

Minutes of Imberhorne Allotment Association AGM 7.30 p.m. Friday 30 October 2015 at Trinity Methodist Church Hall

1. Apologies: Roger and Dianne Gray, Derek Wailes, Wendy Vick, Ann Lesley Elaine and John Bird, Richard Gibbs, James Blair, Lesley and David Wilson, David Williams, Susan Joy

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

3. Chairman's report – Paul Phillips

Good evening all, I would like to welcome you to the Association's 2015 AGM.

This year has been another great year for planting and harvesting our produce. With a fairly mild winter, no heavy snow and hardly any frosts, it made the start of the season a little bit easier.

The mild and dry start to end of March and April gave us a head start in getting the plot cleared of weeds and dug for the early potatoes to be planted. This made a change from last year when we had a really wet start to the year.

This year we have had to deal with a number of machinery failures which has caused a period when we only had one mower available. If you do find an issue on any of the lawn mowers and strimmer's etc. please report it to the committee as soon as possible rather than just putting it back and saying nothing. This will allow us to arrange repairing it as quickly as possible.

This year the committee purchased a new lawn mower and tiller. The tiller can be hired out and the charge for this is £8 per 2 hour minimum and £4 per additional hour after that, this includes petrol. The prerequisite is that you have a one off training session on how to safely use the tiller.

This year the container has had a late spring clean and I would like to thank Paul Radford for his help in this. We are looking into putting lighting into the container with the help of solar panels giving us much needed light to find and safely get out our machinery.

The start of summer, mainly June and July, gave us many dry days and daily watering trips were needed, even twice a day sometimes. July gave us the hottest day on record since 2006 at 33.5 oC.

This year with the help of Jim Thomson the committee introduced a fair and documented way of carrying out plot inspections. This process started in April and has been very successful.

The committee have also been reviewing the existing tenancy rules and with the help of Roger we have produced an amended document containing what we are now calling 'Byelaws'. These will be the existing rules but amended so that they are clearer to the tenants and less ambiguous and also a couple of new ones. You will already have received a copy of this document along with the AGM minutes and agenda and this will be discussed later.

Once again I would like to thank Anne Gray, for all her work on the Orchard. We are currently in the process of expanding the allotment Orchard, which will give us 6 extra fruit trees.

This season we have had no reported thefts, which is always good news.

We also held a successful BBQ, with nice weather on the day which always helps. If you have any ideas of social events we could have please let the committee know.

I would like to remind you about our Facebook group page and I would encourage you all who are on Facebook to join the group. This is a great way to communicate information quickly and to give feedback and raise allotment matters with other tenants.

We had a couple of working parties this year for clearing the stream and perimeter areas. Generally these are carried out in the autumn and winter months and will re-start this month.

This coming year we have a number of things to prepare for firstly the neighbourhood plan for East Grinstead which the revised draft version came out in July. After reading this the committee felt the allotments were not supported and left us in a vulnerable position.

As tenants you would have already seen our comments which were prepared by Roger and submitted to the Council. We encourage you all to read the draft and to send in your concerns even though the consultation period has ended the more pressure we put on the council the better. In these coming years the committee will require your support even more.

The other matter is that our lease runs out in 2019. Currently the East Grinstead council say it's too soon to start negotiations so we will have to wait until nearer the time. Things we can do to give us more of a chance of getting our lease extended or even renewed is to have a well maintained site and a good number on our waiting list for plots. Currently we only have about 13 on the waiting list. So please if you know of anyone wanting a plot please get them to visit our website and put their name down on our waiting list.

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.

I will be standing down as Chairman and would like to give the incoming Chairman my support as a continuing committee member and wish them well in their new post.

Also I would like to thank Elizabeth for all her help and support that she has given to the allotments and to myself during my time as Chairman. After many years on the committee and currently as our membership officer she will also be stepping down.

4. Amendments to allotment site rules – Roger Tullett

A copy of the Allotment Site By-Laws with the proposed amendments highlighted was circulated with the invitation and agenda for the AGM on 30 September.

Roger introduced this item by setting out that the Association had two sets of rules – the Tenancy Agreement which set out how the Association operates and one for the allotment site. The Allotment Site rules were last updated in 2004 and as there had been changes since then eg the secure store, vehicular access, they were out of date. The Committee had reviewed the existing site rules and suggested the amendments in the circulated paper. The amendments sought to provide clearer guidance on site standards and behaviour for plot holders and the Committee.

A change was requested before the meeting to Article 14 on Vehicles. As a result we propose to alter the 3rd sentence to be "The grass roadway through the site, and the temporary car park on Plot 18A, will only be open to vehicles in good weather and when ground conditions permit." The by-laws discouraged the keeping of petrol in sheds and it was suggested plot holders could keep it in the secure container. We would not be asking plot holders to relocate sheds and compost bins within 6 feet of the banks of the stream, which in parts had been collapsing, but if they needed replacing or for new plot holders this would be expected.

