

Minutes of the Church Lane Allotments Association Annual General Meeting.

Tuesday the 19th of January 2016. Queenswood Social Club 7.30pm

Attendance:

Matt Sykes-Hooban (14), Denise Shanks (45), Susan Hallas (60), Alison Colman (61b), Tanya Shanks (45), Leann Sykes-Hooban (14), Carol Drybrough (46), Alison Elgie-Heaton (47), Hazel Page (39) Carl Noblet (28), Michelle Hoole (55) Brian Hoole (55), James Tunnell (49b), Michelle McHale (44), Andy McHale (42), Ann Worth (12), Lynne Breckin (13), John Elgie (47), Dianne Ketteringham (63), Mick Shillito (6), Mandy Long (17), Bill Dicks (33), Kim Taylor (33), Jodi Crome (73), Leanne Clark (30), Nick Ireland (30),

Total according to register: 26

Apologies:

Claire Bromley, Denise Groves, Rob Chapman

Meeting Started at 7:30pm

1: Minutes and Matters Arising from the 2015 AGM.

Secretary (Matt Sykes-Hooban) briefly covered the pertinent points from the minutes. The full minutes were published online before Christmas on both Church Lane Allotment Facebook page and on the website.

Following the previous AGM there were concerns raised about the validity of the vote due to the unopposed nominees being elected as a group rather than individuals. For this reason the committee to be re-elected at this EGM.

The membership voted against rewording of the rules regarding reduced rents for tenants taking plots late in the season. The committee took the action to review the policy and submit a fairer structure to the membership at this EGM.

It was agreed that the minutes were a true and accurate record of the AGM. The minutes were proposed by Leann Sykes-Hooban and seconded by Ann Worth.

2: Vote 1 -Proposed Change to the CLAA Constitution, to adopt the new voting system

Current wording in constitution:

All questions arising at any meeting shall be decided by *a simple majority of those present and entitled to vote.*No member shall use more than one vote. In the case of a tied vote the chair has a second and casting vote.

Proposed change (to be used in place of underlined section of text above):

a simple majority of those present and entitled to vote by show of hands. In the case of member/s standing for election, the nominee(s) must vacate the room whilst the vote for the position takes place.

Votes cast – FOR: 24 AGAINST: 1 ABESTENTION: 1

Motion is carried

3: Vote 2 - Proposed Change to the CLAA Constitution, to change the wording relating to numbers of a meeting Quorate

Current wording of 2nd sentence of first paragraph after the description of roles:
Any such meeting is quorate if three Committee members are present.

Proposed change (to be used in place of underlined section of text above):
'Any such meeting is quorate if four Committee members are present.'

Change proposed in order to align with the quorum number stated in section 5 of Procedural Rules.

Votes cast - FOR: 24 AGAINST: 1 ABSTENTION: 1
Motion carried

4: Vote 3 - Proposed Change to the CLAA Constitution, to change the wording regarding the number of Trustees for the Association and membership of the committee.

Current wording section 3. Management Committee Membership

At any one time CLAA shall have two Trustees, appointed by the Association, responsible for ensuring that the Association is solvent, well-run, delivering the purposes for which it has been set up and meeting the needs of its members. The Trustees must be part of the Committee.

Proposed change (to be used in place of underlined section of text above):
'At any one time CLAA shall have no less than two Trustees, appointed by the Association. Any member elected to the management committee whilst also serving as Trustee may not cast a vote during committee meetings.'

In response to membership queries, Michelle McHale confirmed that trustees do not vote at committee meetings, this is standard practice, advised by Leeds & District Allotment Gardeners Federation.

