

Tudorville Allotments Association

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday 17th August 2016, 7.30 pm

At Tudorville Community Centre

MINUTES

1. Apologies: Jeremy Walters, Chris Hyatt, Peter Reynolds, Julie Tyler, Phil Jenkinson, Graham John, Bryan Bunting, Tom Courtney.

Attending: (Members): Martin Bar (Chairman), John Taylor (Secretary), Avril Fuller (Committee Member), Roger Clark, Bernard Staite, John Walters (Seeds Rep), Maurice Thomson, Lynn Howells (Committee Member), Jenny Clarke (Committee Member), Paul Bailey, Glyn Jenkins, Mike Ebert, Fred Ellis, Peter Wade, Eric Butt, Felicity Hearn

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting: The minutes had been displayed on the notice board since last year including an amendment by Bernard Staite.

3. Approval of the Minutes: It was proposed by Glyn Jenkins and seconded by Lyn Howells and unanimously accepted by all members attending that the minutes be adopted as a true record.

4. Matters Arising: There were no matters arising from the minutes.

5. Chairman Report:

A very quiet year with no major projects of any kind. I am glad to report that the Association is in good heart and at the moment all plots allocated with only one person on the waiting list. We have had only one issue relating to care of equipment mainly cleaning of mowers and notices were put up to try and educate people to make sure they clean and empty the mowers after use.

Again this coming year there are no major plans at the time just another productive year to look forward to.

6. Secretary's Report 2016

The committee have met twice this year on the 12th November and 8th August. The second meeting was an informal get together to agree the Agenda for the AGM.

This will be a very short report as I am pleased to say that the allotments have run themselves this year and we have not undertaken any new large projects. New equipment has been purchased which the Treasurer will say more about in his report.

Plot 42 the one by the gate, was not cultivated this year and despite the plot holder being contacted on several occasions by the Treasurer and Liaison Officer it was required to serve formal written notice of termination of our Association. Phil, Martin and myself then spent time strimming off all the weeds, removed and transported all the rubbish from the plot to the tip to make it suitable for re-letting. Josh White has now taken over tenancy of the plot.

I would like to thank Jenny Clarke for all her hard work in creating a wild flower border along the park homes boundary. It was a very colorful display. Thank you Jenny

I have met Sarah Robson the new Town Clerk on two occasions. I mentioned to her that a new head lease between the Council and TAA is still outstanding. She explained that the delay is because title to the land has to be checked and registered with H M Land Registry. This has to be done before the new Tenancy Agreement can be drawn up.

The second occasion was concerning water supplies to the Allotments. This matter came to her attention after it was reported that the water tap in the cemetery had been vandalised. Phil carried out repairs but Sarah is concerned that if it happens again without prompt action to stem the flow a large quantity of water could be lost with consequential costs. She is recommending to the Council that the water tap be done away with and water to the Cemetery be supplied by mobile bowser. I have offered on behalf of TAA to carry out these works at the Council's cost and at the same time arrange to back feed water supplies to the new plots from the main allotment supply thereby eliminating a second meter and its consequential charge which amounts to about £75 per annum. We will then be totally responsible for the water supplies to the allotments and the water bills.

The membership charges to the National Allotment Society have risen over recent years and are considered disproportionate to the benefits we receive. This matter is down for discussion later in the Agenda.

A further Agenda item is the date of the AGM. This was raised at last year's AGM and we would like your thoughts on amending the Constitution to allow the AGM to be held later in the year when it is hoped more members will be able to attend.

There is little else to report.

I would like to thank all the Committee members for their help and assistance over the year offering their thoughts and advice on an informal basis which has helped us to manage the allotments without the need for formal meetings which in my view is as it should be.

7. Treasurer's Report:

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Secretary, Committee Members, Ladies and Gentlemen, I must apologise for missing this year's Annual General Meeting. The Secretary has kindly agreed to read out my report, and go through this year's balance sheet. I hope everyone has a copy.

The Secretary will read through it and answer any questions when finished.

Our biggest expense was the purchasing of the two Honda mowers and the two Honda trimmers. Total cost of £1464.00. But I hope everyone agrees money well spent.

However all members of committee are still concerned about a member or members still misusing the equipment. Returning the mowers to the shed still full of grass cutting, and not bothering to clean the kit. One of the trimmers returned with the head in bits and throw back in the shed, spilling the fuel all over the floor. Not only is this frustrating but dangerous. This kit belongs to all of us, yet we still have person or persons not giving a thought of other members. I hope any member sees the kit being misused they contact a member of committee, so something can be done to eradicate this problem.

We may be purchasing a further new lawn mower again this next year, and phasing out one of the old units.

Later in the year we are hoping to divert our water supply to the allotments which will save paying for two meters instead of one, when the work starts we will be asking for help from members.

