

Minutes of Imberhorne Allotments Association AGM 8.00p.m. Thursday 7 November 2013 at St Swithun's Church Hall

1. Apologies: Emma Maxwell, Roger Gray, Sue Robinson, David Coldman, Sally Cooper, Robin Peach, Karen Colcomb

2. Minutes of last year's AGM were agreed.

3. Chairman's report

Good evening all, and welcome to the Association's 2013 AGM.

This year has been another challenging year for us vegetable growers, with the winter carrying on into spring. Seeing snow in April was a bit of a shock and concern for getting in the early potatoes. With the late arrival of spring, we were all busy trying to get our potatoes to chit and get them into the ground.

I must admit I was really worried that this year was going to be another disaster. But it turned out sort of ok. We could have done with a bit of rain in July, but we were in the middle of a heat wave. Going down the allotment twice a day was a bit of a challenge, luckily we were never in a position of having our water cut off.

With issues with global warming, are our seasons going to be un-recognisable. Will we be seeing colder winters and hotter summers? Will we have to look at other types of vegetables to grow down the allotment?

I would also like to thank Anne Gray, for all her work on the Orchard. She has been doing this for a number of years.

This year we had some sad news that Mick Wallis, a tenant of the allotments for well over 45 years, died of cancer. He will be greatly missed as he played an active part in the allotment both on site and within the committee.

Also theft as we all know from our sheds has been an issue this year. This I will cover later in the meeting.

The committee have made improvements to the way we get information out. As more and more people have Facebook accounts and smart phones we now have a Facebook group (Imberhorne Allotment Association). This means that the committee and tenants can get important information out very fast, like security issues. If you have Facebook, please join the group. We of course also send out the information by email and using the new noticeboard purchased by the committee this year.

The committee have also purchased a new strimmer. We have plans to increase the car park area by levelling plot 1 and sowing grass seed. This would only be used in the summer period. Also over the coming months we have working parties for the general perimeter clearing, cutting of bushes and trees. This will be discussed later in the evening.

I would like to thank all the current committee officers and members for their dedication in the giving of their time and effort in the day to day management of the site. Also I would like to thank Karen Colcomb who after many years on the committee is stepping down.

4. Membership report

Currently all available plots are let. The committee is holding one plot for drainage works. There will be two plots which will be vacant by the end of the year which we plan to re-let in the New Year.

This year we have let five plots to new members, and there are currently 27 people on the waiting list.

5. Treasurer's report

A copy of the Income and Expenditure Account – year ended 31/8/2013 was available at the meeting.

The accounts have been reviewed by the Committee and independently audited by Bill Blackledge, a current allotment holder and past Chairman of the Committee.

At the end of August, our financial year end, the current account stood at £2099.65 in credit, the deposit account at £1471.82 in credit and petty cash at £65.96. This is a sound position but we must also look ahead.

Income

Income in the financial year to 31st August 2013 arose solely from rents received and these amounted to £1792.62.

We did not receive any specific donations in 2012–2013 in contrast to the previous year when the Town Council generously contributed £200 to the replacement of the site gate.

The seeds scheme was discontinued last year as Emma Maxwell withdrew due to family commitments. However, whilst successful in its early years it should be noted that the benefit to the Association had fallen to just £21 on a turnover of £480 (4%).

There was no income from the bees as the scheme has passed to the private ownership of 3 allotment holders. In 2011-2012 bad weather meant there had been no honey produced. It was agreed at the AGM in 2011 that the capital cost of the bees and bee equipment would be repaid to the Association by August 2014. Each of the 3 acquiring allotment holders would be responsible for their share. So far we have received one repayment in full.

The Association will need to adopt further fund raising measures in 2013–2014 as will be apparent in that our expenses exceed our income by £452.18 (25.2%).

Expenditure

Total expenditure came to £2244.80 for the year. This is an increase of 15% on the previous year. Looking at the first graph you can see how our operating margin has declined over the last 6 years and the shortfall in 2012-2013 actually represents 25% of our income i.e. expenditure is currently 125% of income.

The cost of our metered water supply fell, possibly due to repairs to leaks and weather conditions at critical growing times. A number of allotment holders capture rainwater from their sheds and this is welcomed.

The rent charged by the town council is modest, but we are responsible for the running and the expense of maintaining the allotments ourselves.

The cost of our 'no-frills' liability insurance rose by 16% and the cost of site maintenance rose by 74%. The cost of grass cutting of communal areas of the allotments rose to £280 (133%). It has been evident that the allotments have been kept to a presentable standard and visiting officers of the town council have commented favourably on the appearance.

In terms of site maintenance I would draw attention to the current cost of skip hire. At £271 a time this needs to be a periodic rather than regular feature. Security at the allotments is limited, but we frequently have to replace the padlocks to the gate and this last year we needed to procure a specialist replacement lock for the container and equipment store.

A second strimmer was purchased for allotment holders use at a cost of £212 and the cost of repairs to existing equipment exceeded £417.62. I say exceeded, as the cost of petrol and repairs was above that in the contributions jar kept in the container and taken from general funds.