Discussion over new wording in relation to trustees' ability to vote and their inclusion on committee. Matt Sykes-Hooban explained that the current constitution stating trustees must be on the committee puts an enormous obligation onto the trustees considering the new council leases are for 25 years. Michelle McHale clarified that in exceptional circumstances (e.g. a committee member leaving post mid-term, an emergency situation onsite) it may be necessary for trustees to step into a committee role temporarily to ensure smooth running of the site. In this instance the trustee would carry out duties of the role, but not vote in committee meetings. Alison Elgie-Heaton confirmed that trustees can and do attend committee meetings and are able to join in discussions and field objections and recommendations

Mandy Long asked whether members could attend committee meetings and was answered that members can attend meetings but would not be entitled to cast votes.

Votes cast- FOR: 26 AGAINST: 0 ABSTENTION: 0
Motion carried

5: Vote 4 - Proposed Change to the CLAA Rules, to adopt a new payment structure for new tenants who join the site during the year.

Option 1: Quarterly Proportional Rental Payment Structure (QPRPS)

Oct - end Dec: Full price*

Jan - end April: 3/4 Rental fee plus full maintenance and membership

May - end July: 1/2 Rental fee plus 1/2 maintenance and full membership

Aug - end Sept: 1/4 Rental fee plus 1/2 maintenance and full membership

*This takes into account the fact that the due date for payment of the rent to the LCC is the 10th of Dec of each year.

The proposed structure keeps fees higher in first 6 months when little growing time is lost, whilst still representing a proportional reduction as requested by the membership at the 2015 AGM

Option 2: Monthly Proportional Rental Payment Structure (MPRPS)

Oct – end Dec: Full Price

Jan end Sept: Monthly reductions*

*The monthly reduction is the combined rental/maintenance divided by 9. Membership Fees will remain the same throughout the year.

Secretary (Matt Sykes-Hooban) laid out the 2 discount structures, pointing out that rent is paid to the council in December so no discount could be offered before this point

Bill Dicks wanted to know how the council takes rent and John Elgie queried how the bill was calculated. Matt Sykes-Hooban explained that the site provides the council with details of tenanted plots, the breakdown of full and half plots and where concessional rates have been applied. The council then sends a bill which is currently around 68% of the rental cost. The council used to charge around 33% but the percentage has been increased in an effort to make allotments cost neutral. This does mean that the association now generates less revenue from rents despite the increase in rental costs. Following payment of the bill any plots which are taken or become vacant and are re-let are not included in council billing until the next round of yearly rents the following November.

Rental costs will increase next year as part of the council's 3 year payment scheme and then it is not known whether rents will be pegged or continue to rise. Kim Taylor asked how far into the 25 year lease we were and was informed that the new 25 year leases from the council have only just come into being.

Mandy Long wondered how many plots are let during the year following yearly rental payments. Matt Sykes-Hooban responded that it was variable depending on length of waiting lists and availability of plots throughout the year but estimated approximately 20.

The membership discussed the pros and cons of each system including that the monthly structure may involve more administration for the treasurer and that there seemed little difference in the amount paid under each system. Leann Sykes-Hooban suggested that the quarterly structure may provide more revenue during the spring months as under this scheme the maintenance cost was not reduced until summer meaning that those renting plots in April for example, and likely to use as much water as everyone else, would pay the same for water and site costs rather than a reduced rate.

Vote:

Option 1 quarterly rental structure – FOR: 23

Option 2 monthly rental structure – FOR: 2

ABSTENTIONS: 1

Quarterly rental structure adopted for new tenants joining throughout the year.

A new section will be added to the Rules under Payment of Rent and Service Charge as follows:

4) Once the Association has collected the rent for year and paid the LCC the remaining available plots will be let with a discount, the Quarterly Proportional Rental Payment Structure (QPRPS). The details of the QPRPS are by request from the committee.

John Elgie expressed appreciation for the efforts made to ensure a fairer system for newcomers to the site even though a rolling monthly reduction may have been fairer still.

6: Treasurer Report, presentation of Association Accounts

Secretary Matt Sykes-Hooban presented the report in the absence of the Treasurer (Claire Bromley)

The summary of accounts presented was dated from 19th October 2015 which is when the current Treasurer took office.

