

WINDSOR ALLOTMENTS AND HOME GARDENS ASSOCIATION LTD

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

HELD ON FRIDAY 9th JANUARY 2015 7.45PM

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from: Michael and Raewyn Porteous, Frank Tarrant, Anne Montminy, Frank Hovell, Jenny and Roger Stocks, Dave Morris, Steve Clark, Steve Gray and Andrew Melville

34 members attended

2. Minutes of the previous AGM held on 10th January 2014 and matters arising.

The minutes were accepted unanimously and there were no matters arising.

3. Committee's Report presented by Fran Hartridge

Obituaries

R.M. Jones on Bolton Road, Mrs J Heffernan from Spital, Mrs Martha Pemberton from Maidenhead Road, Mrs B. Black and Mr Joe Rigg both from Fairground.

Joe Rigg, in addition to being an allotment gardener had been a committee member for 13 years. In view of his contribution to the work of the Association it was decided to send a donation to the Thames Valley Hospice in his memory.

Report

The Secretary reminded members of the appalling heavy rain which fell at the beginning of 2014 and which continued for several weeks. The serious flooding along the Thames was not the only area to suffer and the longstanding problem of flooding at the entrance to Fairground continued well into the year. As a result Cliff Partridge and Don Hartridge endeavoured almost every week day morning, from 7am onwards to pump away flood water at the entrance to Fairground. This was to ensure that hall users arriving on foot did not have to wade ankle deep through muddy water to access the hall. This vital work continued for several weeks and indeed every time there was any rainfall.

Finally after repeated requests for help from the Council, an engineer came to see for himself in November. Map searches and some exploratory digging discovered a blockage and the problem at long last would appear to be solved. The exploratory holes have to be filled after a new inspection chamber is in place.

At the AGM in 2014 members were asked for ideas for improvements. As a result the Committee arranged for the Hall and bar to be redecorated. This cost over £6,000 while the

outside lighting cost a further £3,500. New blinds for both hall and bar are on order including blackout blinds for the hall. Members present expressed their approval for these improvements.

A major source of expenditure was the much needed refurbishment of the trading shed at Maidenhead Road. Costs for this refurbishment have been kept down due to the involvement of members who spent time and energy helping with painting and decorating and erecting new shelving. The efforts were well worthwhile and thanks were expressed in particular to Alan Dommett, Ginger Blackmun and Richard and Bobby Baldwin and others for giving so generously of their time and energy to completing the task satisfactorily

The improvement has caused the Committee to think seriously how the trading shed at Fairground can be improved.

Show

The Secretary reported the unexpected resignation of Pamela Bailey in February last year, from both committee and the role of show secretary. Graham Ashley agreed to take over and despite the difficulties of lack of information and no experience in the role, with help from Cliff Partridge the event was organised.

The Secretary expressed the serious concern of the Committee, that despite its efforts and a reasonably successful afternoon, the Show itself was poorly supported.

To put the problem into context she quoted the following figures:

There are 690 members of WAHGA

The show is open to all members and the general public.

Only 63 people put in entries to the show. Of these, nearly half were committee members and their families. This would seem to demonstrate a very obvious lack of interest.

Possible reasons for the lack of entries:

The current age of allotment tenants shows a downward trend.

Lack of knowledge regarding the showing of produce may be a deterrent.

The Secretary reminded members that talks have been arranged in the past to address the issue of "How to Show" and "Growing for Showing" in addition to general talks on horticulture. However the audiences for all these events have been small and consisted primarily of committee members.

This was the reason for posing the question in the newsletter which accompanied the AGM notice, "Should the show continue to be held"?

Only two responses were received to this question. One came from a member of very long standing. This member expressed many criticisms of the committee in connection with the organisation of the show amongst other things. A trophy this particular member had donated to the Association, for a category she herself used to enter, was not awarded for the simple reason no one entered. Indeed 6 trophies were not awarded due to lack of entries.

The other member who responded stated lack of knowledge in addition to the daunting rules of the RHS being another reason for not entering produce in the show.

Presentation Evening

Despite the lack of show entries, the show and fete were judged a reasonable success. The presentation evening was held towards the end of September and invitations to all helpers at the show and fete in addition to the prize winners were sent and accepted. As a change to a simple prize giving ceremony followed by refreshments, two quizzes were held on horticultural themes. It was a very successful evening and thanks are due to Anne Montminy for organising the quiz and to others who contributed to the refreshments.

Membership

Once again Don and Lesley embarked on rent collections in October. Their job is made more difficult as it is often at this point that they are made aware of some tenants' decisions to give up, leaving allotment plots in an overgrown state. Other difficulties are incurred when it becomes apparent that a tenant has moved without informing Lesley. There has also been the necessity to send out renewal reminders both by email and finally in writing often then with notices to quit. Last year the membership was 690. To date the membership consists of 596 with 80 home gardeners who have yet to renew.

Outings

Due to lack of interest, the planned outing did not take place

Thames Valley Hospice

The Committee represented the Association again this year in both quiz evenings held by the Datchet Fund raising group. We maintained our record in not finishing lower than third overall.

