

Henley on Thames Allotments Association
Draft Minutes of AGM held at 19.00 on 28th October 2013
at the Council Chambers, Henley Town Hall

1.0) Apologies: Watermans: Dorothy and David Eggleton, Robin Rippon.
Greencroft: Caroline Bleackley, Paul Bradbury, Mike Hails, Jon Lock, 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: Andrew Hawkins started the meeting by talking about the fantastic growing season that 2013 had produced. He then thanked all of the Committee for their hard work, most of which went unseen.

5.0) Treasurer's Report and accounts: Dave McEwen took the members through the accounts. The annual income and expenditure are almost in balance, making the funds just under £2,000. The key profit-making social events are the Hobbs Boat Trip, the Plant Sale, and the Seed Ordering Scheme. The Boat Trip income is significantly more than in 2011/12 due to better attendance. DM thanked J Hobbs for letting the AA hire the boat free of charge. The key expenditures for 2012/13 include the site insurance, honoraria, the NSALG membership, and various repairs at both sites. The site insurance was purchased from the RHS for 2013 rather than the NSALG, as the cost was significantly cheaper. The Christmas meal and the coach trip to Oxford University Botanical Gardens both lost money. This should not be the case moving forward, as the 2013 Christmas meal is priced to allow for refunds to be made to non-attendees, and the coach for any 2014 trip will not be booked until numbers are firmed up.

5.1) DM confirmed that Henley Town Council has recently reviewed the budget provided to the AA Committee to run the allotments on its behalf. This is the first review for a number of years. Following discussions, and the fact that a small profit will be made by HTC on 2015 rents, it has been agreed to increase the Management Fee from 2015 to £550, and also to provide a small works budget of £350. This will ensure that profits from social events are not used to fund essential allotment expenditure.

5.2) DM asked the plot holders to give their views on the current NSALG membership fees and whether or not they felt that this fee should be passed on to plot holders. HTC has agreed to collect this extra fee with the rent letter if required. Membership of NSALG is £2 per plot holder, and therefore the annual fee is now just under £400. The NSALG provides 2 main benefits: free legal advice and participation in the Kings Seed scheme. DM will look to see if another organisation can provide the same legal cover for a smaller fee, but meanwhile asked the members what they felt about paying this fee themselves. Several members commented on this proposal, and the general consensus was that an annual membership fee of £2 was completely reasonable for plot holders to pay, so long as it could be collected in conjunction with the allotment rents and therefore not cause extra administration for the Site Managers. One plot holder commented that any plot holder using the seed scheme would save significantly more than £2, and therefore this alone would justify passing the cost on to plot holders. DM agreed to research the legalities of mandatory implementation of this.

5.3) DM asked for suggestions as to what members wanted to spend the AA funds on. Communal manure was suggested: this has already been ordered for November 2013 (cost £80). Each plot holder is entitled to 4-5 wheelbarrows full, with any excess left after one month to be distributed on a first come first served basis. Skips were also discussed: some plot holders felt a skip would help keep the sites tidy. Andrew Hawkins explained that the cost of skips (£200 each minimum) made this suggestion too expensive to implement: however, each Site Manager might consider organising a general clean-up day, with any non-compostable rubbish being burnt. Metal items could be collected into one pile and a scrap merchant could remove this free of charge.

6.0) Secretary's Report: Peter Herbert went through his report. The rent for 2014/15 has been agreed with Henley Town Council, and although this is above current inflation rates (5-6%), it has been agreed that the rents will be frozen at these rates for 2015/16. He asked members what they felt about establishing a 'mentoring scheme', where experienced plot holders would be paired with new plot holders in their first year. This idea had been discussed at the last AA meeting, and was seen as a way of helping newcomers succeed and therefore want to keep their allotment for a second and third year. It would also be a way to pass on experience. Following a number of comments from members, it was agreed that this would be a good idea to trial.

6.1) A suggestion was made that experienced plot holders could also help with site maintenance: the job of Site Manager is very onerous and experienced plot holders could perhaps help further by having a section of the site to look after during the season. That way, weeds/overgrown paths could be more easily managed. It was agreed that helping the allotment community in this way was a good idea: Graham Jones and Pippa Hare asked to be involved.

7.0) Election of Officers and Committee members: All existing Committee members are happy to be re-elected. This was put to the vote and agreed unanimously.

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. AH put this to the members and this was approved unanimously.

9.0) Appointment of the Auditor: DM explained that David Burnside, the auditor of the AA accounts for some years, has retired and so a new auditor will need to be found. This role did not need someone with accounting experience: it just needed to be someone independent. Margot Dapper offered to perform this role for next year. This was put to the members and voted in unanimously.

10) Social Events: DM asked for ideas for new events. It was suggested that an open day could be organised at both sites: this might raise funds if an entrance fee is charged.

10.1) Another plot holder suggested that surplus vegetables could perhaps be sold in the Market Place, following the same format as the plant/seed sale/swap, but later on in the year.

10.2) Ideas for garden day trips were discussed: Hampton Court Flower Show (2nd week in July) and The Autumn Malvern Show (last week of September) were considered to be good ideas. The Malvern Show always has a good display of vegetables, but is further to travel to than Hampton Court.

11.0) AOB: Members asked if the grass cutting at Greencroft could be improved. AH felt that, primarily due to the hot weather, the grass cutting had not been a problem this season.

11.1) A plot holder at Greencroft mentioned that the Cricket Club toilets could often not be used as the key was missing. DM will follow this up with the Cricket Club.

11.2) AH discussed the Joint Henley and Harpsden Neighbourhood Plan, and the possibility of Watermans land being proposed as a housing site. The AA is against Watermans being considered as a housing site and is putting forward arguments at the appropriate meetings for why this should not be considered. Soil fertility is key, the allotments are a community facility for all ages and incomes, and Watermans is fully let. The Council has spent a considerable amount of money over the past years improving the site, and legally, an alternative site would need to be found should this site be put forward for housing. DM updated the members on the key dates for the HHNP meetings, so that interested plot holders could attend.

11.3) A plot holder asked if there were plans for poppies to be scattered at the allotments in support of the commemoration of the start of WW1. The Committee are aware that the British Legion has proposed this idea, but will wait to see what Henley Town Council has planned before deciding how to support this idea at the sites.

11.4) DM reminded plot holders that the seed scheme ordering deadline was November 1st: Margot Dapper is running the scheme again this year.

12.0) Presentation of Silverware: The names of the winners of Best Plot and Best Newcomer were read out and those able to attend were presented with a voucher and silverware. The awards had, for the first time, already been presented on October 9th in conjunction with the Henley in Bloom awards. Graham Jones and Anne Sanders had judged the plots this year, visiting both sites twice, once in June and once in July.

A new award was presented: the Henley in Bloom Community Award, given to a plot holder who has contributed over and above the call of duty. The winners are as follows:

	Plot	Plot holder
Greencroft Best Allotment	47 & 52A	Paul Gillbard
Watermans Best Allotment	11	Roger Goodall
Greencroft Best Newcomer	55A	Martin Bidlake-Corser
Watermans Best Newcomer	54A	Liz Fielding Smith

HiB Community Awards:

Watermans - Mick Blackall Plot 13
Greencroft - Graham Jones plot 16

13.0) Date of next meeting: the date of the next AGM will be October 2014: the exact date will be confirmed nearer the time.

The meeting ended at 20.35