

WINDSOR ALLOTMENTS AND HOME GARDENS ASSOCIATION LTD
MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
HELD ON FRIDAY 8th JANUARY 2016 AT 7.45 PM

1. **Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from: Miss Priscilla Ellis, Mrs Christine Cricket, Mrs Julia Bird, Mrs Fran Hartridge, Mr and Mrs E Morgan, Mr Steve Clark, Mr Alan Dommett, Ms Susan Capel, Mrs Dorothy Le-Cornu, Mr Cliff Partridge, Mrs Kay Eglise and Mr David Eglise

41 members attended.

2. **Minutes of the previous AGM held on 9th January 2015**

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

3. **Committee's Report presented by Caroline Jones on behalf of Fran Hartridge**

Obituaries

Mr Michael Morrisey, Mr Charlie Bell, Mr Suresh Chadha, Mr Rene Bongiovanni and Mr Bill Wardell all from Maidenhead Road site. Mr John Hughes from Bolton Road site, Stephanie Nicholls from Brook Street site and Sandra Adams on Fairground.

Mr John Filmer passed away in October. He had been a leading light in the Association for many years as a committee member, chairman and purchasing officer. He only retired from the Committee in 2011 due to ill health. In recognition of all that he had done for the Association the Committee agreed to make a donation of £50 to his preferred charity the Alzheimer's Society.

Report

The Secretary reported how the regular problem of flooding at the Fairground site had finally been solved in 2015. As a result Cliff Partridge and Don Hartridge no longer had the early morning task of pumping away flood water to allow hall users to reach the hall without wading through ankle deep water. The blockage and drainage ditch have been cleared but will now need to be checked regularly to make sure it does not happen again.

She asked allotment holders with plots close to the Bourne ditch to keep an eye on water levels during periods of heavy rain. The Environment Agency is now responsible for the Bourne Ditch and last year was apparently unaware of the existence of the bund built by the Council to be used as a reservoir in case of excessive water in the ditch.

Hall

The Hall continues to be used by many local groups and requires continual maintenance. Last year in addition to the regular maintenance work it was necessary to have major electrical safety checks in order to comply with the insurance policy. All electrical items were PAT inspected and a new consumer unit fitted. Other items such as heaters and kitchen equipment are regularly serviced. Later in the year blackout blinds were installed in the Hall and Bar Lounge. The Lettings Officer, Cliff Partridge, has to invest many hours of his time organising and overseeing this work

in addition to fixing minor damage and replacing items taken. He was thanked on behalf of the Association for his dedication in ensuring that the Hall is kept fit for use.

New car park lines were painted in late autumn but despite the clearly marked No Entry and No Exit markings drivers have been seen driving around the system the wrong way. Members were asked to remind anyone they see doing this of the correct route, to avoid accidents

Events

A "Burns Night" Supper was held in early 2015 and although numbers were not large those who attended thoroughly enjoyed the evening.

A quiz night was organised by Dave Morris and his wife in May. Those attending brought plates of food to share. The evening was a great success and raised £105 for Thames Valley Hospice. Dave, his wife and others who helped organise the event were thanked on behalf of the Association.

Graham Ashley gave a talk for Novice Gardeners in April and then arranged for Graham Talbot to talk on "Growing for the pot" in July. Unfortunately both talks were poorly attended.

The Secretary explained that lack of interest had been the reason for cancelling plans for an outing. Kay Eglise had made several enquiries but found that the cost of the transport would be around £15 a head with entry to the attraction on top of this. Based on previous experience the Committee considered there would not be enough interest to fill a coach with members so an outing was not arranged.

Show and Fete

Members were reminded that at the AGM last year and in the newsletter accompanying the AGM notice they had been asked "Should the annual show continue?" Very few members responded but at the AGM it was decided to continue with the event.

The show was held in early September to avoid peak holiday times. Classes were altered, fun classes included and entry was free. There was plenty of publicity, on local radio and in local papers but to no avail. Despite the Committee's efforts there was a conspicuous lack of interest.

