

Vale Road Allotment Society

AGM

7.00pm

Sunday 29th January 2012
Front Bar, United Services Club

MINUTES

Attendees: David Pidgeon, John Gill, Cherie'lee Harlow, Colin Gurr, Mick Botting, Steve Myatt, Sarah Sedgley, Ann Atkinson, Del & Penny Strong, Dave Philpot, Kevin Laue, Mick Pratt, Lynn Packham, Fern Fuller, Doug & Maria Livett, Fatima Myatt, Cyril Williams, Sue Best, Stuart Meier, Richard Hackett, Jean Sedgley, Julie Hartlaund, Adrian Allen, Robin Harrison, Ron Topson, Steve Canagon, Tony Hardy, Val Botting, Andrzej Miotla, Mr V Ghugroo, Tanya Gardner, Gerry Larner, Martin and Nicki Parnell, Dave Bryant, Penny Davidson, Denis and Clara Nyman, John Swaisland, P Pistocchi, Roy Austin, Waiting list members in attendance – Jocelyn Keen, Max...

1. Welcome and apologies for absence.

Dave Pidgeon welcomed a good turnout of more than 50% of the membership at the 2012 AGM. He noted the attendance of some new members and some of those on the waiting list.

Apologies were received from the following:

Nick Bell
Brian Lisher
Anna and Dave Perkins
Trevor Grace
Nick Gosset
Andrew Downey
Sue Garrod
Bridget Ashplant
Wendy Swinton - Eagle
Tim Newnham
Pat Dempsey

2. Minutes of last meeting (30-01-11) and matters arising not on the agenda.

David confirmed that the committee were happy with last year's minutes as a correct record of the 2011 AGM and the meeting agreed to their adoption.

David confirmed that any matters arising would be covered in his chairman's report.

3. Chair's Report.

- a. David reported on a year of mixed weather leading both to two droughts and problems with slippery paths (see later discussion). The dry spring weather led to predictable issues with use of water. Other than the cost of water to the society (the treasurer noting, however, that costs were close to the previous year) there was disquiet at the amount of water wasted by a number of members due to poor watering practice.

David suggested a need for educating members and explaining the rationale behind the society's guidelines on watering best practice. Several members pointed out that there were a wide range of views as to what constitutes best practice. Tony Hardy has previously provided a range of hints & tips on water conservation.

Cherie Harlow suggested that all members should be encouraged to erect some form of water catcher to drain into their water butts. Cherie offered to help anyone with the design of something suitable.

Martin Parnell felt there was a need to actively support David's desire to educate the members as the likelihood was that those most in need of guidance would probably not be in attendance at the AGM. It was agreed that a reminder of the guidelines should be sent out to all members.

Action: Committee to issue guidelines

Robin Harrison suggested that it might be better to increase plot rental prices and allow unrestricted use of water. There was some support for this viewpoint but nothing was decided. It was agreed that the committee should look into this alternative and report back.

Action: Committee to review options

- b. David noted that it had been a difficult year for the committee with both treasurer and secretary resigning within the first three months. David thanked John Gill and Cherie Harlow for standing in as acting treasurer and secretary and doing such a good job. Graeme Mann also resigned in the autumn leaving only the chairman and treasurer as signatories to the Bank Account.

Action: Committee to appoint third signatory

- c. David noted an increase in thefts on previous years and a rare insurance claim for a broken windscreen which happily did not incur loss of our excess. David noted that a change of Insurance Company by the National Allotment Society had resulted in a doubling of our quoted premium. He reported that the committee had decided to stay with the previous company rather than go with the National Society and even succeeded in getting a slightly reduced premium.
- d. David reported that our society had been without a Voluntary Society Licence for some time but was able to report that he and John Gill had contacted the town Council and been able to gain a new licence which will run for five years from the start of the 2012 financial year with a guarantee of no greater than inflationary rises in the rent of £136. David noted that the Town Council was a good landlord and that rent was very reasonable in comparison with other parts of the country.
- e. Stuart Meier asked if there was a secured right of tenure at the end of the five year licence. It was agreed to look into this.

Action: David to research

- f. David informed the meeting that there was a possibility that the open (grass) space at the Vale Road end of the site was being considered for use as additional plots. This is being considered by the Council.
- g. David reported a high level of turnover of plots due to both increased pressure by the committee on un-worked plots and a tendency of some members to downsize to smaller plots. He reported that only one 10-Rod plot now remained in active use. This had resulted in a lot of extra administrative work by the committee whom David thanked for their efforts.
- h. David gave particular mention to Tom Newnham who had given up his plot at XMAS but continued to work the ground until two weeks before handing it over to the new owners.
- i. David also thanked all those who had helped clear the plot with asbestos for re-use, in particular Tony Hardy and his son who safely removed the asbestos sheets.
- j. David thanked Mick Botting for his tireless work in maintain the society's website. Mick made a plea for more use and additional contributions of any sort from members. David also thanks Mick for organising the children's treasure hunt at the annual picnic.
- k. The Chairman's report was adopted.

4. Treasurer's Report.

a. John Gill informed the meeting that very little documentation was handed over to him by the outgoing treasurer and he would not be able to answer many detailed questions on last year's finances.

b. John noted that both Insurance premiums and water bills had remained flat. It was unclear whether the water was on a domestic or agricultural tariff and what the difference in rate would be. John agreed to look into getting the best option and take appropriate action.