You will notice this year we have not paid money to the Allotment Society. They sent a reminder for payment increased to £2.75 per member a total cost of £159.50. Last year Bernard Staite asked why the cost had increased to the society. I explained they had increased the cost per member from £2.25 to £2.50. Now they have increased again by a further 25pence per member. When we joined the society the cost was 50 pence per member, when I telephoned to explain we could not keep absorbing this cost as we are still the lowest allotments with a cost of only 25pence per square metre. They were not interested in reducing the cost per member. I also explained we have and also split a few allotments into two, helping more people have a

plot, but doing so have increased the number of members. They replied saying the cost is £2.75 for each member, and would not give me any reduction. I also explained our new plots are small and members only pay around £9.00 per year so taking out the £2.75 only leaves the association £6.25 from these members to pay towards our overheads, but alas they were not interested. We get very little from the society; there has been talk about losing the reduction from King Seeds, if we drop out of the society. I have spoken to King seeds and also Marshall Seeds and Dobbies seeds, they will all give us discount on bulk buying. However even if we did not get a discount, last year's profit was only £41.29. So that benefit is small. I put all this in a letter to their Manager, but didn't even receive a reply.

But it is down to this meeting to decide if we leave or pay this ever increasing charge which we have no control of and remain in.

Petrol cost is still under the budget of £150.00 per year I set, so I am happy with that figure, and would like to thank various members who have gone to the garage and refilled the cans when they have found the cans empty, and not left it to a member of the committee.

After all the expense we have incurred this year we still have a healthy balance in the bank, therefore, we stand by our promise two seasons ago and do not need to look at increasing rents.

8. Approval of Annual Accounts: There were no questions arising from the report. It was proposed by Glyn Jenkins and seconded by Paul Bailey that the Annual Accounts be approved and unanimously accepted by the members present on a show of hands.

9. Election of Committee members / officers

The following Committee Members were due for re-election and were willing to stand – Martin Barr (Chairman), John Walters (Seeds Rep), Avril Fuller, Lyn Howells and Tom Courtney.

The Chairman asked if any other members wished to stand for election to the Committee. None of the members present were willing stand.

It was proposed by Mike Ebert and seconded by Jenny Clarke that the above named members be re-elected to the Committee for a further term of 2 years. This was unanimously agreed by the members present.

The rest of the Committee consisted of: John Taylor Secretary, Phil Jenkinson Treasurer and Liaison Officer and Jenny Clarke.

10. Membership of the National Allotment Society (NAS) - annual fees have increased by 16.9% over the last year. Should we continue as members?

The Chairman mentioned that in the Treasurer's Report mention had been made to the discounts on Seeds and Insurance available to members of the NAS. The Treasurer had investigated and had found that such discounts could be obtained by any club or association not a member of the NAS with the proviso that Kings Seeds give a 10% commission to club funds. On insurance NAS were currently recommending Shield whilst the TAA were insured by Blufin. Further investigation has shown we have been offered a lower premium by Blufin with wider benefits.

The Chairman asked the Secretary to talk about the wider benefits of being a member of NAS.

The Secretary said he had been in dialogue with NAS to find out what do they do and why should we continue as members?

Their Mission Statement:

The National Allotment Society (NSALG) is the leading national organisation upholding the interests and rights of the allotment community across the UK. We work with Government at national and local level, other organisations and landlords to provide, promote and preserve allotments for all. We offer support, guidance and advice to everyone with an interest in allotment gardening.

Dimensions:

They respond on average to 60 legal enquires per week.

Typically this concerns Tenancy Agreements and Leases – which Tudorville Allotments Association have benefited from in the past, disputes, small claims etc.

Section 8 Applications – concerning the disposal of allotments land. This seems to be a growing trend by Councils who are under pressure to find land for housing and other community uses such as schools, hospitals, universities etc.

2 Examples of Section 8 Applications successfully fought off in the last 12 months.

Escourt Park Gloucester (Longlevens Allotments) – briefly the University of the West of England required land for expansion. A section 8 notice was served on the Allotments. NAS supported this case pressing for compensation. They then put in a claim for compensation backed up by expert witnesses including the taking of soil samples. The University eventually backed down due to rising costs and high level of compensation.

Farm Terrace Allotments Watford – Watford Borough Council served a section 8 notice to close the allotments as they wanted to use the land for car parking and other Council purposes. They eventually obtained planning permission after an appeal to the Secretary of State Eric Pickles. NAS together with all objectors obtained a judicial review. The Judge reversed the planning permission stating the Council had misused Section 8 who had stated they needed the land due to “exceptional circumstances”.

The question is do we wish to continue with NAS and benefit from the national expertise they have concerning the legal issues surrounding allotments. To leave would in my view be short sighted. We are lucky that Ross Town Council is supportive of the TAA. Will that always be the case? We know that at some stage we may have to give up our present site when more land is required for Cemetery use. When the time comes I would hope that we would be able to force the Council to find us another site. If it is not in our life time then I would hope we will be able to leave a legacy to our successors.

