

WITNEY ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

Minutes of ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING held Wednesday 6 May 2015

Committee members present: Maggie Perrin (Secretary) Margaret Eadle (Treasurer) Barrie Fenton
Val Fisher, Lynne Berry, Dave Mace

Tenants present: 52

In the absence of Chairwoman Mary Killick, the meeting was chaired by Geoff Branner

1 Apologies Mary Killick (Chair), Peter Killick, Keith Holmes, Jonathan Fisher, Claire Hermon, Brian Thorn , Colin Newitt

2 Minutes of the AGM held on 7 May 2014 were approved

3 Chairwoman's Report

I'm delighted to see you all for the 4th AGM of the Association and once again our grateful thanks go to Cogges for letting us use their facilities.

Thanks also to our committee who met 6 times during the past year.

Last year's report identified a number of areas that needed attention, these included:

- *Rabbits and fencing at Lakeside*
- *Re-allocation of vacant plots*
- *Promotion of site tidiness*
- *Checking that all plots were being used*

Rabbits at Lakeside

Steve Bishop brought his ferrets to Lakeside in early January and swept the whole site. Half a dozen adult rabbits were caught. Mr Bishop reckoned that myxamotosis may have hit the rabbit population as he had expected to catch more. Since then he has been in contact with Mr Edmund Strainge who owns the field opposite Lakeside and where it seems the rabbits may come from. Next winter he will using his ferrets there as well as on Lakeside. The rabbit infestation will be a continuing problem and Lakeside tenants are urged to make their plots as rabbit proof as possible. There has been no cost to the Association as the rabbit crop is Mr Bishop's fee

Perimeter fencing at Lakeside

This is the responsibility of WTC and of course has relevance to the rabbit nuisance. A meeting was held with John Hickman from the council to draw up a plan. He asked that tenants with boundary plots clear one metre back from the hedge so that his men could gain access for trimming and subsequent fence repair. The south side hedge has been trimmed but no fence repairs have been done yet. The north side should be done next winter. The council have been contacted again concerning the fence and we have been told that we are on the list for work to be done but that John and his workmen have to build the splash park first.

Update on plots

The association manage 189 plots on three sites, 98 at Lakeside, 38 at Newland and 53 at Hailey Road. With the exception of 1 plot Lakeside and 1 plot at Hailey Road which are currently out to offer, all plots have tenants.

Between 1 January 2014 and 1 May 2015

- 42 plots have been allocated to people from the waiting list
- 5 have been divided.
- 14 tenants were sent initial warning letters about the condition of their plots
- 7 tenants responded, were given a time frame to improve and the plots are now cultivated
- 4 tenants responded that they would like to give up their plots
- 3 tenants did not respond to either the initial warning or final warning and their tenancies were ended.

At the request of WTC the association emailed and wrote to the 101 people on the waiting list asking them to confirm that they wished to remain on the list. Following the responses and the reallocation of 42 plots, the waiting list has been reduced from 101 to 58.

There has been a cost to WAA as some tenants abandoned their plots without leaving them clear. We have had to pay for skips to empty shed contents into, committee members have volunteered to clear vacated plots but when the job was too big we have had to pay for ground clearance and weed killing. However, this is still cheaper than paying for a lawyer to chase the culprits.

Promotion of site tidiness

Witney Town Councillors visited Lakeside and were not happy about a number of issues. These were highlighted in the Spring 2015 newsletter and a letter was sent to Lakeside tenants giving details of what needed to be done to address the issues. WTC very concerned with large bushes growing near the roadways as the roots will lift the tarmac and WAA will have to pay for the repairs. The Committee has arranged to have the problem bushes/trees removed.

Despite reminder letters being sent to the tenants concerned we are still waiting for large, overhanging fruit trees to be pruned. Please fix ASAP even if it means losing fruit.

We are aware that the skips provided by WTC are very necessary and appreciated by tenants. The committee has also identified that Lakeside needs another skip twice a year as it is a much larger site than Newland or Hailey. The committee has decided to pay for a skip to arrive at LS, after the one provided by WTC in spring and autumn. Somehow this spring the skip provided by WTC arrived a week earlier than the date on their notice and their notification of the skip's arrival was placed in a position that advertised it to the public who took the opportunity to drive in and dump their rubbish.

Please read carefully what is allowed in the skip as the Association is charged by the council for each hazardous object placed in it.

Checking that plots are being used

Committee members on each site check all the plots on a monthly basis and report back at the following committee meeting. If, after a number of checks there is still concern then informal contact is made to see what the problem is. At this stage tenants usually either: give up their plot; move to a smaller one or arrange to have it worked. Some of the reasons why plots are not worked were reported on in the Spring Newsletter. If, after informal contact, the plot is still uncultivated then the 3 stage procedure as

laid out in the tenancy agreement is put into action, namely an initial warning letter, a final warning letter, termination of the tenancy.

Other Matters

Lakeside

We are very aware of the balance that needs to be kept between dividing plots and the parking of cars. We have identified two plots on the site which are unusable because of light blockage from boundary leylandii, as potential parking. The sites are located on the West Boundary of Lakeside and we are aware it is not ideal for all tenants.

Newland

For many years the site has been used as a public short cut between the Madley Brook footpath and Kingsfield Crescent often resulting in damage to plots. Having checked that there was NO public right of way it was agreed that locks should be fitted to both gates. Committee member Barrie Fenton attached coded locks to both gates with signs making it very clear that there was NOT a public footpath through it.

PLEASE snap the lock onto the gate as we have already had to buy a replacement for one that was taken. Please DO NOT give out the code to anyone else unless you want the site to be used as a shortcut again. For the time being the code will be changed annually. Barrie tells me that public traffic through the site has been cut by 90%.

