

Minutes of the TGAA AGM held at 8.00pm on 31 March 2010 at the St Margaret's Institute

Committee members present: Tony Hollander, chairman; Neil McLennan, vice-chairman; Bob Crabtree, treasurer; Virginia Wallis, secretary; Vibeke Mannion and Carol Jarvis, lettings secretaries; Peter Jarvis, pest control and plant sale; Stuart Skyte, social and website; Jonathan Clark, website and machinery.

Apologies from Ian and Shelley Salisbury, Gerald Elliott, Katalin Pinter, Mark Foster, Liz Storrar, Julia Aston-Smith, Ade Thomas.

Thanks from Liz Storrar and Ian and Shelley Salisbury for the work of the committee and all other volunteers – especially for the shop, the locks, the fencing, the compost area and the decrease in neglect.

Minutes of the 2009 AGM

These were distributed and approved.

Matters arising

Bees Nothing has happened on the development of beekeeping in the north eastern corner of the allotment site although this area may no longer be appropriate now that the pond and orchard have been created. Liz and Bill Peretz have expressed an interest in keeping bees but would not want to do so without expert help. Ute has volunteered to provide advice. Stella pointed out the need to keep at least two hives which should be positioned to face away from the allotment site. It was agreed that if beekeeping went ahead, the beekeepers should follow the guidance in 'Bees on allotment sites' published by the National Society of Allotment & Leisure Gardeners (NSALG) of which TGAA is a member.

Soil analysis The City Council have still not provided the results of the soil analysis as they are waiting for advice from the Health Advisory Agency. The last time the soil analysis was done all plots showed some contamination and three 'hot spots' were identified but all could continue being cultivated. The water is fine but the soil should not be ingested. The plot holders concerned were given the opportunity to move plots but only one did. Concern was expressed at the lack of results of the more recent soil analysis and it was agreed that the issue would be raised at the next Federation meeting on 13 April 2010.

Chairman's Report

There had been seven meetings of the committee since the last AGM, of which two were attended by Ardent Management (who are advising Chiltern Railways).

Thanks Thanks and a bottle of wine were extended to: Kate Lack for her cheerful and positive messages and emails and work as secretary until standing down in November 2009; John Ashby for his unstinting efforts on the allotment site – especially the new communal compost area; and John Porter for his sterling work, among other things on mowing the small paths and for the delightful new orchard area. Thanks also to: Alastair Lack who has decided to give up organising skips at the 2011 AGM; to the devoted, now mixed gender mowing team; and Genefer Clark for auditing the accounts with such thoroughness.

Orchard Pond The new Orchard Pond was dug out in June 2009 and has since been planted with water lilies, blue iris and reed mace. The old pond was dug out and used to raise the level of the new pond's surroundings. The two willows have been coppiced and logs used as benches, Red cornus plants have been added to the area which has also been underplanted with bulbs. Members were asked not to disturb the 'watery' nature of the planting by dumping unwanted plants there.

Railway crossing Since the last AGM, Chiltern Railways have put forward a formal proposal to close the railway crossing as part of the Evergreen 3 Project creating a new Oxford to London line via Bicester. TGAA members were asked their opinion both on keeping the crossing open and the proposed mitigation plans. Of those who voted, 82% were in favour of keeping the crossing open and 64% thought the mitigation plans should be amended. As a result, the Committee put in a formal objection to the closure of the crossing arguing that the crossing is not

used by members of the public but by responsible allotment holders who know how to cross safely and who rely on the crossing for flat and convenient access. It is stated in Network Rail's policy that crossings are safe if safely used. Since then the committee has learned that Network Rail is currently undertaking risk assessments of all crossings where there is an objection to closure. It was suggested that we commission our own risk assessment.

We have also been given details of a 'near miss' at the crossing in October 2008 before the locks were installed. As the incident occurred after sunset, we doubt it was a plot holder,

We received a Notice of Enquiry dated 15 March 2010 and we have six weeks to reply to it.

Thanks to Debby Ceadel for her invaluable legal help.

Chris Goodall asked if TGAA wanted him to go ahead with his application to make the crossing a public right of way. The general feeling was that given that we now have locks, the crossing could be private rather than public and also making it a public right of way would undermine our case objecting to closure as we are relying heavily on the fact that members of the public don't use it.

Mitigation works Detailed diagrams of the proposed mitigation works were circulated. Our preferred solution – if the crossing were to close – would be to raise the causeway on Port Meadow. But we have been told that Natural England and the Environment Agency would object to that. Instead, it has been proposed that the access to Port Meadow over the railway bridge will be improved with a new path off to the right, giving access to the allotments over the ditch. An undertaking has been obtained that means that the crossing will not close until mitigation is in place. There was a much-voiced opinion that we should fight to keep the crossing open as the recent month-long closure of the crossing had demonstrated how foul and inconvenient the alternative access is. It was agreed that the more individual objections to closure of the crossing, the better. Letters should be individually written using the template on the TGAA website as the model for ideas.

Treasurer's report

The accounts for 2009 were circulated. It has been a big spending year as there have been unusually large amounts of works on site including the fencing, pond, and orchard as well as spending on plant and machinery including the locks, the tiller and hire of a small digger. Spending on skips has gone down. The shop is bringing in a good profit and provides a valuable part of the association's income.

Secretary's report

This focussed mainly on the proposed changes to the TGAA's rules which had been circulated before the AGM. All the new rules were agreed – some with amendments. A fully revised version of the rules – with amendments highlighted - will be circulated to the TGAA membership and added to the website. A map of where wells are situated will also be put on the website and on notice boards.

One of the rule changes relates to changes in contact details which must be notified to the Secretary. The Secretary maintains the email distribution list which is the main way of communicating with members so it is vital that she has correct and up-to-date email addresses.

Lettings Secretaries report

The annual inspection of plots took place on 25 March 2010 - slightly later than in previous years. The inspection found that 61% of plots are in good order, 22% are average, 14% are poor and 3% are in a very poor state which is a dramatic reduction on last year. Generally the allotment site is looking lovely. All plots were let as at 1 April 2010 and there is currently a waiting list of 20.

Website report

This will be circulated by email after the AGM.

Social

The Harvest Supper will take place on Saturday 20 November 2010 and there may be a last-minute summer party if the weather proves fair.

Trap Trading

Thanks to Vibeke for all her hard work in making the shop the valuable resource that it is.

Pest Control

The rabbit population is down but traps are available for people still suffering from rabbit damage. Some hazel and other nut trees are getting out of hand so the committee may organise a tree surgeon to bring them back under control.

Plant Sale

This will be held on Sunday 16 May 2010. 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.

Appointment of Trustees

Pete Jarvis, Jonathan Clark and Tony Hollander were appointed as trustees to join Neil McLennan.

Election of the Committee

The committee of nine was re-elected.

Any other business**Mosaic**

Kate Lack and Gillian Skyte will be creating a mosaic plaque from bits of china found on the allotment site to mark the creation of the new pond area. The meeting was shown the proposed design which was a simple schematic design with the words TGAA MMIX in a circle.

The meeting ended at 10.05 pm