

Minutes of the TGAA Annual General Meeting (AGM) held at 8.00pm on 26 March 2013 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); Jonathan Clark (website, machinery and skips) and around 35 TGAA members.

Apologies from: Julia Aston-Smith; Ian and Tara Flewitt; Chris Goodhall; Rupert Jones-Parry; Joe Lee; David Lowe; Mary MacDougall; Meg Movshon; Faye Pring; Shelley Salisbury; Stuart and Gillian Skyte; Ben Thompson; Karen Walker; Michael Wheale.

Minutes of the 2012 AGM

These had been distributed by email and were approved at the meeting.

Matters arising

Badgers are still a nuisance but we can't do anything about them. However, as a result of the works on the new railway track, there should be fewer badgers this year.

Presentation by Network Rail (NR) and Oxford City Council (OCC)

The meeting was joined by Andrew Holley, Chief Planner for Great Western and NR's Oxford Enhancement proposals and Michael Crofton-Briggs, Head of OCC Development and Planning Department who gave a presentation and answered questions on the proposals for improvements to the Aristotle Lane footbridge, possible link ramp to the allotments and new car-parking arrangements.

Closure of the level crossing OCC confirmed that alternative access to the allotments must be in place and functioning before OCC surrenders its rights and the level crossing is closed. NR needs to close the crossing by March 2015. Works on alternative access will be combined with those needed for electrification of the Oxford to Coventry line planned for 2017 or 2018.

Aristotle Lane bridge Subject to obtaining planning permission from OCC, NR intends to replace the current bridge with a new bridge the height of which will be increased by 50cm as required by electrification. Consultation of stakeholder groups – including TGAA, Freemen of Port Meadow and Natural England among others – has already taken place on site and there will be further opportunities to comment when the planning application is in place. In addition to increasing the height of the bridge, NR intends to raise the path by the Port Meadow gate by 40cm to stop it from being flooded (so ensuring 365-day-a-year access). The path itself will be widened – from its current 2.6m to 3m – and flattened to improve the usable width with the same type of surface as now (rather than tarmac). In response to questions from the floor, NR explained that the approaches to the bridge would change from 1:20 now to 1:16 although the current gradient could be maintained if the approaches were made longer. In addition, although horizontal landings are shown on the current plans, they are not actually needed and could be dispensed with if a steady gradient across the whole length of the approaches and bridge was a preferred option to steeper gradients which would be created by the landings. NR hopes to replace the current bridge with a new one in a single weekend and the level crossing will be kept open until work on the new bridge is completed. It was later agreed that we would prefer the new bridge and approaches to have a steady gradient and no landings and that we were happy with the proposals to widen the path and use the current type of surface rather than tarmac.

Link ramp NR proposes to build a separate metal ramp giving private access to the allotments from Aristotle Lane bridge. Opinion was divided over the need for a ramp but the majority (60%) of members are in favour of having a second entrance to the allotments. However, for preference, any ramp should have a gentle gradient, start at the western end of the bridge (rather than from the middle as proposed) and run north to the allotments with a curve (rather than right-angled corner) to the west. It was agreed that the ramp would not need to be as wide as the new bridge and that its design should be aesthetically pleasing to prevent the ramp from becoming a blot on the Port Meadow landscape and so attracting opposition from other stakeholders. It was agreed that these views would be put to NR and OCC by the committee.

Car park In response to NR's proposed new parking arrangements, it was agreed that we would prefer parking for 15 cars with steps up from the car park to the eastern approach to the new bridge.

Alternative proposal Ian Salisbury circulated an alternative to NR's proposals which would extend the Aristotle Lane byway, make it open to all traffic and create a car park on the site of the old pond at the allotment site. The general feeling of the meeting was that this was an 'unbelievably unacceptable' proposal and should not be suggested to NR. Nevertheless, it will be circulated by email to be voted on by all members.

Other points raised The issue of access by emergency services to the allotments was raised as this would be more difficult with the closure of the level crossing. Deep distress at the 'slash and burn destruction' of the vegetation by the railway line was expressed as was the view that NR should be asked not to use pesticides when dealing with vegetation next to the allotments. It was also pointed out that closure of the crossing would probably increase the number of people crossing Port Meadow to bring heavy loads to the allotments.

NR and OCC were thanked for their efforts to consult TGAA and other stakeholders and for attending the meeting to present their proposals.

Chairman's Report

There had been four meetings of the committee since the last AGM.

Proposed closure of the crossing Ian Salisbury was thanked for his tenacity and efforts in opposing closure of the crossing.

Old pond This has become quite overgrown and will be re-dug in the summer.

Thefts last season were unpleasant, systematic and clearly carried out by someone with good gardening knowledge. It is imperative that members do not disclose the gate codes to non-members nor let in people unknown to them.

Treasurer's report

The accounts for 2012 were circulated. The Treasurer thanked Jim Moore, a professional accountant, who has taken over from Genefer Clark as auditor of the accounts.

TGAA's main sources of income are fees of £4,729, proceeds of £1,010 from the plant sale and profit of around £500 a year from the shop. Maintenance of the site and machinery – including skips – takes nearly half our income.

Secretary's report

Seeds We now have only one discount seed scheme with Dobies as Marshalls has withdrawn its online scheme and we dropped Thompson & Morgan as some members were unhappy with them.

Membership cards are not compulsory but are needed to benefit from discounts at Yarnton Nurseries and Burford Garden Company. Current membership cards expire on 1 May 2013. New cards will be available at the allotment shop and will be free if swapped for an old card but will cost £1 otherwise.

Harvest Supper Stuart and Gillian Skyte have very kindly agreed to organise the harvest supper again this year and it will take place on Saturday 9 November 2013 at the St Margaret's Institute.

Lettings Secretaries report

The recent plot inspection, which took place on 14 March 2013 showed that, despite the awful weather, most plots are in surprisingly good condition with only a handful found to be wanting. There are currently 50 full plots, 135 half plots and six quarter plots all but two of which are let. There is a waiting list of about 20.

Machinery, mowing and locks

Shared equipment Members were reminded that, after being shown how to use it - they can borrow any of the shared equipment which includes a rotavator, tiller, strimmers and mowers. It was suggested that we also acquire a hand-powered grinding wheel.

Mowing Thanks to the team of people who mow the main paths (and some small paths) every week. Members were asked to ensure that stray plastic and ground cover is kept well away from paths and that side paths are kept to a minimum width of one metre.

Locks The codes will be changing in early May.

Trap Trading

2012 was not the best year for the shop but it continues to be a brilliant resource for the allotments and a lovely social hub. Thanks to Vibeke for all her hard work manning the shop and keeping it so well stocked.

Pest Control

The rabbit population is almost non-existent thanks largely to the foxes. Badgers are a problem but we just have to live with them. We have good relations with the council pest control people who have provided us with bait boxes and rat poison for use by members with rats on their plots. However, there are 20 bait boxes which have yet to be returned.

Plant Sale

Last year's sale made another record £1,010. This year's will be held on Sunday 26th May 2013. 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. This year's sale will see the introduction of a stall selling jam and pickles (and possibly honey).

Election of the Committee Stuart Skyte resigned from the committee in January 2013. The remaining committee of eight was re-elected with thanks from the floor for the committee's work.

Any other business

It was suggested that drinks and nibbles should be provided at next year's AGM.

The meeting ended at 10.20 pm