Haslemere Allotments Association 7th AGM

7pm, 15 April 2021, Online via Zoom

Minutes

Attendees

Committee: Johan Ditmar (Chair), Rachel Walkowiak (Vice-Chair), Colin Hewson (Secretary), Ann Tierney (Treasurer), Ian Hayes, Orla Kelly, Sean Lewis, Caro Sanders

Stuart Alexander, Gillian Brown, Nigel Carn, Charles Day, Kay Dudman, William Dudman, Angela Fenelon, Dagmar Gauweiler, David Goodship, Harold Henry, Julie Perkins, Mike Reeves, Vinka Reeves, Letizia Tiley

Apologies: Tom Downer, Thom Stanbury

Introduction

The chair welcomed attendees and introduced the Committee. Ruth Dales stepped down since the last AGM and Sean Lewis has been co-opted on to the Committee.

Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were approved.

Chair's report

Since the Covid lockdown we have seen a surge in applications with the waiting list now standing at 70 compared with 26 a year ago. The person at the top of the waiting list applied in October 2019, whereas somebody applying now may have to wait 5-7 years for a plot.

Applications can now be made online with the information coming directly to HAA instead of having to be handwritten and then scanned and forwarded by Pathways. Applications may still be made by hand, but none has been received since the new system was introduced.

<u>Site maintenance</u>

John McArthur and Alan Raine were thanked for their help.

The Committee has ordered 3 skips during the year at a cost of £336 each. The most recent (on 10 April) saw new procedures introduced because of issues experienced previously, such as plot holders dumping materials by the side of the skip before opening, and poor stacking. The new procedures, which involved the use of volunteers, worked well.

Trees on communal plots were pruned by Bernd Gauweiler and Sean Lewis. A cherry tree on the main path was commercially pruned at a cost of £530, paid for by Pathways.

New trolleys have been ordered and are expected in May. The old trolleys have been repaired several times. Plot holders are asked again not to overload them or let children play with or in them.

New signs were installed, using a design created by plot holder Julie Perkins. The design incorporates the oldest apple tree on the site.

Plot inspections

Plot inspections were suspended by the Committee last year because of anticipated difficulties faced by plot holders having to shield because of the pandemic. In the event the site was very active. Inspections will resume in May.

We hold plot inspections because we are obliged to by the terms of our management agreement with Pathways and because it is only fair to the people on the waiting list. Among the things the plot inspection team looks for are nuisances to other plot holders such as seeding weeds, and trees and structures casting shade. Rubbish is also discouraged as this can be a financial burden on the Association – two years ago we had to spend c£1,000 clearing a plot.

Site security

When break-ins at the site began they were fairly innocent, then we began to see criminal damage and evidence of drug use. The police and Pathways were both called in and eventually a neighbour witnessed a break-in, the police were called, and five youths apprehended. We are unaware of any break-ins since.

Measures taken to improve security include installing a new alley gate behind some houses in Haslemere Avenue, installing a new gate at the Haslemere entrance, installing new railings along the boundary with the trading hut (which has itself suffered a break-in), replacing fencing along the boundary with Chalfont Avenue.

Community plots

Although completed we can't use the community greenhouse as intended because of Covid. However Vinka Reeves is using it to grow seedlings for the next plant sale on 8 May. Second-hand recipe and gardening books will also be sold.

No workdays have been held because of the pandemic but Committee members and a few volunteers have worked on 61B and erected a new shed and built a composting toilet, which should be finished soon (the latter has been part-funded externally). The rest of 61B will be given over to more try-out beds.

Treasurer's report

The Association's finances are very healthy, with a current balance of £10,652.

Previously the process by which we received our management fee from Pathways was obscure, but data and information flows are now much improved.

We have now moved to online banking, replacing our previously cumbersome paper systems.

There were no questions and the Treasurer's reports for both 2019 and 2020 were unanimously approved.

Constitution

The Committee had initiated a review the original HAA constitution, adopted in 2014. Some of the text in the original document no longer applies – for example the date from which rents are payable. It also misses a number of important provisions such as who can vote in elections and how the constitution can be amended.

The Committee agreed a draft in 2020 which was sent to plot holders before the anticipated AGM, and comments and suggestions were incorporated.

The Committee recommended the adoption of the new constitution to the meeting and it was unanimously approved.

Committee elections

No elections were held last year, though as noted Sean Lewis was co-opted. All Committee members made themselves available for re-election and no further nominations were received.

The Committee was unanimously re-elected.

AOB

<u>Dogs and paths</u>

Before the meeting one plot holder raised the issue of dogs not being on a lead and the maintenance of paths, specifically plots encroaching onto paths.

An email was sent to plot holders a fortnight ago reminding them to keep dogs under control. Plot holders should let the Committee know if there are still problems.

The tenancy agreement is insufficient as it specifies a minimum width of 45cm only. The Committee will discuss this with a view to updating the guidelines. Vinka Reeves suggested Pathways' operational manual had more information. The Chair said he would investigate.

Water

Water pressure seems to be down, and tanks are regularly left empty by plot holders after use.

Usage doubled in 2020 but the Committee suspects this is a Covid effect, with more plot holders spending more time on site and using more water.

Measures the Committee will look at include adding overflow tanks to increase storage capacity, and fitting tanks with flow valves which Ealing Council has been doing on some of its sites. There are potential maintenance issues – would flow valves be liable to break?

The Committee will also encourage the use of water butts. A subsidised bulk buy is a possibility. New sheds could be required to have guttering and a butt attached as part of the guidelines.

The water system is old and would be phenomenally expensive and disruptive to replace.

Harold Henry asked whether the water should be on the accounts? The Chair said that the bill is paid by Pathways and goes on their accounts.

Composting toilet

Caro Sanders said that although erected, it was felt that the toilet's floor and step require strengthening. Cleaning materials will be supplied. We will need volunteers, perhaps on a weekly rota, to check the toilet.

The Committee is hoping that community days might be resumed in June-July.

Children

Mike Reeves noted that there have been 59 new plot holders in the last five years, many of them young with children. There has been abuse of the communal trolleys -notices should be attached to them.

David Goodship said that a lot of children were playing near his plot.

The Chair responded that an email reminding plot holders about keeping children under control went out recently.

Nettles

Kay Dudman asked if plot holders could be encouraged to add nettles and water (10:1) ratio to the tub on the main path to make a natural fertiliser.

Gillian Brown asked that nettles not be cut from the main paths as it is not ladybird friendly.

Flowers

Vinka Reeves asked that plot holders be encouraged to plant some flowers on their beds to encourage bees.

Vote of thanks

Mike Reeves proposed a vote of thanks to the Committee.

End of meeting

The meeting concluded at 8.05pm.