

Minutes of the TGAA Annual General Meeting (AGM) held at 8.00pm on 8 April 2011 at the St Margaret's Institute.

Present Tony Hollander (chairman); Neil McLennan (vice-chairman); Bob Crabtree (treasurer); Virginia Wallis, (secretary and lettings secretary); Carol Jarvis (lettings secretary); Vibeke Mannion (shop); Peter Jarvis (pest control and plant sale); Stuart Skyte (social and website); Jonathan Clark (website, machinery and skips) and 22 TGAA members.

Apologies from Chris Tyzack, Alun & Hilary Evans, Genefer Clark, Paul & Alexa Galley, John Ashby.

Minutes of the 2010 AGM

These were distributed and approved.

Matters arising

Soil analysis The City Council have still not provided the results of the soil analysis as they are still waiting for the Health Protection Agency to pronounce on the results of the last soil survey. Interim advice is that there appears to be no evidence of anything to be alarmed about but that the advice to avoid ingesting soil, to wash all above-ground produce and peel root vegetables remains unchanged.

Chairman's Report

There had been five meetings of the committee since the last AGM, of which one was attended by Ian Salisbury and Stella Boswell.

Railway crossing Since the last AGM, Tony Hollander had represented TGAA at the public enquiry with Stella Boswell and Joe Lee appearing as witnesses and Carol and Pete Jarvis providing written input. In his private objection, Jonathan Clark challenged the weak case put by Chiltern and Network Rail concerning the safety of crossings. Ian Salisbury also put in a private objection and did an amazing and extremely professional job. Many thanks and a bottle of wine were extended to Ian for all his hard work, his amiable relationship with the inspector and his hugely impressive performance. Ian said that the fact that Hoonie Feltham had to call an ambulance was immensely helpful to our case. The inspector's report will be out in late summer 2011.

Trees The Council has pollarded the willow trees and removed coppiced hazels which has really cheered the allotment site up. The resulting wood chippings which were piled next to the equipment shed have proved popular.

Skips: Thanks and a bottle of wine to Alastair Lack (received by Kate on his behalf) for organising the skips for the past few years. And thanks to Jonathan for taking over.

Treasurer's report

The accounts for 2010 were circulated with thanks to Genefer Clark who audited them. TGAA's main sources of income are fees (£3,000), the plant sale (£1,000) and profit from the shop (£1,000). Maintenance of the site and machinery – including skips – takes nearly half our income. Fees have increased this year in order to build up a reserve of £3,000 so that we are in a position to replace the sit-on mower. Cash is also needed to stock the shop. The amount most people pay for a half plot is £24. TGAA is no longer a member of the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG) which has saved £240 but as a result, the Kings discount seed scheme is no longer available but other discount schemes have been put in place. Nick Hunter enquired what the legal basis was for Oxford City Council to charge us rent. Ex-treasurer, John Porter said that what we paid the council had been the same for at least 12 years while it was pointed out that given the services the council provides – such as compost, tree cutting, chippings and pest control - the rent we pay represents good value for money. Nevertheless, the question of rent will be raised at the next Federation meeting on 19 April 2011.

Secretary's report

Seeds Three discount seed schemes with Dobies, Marshalls and Thompson & Morgan are now available to TGAA members throughout the year. Full details will be put on the TGAA website.

Membership cards: These were organised in order to benefit from a 10% discount at Yarnton Nurseries. They can also be used at Burford Garden Company. Cards cost £1 each and around 50 members have bought them so far.

Membership cards are not compulsory but are needed to benefit from discounts.

Rule changes The rules need further tightening up to introduce clear deadlines and processes for members falling short of required standards of cultivation. Warning and quit letters also need rewording so that they no longer ask if someone wishes to remain a member. It was agreed that the Secretary and lettings secretaries would amend the rules and letters as necessary.

Lettings Secretaries report

Thanks A very big thank you and card were extended to Vibeke Mannion who has stood down as lettings secretary.