The revised by-laws were proposed by Roger and seconded by John Harding. The meeting was in favour of the amendments.

5. Treasurer's report – Robin Yetman

A copy of the audited Income and Expenditure Account – year ended 31/8/2015 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 £2,154.70 in credit, the deposit account at £2974.74 in credit and petty cash at £34.05. Our finances thus remain at a sound albeit modest position.

Income

Income for the year rose from £2,442.76 to £3,121.91. Whilst rental rates remained the same as for the previous year, this increase can be attributed to a slightly higher turnover in our plots and a one off amount of £403.04 for the final repayments of loans by our beekeepers for their equipment purchased 3 years previously.

53% of members are now paying their rents by internet banking compared to 40% last year and 30% the year before. This is to be welcomed as it does reduce the administrative effort and cost of collecting rents.

Last year we introduced a late fee as an incentive to encourage prompt payment of rents. Invoices are normally issued during the first week in December with rents due on the 1st January. The late fee applied from the 1st February. I am pleased to report that the 20% of allotment holders paying late dropped to 6%. I should emphasise again that ploholders not paying on time do risk losing their plots.

Overall, income exceeded expenses by £669.72.

Expenditure

Expenditure for the year totalled £2,451.63 an increase of 39% on the £1,762.91 of the previous year.

The increase is due to greater activity in maintaining the site and weather conditions. A dry early summer and higher levels of activity by allotment holders saw the metered water bill increase 34% to £389.06 (£289.53)

Site maintenance costs rose 25% to £518.24 (£413.22). In addition to this are the costs of mowing common areas around the car parks and orchard totalling £260 (£240). Maintenance of the orchard is primarily down to voluntary contributions and hard work of Robin Peach, Ann Gray, Cynthia and Alan Stonley.

Specifically, we added a third drain through the road way to prevent excessive build-up of surface water in bad conditions. The water butts were serviced and a fresh water tap added by the side of the roadway. The Committee extends its thanks to Eric Eves for voluntarily carrying out this work on our behalf.

We rented a skip during the year which as always proved a popular decision but at £310.80 is not a particularly cheap amenity. In the general clear up of the site some asbestos sheeting needed to be removed and again thanks to Robin Peach for obtaining the necessary protective materials and safely disposing of the material.

The committee also obtained a supply of weed suppressant material to prevent plots becoming overgrown between rentals and for cases where plot holders are temporarily unable to look after their plots for health reasons and have asked the committee for assistance.

There were again costs in replacing locks to the site and in the container.

In terms of equipment, repairs and maintenance to existing machinery came to £311.64 and the committee invested in further new equipment, a strimmer and an extra mower totalling £525.49.

The Association's internal administration costs came to £115.69 which includes office expenses of £54.51 and £61.18 for the website.

As you will see from the pie chart, site maintenance and mowing currently consumes 32% (37%) of our total expenditure and equipment 34%.

Conclusion

The Committee intends to hold rents at their current level of 15p per square metre (nominal) for 2016 plus the £5 membership fee.

It also intends to continue the late payment fee of £5 for members who have not paid by the 31st January 2016. This is not intended as a revenue raising measure but as an incentive to encourage timely payment of rents.

There were no questions.

6. Association Business

Site improvements

During the year we had applied unsuccessfully for 2 grants towards a polytunnel which a straw poll had identified support from plot holders. Plot holders were asked for other ideas for communal facilities eg a shed/meeting place to improve the site.

Given the significant spend on maintaining machinery, plot holders were asked look after them and report any issues on the wipe board in the secure container.

Neighbourhood Plan Update

The Council's plan identified the potential relocation of allotments within the town boundaries and possibly to farmland outside the area. The Mid-Sussex plan did not allow housing on allotment land. The Council plan would be submitted soon and a Planning Committee meeting on the consultation results and the Council's response, which Roger would attend and provide feedback from, was to be held the following week. The plan was to be reissued on 19 November and we would keep a close eye on the allotment proposals. During discussion it was identified that the Council were required to provide land for allotments and find suitable alternative sites. The Committee considered joining the National Allotment Society at its meeting on 19 January 2016. As this would be a significant outlay and only included general legal advice it was agreed to review potential membership annually.

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

Paul Phillips resigned as Chair of the Committee. Roger Tullett was proposed by Paul Phillips and Alan Stonley.

Elizabeth Philp resigned as Membership Secretary. As no-one stood it was agreed the Committee would discuss at its next meeting.

Dave Williams volunteered to join the Committee.

Robin Yetman was proposed as Treasurer by Roger Tullett and Bill Blackledge.

The meeting supported the new members.

Signed Date
(Chairman)