Haslemere Allotments Association 9th AGM

4pm, 23 April 2023, held at the Northfields Community Centre

Minutes

Attendees

Committee: Johan Ditmar (Chair), Orla Kelly (Vice-Chair), Colin Hewson (Secretary), Stuart Alexander (Treasurer), Caro Sanders, Val Austin

Doreen Allen (65B), Gillian Brown (34B), Nigel Carn & Ann Tierney (58A), Debbie Coates (47A), Lisa Hammond (46A), Len Harding (23B), Harold Henry (16), Tyrone Hodges (46B), Tony Hurle (29A), Peter Knowles (54B), John McArthur (14A), Ali Mohammadi (5B), Jenny Nicholas (14B), Doug O'Connor (53A), Vinka Reeves (43), Thom Stanbury (67A), Letizia Tiley (50B), John Usher (64B)

Cornelia Perquin (Gardening Club)

Apologies were received from: Helen de Jiminez (28B), Tom Downer (40A), Ian Hayes (23A), Julie Perkins (33a), Seady van der Graaf (39A)

Introduction

The Chair welcomed attendees and introduced the Committee.

Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were approved

Chair's report

In the last year the number of plots increased by one – a full plot had been given up and been split into two. In the past year there have been nine new tenants – quite a low turnover – including two evictions for non-cultivation. The waiting list has been growing since lockdown, and now stands at 86. Those at the top of the list applied in July 2020 so have waited about three years, which is similar to 2018, but now people joining are likely to wait seven or eight years.

<u>Site maintenance</u>

Johan thanked John McArthur for looking after the paths, Ian Hayes for maintaining the trolleys, and Steve Embleton for work on the water tanks. The cost of skips for waste removal has gone up in price; and we have a plot holder who is able to help with ad hoc rubbish collection. We spent £3000 on the fence replacement, and are gradually increasing the water supply with more tanks.

Plot signs

When carrying out inspections or deliveries to a plot it is not easy to find some plots, hence the purchase of plot signs (applause greeted this announcement). Plot holder Michael Lyons will be installing them over the next few weeks. Looking at the signs, the top letter indicates the plot at the back, the bottom letter indicates the plot at the front.

Events

Thanks to those who helped with the plant sale, and this year's is confirmed for 13th May. The first summer barbecue was held in 2019, didn't take place during lockdown, but was held again in 2022. A coffee morning was held in September for Macmillan Cancer Care.

Communal plots

Orla Kelly said workdays were held on the first Saturday of each month, unless the weather was particularly bad or the king was getting crowned. As a self-managed Allotment Association, these keep our maintenance costs down but are also a good way of getting to know other plotholders and building ties in the community.

We are now coming to the end of a five year programme of construction, the last thing being the new shed on Plot 48A. The new shed is designed to be more for social use with tea making facilities and a gardening library. The final projects include the installation of water-butts on all the communal buildings and installation of paving and a pergola outside the new shed on 48 for the BBQ.

After this programme is finished, work days will be for maintenance of the communal plots and shared areas, as well as clearing up overrun plots (when someone gives up their plot and leaves it in a bad state), and for example, helping elderly plot holders on big jobs they can't do alone. How much gets done of course depends on turnout, but any other suggestions are welcome.

In 2022 we set up the Gardening Club – where the top applicants on the waiting list get to cultivate a small 'try-out' plot on plot 1 or 61 for a full year on a probationary basis before they can be awarded a half-plot. Sometimes half a plot can be a lot to take on, and in this way, with a try-out plot, a new member can see whether it works for their lifestyle and we can assess whether they are likely to cope. Because of the length of the waiting list this is quite important – If a plot is neglected even just for one year it can get massively overgrown and this is a way to weed out people who may not realise what level of commitment is required.

The family of Alan Raine (who died suddenly in 2021) have arranged for a lovely new bench to be installed in his memory on communal plot 48. Alan loved playing a part in the community here and was on the allotment maintenance team and is much missed.

Treasurer's Report

Stuart gave a big thank you to former treasurer Ann Tierney who had "taught me all I know"! In short, he said, we are in a sound financial position. Our external auditor had a couple of points, one being why our balance is rising? The answer is that we need a certain amount as we may have unexpected expenses along the way, for example we are about to spend a considerable amount of money on the signs. Also, we intend to hold a barbecue again at the cost of £500, and it was suggested that it would be good to ask at the AGM if there were any objections to it. The accounts, which are on the website, have been signed off.

John McArthur asked why the sinking fund was separate? The answer is that it is managed by Pathways, and it is difficult to ascertain how much they will allocate us each year.

Colin said part of the problem with Pathways is their record-keeping, which is extremely poor: we have to give them information to update their records. And it seems to take them longer each year to collect the money.

He reported that this autumn Pathways will introduce payment by direct debit, which in theory should mean we know earlier.

Harold Henry said payment by direct debit should be opposed, and John McArthur endorsed this, saying he had had false payment demands from them.

Johan said we would tell Pathways that we have concerns, and it was pointed out that people couldn't be forced to pay by direct debit.

Harold Henry questioned the cost of the barbecue, saying he doesn't go, and doesn't eat meat, and what about the gas consumption?