There was a query over whether the accounts presented had been audited. To date, the books have never been audited but Alison Colman has volunteered to audit the accounts with Claire Bromley.

Michelle McHale was concerned that, with Alison Colman standing for committee, she would not be able to audit the accounts were she to be voted into post in the evening's election. There was general agreement that as a first action, Alison and Claire should conduct an audit as there was willingness to do so and then the committee would look to other individuals to review and approve the accounts.

It was confirmed that the membership costs detailed in the report were for both the Leeds & District Allotment Gardeners Federation and the National Society of Allotment & Leisure Gardeners (NSALG). Andy McHale opined that the membership cost were quite a sizable amount of money and questioned the benefit of membership of NSALG. None of the committee knew from memory the actual cost paid for each individual membership to this organization and agreed also to look into the benefits of membership beyond discount at local establishments.

7: Election of the Association Committee

Susan Hallas asked if all roles were listed in the constitution and if, therefore, they must be filled as it was noted that there were no nominees for the role of site maintenance – Brian Hoole currently filling the role was standing instead for Lettings Officer. Alison Elgie-Heaton said that the constitution names a number of roles that can be filled on the committee but specifies that four officer roles must be filled being Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and Lettings the latter role not normally required as standard but required within our own site constitution.

It was suggested that the non-obligatory roles be removed from the constitution though in order to do this correct notice would have to be given to the membership and a subsequent meeting called to vote on the amendment. The constitution will remain as is for the time being.

Chairperson Alison Elgie-Heaton announced she was very disappointed at the lack of nominees standing and the apparent unwillingness of members to put themselves forward for committee given that there have been significant gripes and issues raised against the committee in recent months.

Alison Colman queried whether it was within the rules, given previous voting errors, for Claire Bromley to be standing *in absentia*. Matt Sykes-Hooban said that Claire had specifically contacted him as Secretary to say that she wished to stand to remain in post and sent apologies for the EGM due to being on night shifts as a midwife. As she has been fulfilling the role well satisfactorily so far, was unopposed, expressed a desire to stand for re-election and would, anyway need to be absent from the room during the vote, he could see no good reason for not holding the vote for Treasurer as planned. No oppositions were raised.

It was suggested by Alison Colman that Carol Dryborough and Leann Sykes-Hooban should swap roles given Carol's superior technical ability with regards to website development. Carol Dryborough explained that she spent many hours at work on computers and websites and did not want to devote still more time to this activity away from work, her current role is satisfactory and takes up all the time she is able to commit.

Those present voted for each committee role individually according to newly adopted rules requiring the nominees to leave the room for the vote.

Lettings Officer

Standing: Brian Hoole (plot 55) - unopposed

Incumbent lettings officer, Chris Mills has stood down from the committee.

Vote – FOR: 24 AGAINST: 0 ABSTENTION: 1

Brian Hoole elected into post

Secretary

Standing: Alison Colman (plot 61b) - unopposed

Incumbent Secretary Matt Sykes-Hooban is standing down from committee

John Elgie offered a vote of thanks to outgoing Secretary for his work for the site. Lynne Breckin asked if Matt Sykes-Hooban would remain available to advise the new Secretary. Matt Sykes-Hooban responded that he would conduct a comprehensive handover and is obviously remaining on site as a plot holder should there be any further queries.