The Association received a letter from the secretary of the Thames Valley hospice thanking us for our continuing support. Collection jars are placed in both trading sheds and members are asked to make a small contribution to this fund whenever they take advantage of surplus plants left for that purpose in the sheds. Contributions are also invited for any other item which is donated and available to members.

RHS

The Secretary reminded members of the Association's affiliation to the RHS. As a result we receive a regular monthly magazine which is made available for members. Copies are placed in the Fairground trading shed.

Two reduced price entry tickets are also available for members to use at any of the 4 RHS gardens. Members can use these tickets as often as they would like. Tickets can be collected from the Secretary.

4. Treasurer's report presented by Graham Ashley on behalf of Gaynor Masters

Graham explained that in accordance with FCA regulations it was necessary to ask the membership to approve the forgoing of a full audit of the accounts. He explained to members that the Association could approve a limited scrutiny as our association is very small in financial terms. This decision had to be approved by the membership on an annual basis. Stephen Le Bras has overseen the accounts for many years and has charged a modest £250 for what is classified as a review whereas a full audit could cost in the region of £5000.

Graham then proposed forgoing a full audit.

It was seconded by David Hickman and the vote was unanimous in favour of the proposal. There were no abstentions.

Graham went on to outline the main details of the accounts which overall showed a surplus from the three profit centres. These are trading sheds, allotment rental and membership income, and hall and bar income.

Hall Letting income totalled	£29, 000
Rental and membership totalled	£16,394

Profits from the bar over the year had amounted to around £1,500
Profits from the two trading sheds had amounted to around £2,500

Operating Expenses over the year had remained similar to last year at £25,613

During the year there had been extra costs for:

- a) Refurbishment of Maidenhead Road Trading Shed
- b) Redecoration of Hall and Bar
- c) Exterior Security Lighting at the Hall
- d) Purchases included-sound system, machinery, tables

Extraordinary expenditure anticipated during 2015 will be new blinds for hall and bar.

At the end of the presentation of accounts Graham thanked Cliff in particular, for his hard work as lettings Officer. The Hall is in constant use, hence the level of income.

As there were no queries on the accounts Ginger Blackmun proposed the adoption of the year end accounts. Frances Hickman seconded the proposal and the voting was unanimous. There were no abstentions.

Elizabeth Gray thanked the committee for installing much improved exterior lighting and remarked on the pleasing redecoration. The Membership agreed with her remarks.

5. Allotment Secretary's report

The Allotment Secretary reported that there had been a continuing decline in allotment demand. He referred to an item in the national press in which a spokesman for the National Association of Allotments blamed the "Mary Berry effect". Rather than gardening he suggested that everyone is now cooking. Whatever the reason, the decline seems to be nationwide. As a result an earlier restriction, that of Windsor residency alone, has now been lifted and allotments are available to residents of other parts of the borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. The secretary then gave details of the situation on each site.

The Secretary thanked all those who have helped to keep each allotment site in good order.

He wished to mention Ginger Blackmun in particular as he has given many hours recovering plots on Maidenhead Road sites and elsewhere. He has also been heavily involved in the refurbishment of the Maidenhead Road trading shed and the day to day running of it.

He also referred to Steve Gray, a site co-supervisor on Fairground, who whilst recovering from a serious accident had spent much of his time helping the Allotment secretary. Steve Clark, his co-supervisor has also been heavily involved and between them they are making a huge difference. Others are fortunate enough to have Graham Gough, Joe Horan, John Drewett, Fred Fletcher and others who give time and effort to keeping their respective sites in good order. However as we are all getting older serious consideration has to be given to using outside contractors for some remedial work.

The Allotment secretary appealed for help from tenants in keeping him informed of plots which were becoming overgrown. There are 800 plots on 10 sites. It is impossible for him to be aware of the whole situation all the time. Any tenant aware of a disintegrating plot is asked to let site supervisors or him know so that steps can be taken to contain the situation.

Thefts and Vandalism.

These occur from time to time on all sites. Fairground has a particular problem of security due to the Hall.

Any tenant who has been unlucky enough to have had damage done or items of equipment stolen must inform the police him or herself. The police will not take the information from the Association but only from the victim of such events. If such actions were found to be from another allotment tenant and could be proved to be so, the Committee will take action against the perpetrator.

The Secretary referred to the question concerning the future of the Annual Show. The Committee does need views of the membership in order to come to a decision.

Chickens

The Secretary reminded the membership that chickens may be kept on allotment plots with the consent of the Association. They must be kept in accordance with the rules. Safe and secure compounds are essential if disasters like the recent event on Maidenhead Road are to be avoided.

The secretary went on to pay tribute to the members of the committee who were seeking re-election at the AGM. He became involved after having an allotment for a few years and wished to give something back. He praised the current committee as being the most hard working, honest and professional that he has been involved with and considered it a privilege to work with them. He referred to the financial results which bore testament to all their efforts. He acknowledged that there would always be some who were not satisfied and regretted the comments in a recent anonymous and malicious letter which had been sent to the local council.

The committee was accused of many things and had the writer been known, litigation would have been considered as a result of the libellous nature of the contents.