There were over 700 members last year but the total number of entrants to the show was 53 and this included 17 committee members. Several trophies could not be awarded due to lack of entries, some categories had very few entries and the overall standard was not high.

At a wash up meeting the Committee therefore voted to discontinue the event due to continued lack of interest from the members.

The fete however had been a great success and many of those who attended said how much they enjoyed the afternoon. The Committee agreed to hold a fete as before and raise funds for charity. It will be held on 3rd September. Members were asked for ideas for an attraction in the Hall and for their support in helping to organise and run the event.

Membership

The Membership Secretary, Lesley Spence, reported that at the end of the Association's financial year in September there were 717 members compared to 680 in 2014. To date this year there are 583, 412 allotment holders and 171 home garden members. This compares with a total of 540 at the same time last year. This figure is expected to rise as many home gardeners renew their membership in the spring.

In October, Don and Lesley were very busy collecting rents and membership fees. They also spent a considerable amount of time sending emails and letters to remind those who had forgotten to pay. As usual some members had changed address and had not informed Lesley. Members are asked to let Lesley know if there is any change of address, telephone numbers or email address so that the Association's contact information is always up to date.

The Committee continued to represent the Association in the twice yearly Thames Valley Hospice Quiz held in Datchet. In the last quiz in October they unfortunately dropped to equal 4th place.

The Secretary reported that earlier in the year she received a letter from the treasurer at the Thames Valley Hospice, thanking the Association for donations made. She explained, for those that are not aware, that both trading sheds have collection jars and when any plants or tools are left for sale members are asked to make a donation to TVH.

The Association is an affiliated member of the RHS and receives the monthly magazine which is full of useful advice such as actions to be taken each month. Copies are available for members to read in the Fairground Trading Shed. In the January edition there is a table with a list of soft fruit varieties and when to harvest them. There is also a very good article on pruning roses for those who grow them.

In addition to the magazine the Association's membership includes two reduced price entry tickets which are available for members to use. They are valid for all four RHS gardens. The Secretary encouraged members to make use of them this year by contacting her when they are needed. RHS Wisley will have a butterfly exhibition in the glasshouse from 16th January. The glasshouse is fascinating and the butterflies are a wonderful sight. She suggested this would be good time to use the tickets for those who are not RHS members.

The Secretary finished by wishing all the members a successful gardening year and hoping that there is more of the right kind of weather at the right time.

4. Treasurer's report presented by Frank Tarrant on behalf of Gaynor Masters

Details omitted from web version

Questions

David Hickman asked if considering the size of the surplus had the Committee considered if there are any further major improvements possible. Frank said that currently no major work was planned. The President Harold Mitchell said that the Committee had looked at repairing the road

on Clewer Park but this was too expensive even with these funds. One quote was for £88,000. A discussion about the road followed. Allotment holders at Clewer Park described how the condition of the road makes it dangerous to transport manure and other materials to their plots. There are large potholes which make it almost impassable. The Site Supervisor Tom McCreath has been experimenting with 2 possible solutions. It was agreed that the Committee will keep this on their agenda and work with Tom to find an answer to the problem.

Andrew Melville asked if it would be possible to subsidise rents with the money. Don said that the rents had been held at the same level this year but it would not be possible to subsidise rents as the Council is putting pressure on the Association to increase rents to bring them in line with Maidenhead which are 25% higher.

Frank explained that the accounts are in an abbreviated form which is permitted by the FCA as the Association is small in financial terms. However the Association is required to ask members to approve the foregoing of a full audit of the accounts and to allow the abbreviated accounts. He said that as in previous years the accounts have been checked by Stephen Le Bras for £250.

Frank then proposed foregoing the full audit. The proposal was seconded by Ginger Blackmun. The vote was unanimous in favour.

5. Allotment Secretary's report

Don Hartridge reported that activity on the sites has continued at much the same rate as last year. There had been a higher level of terminations in 2015 in part due to the more skilled gardeners who were multi plot holders scaling down as the years take their toll. In other cases tenancies have regrettably been terminated through non-cultivation or failure to pay their rent. On the positive side there has been a regular stream of enquiries resulting in plots being let such that occupancy levels have remained fairly constant.

