

Vale Road Allotment Society

2013 AGM

7.00pm

Sunday 27th January 2013
Front Bar, United Services Club

MINUTES

Attendees: (48 plots) Ann Atkinson, Andrzej Miotla, Angelo Cannizarro, Brian Flynn, Brian Lisher, Clive & Jane Cowley, Cherie'lee Harlow, Colin Gurr, Cyril Williams, Dave & Ellie Harris, Dave Midmore, Dave Perkins, David Pidgeon, Denis & Clara Nyman, Dino Bolletta, Eddy Campbell-Jenner, Jagger Ghugroo, Jean Sedgley, Jim & Lianping Marks, Jill & John Partis, John Froude, John Gill, John Swaisland, John Redpath, Jude Fruin, Lynn Packham, Marie Innes, Martin and Nicky Parnell, Mick & Val Botting, Mick Pratt, Neil & Nat Powell, Nicola Celano, Nick Gosset, Pat Dempsey, Patrick Sarsfield, Penny Davidson, Pietro Pistocchi, Ray Short, Richard Hackett, Richard Ridgley, Rob Grinham, Roy Austin, Silvia Amerio, Steve & Fatima Myatt, Steve Atkinson, Stuart Meier, Sue Best, Tony Hardy,

Apologies: (16 plots) Adam Cox, Andrew Downey, Andrew Tunks, Barbara Kania, Carol Whiley & Kelvin Heron, Dave & Paula Bryant, Debbie & Joven Dellonson, Fiona O'Leary, Gerry Larner, Kevin & Donna Parker, Lynne Parkes, Martin Cawdry, Mick & Claire Jewell, Robin Harrison, Tim Newnham, Tony Griffiths,

Waiting list people in attendance: (3 plots) Dave Shahbazi, David Smith, Kate Mitchell & Ashley Virgo

1. Welcome and apologies for absence.

Dave Pidgeon welcomed the usual good turnout at the AGM with members representing 52 plots. There were 16 apologies for absence. He welcomed the attendance of some new members and 3 of those on the waiting list.

2. Acceptance of 2012 AGM Minutes and matters arising.

David confirmed that the committee were happy with last year's minutes as a correct record of the 2012 AGM (distributed by Cherie, and posted on the website and notice board; there were also copies available at the door). 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 with both drought conditions and unprecedented flooding leading problems with slippery paths (see later discussion).
- b. David noted that the difficult conditions had again resulted in a high turnover (28) of plots – the same number as last year.
- c. There was also a high turnover of committee membership with Sarah Sedgley, Cherie Harlow and Colin Gurr leaving mid-year for various reasons. David thanked Martin Parnell for stepping in as acting Secretary.
- d. The dry spring weather led to predictable issues with use of water and a hosepipe ban. Plot holders were reminded of last year's attempts to get lids put on water butts. This was neglected once the rain started but will be strongly encouraged again in 2013. John Gill, Tony Hardy and Cherie Harlow again offered to advise members on securing the lids on blue water butts.
- e. Individual members were notified of safety issues with their plots during the year but the majority of these are still outstanding (see later discussion).
- f. David reported on Robin Harrison's suggestion at the previous AGM that it might be better to increase plot rental prices and allow unrestricted use of water. This was reviewed by the committee who decided that, given the likelihood of more Water Authority restrictions in future years, water conservation best practice measures were a better approach.

- g. David informed the meeting that Stuart Meier's suggestion of getting a secured right of tenure at the end of our five year licence had been discussed with the Council but he was not able to get their agreement.
- h. David reported that there was the possibility that the open (grass) space at the Vale Road end of the site being used as additional plots had been raised with the Council but the ground was owned by a Housing Association and he had not been able to engender any interest. A member informed the meeting that the Council spent £16,000 a year on mowing the area. It was agreed that this might be a good point on which to base further discussion with the Council.
Action: New committee to reconsider
- i. David thanked all those who had attended the clear-up weekend; attendance was up on previous years but the same people generally volunteered as usual. A pre-defined programme of work was completed successfully on the Saturday and the Sunday was not required. This work may well be done throughout the year in future, rather than collecting all the jobs for one. Martin Parnell suggested that a register of volunteers be kept who could be asked to help with specific jobs when required.
Action: Martin to set up volunteer register
- j. David thanked Cherie and Sarah for organising our first show weekend. Prizes were awarded in various categories and a marquee was purchased. The event will be considered again for 2013.
Action: Committee to assign responsibility for organising
- k. David will have to be replaced by Cherie as a signatory on the VRAS bank account.
Action: John to arrange paperwork
- l. David thanked Denis Nyman for servicing the VRAS mower at an extremely good price.
- m. David reported on a miserable year in terms of site security. Acknowledging that this was a separate agenda item he wanted to make it clear that the committee had felt they had no option, during 2012, to go against the AGM vote for leaving the site open once the level of thefts and vandalism became intolerable. The committee went for a trial locking of the gates overnight and there was no opposition to this from members. Once this failed to stop the security problems, the locks were applied all day as well and instructions were finally given for all members to lock upon every entry and exit at either gate. The padlocks proved difficult to use, they were vandalised and finally stolen. New locks, with chains welded to the gates, were purchased but these were no easier to use and were also vandalised before being stolen. Due to concerns about members getting locked in overnight, the gates were finally left unlocked pending a decision at this AGM (see later discussion).
- n. The thefts included the theft of the £400 VRAS strimmer which was padlocked inside the large container. As a result, the container is now locked and anyone requiring access will need to purchase a key from the committee at a cost of £5. Members purchasing a key have been given instruction in the technique. The container is difficult to open and close and Angelo Cannizzaro reported problems with his key. The committee will help any members who are having problems.
- o. The shared shed, agreed at the previous AGM is in use and places in shared shed are still available. Any members who are interested should contact the Secretary.
- p. David reported that grants for toilets were tied to provision of plots for disabled/disadvantaged members (see later discussion).
- q. David closed his report with a plea for members to support the new committee during 2013.
- r. The Chairman's report was adopted.

