

AGENDA 11, Enc ix) Allotment Fires – High Market and Wansbeck Road Allotment Sites

Supporting Report

Members are asked to endorse officers' actions to support a ban on allotment fires at High Market and Wansbeck Road allotment sites, apart from the months of **March and November**.

Both allotment sites are managed by their respective associations on behalf of the Council. The Council's approach has always been to work collaboratively with associations to address issues rather than impose decisions that could risk the voluntary efforts sustaining these sites.

Historically, the sites and the Council have permitted allotment fires during weekdays, subject to conditions such as wind direction, with fires prohibited at weekends. However, these variable conditions have continued to cause nuisance to residents.

Since 2024, the Council has received just under 30 reports of nuisance fires, with 20 originating from either High Market or Wansbeck Road allotment sites. In 2022, 24 complaints were logged in relation to these same sites. Residents have, on occasion, felt let down by the Council's response and, for some time, reduced engagement despite mediation efforts with associations and residents in September 2022.

The Council has consistently logged complaints, investigated incidents, and referred matters outside of regulations to allotment associations, while also advising residents to raise concerns with Northumberland County Council Public Protection if they considered them a statutory nuisance.

Changes in committee members and officer over this period has contributed to a shift in approach. The current position reflects a more open and accepting approach to resolving long-standing issues. Most recently, following a further increase in complaints and the severity of some fires, officers have re-engaged with allotment associations. A meeting with representatives of both sites took place, at which:

- **Wansbeck Road Allotment Association** agreed to immediately instigate a ban on allotment fires, except during March and November (existing rules to apply during these months).
- **High Market Allotment Association** indicated cooperation with the same ban being imposed directly by the Council.

Notices have now been displayed at both sites. It is recognised that some tenants may disagree with the ban, but the measure is considered necessary to provide consistency, remove ambiguity, and address the longstanding concerns of neighbours, while continuing to work closely with associations to support their volunteer efforts.

The Council support is sought to provide clear authority for officers and associations, ensuring consistent enforcement and demonstrating to residents that the Council is fully backing this approach in the event of challenge.

It should be noted that allotment fires are not currently a persistent issue at other sites. Endorsing this action will, however, send a clear message that the Council will act where necessary to protect neighbours, which should encourage allotment holders across all sites to act responsibly.

Recommendation

That Ashington Town Council endorses officers' actions in supporting a ban on allotment fires at High Market and Wansbeck Road Allotment Sites, limiting fires to the months of March and November only (existing rules to apply during these months).