Negotiations in connection with the renewal of the lease for Gardeners hall are imminent and this unpleasant letter could have serious consequences for those negotiations.

On the other end of the scale we have been accused of failing to run beetle drives and other activities of a social nature. It is a sad fact that recent years show a trend in the membership of being interested only in gardening. However members present would be able to demonstrate their satisfaction or not when the item on the agenda, that of election for the committee was reached.

6. Purchasing Officer's Report

John Spence explained the role of the Purchasing Officer for the benefit of any new members present. He buys and prices non-perishable products for members to purchase from the two trading sheds. The trading sheds are run with a small group of volunteers in both. The trading shed on the site with the hall is called Fairground and the other is situated on the Maidenhead Road site.

He reported that at the last stocktake the Association carried 237 different items of stock. Popular items include fruit cage netting and black sheeting. Sinclair potting compost, new to the Association has also proved popular. Although quite expensive reports from members say that it is well worth the cost. Every effort is made to keep prices as low as possible without selling at a loss. Bagged farmyard manure has also proved to be popular.

Pesticides are proving to be less popular and legislation has removed effective chemicals. An organic insecticide is stocked, called SB Plant Invigorator and can be used regularly on vegetables.

Growmore sells well. A new addition in the Chempak range is Chempak for Onions.

We continue to stock Dobies seeds. New seeds have been delivered and will be available in the sheds soon. Members are welcome to ask for any non-stock variety to be obtained.

We need to bulk buy. Therefore we do not stock too many perishable items. Exceptions include seeds, seed potatoes, onion sets and autumn and spring bulbs.

Autumn 2014 sales of 3 types of garlic and hyacinths sold out. Daffodils and tulips did less well. Sales of seed potatoes have been falling. Potatoes from the Association are considerably cheaper than garden centres.

Fargro is one of the main suppliers used. Members can make bulk orders from them through us. A member recently ordered 50 bags of Sinclair compost and had it delivered to her home direct making use of our account. Fargro have a web shop fargroamenity.co.uk, which provides a route into their main website. The Association can obtain products cheaper than prices listed should you need items not stocked.

The Purchasing Officer would welcome suggestions for items not currently stocked. A recent popular request has been for an effective rat poison which appears to be expensive.

John completed his report by thanking the tireless volunteers who turn up every week to man the trading sheds.

7. Elections of Committee Members

Before the election was held the Secretary, Fran Hartridge made a statement to the members.

In accordance with the rules of the Association it is necessary for committee members who are willing to continue as committee members, to stand for re-election every three years.

Therefore the names of officers and other committee members who are so willing to stand were on the nomination papers before members.

The Secretary felt it necessary to report to members the contents of a malicious and highly critical anonymous letter which had been sent to the local council earlier in the year.

She referred to some of the criticisms of the current committee, which were libellous and had the author been known litigation would have been seriously considered.

Therefore if the membership present felt some of these criticisms mentioned, were valid it was an opportunity for the members to vote accordingly.

Committee members who were willing to stand were then identified and a new nominee, Jo Slattery, a tenant on Fairground was asked to stand up. A vote followed. David Eglise proposed a vote in favour of accepting the nominations of all those named and this was seconded by David Hickman.

The vote was taken. It was unanimous in favour of the proposal. There were no abstentions.

Frances Hickman thanked the committee on behalf of members for all their hard work.

8. A.O.B.

Hilary Hopper once again offered to organise a trip. It was agreed that the information be put on the website as soon as possible and notices should be put in the trading sheds and next newsletter. Kay Eglise also suggested possible outings around a theme. Responses would be asked for before any bookings would be made.

Lesley reminded members of the Burns Night dance planned for 23rd January. Tickets can be purchased from her or in the trading sheds. A modest £5 per head plus a food plate contribution is the cost for the evening.

Mike Lamprill thanked John Spence for his running of the shed.

Show and Fete.

David Hickman expressed the opinion that as the RHS rules for showing vegetables and flowers are very restrictive many people are daunted by the demands especially organic gardeners who refrain from using pesticides.

Better publicity was suggested, though Caroline had used local radio, newspapers, both local and national, notices and posters in various locations. What and where else could be used?

Sue Ashley remarked that Windsor Rose show had similar problems.

Date of show.

It had originally been bank holiday weekend. But was moved to a week earlier in the hope this would increase entry numbers.

Suggestions made included:

Relaxing rules for entry

Asking public to vote

Have different categories

Have fun classes

Difficulties are;

Relaxed rules will deter serious exhibitors

Judging by public could take far too long

Some form of criteria would still be needed for making judgements.

Serious entries need qualified judges and their diaries are filled a year in advance.

Ginger commented that even the produce stall had not been very well supported in 2014

Attractions for children

These used to include pony rides (now impossible to arrange)

Punch and Judy show (last time it cost £100 and only 3 children sat and watched.

Bouncy castle is far more popular.

Modern attractions like loom bands were provided but not overly successful.

After further discussion the President asked members to vote on the question of whether to continue to hold a show.

The majority of those present agreed to the proposal.

Harold the President thanked members for coming.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 9.13 pm.