

Minutes of the TGAA AGM Tuesday 28th March 2023

The minutes record the main features of the written reports circulated to members before the AGM with additional points discussed during the meeting added in italics.

Present:- Tony Hollander (chairman); Neil MacLennan (deputy chairman); Bob Crabtree (treasurer); Rachel Faulkner (secretary); Virginia Wallis (lettings secretary); Philip James (machinery); Michael Wheale (compost and bonfires); Robin Nicholas (water); and 29 TGAA members.

Apologies were received from:- Chris Beckett & Liz Kay, David Kewley & Jan Maulden, Bob & Martine Moon, Jonathan Clark, Faye Pring, Richard & Bee Hillier and Tom Bulford.

Chairman's Report:- Seasonal floods and frosts brought their benefits to the soil's fertility on our site but also the demise of vulnerable winter crops which couldn't survive minus eleven degrees celsius. The wider climatic range from summer heat to winter cold is a new challenge to our gardening skills.

Our access over the railway bridge is vulnerable to erosion and the path's banks remain un-repaired whilst the railway authorities and city and county councils postpone attention and funding. I have reminded them of the problem to try to prevent any prolonged closure for radical repair works should they become necessary.

Scottish and Southern Electricity's new substation on the railway side of the fence has been built without the threatened trenching through the car park, although we have lost two parking spaces for their access.

The city's Parks Department are adamant that boundary trees on the Port Meadow side of our fence are to remain. Only the willows will be pollarded, so sycamores and ash, whilst handsome trees, are spared and continue to shade adjacent plots.

Some people passionately defend the presence of certain trees on our site and others are oppressed by neighbour's trees too near their plots. We need to minimise tree intrusion onto adjacent areas so please plant (dwarf varieties only) with consideration for others.

A request was made for a stoned fruit tree pruning session by Chris Lanczac. The Chairman will contact him to arrange a suitable date.

Plot 30 where we raised levels with pond spoil, and from which unproductive trees have now been removed, is gradually becoming ready for cultivation and will help reduce the long waiting list. David Haynes has worked on this restoration as he has with path improvements and the regular turnover of the communal compost.

Many thanks, on behalf of all of us, to volunteers and to the committee who manage our money and resources with devotion and skill.

The Chairman hoped that someone might volunteer to take charge of pest control. Four bait boxes are now available for use.

Volunteers are also needed to go on the mowing rota. Marco Sanna was thanked for his frequent help with mowing. Gillian Skyte suggested that elderly members who enjoy coming to the allotments, but find themselves unable to cultivate their plots fully, could be invited to give up their plot and instead become Honorary Members. They might provide a useful role as mentors to new members and be able to continue to enjoy the social aspects of the Association. Further discussion included a suggestion of providing two additional benches and a picnic table. The Committee will discuss this at their next meeting.

Several members asked if the Committee could use a more robust approach with those whose plots are neglected and uncultivated. The Vice Chairman said it was also important to know and support those who might be temporarily unable to work on their allotments, upholding an ethos of kindness.

Treasurer's Report:- 2022 was a satisfactory year from the finance perspective. The water project was completed in 2021 so there were no water costs and the plot fees returned to 'normal'. Income from fees was £5,141 and total income (including the shop) was £6175. The shop produced a useful income of £1,148 when adjusted for valuation changes. This was slightly more than in 2021. Expenditure was £3572, substantially less than in 2021 (£6,036) due to less expenditure on machinery maintenance, in part a reflection of new machinery purchases (higher than last year at £999). There has also been no rent payment to Oxford City Council in the year due to a failure to collect on their part. We envisage that this will change at some point in the future and the assets are sufficient to cover any debt. The net income for the year was £2,602 leaving an end-year bank balance of £14,451. This is healthy and there should be no need to review plot fees in the current year. Jim Moore of Chapman, Robinson and Moore has examined and approved the 2022 accounts. His willingness to do this each year is also very much appreciated.

The treasurer said the unpaid rent to Oxford City Council would be approximately £600/year.

Lettings Secretary's Report

Allotment site There are now 42 whole (10-pole) plots, 146 half plots (5-pole) and 20 quarter plots. At this time last year there were 80 people on the waiting list (which includes existing plot holders who want to take on an additional

half plot). There are now 108 people on the waiting list so if you are finding working your current plot a struggle, please consider giving up all or part of it. Following the spring plot inspection (by a minimum of four committee members), you may be asked to give up all or part of your plot if nothing much has happened on it since the start of the growing season. Members are reminded to let the lettings secretary know of any change in contact details.

Seeds: It is still possible to order seeds at a 50% discount from Dobies as there is no cut-off date for seed orders.

Catalogues and the necessary discount code are available from the allotment shop.