He thanked those members, not all committee members, who have given their time to help maintain the sites in reasonable condition. On those sites where there has been a team operating, it is clearly evident that they perform better than those without a guiding hand. This year Joe Horan was lost from the Municipal site and someone is needed to take over his role. On Fairground both Steve Clark and Steve Gray have had serious matters to deal with which has restricted the time they are able to give to allotment matters. Additional assistance on this site would be welcome.

During the year, the Association spent more than usual on outside contracts. There have been three drainage improvement schemes on Fairground. Two schemes successfully drained plots. The third scheme related to a long running problem at the entrance. As has been mentioned this has been resolved and to further improve the situation the whole area behind the trading shed has been cleared and grassed. Further exercises have been undertaken to reclaim areas which had gone wild on some sites together with tree pruning and removal where necessary. Although some of this was willingly performed by the team at Maidenhead Road, some has been contracted out.

Don reminded members that he had listed a number of clauses which appear in the tenancy rules and regulations in the last newsletter. He stressed that if all the tenants observe the rules the sites will benefit and site maintenance will be much easier. It has been a regular request that members inform Don or Lesley at the earliest opportunity if they intend to give up or indeed have problems which prevent them from working their plot. The majority of those given notice to quit this year, have made no contact with the Association despite receiving the invoice, a reminder and the termination notice. One member who did respond to the reminder was in transit to New Zealand, as the family had decided to return home. It would be so much easier if allotment holders such as these would inform the Association as soon as they make their decision so that it is possible to prevent the plot falling into a wild state.

On some sites the Association has equipment to help with maintenance of plots. Some of this equipment is available to be hired by members after suitable supervision has been given. Unfortunately significant expenditure has been necessary due to equipment being broken through improper use. On one or two sites the resident team prefer to undertake the work to avoid mishaps. Appropriate charges for their time will then be made.

Don said that the fate of the show had been mentioned and that he had regularly encouraged tenants to enter. However there had been a constantly falling entry and regrettably, this year, the standard was poor. So it must be accepted that members do not wish to support this function. Finally he congratulated the winners of the various categories in the Best Allotment Competition, particularly Ron Pediconi from Maidenhead Road who was overall winner.

6. Purchasing Officer's report

John Spence introduced himself and told members where the trading sheds are located. He described some of the stock the trading sheds hold including bird food and good value vegetable seeds from Dobies at 25% below list price. The seeds for 2016 have been delivered and will be in the trading sheds shortly. There is a list of the seeds on the website. Members will get an email message to let them know when stock arrives. He said that the seed potatoes are about half the price of other suppliers. He would appreciate receiving orders before the potatoes arrive. Items can be stocked if requested. There is a good quality peat based compost. There is also a small stock of pure peat. There are problems stocking items of finite life. Last year the gladiola bulbs did not sell well.

John concluded by thanking all the volunteers who help out at the trading sheds.

Frank Tarrant said that John does a great job of managing the web site and asked members to thank him for all his hard work.

7. Election of Committee Members

Three members have left the Committee. These are Jo Horan, Steve Gray and Graham Gough. The Committee would like to thank them for all that they have done for the Association.

Allan Boyce has recently joined the Committee and was to be confirmed as a committee member. This was proposed by Ginger Blackmun and seconded by Don Hartridge. Martin Pritchett had agreed to stand as a committee member. This was proposed by Frank Tarrant and seconded by David Hickman. A vote was taken in favour of accepting the nominations and was unanimous.

There were no volunteers at the meeting to take the third post.

8. Any other business

Elizabeth Grey asked about parking on Wood Close for Bolton Road allotment holders. She said they have to get there by 8am to guarantee a parking place. She thinks it may be due to hospital employees.

Don responded that he thought people working in the town were also parking there. There is a parking scheme with permits but it does not seem to help and the Council is unlikely to give permits to allotment holders. He suggested they could use the Bolton Road gate and come right up the road into the allotment site.

A new member at Clewer Park wanted to thank Tom Macreath and all the people at the trading shed for all their help and support.

The meeting finished at 8.45pm.