

WITNEY ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

Draft Minutes of the Annual General Meeting

Meeting Date: Sunday, 16th March 2025

Time: 2:30 p.m.

Location: The Corn Exchange, Market Square, Witney, OX28 6AB

Attendance:

49 allotment tenants,

Also Present: Cllrs Ruth Smith Leader of the Council & Rachel Crouch Chair of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotment Committee and nominated Allotment Rep and Sharon Groth Town Clerk/CEO Witney Town Council

Councillor Ruth Smith welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced herself, Councillor Rachel Crouch (the Council's appointed representative for allotments), and Sharon Groth (Town Clerk and CEO of Witney Town Council). Cllr Smith handed over to the Town Clerk.

The Town Clerk read a statement on behalf of Witney Town Council, emphasising that the devolved management structure in place since 2010 continues to be the most advantageous approach for the association and its tenants. The key benefit highlighted was that rental income remains under WAA control, allowing for direct reinvestment into site improvements without Town Council bureaucracy.

The statement clarified that while the Town Council respects the WAA's autonomy in determining its internal structure, any significant organisational changes would need to follow proper procedural requirements with transparent voting. The Council expressed hope that the AGM would mark a turning point in restoring working relationships and refocusing energy on allotment gardening, reaffirming their commitment to supporting the WAA through annual inspections and continued investment in site improvements.

1. Appointment of Chair pro tem

Cllr Smith Leader of Witney Town Council agreed to chair the AGM.

2. Appointment of Secretary pro tem

Sharon Groth, Town Clerk/CEO of Witney Town Council, agreed to act as Secretary and take the minutes for the meeting.

3. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Peter Lismer, Martin Rowland, and Julie Charlesworth (Hailey Road).

4. Approval of the minutes of the AGM held on 3 April 2023

The minutes of the AGM held on 03.04.2023 were approved.

5. Matters arising

Windrush Place rents. See item 12

6. Approval of the minutes of the General Meeting held on 16 September 2024

Minutes not posted.

7. Matters arising

None.

8. Chairman's Report for the period since the last AGM

No chair report was presented as a consequence of the constitutional difficulties of the previous year.

9. Treasurer's Report for 2023 and adoption of the audited accounts

In the absence of the acting Treasurer, the Treasurer's report and accounts were circulated. There was discussion about whether the accounts had been properly audited, as the accountant's report was unclear on this point, despite the reviewing of the accounts by an allotment plot holder.

It was clarified that an Honorary Auditor doesn't need to be a qualified accountant but should review the records to ensure they are true and valid.

Agreed unanimously. The accounts were provisionally accepted pending a review of the previous records by the new auditor.

10. Changes to the Constitution adopted in 2012

The Chair introduced the proposal to adopt changes to the rules in the Constitution as approved at the meeting held on 16 September 2024, as shown in the circulated documents:

- Draft-WAA-Constitution-and-Rules-2024.pdf
- Draft-WAA-Constitution-and-Rules-2024-changes-made.pdf

Discussion Points:

The Chair noted this was a pivotal moment for the organisation, providing autonomy to develop its own structure while recognising that WTC retained the ownership and landlord responsibilities for the allotments.

It was explained that following research into similar-sized allotment associations across the country, it is not unusual for an organisation of WAA's size to have two committees.

The historical context was explained.

- A change to the WAA structure was first proposed at the March meeting of the WAA management committee as a solution to the difficulties of finding people to stand for committee positions following the anticipated resignation of the existing officers.
- The WTC supported the right of the WAA to alter its internal structure, but stipulated this had to be in a single WAA.

- In July, the Management committee approved a proposal to increase the nature and number of officers on the committee to facilitate the creation of 2 site Committees
- The membership approved the change at a special general meeting in September, to be formally accepted at an AGM when an amended constitution had been produced
- This AGM represents the first opportunity for the full membership to vote on that constitution, requiring a two-thirds majority for approval.

Structure Clarification:

A question was raised about the structure. It was explained that there would be:

- One overarching committee comprising 5 people: 2 co-chairs, 2 co-secretaries, and 1 treasurer
- Two site committees: one for Lakeside and one for the combined sites of Newland, Hailey Road, and Windrush Place

The overarching committee would meet a few times per year to discuss strategic and constitutional matters, while the site committees would handle the day-to-day operations of their respective sites.

Points of Discussion :

- Whether the motion should be presented without an indication that there were people willing to stand for election for the posts of co-chair and co-secretary. *It was agreed to continue without a response to this.*
- How far the current proposal was consistent with the decision taken at the special general meeting in September, for which the minutes had not been posted
- What impact the current proposal would have on the decision of the meeting held on Saturday 8th March involving members from Newland, Windrush Place, and Hailey Road sites to propose leaving the WAA. *It was stated that the two were separate processes, and the decision as to whether 2 leases were given remained with the WTC.*
- Whether the meeting on 8th was open to all members of the WAA and whether Lakeside members were excluded. *The Lakeside rep explained he had been invited, but without 2 weeks notice and only to observe. No consensus was reached on this.*
- The position of the WTC with regards to the legitimacy of the meeting to approve a break up of the current Association. *Rachel Crouch, chair of the Halls, Cemeteries and Allotment Committee, clarified that she had asked for the meeting to **gauge opinion** on forming a three-site association, stating that they couldn't "just disappear and form your own association without all plot holders."*
- The advantages of a single WAA. *The position in which Lakeside currently accounts for 47% of the association's income but had received only 9% of site expenditure in the current year and 16% in the prior year, showed the flexibility a single Association gave in managing the financial needs of individual sites. It also strengthened the Association in any discussion with the WTC over matters of the lease.*

Financial Considerations:

There was discussion about the treasurer position. A query was raised about why there wasn't a co-treasurer arrangement similar to the co-chair and co-secretary positions. Some members expressed support for having two treasurers for greater financial oversight, while others preferred a single, accountable treasurer for the overall WAA, with site committees managing their allocated budgets and being able to have a co-opted Treasurer.

