a trial period.

Stephen Humphrey
Principal Officer

20 February 2025