Action: John to research

c. Tony Hardy noted that several members were able to take on mower service & repairs (one of the big items under sundry expenses). John agreed to consider this if future repairs were needed.

Action: John to action if and when required

d. John noted that Tony Hardy's son removed the asbestos sheets at a big saving to the society.

e. Stuart Meier questioned the cost of £117.60 for repairing a tap. David and John felt that the expenditure for three hours work and parts was perfectly reasonable.

f. Martin Parnell queried the interest of 1p noted in the accounts but was assured that a better deal concerning interest had been looked into but was not available.

g. David noted that a formal audit of the accounts would not be sought but informal approval from the Town Council might be obtained.

h. Three possible expenditure items for 2012 were tabled for discussion (see below). These were toilet facilities, artificial strengthening of paths and locks on the gates.

i. The Treasurer's report was adopted.

5. Committee Membership

a. David offered his services for one more year as chairman but indicated his intention to step down next year, was thanked for his efforts and voted in unopposed once Tony Hardy, who had also been nominated, declined to stand.

b. John Gill was voted in unopposed as treasurer.

c. Cherie Harlow was voted in as secretary.

d. Martin Parnell stood as secretary but was voted onto the committee as a non-officer when Cherie was voted in.

e. Jagga (Mr V Ghugroo) was voted onto the committee with special responsibility for Health & Safety matters (see discussion below)

6. Committee Proposals

1) Toilet facilities

a) There was general support for some form of on-site toilet facilities and two types were discussed

b) Cherie Harlow proposed consideration of composting toilets, outlining two different types at different costs in the range £1,200 - £3,500 but suggested that these costs might be mitigated by grants if proposals under consideration (see below) for providing plots for disabled members were adopted.

c) Tony Hardy suggested that brick-built facilities might be cost-effective if members who were in the building trade were asked to provide material and labour.

- d) There was some discussion of providing separate male & female facilities. This was acknowledged to be an important issue for some members but no real discussion was entered into on this subject.

It was agreed that the costs of any proposal would be significant enough to warrant a full review and member consultation thorough an EGM or other form of communication. Cherie Harlow has meetings arranged to discuss the possibility of grants with the local council and agreed to put together some options at various cost levels for consideration by the committee.

Action: Cherie to submit options/costs to committee
Action: David to arrange member consultation

2) Disabled plots

The committee is considering providing a small number plots for disabled members. This could incidentally lead to the allocation of some grants which could be used to support the installation of toilet facilities.

Action: Committee to consider proposal

3) Paths

In addition to members being reminded of their duties to keep paths clear, well mown and a minimum of 24 inches wide, John Gill mentioned the possible purchase of reinforcing hexagonal sheets. Discussion was deferred from the treasurer's report but not picked up in A.O.B so John will need to bring it to the next committee meeting for further discussion.

Action: John to table at next committee meeting

4) Gate Locks

There was much debate about the need for locking the two entry gates in view of the increased level of thefts. Other than appeals to members to keep the gates closed as a deterrent, two proposals were considered. The first was to introduce combination locks and the second to install bolts with padlocks. Problems were envisaged with both options and, after much discussion, the meeting voted to retain the status quo for now and review the situation again in the future.

Cherie suggested the provision of shared shed(s) for expensive equipment and this was agreed to be passed to the committee for consideration.

Action: Cherie to table at next committee meeting

7. General notices.

The high bar will be restored to the upper gates in the next few weeks. It was removed to allow in tractors bringing manure. It can be removed on request. If members need entry for high vehicles they should contact David.

We will need volunteers again this year to clear up the stream. There was a poor response last year.

Any ideas for social occasions will be welcome. Please contact a committee member.

8. Waiting lists and new members.

There were 37 plot changes in 2011. There are currently 13 people on the waiting list and they were invited to the AGM so that they can get to know people.

Newcomers will now get an introductory handbook on allotments. This is in response to the number of newcomers who have struggled this year.

9. Any Other Business

There was an open discussion on dangerous items such as corrugated iron in disrepair, water butts without lids or tipping over. This led to a wider discussion on Health & Safety and compliance with society rules which affect safety.

The society's rules are not available on the website.

Action: Mick to rectify

After much debate Jagga (See note above) was co-opted onto the committee with responsibility for Health and Safety matters. It was agreed that Jagga would carry out an informal Risk Assessment of the entire site and inform the committee of non-compliance by individual members with safety rules. This assessment would also need to cover communal areas.

Action: Jagga to carry out Risk Assessment

Tony Hardy offered to provide a list of dangerous items but it was agreed that a full site Risk Assessment was required.

Mick Botting pointed out that many of these issues (for instance corrugated iron in poor condition) had been outstanding for many years but David agreed that the society would be in a much better position, from an insurance viewpoint, if these safety issues were to be documented and action requested from members. Enforcement is a separate issue and will be discussed within committee.

Once Jagga has completed his report to the next committee meeting it will be the responsibility of the committee to contact all members whose plots constitute a safety risk and request that measures are taken to rectify the issues within a specific timeframe.

Action: David to decide on approach

Meeting was brought to a close after a call to the members for any other business to be raised was concluded.

Date for Next AGM To Be Confirmed.