Haslemere Allotments Association 10th AGM

4pm, 29 April 2024, held at the Blondin Community Centre

Minutes

Attendees

Committee: Johan Ditmar (Chair), Orla Kelly (Vice-Chair), Colin Hewson (Acting Secretary), Stuart Alexander (Treasurer), Lisa Hammond, Letitia Tiley

Apologies: Debbie Coates, Caro Sanders

Helen de Jiminez (28B), John McArthur (14A), Michael Reeves (44A), Julie Perkins (33B), Gillian Brown (34B), Thom Stanbury (67A), Kay Dudman (44B), Rachel Walkowiak (62B), Richard Bowden (15), Matt Jones (47B), Wendy Nayyar (8B), Dagmar Gauweiler (19A), Jenny Parker (63A), Nigel Carn (58A), Cornelia Perquin (7A), Peter Knowles (54B), Chris Delger (66), Lillian Kospic (70A), John Usher (64B), Angela Fenelon (64A).

Note: only one plot holder from each plot was asked to sign in. Some plots were represented by more than one plot holder.

Apologies were received from: Tony Hurle (29A), Flora de Jimenez (30A)

Introduction

The Chair welcomed attendees to the 10th anniversary AGM in a new venue that was much easier to deal with than the previous one. He thanked the Committee for their work over the last year.

Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were approved.

Chair's report

Plot management

Eleven new tenants joined this year – two more than last. Two plot holders were evicted for non-cultivation. The waiting list remains unchanged at 85. The length of time required to wait for a plot is unclear. A number of people offered one have turned it down. We suspect a number of people applied during lockdown but now things have returned to normal they have found they don't have the time.

Site maintenance

The Chair thanked the site maintenance team: John McArthur (grass cutting), Ian Hayes (water and trolleys), Nick Lee and Ronan Bourke (general maintenance).

£384 was spent on a skip (up from £320 until recently) and £403 for Nick Lee's work clearing rubbish from vacated plots.

The Committee identified three plots with asbestos which was removed by a specialist company at a cost of £780 (paid by Pathways out of maintenance budget).

One new trolley was bought at a cost of £160. Numerous repairs were necessary to the others.

A site survey was conducted by John McArthur which identified a number of unsafe paths, as well as examples of encroachment. Some of these have been resolved, others will be raised with plot holders. The Committee has spoken to a specialist contractor.

A number of areas of fencing have been repaired at a cost of £4,152 from the sinking fund. Some of this fencing has been erected to protect the site from entry from houses backing on to the site.

The Midhurst gate has been repaired at a cost of £3,670, £2,000 of which was a charitable donation.

Bamboo was removed from one plot – a digger was necessary to dig it out and in total £558 was spent on the removal and disposal. The tenancy guidelines have been amended to ban the growing of bamboo and other invasive species.

Trees on communal plots have been pruned, and the very large apple tree on 72B was removed for the benefit of the new plot holders. A chipping day was organised. £1,914 was spent on tree surgery (paid by Pathways out of the maintenance budget).

Five expanded water tanks have been installed. Turning on the water is an involved process as any leaks that have developed over winter have to be checked for and repaired, something which happened this year.

New plot signs were installed. They aren't cheap, so plot holders were asked to take care not to damage them.

New locks were installed after multiple complaints about the old ones were received and some plot holders required rescuing so they could get out. The cost was £1,144 for the locks and the cutting of 290 keys (two for each plot holder).

Events

The annual plant sale raised £450 towards the cost of organising Ealing & Hanwell Allotment Association's annual show.

This year we are partnering with a charity called City Harvest for the donation of surplus produce.

The third annual barbeque was held in July.

We had visits from St Pauls Playschool (organised by Kate and Michael Horn) and students from OpenEaling watercolour class (organised by Gillian Brown).

Dagmar Gauweiler organised an apple collection for Hobbayne Primary School.

These events are good supporting evidence for when HAA resubmits its application to be recognised as an Asset of Community Value.

Communal projects

Community days are held on the first Saturday of every month.

A communal shed was built on 48A.

Flowers, obtained from the Hampton Court flower Show by Stuart Alexander were planted on 48A and 61B. Unfortunately some didn't survive the winter but Stuart will apply again.

We won first prize – a silver cup awarded since the 1980s - in Cultivating Ealing's Large Allotment Site category, having been third last year. The award covers all aspects of the site including signage, facilities (such as the toilet) and support for charities (such as the Ealing Cardiac Group).

Trading hut

Stuart Alexander delivered an update on the Trading Hut, which has been run by the committee of the Ealing & Hanwell Allotment Association since 1917. The committee now includes a number of HAA plot holders – previously it was dominated by people from the Ascott site.

Site is completely separate from HAA but ownership and terms of lease are lost and therefore unclear though rent is paid to Ealing Council. It used to serve all allotment sites in the borough, but has dwindled to serve just HAA and Ascott. It also holds an annual show which SA encouraged all to enter.

The site has been extensively tidied in the last few weeks. The aim is to make it an attractive shopping experience and to make clear to all what the site is for. 'Cooperative trading', so cheaper prices - membership is £2 a year, though offering membership to all HAA plot holders in return for an annual payment is under consideration.

A grant to erect a new fence has been obtained but permission from the council is required. The hope is to install a gate allowing access directly onto HAA.

Treasurer's report

SA described some of the difficulties of dealing with Pathways.

The fees paid by plot holders go to Pathways who retain some for maintenance - insurance legal/admin/water and as a fencing/contingency fund, - and then pay a 'management' fund back to HAA. Last year the maintenance deduction was c £1000.

It is unclear how they decide our grant despite many attempts by HAA and Northfields to find out. They are a housing association and we are of little interest to them. Still, they want us to be cost-neutral to them and we probably don't get a bad deal.

The Committee deliberately overspent this year - for example on fencing, the Midhurst gate and signs - because our surplus has been rising.

Question from Kay Dudman 44B: Why was the Midhurst gate not replaced with one similar to Haslemere?

Answer (from JD): a neighbour had previously objected to the height. We would need planning permission, which we would require Pathways to apply for on our behalf. Neighbours at the Haslemere end signed a waiver should we have to apply retrospectively. Also, the Midhurst gate is in the Council's new conservation area so permission might be refused.

The accounts were approved.

Elections

Several of the current committee were standing down because they reached the end of their permitted terms under the constitution.

JD presented a slate of plot holders standing. These were Stuart Alexander (Treasurer 58A), Debbie Coates (47A), Letizia Tiley (50B), Lisa Hammond (46A), Vinka Reeves (43) – all currently on the

Committee, plus the following newcomers: Cornelia Perquin (7A), Matt Jones (47B), Thom Stanbury (67A), Wendy Nayyar (8B).

JD will stay on as interim chair while the new Committee finds its feet and elects new officers.

Question from Chris Delger (66): When will the new officers be announced?

Answer: After the new Committee has held its first meeting.

AOB

Question from Gillian Brown (34B): The new locks are slightly tricky, and why isn't the chain welded to the gate?

Answer: You will get used to them. We don't think plot holders would want to steal them. If one goes wrong it can easily be replaced – as has happened already. The cost of finding a welder, hooking up to power supply would be extortionate.

Vinka Reeves was thanked for organising deliveries of manure. Another is planned shortly.

Question from Dagmar Gauweiler (19A): Could woodchip be delivered to the Midhurst end?

Answer: No, there is insufficient room for a lorry to enter.

Stuart thanked the outgoing Committee members for their contribution.

The meeting ended at 5.10.