The committee determined that the old noticeboard was in poor repair and its frame starting to rot. This has been rebuilt at cost price, and a few bags of potatoes, and I should like to thank Mick Pope who generously donated his time and carpentry skills to build us a new one which should last another 10-15 years.

In terms of 'Other' expenditure AGM and office expenses cover the cost of hiring this hall and mailing each allotment holder in respect of this meeting and annual lease renewal.

In response to points raised about the cost of the water supply, which was turned off in the winter months, members were asked to keep an eye on water tanks to avoid paying for leaks or overflows. A working party would also be set up to check washers and ball cocks. **Action: Roger Tullett.**

6. Rent increase

The Committee is proud of the fact that it has been able to maintain the current low level of rent for as long as it has. However, it is evident that the Association needs to improve its income whilst controlling its costs in order to maintain and extend the current standard of maintenance. It is unsustainable for expenditure to exceed income by 25% (as identified above), amounting to some £400 p.a.

The resources of the Association are comparatively modest and it is appropriate to maintain a small contingency for unexpected items or events. Hire of equipment, or professional services is not cheap and we do need to maintain the current reasonable level of working capital in real terms.

Work in 2013–2014 will cover further improvements to the site including some tree trimming and drainage work which has already started. We expect to hire a shredder and install pipework under the road as approved by the previous AGM. General maintenance of the site is planned to be at least of the same standard.

As far as the collective memory of the Committee can recall there has been no rent increase on the basic rate of 10p per square metre since the Association was first set up. A fixed £5 membership fee was introduced from 1/1/2007 to cover part of the cost of the car park improvements and other common amenities enjoyed equally by allotment holders rather than in relation to their plot size. At that time a further £1000 was contributed from Allotment reserves (the deposit account) but which has not yet been replenished.

We have said the Imberhorne rents are modest and this is borne out by the advertised rates per square metre for :

- Crawley : 37p
- Tandridge: 26p (includes Felbridge)
- Tunbridge Wells: 32p
- Imberhorne: 10p + £5 pp.

It is therefore proposed that the Association should continue to :

- carry out the majority of maintenance itself,
- seek further donations and grants where available,
- seek discounts with potential suppliers e.g. Wickes.

The Committee recommends an increase of the Imberhorne rents to 0.15p per square metre + £5 pp. This is expected to raise income for the year 2013-2014 by approximately £716 to around £2500. The rent increase was proposed by the Chairman and seconded by Alan Stonley of the Committee.

Points made: no objection to rent increase but in percentage terms it was horrendous, that other allotments were maintained by the Council, and what were the rent figures for Mount Noddy. It was identified that Cuckfield and Mount Noddy rents compared favourably.

7. Association Business

Site maintenance

Roger Tullett identified that regular working parties had been set up on the first Sunday of the month. Last Sunday a drainage pipe across the compacted roadway and soakaways had been put in as an experiment to reduce the water logging problems. The soakaways had been left open to see what was achieved.

We would be grateful for volunteers for the working parties and for plot holders to identify key issues and priorities to address. We're aware of boundary issues – overgrown trees and hedges, and have identified maintenance of the stream and improvements to the ditch, as in places it had crumbled away and/or was overgrown, as priorities. Erosion of the stream near plot 34 was identified and the plot holder would discuss with Roger. **Action: Plot holders to contact Roger Tullett.**

It was identified and agreed for a bulk bag of aggregate to be purchased to fill the large hole just inside the gate in the carpark.

Security

Security of the site had been improved through repairing the fence in the back corner of the site and it was suggested that leaving brambles and nettles along the boundary would act as a further deterrent. All were asked to keep an eye on boundary security issues and report so they could be addressed. All were asked to ensure they scrambled the combination lock when entering the site, to lock the gate if they were last to leave, and not to leave valuable items such as strimmers or rotavators in sheds. If valuable items were stolen this should be reported to the police as they may keep more of an eye on the site and this may help with an insurance claim. The lock combination code would be changed annually when rents were paid.

Neighbourhood Plan

Roger Tullett identified that the lease on the site ended in 2019 and that in other areas allotment sites were under threat. However paragraphs 68-70 of the neighbourhood plan identified a clear policy to retain Mount Noddy and the Imberhorne sites for the same use. Although this was one of many local policy documents, this was welcome and may provide an opportunity for more allotments in East Grinstead. It was suggested that plot holders expressed support for these policies. Points made that East and West Sussex District Council had made a statement in their draft district plan of commitment to neighbourhood plans. Also as the land was owned by the town council we were in a better position. During a tour of the site local council officers had been very supportive of what we're doing and we'd continue to engage and work with them e.g. to apply for grants to invest in the land. As support was available for voluntary organisations Roger Tullett would consider projects, such as maintaining the existing watercourse, which may attract grant funding or council/community labour to get done. **Action: Roger Tullett.**

Social event

A barbeque was planned and plot holders were asked to suggest other events by e-mail to the committee.

8. Resignation of committee members and Election of new Committee members

Karen Colcomb had resigned from the Committee. Jim Thomson had expressed an interest in coming onto the committee next year. Plot holders were encouraged to join the committee which met 4-5 times a year.

Signed Date
(Chairman)