

WITNEY ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 7 May 2014.

Committee Members Present: Andy Howells (Chair) Maggie Perrin (Secretary)
Margaret Eadle (Treasurer) Mary Killick, Val Fisher, Dave Mace, Barry Fenton, Ray Harris
49 tenants attended

1 Apologies : David and Daphne Hill, Mr Lamacq, Mr Newitt, Claire Henman, Caroline Brett

2 Minutes of the AGM held on 1 May 2013 were agreed.

3 Chairman's Report

This is the third AGM of the Witney Allotment Association since we took control for the management of the sites from the Town Council. We are again grateful to Cogges Heritage Trust for the use of this wonderful barn.

I appreciate your attendance this evening and hope the meeting will not just inform you but encourage lively discussion both now and back on your allotment sites. I am particularly looking forward to hearing from Julie Charlesworth on a topic of wide interest. Julie is new to the Allotment Association, having taken a plot last summer, but certainly not new to gardening.

I want to give particular thanks to our committee who met five times over the past year to review plans and agree future actions. It is a simple statement of fact to say that it is our Secretary, Maggie Perrin, who continues to commit the most time to support the running of the Association and I would like us to show our appreciation in the customary way.

The demands made on the office of secretary concerns me and I would like to suggest it is appropriate to consider making an honorarium next year (that is a monetary gift in recognition of voluntary services provided). I leave that decision to the new committee however.

To help the committee gauge member opinion about any relevant issues I invited responses to a simple questionnaire. Although there were relatively few responses those made include some very helpful thoughts and ideas.

8 responses: 2 from Hailey Road and 3 each from Lakeside and Newland.

- *All felt self-management was either better or no worse than council control.*
- *Two felt the rent was too high with one feeling they were too low and the rest about right.*
- *Suggestions for site improvement included:*
- *Rabbit control*
- *En sure plots are being worked*
- *More frequent provision of skips*
- *Advanced notice of skip availability*
- *Communal arrangements for grass cutting*
- *Better use of notice boards*
- *Family events such as 'a potato day'*
- *Actions to encourage sense of site camaraderie*
- *Improve surface of site access footpaths so less muddy (HR and N)*
- *Improve site security by introduction of locked gates (N) better gate and signage*

- *More secure fencing*
- **Committee focus for 2014/5**
- *Improve site fencing to keep rabbits out*
- *Re-allocate vacant plots without delay and encourage new tenants to work them immediately*
- *Check that all plots are being used*
- *Promote site tidiness by regular provision of skips*
- *Deliver enough free manure for at least three barrow loads per tenant*
- *Use funds to support social activities that benefit tenants*
- **Further comments**
- *Do some tenants believe that, having paid their rent, they are free to leave their plots unused until they find the time/motivation to work it?*

We have been very successful in keeping our costs to a minimum but, as will become apparent in the Treasurer's report, it is now time to explore new ways to best use our funds to benefit all members. One example of this from the past year was the bulk delivery of manure to sites and we will return to that topic later in the meeting under item 9.

Having a single committee has served us well in setting policies and the overarching administrative tasks including management of the waiting list, allocation of plots to new tenants; rent collection and liaising with external bodies including local councils and the media. However, I think we are missing a trick in terms of encouraging more local involvement on each site. This would go some way to address ongoing concerns about some plots not being actively or effectively worked. I am pleased to see this was a theme that was raised by the survey.

With this in mind I would encourage the new committee to explore direct representation of each site – reflecting the reality that issues of concern on one site may not be relevant to another. An example of this is the increased rabbit population wreaking havoc at Lakeside – a problem which doesn't exist on the other two sites. Conversely, some on Hailey Road and Newland have concerns arising from public access – which isn't of concern at Lakeside. Having site "user groups" (or whatever we call them) would help focus time and attention where it would be most appreciated and would be in the best position to advise the committee on how best to target our financial resources. Such groups need not be formally constituted and might come and go as issues are raised and addressed.

There remain in excess of 100 people on the waiting list with new people replacing around 40 who have taken up plots over the past year. (by the way, I can assure you that, once notified, there is no delay in offering a plot to the next person in line.) Unfortunately plots are not always relinquished in a tidy state and new tenants can face an uphill struggle to bring it into a productive state - especially if they are a novice which it comes to gardening.

So finally, I return to our good financial health which has enabled us to cover water charges out of general funds this year. It also presents a tremendous opportunity for us to think how the experience of allotment gardening can be improved for all. So in all senses, it's time to move on.

As Andy is stepping down from both his role as Chairman and committee member, Maggie proposed a vote of thanks and presented him with a gift from the association in recognition of the enormous contribution he has made to the setting up of the association.

4 Treasurer's Report

We began with an opening balance, on 1st January 2013 of £3,385 and closed the year with £5,495. This is because we received income of £4,285 from rent but spent only £2,175. Expenditure is made up of:

Water charges	£846
Subscription to National Society of Allotment & Leisure Gardeners'	£366
Office Sundries	£278
Insurance	£164
Miscellaneous items	£521

5 Election of Officers

The following Committee members were elected:

Chair	Mary Killick	Lakeside
Secretary	Maggie Perrin	
Treasurer	Margaret Eadle	Hailey Road
Committee	Barry Fenton	Newland
	Val Fisher	Newland
	Lynne Berry	Newland
	Penny Ponton	Hailey Road
	Dave Mace	Lakeside
	Ray Harris	Lakeside
Disputes Panel	Tim Partridge	Lakeside
	Janet Garrison	Lakeside
	David Barber	Lakeside
	Judith Legood	Newland
	Mr Newitt	Hailey Road

6 Rents 2015 -2016

The committee proposed that the rents be frozen for the year 2015-2016. This was carried nem com.

7 Talk by Judith Charlesworth

Judith gave a very informative talk with slides on Historic Kitchen Gardens.

8 Supply of Manure to Allotment Sites

Tenants thought it was an excellent idea and worthwhile repeating. It was suggested that deliveries should be allocated to specific groups of plots in rotation to ensure that all tenants benefitted from the scheme.

9 Any other business

9.1 Provision of additional skips needed at each site. Can skips be collected more quickly to avoid them being filled with domestic waste.

9.2 Mr Adams was concerned that the road to Lakeside was being used as a car park. The committee will contact Witney Town Council and request that No Parking notices be erected.

9.3 Rabbits continue to be a problem at Lakeside. Ferreting has been carried out over the last year and arrangements will be made for this to be continued.

9.4 Concern was raised re the poor state of some Lakeside plots. The committee will check these plots and contact tenants. All sites are regularly monitored and tenants are contacted if their plots are not cultivated.

9.5 Lynne Jones, LS asked if fencing at the rear of her plot could be mended. Andy responded that the Town Council are responsible for the perimeter fence and will respond if photos are provided showing the gaps.