Vote- FOR: 24 AGAINST: 0 ABSTENTION: 1

Alison Colman elected into post

Chairperson

Standing: Incumbent Alison Elgie-Heaton (plot 47) – unopposed

Vote – FOR: 21 AGAINST: 1 ABSTENTION: 3

Alison Elgie-Heaton re-elected into post

Treasurer

Standing: Incumbent Claire Bromley (plot 4b) – unopposed
Vote – FOR: 19 AGAINST: 2 ABSTENTION: 5
Claire Bromley re-elected into post

General Committee - Webmaster

Standing: Incumbent Leann Sykes-Hooban (plot 14) – unopposed
Vote – FOR: 21 AGAINST: 1 ABSTENTION: 2
Leann Sykes-Hooban re-elected into post

General Committee – Communications

Standing: Incumbent Carol Dryborough (plot 46)
Vote- FOR: 19 AGAINST: 0 ABSTENTION: 5
Carol Dryborough re-elected to post

General Committee – Polytunnel/shop

Standing: Incumbent James Tunnell (plot 49)
Vote – FOR: 25 AGAINST: 0 ABSTENTION: 0
James Tunnell re-elected to post

Denise Groves has stood down from the General committee – communications

Matt Hanson is considered to have stepped down from general committee – volunteering/deli market as he has had no contact with the committee since November's AGM and has not expressed a wish to stand for re-election

There were no nominees for remaining 3 places on committee.

Leann Sykes-Hooban gave thanks to all who have served on the committee in the past year, giving their considerable time and efforts to the running of the site.

8: CLAA Long term plan: Group discussion

Site Security

Several options have been considered regarding access to the site following several padlock failures over the past year.

Keys – It would be a huge cost to have keys cut for everyone on site and the practicalities of issuing keys to plot holders and then ensuring they are returned if a plot holder leaves or is evicted presents further problems. There is no guarantee that individuals would not have keys cut for other friends and family who help them on the plot.

Padlock – Even with the cost of replacing broken or ineffective padlocks a code padlock remains the most cost effective option, especially when there are still gaps in fences/hedges that can be breached. Members of the committee discussed the problems of finding a secure padlock that would withstand the heavy usage of people constantly visiting the site but also be simple enough to use. Denise Shanks added that, as an arthritis sufferer, the small dials on the current padlock are particularly difficult to manage in cold weather. The committee intend to find a sturdy padlock without a push button release and with larger dials. Carl Noblet suggested that increasing the size of hole on the gate would enable us to use a larger gauge padlock.

Keypad – the idea of a push button keypad has previously been suggested. The committee looked into the cost of this and think installation of a basic lock would cost

around £400, this seems a lot of money when, as mentioned, there are still issues with gaps in fences/hedges and £400 would buy many padlocks. Leann Sykes-Hooban related that a colleague had tried a similar lock on another site and found it could be easily breached with a crowbar or claw hammer. Michelle Hoole said a keypad had been installed in her place of work and failed quickly.

It was generally agreed that a padlock system would remain for the time being. Anyone with recommendations or suppliers for a decent padlock should let the committee know.

A second, pedestrian entrance to the site would be a welcome addition. In the event of a padlock jamming, such a gate would allow plot holders to access the site whilst the issue was dealt with.

Regarding the fence, Matt Sykes-Hooban said that original intention of the committee was to use surplus funds to pay for fencing. Funding is rarely given for projects such as fencing as it is widely seen as antisocial. The original quote for the fencing along the Woodbridge side of the site was £7000, of which around 1/3 has been completed. It is possible to pay for fencing in stages as funds allow.

Diane Ketteringham suggested that brambles and spiky shrubs be planted around the boundary as a deterrent. It was noted that thorny hedges have been planted but will take time to establish.

Mick Shillito had the idea to put up sheet fencing, similar to that around his plot boundary, in the gaps in the hedges as a deterrent.

Further discussion on this topic centred on fundraising and possible funding pots that the site could apply to.

Police Commissioners Fund - Michelle McHale thought this might be a good option for getting funds for fencing as Headingley West has received funds from this source. Matt Sykes-Hooban said that we have previously applied but unsuccessfully.

Lottery Fund – The lottery fund is a source of large amount of money, the committee had not applied to this fund previously as there is a huge amount of paperwork involved and projects need to be very large so the site would need to have several projects to submit in one application

Kirkstall Forge Development has funding available. This should be looked into to see how to apply.