Membership cards are not compulsory but are needed to benefit from discounts at Yarnton Nurseries, Burford Garden Company and Cassington Nurseries and Oxford Garden Centre at New Hinksey. Current membership cards will expire on 1 May 2023. New cards are available at the allotment shop.

Since the pandemic several people have dropped out of the waiting list for various reasons. However the waiting list remains high. New members are given a lot of information when they join.

Machinery Report:- We have a well equipped machinery shed with both hand tools and petrol driven machinery, from lawn mowers to rotavators and a strimmer. The equipment is serviced on a regular basis and trainers are available for hands on training. The two old lawnmowers were replaced in 2022 as they were becoming expensive to maintain. The larger Honda (self propelled) is a powerful machine and good for larger areas. A smaller Webbs (non self propelled) petrol driven machine was also purchased. This is light, easy to use, suitable for narrower strips of grass and is proving to be a popular piece of equipment.

There are now two combination locks on the shed door replacing a key lock. This makes the equipment readily available to all. Please ensure that both locks are in place after you replace the equipment which should first have been cleaned using the brushes in the shed. Please let me know if there are any issues with the equipment ie if something is not working or parts are broken or if we are running low on petrol. Send me an email via the website or a WhatsApp and likewise if you have requests for other types of equipment. Philip James

There is a grass collector available for the small lawnmower in the shed.

Over a hundred members have received training on the shared equipment.

Water Project Report (without accompanying graphs)

You will have water available from the Association's communal water system. This is supplied to a water trough near to you (typically within 20m of your plot) where there is also a tap for filling buckets and watering cans. Hosepipes can be temporarily attached to this but please speak to a committee member if you would like to attach anything more permanent. Please note: The water is not drinkable.

In the past year we have seen how the system functions in drought and extreme heat and so far it seems to be standing up to the challenge. Our water use is monitored by the pump in the borehole driven by its controller mounted inside the shop. July and August in 2022 had the high temperatures and drought conditions which led to a large increase in usage. Overall the total water supplied was 873 tonnes (873,000 litres), which is more or less double last year's total of 429 tonnes. Nevertheless the system coped well with this and only ran out on a very few evenings of very heavy demand. As a result we did some more pollarding of the willows close to the solar panels to reduce shading, after which the tank hardly ever emptied. Remember that our system has no batteries and when the sun gets low the extraction stops after which we only have the 3000 litres in the tank plus about the same again in the troughs to last us until the next morning. Despite the large total demand the peak daily usage total (16 tonnes) never exceeded the amount that we are allowed to extract daily without a licence (20 tonnes) and even that day was significantly increased by a tap left on overnight. Parts of the system were turned off for a couple of weeks over Christmas/New Year to trace a leak caused by a faulty valve which was then replaced, but otherwise there weren't any significant problems. Please let us know if you experience any problems with the watering system. We aim to keep it in full working order.

Overall we pumped approximately, 870 tonnes (cubic meters) over the whole season (2021 – 430). On average each of our 130 full plots used 6.7 tonnes (2021 – 3.3). This is approximately 830 watering cans and previously would have needed an average of around 7300 (2021 – 3600) buckets of water to be raised from each of the 20 or so wells that we have around the plots. Some plots will clearly have used much more than this.

The Future

Are we now at the limit? Not yet, but we can't double our consumption again without passing the extraction limit on some days so we should begin to think about using water more effectively, such as by directing the water to the base of plants and not all onto their leaves where much of it will rapidly evaporate. An interesting way to do this would be to use a soaker hose with a simple timer. Soaker hoses are low pressure systems (optimal at 1 bar) so it would be interesting if anyone has experience of these on our system, which operates at about 0.5 bar.

In the summer our pump can lift over 30 tonnes a day in sunny weather provided that the use is spread evenly throughout the day, such as by filling your own water butt. Even in July our daily average was still only about 8 tonnes. Extraction from groundwater without a licence is limited by Thames water to 20 tonnes per day, so we still have some headway. By extracting the groundwater from the gravel level we are taking water which is too high in ammonia salts and filtering it through the ground on our plots, where the ammonia turns into fertilizer and some of the water goes back to the river. Anything we return to the river goes back in a better state than before, so higher use is (very slightly) beneficial to the environment.

We still have 1 cattle trough that can be installed if anyone is unreasonably far from their nearest one.

Winter Precautions

If you install a manifold (a connector to enable multiple outputs to your tap) this should be drained down over the winter by either disconnecting it or just closing the lever tap on your trough and opening one of the outputs. We have had several of these connected over last two winters and most of the ones made from hard plastic failed in long hard frosts. Metal ones seem to be OK. The taps and connections on the troughs are frost resistant and do not need any extra precautions.

Each plotholder should share responsibility for their nearest water trough. If there are any problems with maintenance or if levelling is required please let Robin Nicholas know. Please water the base of plants and use water thoughtfully.