4. Secretary's Report.

- a. Martin reported that the society's rules are finally on the website, as requested at the previous AGM, and that printed copies are available on request.
- b. A total of 28 plots changed hands in 2012, the same number as in 2011; there is a current waiting list of 4 (ready now) and 7 (waiting confirmation). When numbers drop to zero, the waiting list is opened up to County Council applicants.
- c. New plot holders are now getting introductory allotment handbooks as and when they are available. New members who have not received a book should contact the Secretary. These

books are not returnable when members leave. They are considered “free” as part of the £20 joining fee.

- d. New members are being assigned a committee “buddy” for their first growing season. It was proposed that this system be dropped as nobody was using it but Cherie reported regular contact with her assigned members so the system will continue for another year and be reviewed again in committee. **Action: Committee to review**
- a. Martin reminded members that new members are restricted to a maximum of 6 rods and that existing members wanting a second plot are affected by this rule. It was agreed, on a show of hands to agree that the 6 Rod maximum would be retained but subject to committee discretion and dependent on waiting list lengths. **Action: Martin to update rules**

5. Treasurer’s Report.

- a. John has confirmed, as requested at the previous AGM, that the water was on a domestic tariff which is the correct one.
- b. The marquee mentioned in the Chair’s report was purchased with a view to gaining rental income. The only take up so far failed as the marquee was too large for the venue but this is a potential revenue stream.
- c. John explained the accounts; annual income is approximately £1,500 and, supplemented by £20 joining fees took the income to £2,026. With outgoings of £1,178, the surplus of £848 for 2012 was similar to last year and the current Bank Balance is £2,410.
- d. As the balance of £2,410 is likely to continue growing at approximately £800 per annum, next year’s AGM might like to consider when and how the funds should be spent.
- e. The outgoings on padlocks and chains were £280.
- f. The Treasurer’s report was accepted.

6. 2013 Committee nominations and voting

- a. David Pidgeon announced his retirement as both Chair and committee member. John Gill gave a vote of thanks for David’s long years of service.
- b. David thanked the other retiring committee members, Steve Myatt and Mick Botting. David thanked Mick for agreeing to continue looking after the VRAS website.
- c. Cherie Harlow agreed to return to the committee, replacing as David as Chair.
- d. Martin and John agreed to stay on as Secretary and Treasurer respectively and Jagger will remain responsible for site safety.
- e. Tony Hardy, Colin Gurr, Ann Atkinson and Lynn Packham were nominated as new committee members.
- f. The new committee was voted in unopposed.
- g. Martin proposed that each 2013 committee member should have specific roles and responsibilities. In particular, responsibilities will be assigned for site safety, rules compliance and communal facilities. Once the roles are assigned, they will be posted on the website and site gates so that members know who to contact. **Action: Martin**

7. Site Safety report

- a. Jagger completed a Risk Assessment during the year and identified the following items requiring attention:
 - i. No First Aid box
 - ii. No notices about what to do in an emergency (which gate, etc)
 - iii. No drinking water
 - iv. Lids missing on very many water butts
 - v. Unsafe use of corrugated iron for compost heaps
 - vi. A can of petrol on one Plot
 - vii. Dangerous paths (sloping and/or narrow)

- viii. Bamboo canes at eye level with no protective bottle or cap
- b. As a follow-up to Jagger's general findings, Martin, Steve and Jagger compiled a list of plot-specific problems and a prioritised list of recommendations was passed to specific plot-holders by Cherie. If any of these items are outstanding, in 2013, warnings will be reissued.
 - i. Asbestos
 - ii. Corrugated Iron
 - iii. Leaning Water Butts
 - iv. Missing lids on Water Butts
 - v. Missing down pipe to Water Butts
 - vi. Sharp sticks
 - vii. Narrow paths
- c. Tony Hardy explained how plot holders could arrange for disposal of asbestos through Viador. The three individual members will be contacted. **Action: Committee**