Matt-Sykes-Hooban explained that the site has been successful in raising funds in the past, for example the composting toilet and original improvements to the site entrance and car park. Many of the funds available need to be match funded but the site has done this with volunteer hours rather than using association money

Car Park

It was reiterated that members should refrain from parking in the Woodbridge residents parking area outside the entrance to the site and instead use the car parking areas available onsite. Susan Hallas pointed out that it is a particular problem late afternoon when people 'pop in' to the site but take up parking spaces from residents arriving home from work.

The parking area is not designated residents only and the site cannot legally stop plot holders from using it. Susan Hallas suggested that residents did not want to make the car park permit holders only but might consider it if problems persisted. Mandy Long suggested that plot holders should be asked to be considerate, especially with regard to times when people would be coming home from work. Committee can put a sign on the notice board to this effect.

We could better encourage plot holders to park onsite by improving the car parking areas. The committee could seek funding for such improvements and it was suggested this might be possible as it could be construed as improving access especially for the elderly and less mobile.

The paths around the site also need attention. Woodchip could be used as there is a stock onsite already, but this would only work as a very temporary measure before the woodchip was ground into the paths. Carl Noblet suggested filling the paths with gravel or purchasing some recycled aggregate and hiring a whacker plate. Bill Dicks thought that the paths would need to have some sort of drainage installed. It would be ideal to get the opinion of an engineer to suggest an appropriate course of action to improve the paths long term.

Tree Surgery

Matt Sykes-Hooban addressed queries and concerns that have arisen over why trees onsite are being chopped down.

The trees on the railway side have grown too high to manage, heavily shading nearby plots and also areas of more central plots. There is a danger that, left unmanaged, branches or trees may fall, causing damage to plots or the rail track.

There is a 3 year waiting list to have the council take down trees and they will only consider individually trees rather than an entire row. Network rail will take down trees but only if they can bring down the entire tree and root ball in one go, likely causing damage to plots.

The committee organised a deal with the local tree surgeon to do blocks of work, starting with some of the tallest trees on the boundary. The intention is to pay for further blocks as funds allow. The trees are being pollarded rather than cut down. This means that the trees will continue to grow but will be at a height where growth can be managed in the future.

Regarding questions over charging for the logs and woodchip created from the tree surgery, the charges were seen as a way of helping to fund the next session of tree surgery though to date only £15 has been raised. Alison Colman thought maybe the reason for charges was not made clearly enough.

Jodi Crome asked that the membership to consider the residents on Morris Lane when cutting back trees, they provide masking and are much appreciated. Matt Sykes-Hooban replied that whilst the pollarding seems hard, the foliage will grow back in time, though the first year of growth may appear straggly and unappealing.

There were further discussions as to where current site funds should be directed. Carol Dryborough pointed out that the site should have a contingency of at least one year's

rent in the bank to deal with any unforeseen costs or emergencies. Only funds surplus to this should be used.

Bill Dicks requested that in future financial summaries it should be made clear whether certain sums of money in the account have been ring fenced or are already set aside for particular projects.

Other Discussions

Denise Shanks asked for an update on the bees. Alison Elgie-Heaton explained that the bees were all alive and well but the hives are still relatively young and only a tiny amount of honey was produced this year.

Susan Hallas wanted an update on her complaint. Due to its personal nature, the discussion is to be held for a future committee meeting.

Alison Colman also asked whether there had been any further issues from plot holders with regard to turning off the water. No committee members were aware of any. Several members pointed out that it has rained so heavily this winter that very little should need watering and water butts onsite were full. Hazel Page suggested water butts be placed on all plots to avoid future complaints when the water is switched off. This would be an expensive undertaking and, furthermore, many plot holders have already purchased their own.

9: Close of Meeting

Chairperson, Alison Elgie-Heaton, thanked members for their attendance and contributions and closed the meeting.

Meeting closed at 9.45pm