

Henley on Thames Allotments Association

Draft Minutes of AGM held at 19.00 on 3rd November

2014 at the Council Chambers, Henley Town Hall

1.0) Apologies: Paul Bradbury, Liz Cope, David Cook, Margot Dapper, Ralph Dapper, Mike Hails, Graham Jones, Sally McEwen.

2.0) Presentation of last year's minutes: Passed as correct.

3.0) Matters arising from the minutes: None.

4.0) Chairman's Report: The Chairman Andrew Hawkins thanked the 2 Site Managers (Doug Richards and Lewis Every) for all their hard work over the year, most of which goes unseen. He also thanked Marisa Francini (Assistant Secretary) and Becky Walker (Henley Town Council Committee Administrator) for their ongoing work, which helped the relationship between the Council and the Committee to run smoothly. He also gave special thanks to Dave McEwen (Treasurer) and Peter Herbert (Secretary) for their continued support and experience in helping to run the Committee. AH also thanked the group of plot holders on Watermans who have offered to help with site maintenance during the season.

4.1) AH raised 3 other points: i) AH felt that plot holders at both sites generally got on well and helped and respected each other. However, following 2 incidents at Greencroft between 2 elderly plot holders and another plot holder, which resulted in one of the elderly plot holders giving up their plot, he wanted to make it clear that, moving forward, rude and aggressive behaviour towards other plot holders was unacceptable would NOT be tolerated.

ii) AH felt that good fertile soil was the most important thing on a plot. The addition of manure or compost is very important: it improves the soil structure by allowing air to get into the soil, and also helps the soil to retain water. As the manure/compost is broken down by micro-organisms, nutrients are released to help plant growth. Annual weeds should not be composted: once the roots have been dislodged from the soil, they should be dug into the soil as they will increase the fertility for the following year.

iii) AH also wished to comment on the excessive use of water during the 2014 season. The last two dry summers have resulted in crops needing more watering than normal, but although water helps crops to grow, excessive watering can wash away organic material and can be counter-productive. The water supply at Watermans is metered and the cost of the water used this summer was over £800. This is not an acceptable situation both from a cost and environmental/water wastage perspective, and AH asked plot holders to be more respectful of this wastage next year. ■

5.0) Treasurer's Report and accounts: DM explained that the accounts prepared for the AGM are dated 31/8/14, and do not include the following: a Cricket Club donation of £500, a Management Fee payment from Henley Town Council of £550, and a new Small Works payment of £350 from HTC. So an extra £1,400 of income has been paid in since 31/8/14. Expenditure

that has been deducted since 31/8/14 includes honoraria for 2013 (£350 that was not paid out in error) and honoraria for 2014 (£350). So the accounts are always a snapshot in time, but they continue to be healthy.

5.1) DM talked about the main income drivers being social events. The strategy for social events is to break even and some social events (e.g. the Christmas Dinner) achieve this. However, the Hobbs Boat Trip always makes a healthy profit, courtesy of Hobbs kindly donating the boat free of charge, as does the Plant Sale and the Kings Seed Order Scheme. Unfortunately the Boat Trip numbers were down in 2014, resulting in a reduced profit, but the Seed Scheme profit was healthier due to a bigger retrospective discount being triggered due to increased sales.

5.2) DM updated the plot holders on the insurance cover that plot holders have under the RHS insurance scheme. Anyone carrying out work on behalf of the Allotments Association is covered for accidents under Employers Liability insurance. Public Liability covers any person on the site who injures themselves. However, property is not covered, be it a shed that is broken into or a car that is damaged by a stone from, say, use of a strimmer. Property insurance is ridiculously expensive and insurance companies have many regulations around what can and can't be claimed. Both sites have a copy of the Insurance Certificate on the notice boards for plot holders' information. DM hoped this was clear and asked that, if anyone had a query, to discuss this with him after the meeting or at a later date.

5.3) DM invited questions from the floor: a plot holder asked why there was a deposit for a greenhouse in the accounts. DM reported that deposits are now taken if a plot holder wishes to erect a greenhouse, following costs incurred following the dismantling of a dangerous greenhouse that belonged to an ex-plot holder. Another plot holder asked if the accounts had been audited and DM replied that they had been audited by Margot Dapper, a Greencroft plot holder who had agreed to audit the accounts last year. A further question was asked regarding the expenditure of £60 for a hanging basket: why had this been authorised and where had the hanging basket been hung? MF confirmed that this was a donation to the Henley in Bloom campaign, and the basket had been hung in the town centre, where there had been a gap.