8. Committee Proposals

- a. A number of plot-holders with untended plots were asked to leave during 2011 and 2012 but the enforcement of rules was sporadic and uneven. Martin proposed a number of alterations to VRAS rules to make enforcement both fairer and clearer. Copies were sent out prior to the meeting and were adopted unopposed. These are now posted on the website, with the changes highlighted.
- b. The meeting was canvassed over members' wishes concerning enforcement of the revised rules concerning plot control – weeds, paths, dangerous items, etc. The following was agreed:
 - i. Untended, unsafe or weed infested plots will result in verbal warnings
 - ii. If no improvement is made, a written warning will be issued
 - iii. If no improvement is obvious, after 4 weeks, a second written warning will be issued
 - iv. Following a second warning, if no improvement is obvious, the plot-holder will be asked to leave
 - v. Repeat offenders (year-on-year) will only get ONE written warning before eviction
 - vi. All the above is at the committee's discretion and, as per VRAS rules, due consideration will be made for illness, etc
 - vii. These guidelines provide the best protection for all members in the interests of good and safe conditions for all

9. Member proposals

- a. Rules banning 4x4 (Paul & Toni Lister)
It was agreed that ALL CARS should be banned from site in wet weather to stop the main paths getting ruined. The committee will look into putting ropes up under bad conditions to warn people off. **Action: Committee to organise**
- b. Enforcement of minimum path width rules (Paul & Toni Lister)
Minimum paths widths WILL be enforced in 2013. **Action: Committee to organise**
- c. Getting water to lower plots (Ann Atkinson)
Despite Tony Hardy proposing a relatively cut-price proposal for hiring a trencher to dig a trench to 0.5 metres, the meeting showed no inclination to approve funds for installing additional water point. Hosepipes will have to be used, as before, but are at risk of theft; this will be discussed at committee to see if the hosepipe solution can be improved in any way. **Action: Committee**
- d. Every member to vote on security measures (Brian Lisher)
A postal vote, so that every member gets the chance to decide, was suggested in the event of an unclear resolution on padlocks and site security. In the event, there were 48 plots represented at the meeting and the vote was carried almost unanimously (see below). The committee will decide whether this is a sufficient majority of members to remove the need for further consultation and will decide how to communicate this to members who did not attend. **Action: Committee**
- e. Advanced notice of events such as spring clean (Lynne Parkes) The committee will give as much notice of events as possible so that members can plan diaries accordingly. **Action: Committee**

- f. Tony Hardy asked that members do not put metal, plastic and other rubbish items on the annual bonfire. Tony can dispose of such items if members care to arrange it with him.

10. Extraordinary item #1: Site security, locking of gates

- a. Last year's AGM voted to retain the status quo for now and review the situation again in the future but committee decided that the situation has deteriorated too much and undertook a locking up trial (see above). After much discussion, three options were considered.
 - i. No locks – site unprotected
 - ii. Padlocks with codes
 - iii. Padlocks with keys

The meeting voted almost unanimously (with one person against) for Option iii (padlocks with keys). Although it was recognised that there is still an exposure with lost keys, people cutting copies, etc, it is believed that this will prevent casual theft and vandalism from people taking short cuts through the site.

- b. Having agreed on padlocks with keys, the following rules were agreed
 - i. The same key to fit padlocks on both gates
 - ii. Locking up on every entry and exit
 - iii. VRAS funds will be used to provide everyone with a key
 - iv. Anyone requiring an additional key will pay a small charge
 - v. Anyone replacing a lost key will pay a small charge

Most importantly, all other entry points must be secured. This applies particularly the gate in the bottom corner. **Action: Committee**

- c. The police have asked that individual plot holders report every occurrence of theft or vandalism, rather than the committee coordinating reports. It is likely that this will get them to take it more seriously. The committee will also keep a register. All plot holders are asked to comply. Details will be posted on the container, the gates and the website. **Action: Martin**
- d. Jane Cowley kindly offered to help with distribution of keys. **Action: Committee to organise**

11. Extraordinary item #2: Provision of toilet facilities and/or plots for disabled

- a. The meeting was not prepared to allocate significant funds to providing the funds needed for full toilet facilities.
- b. Jean Sedgley. Brought a sample portable, folding toilet for viewing. It is thought that this would provide a very cheap solution, housed in a small shed. The committee will see if this can be done at reasonable cost and may well install one for a trial period if appropriate.

Action: Committee to decide on viability

12. Any Other Business

David proposed that that VRAS honorary life membership be awarded to Ron Topson who retired from his allotment this year after many years of service to VRAS. This was agreed unanimously.