Plot inspection The first of two main plot inspections took place on 29 March 2011. It was attended by the lettings secretaries and three other members of the committee. The inspection found that 78.5% of plots are in good order, 13.5% are average, 8% are poor but there is no longer a wilderness category. This is a splendid result and a dramatic

improvement on previous years. All plots were let as at 8 April 2011. The next main plot inspection will take place at the end of September 2011.

Website, machinery and skips

Website This is three years' old, in need of updating and open to ideas for improvements. Nick Hunter suggested that there should be a page for members' websites because being linked to an org.uk website improves Google ranking. There was general support for the idea and it was agreed that members should be charged an annually-renewable fee of £10 per website.

Machinery Members were reminded that, after being shown how to use it - they can borrow any of the shared equipment which includes a rotavator, tiller, two strimmers and two mowers. Mowing of small paths between plots is the responsibility of the adjoining plot holders while the Mowing team – who were thanked for their efforts – mow the large paths and some small paths if this is easy.

Social

The 2010 Harvest Supper enjoyed positive feedback. The next Harvest Supper will take place on Saturday 12 November 2011 and there may be a summer pop-up party if the weather proves fair. Kate Lack suggested holding a Bonfire Night Party which would appeal to families.

Trap Trading

The shop has again enjoyed a good year's trading and more importantly provides a nice community gathering place at the week end. The shop is fully stocked despite three suppliers going out of business. Thanks to everyone who donates things to be sold in the shop.

Pest Control

The rabbit population is down but very effective traps are available for people still suffering from rabbit damage. Piles of rubbish and neglected areas of brambles and nettles provide perfect homes for rabbits and rats so should be cleared. Access to the council rat man has become more difficult since council cutbacks.

Plant Sale

Last year's sale made a record £1,000. This year's will be held on Sunday 22 May 2011. Please set aside spare plants – such as herbs, cuttings divisions, surplus vegetable seedlings - for the sale. There are plenty of pots by both allotment gates if you need them. The biggest problem is publicity as there have been complaints about too many posters on trees and telegraph poles. Members will be emailed a poster to put up in their windows or on gates. Other suggestions included community noticeboards, Co-op noticeboards, community announcement on Jack FM and a mention on the local TV weather slot. Yarnton might also let us advertise.

Election of the Committee The committee of nine was re-elected with thanks from the floor for the committee's work.

Annual gate code change It was proposed that the code should change annually on 1 May (the cut-off date for paying plot fees). This was unanimously agreed.

Bees Jonathan Clark, along with two other people, would like to keep bees on the allotment site. He has joined the Oxford Bee-keeping Association and is currently being trained. He won't keep bees until training is complete and a suitably secluded site – on the advice of an expert - has been found to house hives. Ian Salisbury volunteered a space on his plot where hives would be out of the way. It was agreed that more bees – and bee hives – would be welcome on the site. It was pointed out that, whether there are hives or not, anyone allergic to bee stings should carry the necessary medication when visiting an allotment because of the presence of bees naturally. It was also agreed that the rules would be changed to give the committee the right to eject hives if the bees became a nuisance. Any plot holder wanting to keep bees on his or her plot will also have to get the agreement of all adjoining plot holders.

Wells An audit of wells – which took place at the same time as the plot inspection - found that there are about 30 wells on the allotment site – most beautifully kept but some just dangerous holes in the ground which need attention. A plan of wells on the allotment site is being drawn up but the distribution of wells is uneven. It is possible for two people to dig a well in a day and blue plastic barrels are available (at no charge) for lining wells. There was some discussion as to whether the digging of wells should be left to individual plot holders given that well water is a communal resource. It was felt to be unfair that plot holders unable to dig should have to pay for a well to be dug. The meeting was reminded that the 2010 AGM had agreed a rule change which allows the committee to help with the costs of – and materials required for – wells if asked. Since the 2010, the committee has received no such requests even though three new wells have been dug in that time. It was agreed that the committee would put together a proposal for improving the availability of well water on the allotment site as well as a plan for wells in a bad state of repair. It was pointed out that plot holders wanting a private source of water could install a water butt on their plot.

The meeting ended at 10.05 pm