

Members dig in over allotments

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A ROW is growing over the rents to be charged for new parish council-owned allotments in Hemsby – nearly five times more than other allotments in the borough.

Members of Hemsby Allotments Association, which has been campaigning to get plots in the village, are angry the parish council is planning to charge £100 a year for a large plot on the village's site and £50 for a smaller plot.

However, large plots at Acle only cost £22 per year, while a patch of Caister land could be rented for £20.

Association chairman Noel Galer said for their money the Hemsby gardeners would get a plot on the Yarmouth Road site that had no tap water, no shed, no water butt or composter, and no security fence.

Instead, the association wants an alternative site near to the village hall which would provide easy access to a children's play area and toilets.

Mr Galer said: "We are trying to persuade the council to give us better value. Unfortunately, they seem to have a deep-rooted view that allotments are a waste of space. They are charging £100 for allotments, but we are saying, for heaven's sake, it can be done for less so why aren't the parish council doing it."

The association has been campaigning on the basis the council had a statutory duty to provide allotments.

Association members were also upset by the council's decision to allow any parishioner to apply for plots, believing the allocation process should be restricted to its members.

Hemsby Parish Council is paying landowner Richard Hirst £800 a year per acre in rent money, that will be recouped from rents charged to allotment holders and not council taxpayers.

Lyndon Bevan, the council's vice-chairman, said because the plots



RENT ROW: Hemsby gardeners believe they are being asked to pay too much for their allotments, £100 for a large plot compared to £22 at Acle.

had to be self-financing the rents were higher in order to pay the rent it was having to pay for the 30-plot site close to the Jet garage.

Mr Bevan added there had been a lot of interest in the site with 24 applications for the 30 plots available.

He said: "We are providing allotments because we have been told we have to, which is something we did not realise and now we have to provide them we are doing what we can with limited resources and limited space in Hemsby."

Cliff Weavers, chairman of Acle Allotments Association, said plots at the site close to the Hermitage pub were charged on a sliding rate from £8 to £22 a year depending on the size.

The parish council used to own the site and charge £12.50 for plots, but the association took over the lease when the council decided to double

rents. The association is now responsible for maintaining the site and all rents are paid into its funds.

Mr Weavers added: "I would suggest that £100 per annum for a plot is probably approaching twice what the average allotment holder would pay in Norfolk."

"Unless there are some allotments I have not heard of in the county then the Hemsby site is the most expensive in Norfolk."

Jean Cunningham, an allotment holder at Caister, said that a plot close to the village's Tesco superstore could cost between £15 and £20 a year.

She said the parish council had always run the site since it was created over 100 years ago, but had never charged much money to rent a plot.

She added: "The whole point of allotments is to grow things to save yourself money."