Stuart said it was a wonderful social event, which people spend time organising, it is not just for meat-eaters, and people do bring their own alcohol. It is a chance for people to meet other plot holders, and is free entry, it is fun, there was a face-painter last year, it is a community day and we don't have many of them. We set aside £500, so that is about £3 per plot holder.

Tony Hurle said it had been really helpful, as a new member, to get to meet people.

By a show of hands it was agreed by an overwhelming majority to fund the barbecue again.

The accounts were approved, with no objections.

Elections of officers and committee members

Asking for volunteers to join the Committee, Johan pointed out that a lot of the Committee had been on it a long time – Orla for six years, Caro for five, Colin for five – and Colin had decided not to stand again. There is a limit of five years, it is definitely Johan's last term – and it was important to transfer knowledge from old to new Committee members.

Asked about what being on the Committee entailed, Colin aid there was no hard and fast rule, but we have to have a Chair and a Treasurer. Committee responsibilities include plot lettings, plot inspections, helping organise events, plus ad hoc jobs for example being there for deliveries – Thames Water have just installed water meters, and dealing with Pathways.

Johan said the nuclear option would be that we have to tell Pathways that we can't do it anymore. Orla said that it was a lovely, positive Committee, and we have funds. Plot letting and the Gardening Club takes time. The Committee meets about every six weeks – previously it was in an upstairs room at the Harvester, but that ended, so recently we have been on Zoom, but are looking for another location.

Committee members can rejoin the committee after being off it for a year, but Johan said it was good to have new people.

Stuart said he was happy to continue in his role as treasurer

Colin said he was happy to be co-opted for a while we are looking for a new secretary. Letizia Tiley stood for election.

Val, Orla and Caro were happy to re-stand as committee members

Cornelia Perquin said she was a Gardening Club member, but could shadow committee members ahead of becoming a plot holder and then join the committee.

Vinka Reeves said she didn't mind sharing the secretary role, doing for example plot lettings but didn't want to be writing letters. She was nominated by Johan, seconded by Colin.

Lisa Hammond said she would be happy to share the role with Vinka.

Elected: Johan Ditmar (chair) Orla Kelly (vice Chair) Stuart Alexander (Treasurer) Vinka Reeves and Lisa Hammond (joint secretary), Caro Sanders, Val Austen, Letizia Tiley and Debbie Coates

John McArthur thanked the committee for their work.

Matters raised by plot holders

Gillian Brown said she still felt sad that nettles were being cut down, and asked what could be done about overflowing water from the tanks, when people left them running. JD said they had looked at solutions which didn't work. Doug O'Connor asked about the option of the water switching off automatically after a certain time, perhaps an industrial tap? He offered to look into this. Johan said that the council allotments had looked into using cattle troughs, but the feedback wasn't good, as they were very shallow. Plot holders were being encouraged to put up more water butts. Gillian queried about the connector pipe

It was also pointed out that the matter was even more important now that our water was being metered.

Vinka Reeves asked if there were any plans to sort the path widths/levels, so many were unsafe or people were encroaching on them with sheds etc. There should be a project over the next year to look at this.

Johan said that there probably wasn't the bandwidth on the committee to do this, but we could look to outsource it, and once done, look after it.

Johan said the only existing rule about paths was the 45cms width.

John McArthur said plot holders shouldn't encroach on the path and he endorsed the survey. Some paths were impossible/impassable.

Johan said when we had shed applications, we checked they didn't encroach on the paths.

John McArthur suggested we have path inspections as well as plot inspections. He offered to undertake a part survey of paths and report back.

Peter Knowles said the problem was that it was not always possible to be sure where the paths should be, they needed some marking.

Harold Henry asked whether we were subject to disability laws? Stuart said we can offer raised beds.

Orla said we would need everyone on board about paths, it will raise heckles.

Stuart said that after the survey had been done, maybe we could do some marking out.

Orla said there was a minimum size to all plots, but they were not all exactly the same, and we are well above that minimum with the half plots. Imposing a path width/size/quality was a good aspiration, but maybe we should identify the critical ones first.

John McArthur said we should address the issues as they come up, a way of fixing encroachments when they happen.

Action: John Mc Arthur said he would do the survey and report back by Christmas, then someone could take it on.

Len Harding had been asked by a neighbour how he can get tyres left on his plot taken away.

Colin said he knew that we have two plots with asbestos, and he has asked Pathways several times about that and about taking away tyres and they haven't dealt with it. Recycling centres won't take asbestos or tyres.

Vinka Reeves said we should encourage people to use the Trading Hut more – if they don't use it, as a council site we risk having something else on the site. Other allotments are not using it, either because of the distance from them, or because they are going to garden centres. It is important that we advise them of what we need them to stock. The Trading Hut is open from 12 to 3 on Saturdays, and 10 to 12 on Sundays.

Peter Knowles said he would welcome another skip, the new fence had thrown up stuff that needed removing.

There was some discussion about whether work days always had to be Saturdays, as people had commitments with children. Perhaps a list of jobs that needed doing could be produced and people do them on other days. Debbie Coates said she had struggled with installing a water butt and Steve had helped.

End of meeting

The meeting started at 16.05 and concluded at 17.05