Collective Compost and Bonfire Report

The main **Bonfire** is a service to members to avoid the need for fires on individual plots which can be a nuisance to neighbouring plots and neighbours. If you do have your own please follow the OCC/TGAA guidance and only burn dry stuff, quickly, and while supervising it. It's courteous to avoid days and times when lots of other plot holders are gardening downwind of you. In the past year we needed 7 big bonfires to clear branches, stalks, pruning etc that couldn't be composted. I try to pick a morning after a dry spell with a wind from the NE (rare) that blows the smoke towards Wytham Woods, not the town, railway or the houses beyond it. Typically one hour is enough to clear the heap and again this year we have had no complaints. The wood ash is usually taken away promptly to fertilise fruit trees.

Behind the bonfire is a drying rack for thick stalks like Brussels Sprouts which burn when dried out. Please don't put wet weeds, grass or dangerous rubbish onto the bonfire heaps. Most of us are very good about this.

Composting is a much better way to deal with most garden waste. It recycles all the organic matter from your plot and supports a broad biome of essential bacteria, insects and fungi that are better than just imported cattle dung. If your plot is big enough having your own heap is worthwhile and saves borrowing it about. There are posters about this on the Notice Boards. The most helpful thing to do is to turn the heap once or twice a season just by moving over the the heap slightly and refilling it. Always try to mix green stuff with layers of brown stuff, dried grass small twigs, leaves etc. the big heaps do build up a good heat in the middle helped by using a JCB to turn it. (Three times last year.) **Please don't put rubble, glass, plastic etc in the compost. It doesn't break down, nor do very large branches or solid roots of trees (Takes Years!)**

The compost is popular when ready. Members are encouraged to watch out for emails or WhatsApps announcing release dates when the compost is available for collection.

Website Report

The website has a host of information from the rules of the association, advice to new members, notices about facilities provided (the shop, shared equipment, discounts from local garden centres). It hasn't changed for a long time and I hope to get round to freshening it up a bit, to make it easier to find relevant material. Meanwhile if anybody sees something clearly wrong or out of date, please let me know so that I can correct it.

On the contacts page there are links so that members can invite themselves to join the Whatsapp group (most used), the Facebook page (not much used) and the Signal group (hardly ever used). They are each voluntary mechanisms to facilitate member to member communication.

There is also the email distribution list which is maintained by the committee with the aim of having everybody on it, for necessary communications to members. We try to send out only information relevant to almost all members via the email route.

ODFAA Lease Report

Very little has changed since last year.

For the last four or five years the Oxford and District Federation of Allotment Associations (ODFAA) has been in discussion with Oxford City Council (OCC) about renewing the leases for the city-owned sites which expired in 2021. The basic message has been that, in an increasingly litigious society, and with anticipated changes to the lease which impose greater responsibilities on allotment associations, associations might wish to consider whether the traditional allotment associations with trustees is an appropriate legal entity to be the leaseholder. It has been recommended that associations consider incorporating (e.g. as a co-operative, as a limited liability company, or as a Community Interest Company) so that trustees do not have to take on increasingly onerous liabilities.

The last news we had from the ODFAA was that there are still one or two outstanding issues with the OCC, including about liability for maintenance of structures on site, and responsibility for looking after trees. OCC do not apparently have staff available to work on the lease. The ODFAA have agreed with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) model rules for a Co-operative Association which associations could use.

The TGAA is waiting for the lease negotiations to conclude. Assuming it is successful we expect to come to the association at some point in the future to recommend that we set up a co-operative to be the leaseholder of the site, although until we see the final outcome of the negotiations we can't say for sure that that is what we will wish to do. Members of the existing association would be invited to become members of the co-operative.

Meanwhile we continue to occupy the site without a lease from the City Council (in common with the other associations who used to have leases with OCC). We are not particularly concerned about this - the last lease between OCC and TGAA was not signed for the entire twenty-one year term of the lease, because OCC had concerns about their ability to guarantee access to the site when we used to access it over the level crossing. We seem to have managed to run the association, occupy the site, and grow our fruit and vegetables without a signed lease for over twenty-one years.

When we have more news about how we should agree a lease with OCC, and what form we wish the legal entity to take, we will inform members.

The Chairman informed members that the legal advice we have received recommends the TGAA to become a Co-operative.

Shop

The shop is open between March and September on Saturday 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. and Sunday 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. It sells such things as manure (bagged), ground cover for weed suppression, horticultural fleece for plant protection, various nettings to protect plants from birds and insects, canes for plant support and other items we believe will be useful for gardening. There is a price list at <https://www.trapgroundallotments.org.uk/trap-trading>. The shop is card only, we don't use cash.