A proposed amendment for three treasurers (one overarching and one for each site committee) was not supported.

Vote:

A secret ballot was held. Members were asked to vote "Yes" for the co-chairs model (adopting the new constitution) or "No" for maintaining the status quo. A three-quarters majority was required for the motion to be carried.

Results:

- Total votes: 49
- No: 4
- Yes: 45

The draft constitution was therefore adopted.

11. Election of Officers, Committee Members and other appointments

Following the adoption of the constitutional changes, elections were held for the new positions:

- Co-Chair** (Hailey Road, Newland, and Windrush Place): Richard Bourget (26 votes)
- Co-Chair** (Lakeside): John Cooper (21 votes)
- Co-Secretary** (Hailey Road, Newland, and Windrush Place): Diane Newsham (25 votes)
- Co-Secretary** (Lakeside): David Mankelow (21 votes)
- Treasurer**: Nichola Pease (31 votes)
- Waiting List Co-ordinator**: Position not filled
- Committee Members** (Hailey Road, Newland, and Windrush Place): Brian (7 votes), Rosie (7 votes), Barry (9 votes)
- Committee Members** (Lakeside): Glenis, Deborah, Chris, Kevin (22 votes)
- Honorary Auditor**: Jan Taylor (24 votes) defeated Peter Lismer (15 votes)
- Disputes Panel**: Mary Killick (LS), Judith Legard (NL), Ingrid Maxa (LS), Martin Rowland (LS), Sarah (LS), Harvey Leach (NL), Colin Newin (HR), Jacky Bone (WP)

It was noted that Steve Stokes would serve as the Windrush Place site warden.

12. Allotment Rents for 2026-27

The meeting discussed proposed rent increases for 2026-27. Barry Jessel explained that due to his resignation before the 2024 AGM, previously approved rent increases for Windrush Place had not been implemented, despite it being approved at the 2023 AGM.

After discussion, it was agreed that Windrush Place would pay the new approved rates from April 1st, 2025.

For the 2026-27 period, despite the healthy financial balance, small increases were proposed to account for rising costs, particularly water rates. There was discussion about whether concessionary rates should remain the same, with a proposal that standard rates increase but concessionary rates remain unchanged.

After discussion about percentages, a 10% increase (rounded up) was proposed:

- Hailey Road: increase of £3 for full plots (to £27.00)
- Lakeside and Windrush Place: increase of £4 for full plots (to £40.00)

This was approved with 31 votes in favour.

The full revised rates were agreed as follows:

Site	Standard 2026-27		Concession 2026-27	
	Full Plot	Half Plot	Full Plot	Half Plot
Hailey Road	£27.00	£17.00	£19.00	£11.00
Newland	£27.00	£17.00	£19.00	£11.00
Lakeside	£40.00	£26.00	£31.00	£19.00
Windrush Place	£40.00	£26.00	£31.00	£19.00

13. Items and Motions submitted prior to the Meeting

a. Decision on the formation of two WAA associations

This matter was addressed and resolved under item 10 with the adoption of the new constitution.

b. Discussion on assets allocated to sites

As (a) above

c. Explanation about Windrush Place plot rents

This was addressed under item 12. Rents to rise as agreed in 2023.

d. Newland Allotment site fencing issue

The issue of inadequate fencing on the Kingsfield Crescent side of the Newland Allotment was discussed. It was reported that Angus (from the Town Council) had visited the site 3-4 weeks ago but no updates had been received. The Town Clerk agreed to follow up on this matter.

e. Waiting list update

It was reported that there were 228 people on the waiting list and a few vacant plots.

f. Flooding at Lakeside Allotments and impact on rents

A Lakeside Allotments tenant submitted an agenda item proposing that plots affected by flooding be exempt from rent until the issue is resolved.

It was reported that flooding affects approximately 25 plots at Lakeside, with water levels sometimes exceeding wellington boot height, particularly in September. It was explained that the issue involves Emma's Dyke and Colwell Brook backfilling, with the ditch being critical. It was suggested that the access road was in council ownership.

It was noted that a 2008 report by OCC, EA, and WTC had identified issues, but there was "no joined-up thinking" regarding hydrology in the area. The situation has worsened in the last two years due to high groundwater levels, water dispersed from Thames Water, and ongoing development including a hotel with no maintenance of the ditch. Cllrs Smith, Crouch and the Town Clerk agreed to take this back to the Council's Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee for further research and discussion.

14. Any other business

A vote of thanks was proposed for the chair for bringing some semblance of order in her chairing of the meeting.

Thanks were also extended to all volunteers.

The meeting closed at 4.40pm