6.0) Secretary's Report: Peter Herbert commented that most things in his report had already been discussed. The rents have been frozen for 2 years and a number of small amendments have been made to the Tenancy Agreement between plot holders and HTC to reflect current Council policy. MF mentioned the terrible flooding that had affected parts of Greencroft during the winter and the fantastic effort made by plot holders to recover their plots for the growing season. She also mentioned that there was currently no threat to allotment land under the Neighbourhood Plan Housing Strategy.

7.0) Election of Officers and Committee members: AH summarised the changes: Robin Rippon is standing down after 20 years on the Committee. Thanks were made for his outstanding contribution. Jon Lock has already

stood down from the Committee due to moving away from Henley during the year. Thanks were given to Jon for his contribution to the website. A number of new Committee members were proposed:

7.1) Dave Chilvers, Watermans, has agreed to become a Committee member and will be taking over the position of Treasurer from Dave McEwen during the coming year. Thanks were given to DM for his excellent work as Treasurer over the past 12 years. This was proposed by Dave McEwen and seconded by Pete Anderson.

7.2) Max Wall, Greencroft, has agreed to become a Committee member and will be responsible for the website. This was proposed by Andrew Hawkins and seconded by Marisa Francini.

7.3) Laura Dance, Watermans, has agreed to join the Committee. This was proposed by Dave McEwen and seconded by Doug Richards.

7.4) Sophie Pentacost, Watermans, has agreed to join the Committee. This was proposed by Andrew Hawkins and seconded by Doug Richards.

All these new appointments were put to the vote and agreed unanimously.

7.5) All other existing members were happy to stand for re-election. This was put to the vote and agreed unanimously.

7.6) AH confirmed that this would be the final year that he would serve as Chairman as he intends to retire from the Committee in October 2015.

8.0) Honoraria: The 5 most onerous Committee roles (Treasurer, Secretary, Assistant Secretary and 2 Site Managers) are usually awarded an honoraria of £70 each. A plot holder asked when this honoraria was last reviewed, and DM confirmed that the honoraria was increased from £50 to £70 in 2009. AH put the £70 honoraria payment to a vote and this was agreed unanimously.

9.0) Appointment of Auditor: Margot Dapper performed this role for 2014. DM explained that this role did not need someone with accounting experience: it just needed to be someone independent. Margot Dapper has offered to perform this role again for 2015: this was proposed by DM, seconded by MF and put to the members and voted unanimously.

10.0) Motion: NSALG (National Society of Allotments and Leisure Gardeners) Membership Fees:

"This AGM accepts the Committee's recommendation that the NSALG fee, currently £2.25 per plot holder, should be paid by individual plot holders and collected by the Town Council with the annual rent. This process to commence October 2015".

Proposed by Dave McEwen and seconded by Peter Herbert.

DM explained that, currently, the AA pays the NSALG £2.25 per plot holder and that this cost is due to rise over the next few years. The cost of membership in 2014 was £427.50 (190 plot holders @ £2.25 each). AA funds currently pay for this cost but, given the number of plot holders at both sites and the rising cost of membership, AA funds can no longer bear this cost in future. So, moving forward, the cost of membership will need

either to be passed onto plot holders or the AA will have to cease being a member of the NSALG.

10.1) The membership of this independent association is important because it provides valuable legal advice. The NSALG has given vital legal advice and support in the past (when Brakspear tried to halve the size of Greencroft allotments in order to accommodate the cricket club/conference centre at The Little Angel) and it is felt that the AA may need this support again in the future if it wished to fight any change of allotment strategy HTC might wish to implement.

Given that the Committee feel it is important to have this legal facility available when needed, the motion proposes to pass the cost of membership onto plot holders from 2015, with HTC collecting the fees on behalf of the AA with the rent.

10.2) DM reminded plot holders that the Seed Scheme was also part of the NSALG membership, and that the AA used them periodically for other advice, e.g. bee keeping, and Tenancy Agreements.

10.3) A question was asked why HTC should keep this money and MF clarified that all monies collected by HTC would be refunded to the AA: collection would be undertaken by HTC at the time of collecting the rent, purely for ease of administration.

10.4) Other questions were asked about the fairness of passing on the same cost of membership to plot holders, regardless of the size of their plots or number of plots they rented. DM explained that the NSALG charged per plot holder and not by size of plot, so the cost that would be passed on would have to be by plot holder.

10.5) The motion was put to the members and was passed unanimously.

11.0) Social Events: DM confirmed that the Social Events run by the AA did not seem to be as popular as in the past and asked plot holders for suggestions as to what other events could be held. He confirmed that the numbers for the Hobbs Boat Trip were significantly down on 2013 (43 people v 71 people in 2013), and asked why that might be. He mentioned a number of Social Events that used to take place but that had been discontinued due to lack of support. These included workshops for new plot holders (no attendees at the last 2 sessions), Gardeners' Question Time (attended by only 12 people, despite a guest speaker), coach trips to various national gardens (loss making other than Highgrove), BBQs at each site (6 people attended the last BBQ) and scarecrow/sunflower/pumpkin competitions (only a handful of entries when last run). The following comments were made:

11.1) The Boat Trip was not attractive to new plot holders as the trip lasted over 3 hours, which was a long time for a new plot holder to mix with strangers.