We try to price things to make a modest profit and generally we are able to do that while keeping prices lower than you would find at local garden centres – I believe. Let me know if you find that we are more expensive than local suppliers for any item, and I will see if we can afford to match it.

It only functions due to the volunteers who each do about six sessions each during the season. Special thanks to them:

Howard Cox, Isabella Underhill, Jan Maulden, Judy Shakespeare, Katalin Pinter, Liz Cairncross, Meg Movshon, Rachel Faulkner, Sue Ledwith, Vibeke Mannion, Virginia Wallis.

If you think of something we ought be selling, please let me know. We don't sell seeds or plants because of wastage.

N.B. The shop also has:

- Dobies plant and seed catalogues
- A supply of membership cards which gets you access to discounts at Cassington Nursery, Oxford Garden Centre, Barlows Woodyard, Yarnton Garden Centre and Burford Garden Centre. The discount is usually 10%, not necessarily on all products though. See [the website](#) for details.

for which there is no charge

Vibeke Mannion commented that stocks were running low for bags of compost.

Photo Competition

The reason I like to run the competition is that all the photos which are entered end up in the library of images which are used randomly to enliven the website.

2022

The photo competition held in 2022 was on the theme "Exotica and other rarities".

Karin Fremer kindly judged the entries and the winners (in order) were:

1. Ian Salisbury
2. Suke Walton
3. Bob Moon

Members also voted for the people's prize which was won by Suke Walton.

The photos can be viewed here: [Photo Competiton 2022.2023](#)

Enter your photos in the 2023 Photograph Competition and win a prize!

2023

2023's theme was chosen at the harvest supper and is "Pick Your Own", meaning pick your own subject for your photo. Karin Fremer has once again very kindly agreed to be the judge.

There will be four prizes of £20, £10, £5 and £5 vouchers to spend at the shop.

We expect to show the entries at the Allotment Harvest Supper next year which is scheduled for the evening of 11 November. The winners will be announced for the first three prizes and the people's prize will be decided by a vote of the attendees.

Cotteslowe Larder report

Produce donated to the Cotteslowe Larder has been greatly appreciated, with generous helpings of all manner of fruit, veg and salad in season. Naturally, the cold winter brought about a temporary halt. For those of you who may be new this is a project in which we collect excess produce from our plots and pass it on. Cotteslowe Larder is a self supporting co-operative where members pay a small monthly sum, and can have access to all sorts of food, both fresh and store cupboard, cleaning materials and toiletries.

I have been very grateful to the rota of people who collect each week from the cupboard at the bottom of the ramp and deliver to the Cotteslowe Community Centre. I hope this can continue this season. Can you kindly let me know if/when you have any excess produce and I will get the rota of volunteers, including myself, into action. As in previous years it will be Wednesdays.

You may have noticed the cupboard is now in a sorry state. It has served us well, but if you have something rather more robust could you please let me know.

mary.gurr1@btinternet.com

Mary Gurr read out a letter of thanks to all members of the TGAA from Rev Tom Murray who co-ordinates the Cotteslowe Larder. Chris Goodall volunteered to act as a co-ordinator for those wanting to donate to the Larder whilst on holiday. He and Vibeke Mannion will also be planting courgettes and other seeds in pots for ploholders wanting to contribute to the Larder. Any small pots can be left by the shop for their use.

Secretary's Report

The TGAA Harvest Supper returned in November, following a break of three years due to Covid restrictions. Demand for places was high and we were quickly over subscribed. Apologies to those who were left on the waiting list despite a very full house. Many thanks to all those who provided the delicious food and whose spirited participation in the choosing of this year's photo competition title added to the happy atmosphere.

Many plots still need their number displaying clearly. This facilitates easy recognition now that there is a greater number of smaller plots and members.

As we have several new members it is worth a reminder that dogs should be kept on a lead at all times on the allotment site and all dog waste should be disposed of in a bin off site.

As there was a shortage of crockery and cutlery at the Harvest Supper it was suggested that members could be asked in future to bring their own, together with food and drink. This was agreed with a show of hands. The secretary said she had agreed with the SMI co-ordinator that the SMI would complete an audit of their cutlery and crockery stocks in early October before the next Harvest Supper.

Election of the Committee

The Chairman said the Committee were all willing to stand again for re election. Ian Salisbury thanked the committee for their excellent work and Chris Goodall proposed that all the current committee members should be re elected.

Vibeke Mannion seconded the proposal.

After a general discussion the Chairman invited members to put themselves forward for election in future years. It was suggested that Committee members should automatically come up for re-election every 3 years or stand down if that was their wish. A vote was taken on whether to adopt this proposal . There were 22 votes for, 4 votes against and 12 abstentions.

A system whereby a maximum of 3 three year terms could be adopted. The Committee will consider how best to implement this during the coming year.

The meeting closed at 9.15pm.