The Chairman then asked for comments from the floor:

Mike Ebert thought that we may need the backing of NAS in the future and that we should stay which was also echoed by Roger Clark.

Lyn Howells considered that the levy of £2.75 per member was nothing these days.

The Chairman reiterated that costs of being a member of NAS £159.50 and that we will receive a commission on Kings Seeds sales of around £40. Our net contribution being £100. The Secretary commented that NAS membership fees would be rising to £3 per member next year.

Peter Wade asked what membership costs would be after that. The Secretary said that the incremental rises of 25p per year had been agreed at a national AGM and that he was unaware of further increases in the pipeline.

Roger Clark thought that NAS annual membership fee should be apportioned to members of TAA according to plot size.

There being no other comments the Chairman put the motion should we remain in the NAS?

On a show of hands the majority were in favour of remaining in the NAS with 1 abstention and 1 against.

It was further agreed that the matter would be further reviewed again next year.

11. Date of the AGM is laid down in the Constitution. Should we amend the Constitution to allow the AGM to be held on the last Wednesday in October?

The Chairman explained that the AGM this year had to be brought forward because most the Committee was away on holiday in September. The Committee considered that if the constitution was amended then the AGM could be deferred to October which was hoped would enable more members to attend.

General discussion on the subject was supportive of the motion and the Committee would work through the detail of any changes to the Constitution and Rules.

It was proposed by John Walters and seconded by Roger Clark to adopt the motion which was unanimously carried.

12. Any Other Business

Future Projects:

Transfer water supply to new plots to main allotments supply pipeline to save having 2 water meters. Annual saving £75.

Provide multi bay compost bins and remove concrete plinth neat the equipment shed.

Hire or buy petrol driven shredder.

The Chairman explained that these projects had been put forward by the Committee for comment. In the case of the water supply re-arrangement this had been covered in the Secretary's report and would be funded by the Ross Town Council. Providing a multi-bay compost bin near the equipment shed after removing the concrete plinth would hopefully enable the mowers to be emptied and cleaned before being returned the shed. The Chairman went on to say that despite the purchase of new mowers they were not being cleaned after use hence notices recently being put up to remind and educate members to clean the mowers. One member asked how the concrete plinth would be removed. The Chairman replied we have cunning plan. When a digger is hired to trench in the new water pipe such hire is on a daily basis. Hence the digger will have spare time to break up the concrete plinth and no cost to TAA. Shredding up garden waste would assist composting. The Committee will look into the most effective way of doing this – rent or buy. John Walters commented that shredders are heavy on maintenance and renting will enable the use of industrial equipment capable of shredding large stalks and small branches. One member questioned whether general compost could be placed in the new multi bay bins and if so could this lead to the spread of diseases. Paul Bailey thought members should place the shreddings in their own compost bins.

After some debate members thought the ideas put forward under Future Projects should be pursued by the Committee to work out the fine detail.

Bindweed behind the Equipment Shed: Comments were raised concerning the unkempt nature of the land behind and to the side of the equipment shed. It had been planted with shrubs 2/3 years ago but the bindweed had now taken over. The Committee was aware of the situation and intends starting to clear it next week.

Procedure for obtaining a larger allotment plot – raised by Maurice Thomson.

The Secretary explained that priority was given to allocating vacant plots to new members joining the Tudorville Allotments. If there was no one on the waiting list then if a member wished to move to a larger vacant plot then this would be permitted. Over the past year or two we have had a healthy waiting list and there has been no opportunity for members to move to larger vacant plots. Maurice Thomson and Roger Clark who both would like larger plots both thought that the process too rigid. The Secretary said there had been several iterations of the letting process. If it was too flexible then there were comments of favoritism by the Committee. To overcome this Upsizing and Downsizing Guidelines were introduced. However these guidelines were removed after the Rules were last reviewed. The Secretary stated that upsizing and downsizing was now decided on a case by case basis by the Committee.

The Chairman asked if any member had a proposal they would like to put forward regarding this issue. There being no proposal it was agreed the Committee would review the matter at its first meeting.

New Plots: Mike Ebert asked if there were any representatives from the New Plots. Eric Butt plot 46 stated that there were no problems.

Manure Delivery: Maurice Thomson asked if there was date for manure deliver. The Chairman stated that it would depend on the framers own commitments. Last year it had been delayed because it was impossible to get on the fields due to the wet weather.

Free Manure: Jenny Clarke reminded everyone that there is free well rotted horse manure available at Goodrich for members to take away. Details are on the notice board.

Thanks to the Committee: Mike Ebert wished to express his thanks to the Committee on behalf of all the members of Tudorville Allotments Association for all their hard work over the past year.

There being no other business the Chairman closed the meeting.