11.2) The Boat Trip quiz was far too difficult and put people off.

11.3) Events might be more successful if run by a separate sub-Committee, who would have more time to discuss what plot holders would support.

11.4) Communication of events could perhaps be improved: how were events communicated? MF replied that electronic and paper newsletters were sent quarterly, the website promoted future events and the notice boards always communicated future socials too.

11.5) Plot holders should be surveyed to find out what they wanted.

11.6) MF commented that the mix of plot holders had changed radically over the last 6-7 years, with far more families than retired people renting plots now. Families tended to have less free time to attend events, due to their children's commitments.

11.7) A drinks evening in a pub might be well attended.

11.8) An informal get-together on each site might also work.

11.9) New plot holders could be given the name of an experienced plot holder to "buddy" with.

The Committee agreed to discuss all these ideas at their next meeting and continue to ask plot holders for their suggestions.

12.0) AOB:

12.1) The security situation at Watermans was discussed at length. There has not been a working lock on the main gate for over 12 months and many Watermans plot holders felt this was unacceptable, as it made plot holders feel insecure. DR explained that all the previous combination locks had broken within a matter of months, as they were in constant use and therefore broke easily. He also received continual phone calls from plot holders when the locks were working, asking to be reminded what the combination lock number was as they had forgotten it.

Other comments were made as follows:

- Why not run a padlock system with keys?
- The gate is constantly left open at night, why is this?
- The site has had no vandalism in the past 12 months so how important is a lock in reality?
- Greencroft does not have any kind of gate or lock, and plot holders there feel safe.
- Vegetables have been stolen at Watermans this season, which made plot holders feel violated and unsafe.
- Should the pedestrian gate have a lock too?
- What had happened to the sign at the main gate reminding plot holders to close the gate if they were the last to leave the site?

The Committee agreed to discuss all these issues at their next meeting and look into providing a lock for the main gate. A key system would be difficult to manage, but would be considered.

12.2) Plot holders feel that unkempt plots at Watermans are not dealt with quickly enough and were taking too long to re-rent. Regular checks should be instigated and overgrown plots dealt with more aggressively. Plot holders who grow produce on just a small patch of their plot should be given notice, as they are breaking the Tenancy Agreement rules. A much stronger ethic of "use it or lose it" should be instigated. AH suggested that perhaps some of the plot holders who feel strongly about this could help monitor which plots were overgrown and report back to the Site Manager.

12.3) Plot holders disagreed with the strategy that sheds could only be sited around the perimeter of the sites. They felt that sheds should be allowed on individual plots, for more flexibility. AH confirmed that sheds on individual plots led to shading issues and made the sites look very untidy. They also

reduced the amount of land that could be used to grow produce, and led to problems when a plot holder vacated their plot but left their shed.

13.0) Presentation of Silverware: The names of the winners of Best Plot and Best Newcomer were read out. The awards had already been presented on September 24th 2014 in conjunction with the Henley in Bloom awards. The winners are as follows:

	Plot	Plot holder
Greencroft Best Allotment	53A & 54	Heidi Whitelock
Watermans Best Allotment	13	Mick Blackall
Greencroft Best Newcomer	28	Tracy White
Watermans Best Newcomer	28AS	Laura Dance

HiB Community Award:

Graham Jones, Greencroft plot 16, was awarded this community award for his contribution to the AA over many years and for the work undertaken on developing and maintaining the website.

14.0) Date of next meeting: The date of the next AGM will be October 2015: the exact date will be confirmed nearer the time.

The meeting closed at 20.45

The meeting was followed by a Presentation by Frances Hill, CEO of the Ways and Means Trust, a charity that runs Greenshoots Garden Centre, which is a horticultural therapy unit based at Peppard.

Francis Hill gave a short presentation about the Ways and Means charity, and the work undertaken at Greenshoots. Adults with learning, physical and mental issues are given the opportunity to learn about horticulture. Support is needed to help this charity, and this can take the form of physical help at Greenshoots, providing products to sell at the shop (e.g. books, gardening implements, etc), or buying produce from the shop. The shop is open Monday to Friday 8.30am to 4.45pm and sells many interesting items including produce, jams, chutneys and much more.

The May Plant Sale/Swap profits were split 3 ways in 2014, with Henley in Bloom and Greenshoots being the other 2 beneficiaries. This split would continue for 2015.

Thanks were given to Frances for an interesting and informative presentation.