Termination of Tenancy Agreements

As previously mentioned, one of the committee's responsibilities is checking the state of all the plots so they don't get to an unmanageable stage and weeds set seeds. We have to follow up complaints made by tenants about surrounding plots and answer to the spot checks carried out by WTC. We also have 58 people on the waiting list wanting to know why they can't get onto apparently abandoned plots.

Whoever runs WAA, be it a future committee or WTC they will still face the issue of having to terminate the tenancies of tenants who breach the conditions of their tenancy agreement. The committee follows the procedure for poorly cultivated plots, as described in Item 14 of the agreement and we try to carry out this process in a friendly and supportive way. However, at the end of the day if a plot remains uncultivated the tenancy has to be ended.

I cannot end my report without mentioning an event that you may have been made aware of, concerning a tenant and the committee.

In this particular case the association's procedure was followed - the matter was resolved between the committee and the tenant.

Third parties, however well intentioned, can undermine and confuse the work of the committee and I would reiterate that all communications should be solely between the tenant and the committee.

Because the Association has received so much negative publicity regarding this issue, if the Association so wish I will stand down as chairwoman.

Mary Killick, Chairwoman

Having heard the Chairwoman's report Tenants raised the following points:

- Concern was expressed about holes beneath and either side of the main gate at Lakeside. These would need to be dealt with when fencing has been completed otherwise rabbits will have access from fields opposite. ***It was agreed that this point will be taken up by the new committee***
- Lakeside Plot 75 appears to have been uncultivated for past two years? ***This will be investigated by new committee as part of the ongoing plot inspections***
- The tenant of LS51 was concerned about proposal to use Plots 26 and 1 as additional car parking. What effect was this going to have on access to her plot?
- Hailey Road footpath: is there any way of stopping it being used as a thoroughfare, eg by locking the gates? Response: ***As the perimeter fence is not high enough to stop access and the eastern boundary wall has been breached by people from Eastfield Road, it would not be possible without Witney Town Council completely re-fencing the boundary, and this is very unlikely to happen.***
- Why was the event between committee and tenant which generated the adverse publicity not taken to the disputes panel? ***The secretary explained that the matter had been resolved quickly so there was no need to refer to the disputes panel. Unfortunately the interference of a third party had generated the adverse publicity.***
- The tenants supported the work of the Chairwoman and did not wish her to stand down.

4 Treasurer's Report

The accounts for 2014 have been audited. The auditor was happy with the presentation of the accounts but has requested a receipt from Cogges Manor Farm for the hire of the barn for the AGM.
Bank Balance at beginning of February 2015 £6,000.

A discussion took place regarding whether the 50% discount on rent which is available to those in receipt of State Pension or benefits should be continued. It was agreed that the discount should continue.

5 Election of Officers and Committee

Maggie Perrin (Secretary) and Peter Killick (Committee) were not standing for re-election.

The following Officers and Committee were agreed:

Chair:	Mary Killick	Lakeside		
Secretary:	-			
Treasurer:	Margaret Eadle	Hailey Road		
Committee:	Barrie Fenton	Newland	David Barber	Lakeside
	Lynne Berry	Newland	Timothy Brown	Lakeside
	Val Fisher	Newland	Geoff Branner	Hailey Road
	Dave Mace	Lakeside	Claire Johnson	Hailey Road

6 Election of Disputes Panel:

The following tenants were re-elected.

Tim Partridge	Lakeside
Janet Garrison	Lakeside
Judith Legood	Newland
Colin Newitt	Hailey Road

7 Rents 2016 -2017

The secretary apologised for forgetting to increase the rents for 2015 in line with the agreement made at the last AGM. This should have seen the rents at Hailey Road and Newland raised by £3 for a large plot and £2 for a small plot.

The rents for the year commencing 2016 will be:

Standard Plot

- Lakeside £36
- Hailey Road and Newland £24

Small Plot

- Lakeside £24
- Hailey Road and Newland £16

8 Talk on Pollinators by Newland Tenant and Committee member Lynne Berry

Lynne gave a very interesting and informative talk on the wide variety of pollinators, - bees, insects, wasps, butterflies, etc. which we should be encouraging onto our plots. She also talked about habitats that can encourage pollinators.

9 Presentation of Best Kept Allotment Cup

The following tenants were successful in the competition for the best kept plots 2014-5

Lakeside:	1 st Mr L Simons Plot 74	2 nd Mr & Mrs Wilsdon Plot 12
Hailey Road:	1 st Mr R Smith Plot 39	2 nd Mr L Curwood Plot 36
Newland:	1 st Mr A Howells Plot 6	2 nd Mrs P and Mr B Hill Plot 17b

Overall Winner of the Challenge Cup for the Best Kept Allotment : Mr A Howells Plot 6 Newland

8 Any other business

- 8.1 Lyn Jones LS asked if it would be possible to keep bee hives on the sites. Geoff responded that because of health and safety issues around the possibility of tenants who might be allergic to stings, it was probably not a good idea.

- 8.2 Mr Hunt NL asked if it was possible to keep chickens on one's plot. Committee to look at lease documents to see if this is allowed.
- 8.3 Richard Mackenzie NL has set up a Facebook group for Newland Tenants. Use of Facebook and other activities such as plant swaps and shares to be discussed by new committee.
- 8.4 On behalf of the association Barrie Fenton thanked the retiring secretary for her work over the past 5 years and she was presented with flowers and gifts. Maggie thanked the Association and said that although she had very much enjoyed her role as secretary she was now looking forward to retirement.