

Minutes of the TGAA AGM Tuesday 19th March 2024

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); Martin Fleminger (lettings secretary); Andrew Parsons (machinery); Michael Wheale (compost and bonfires); Jonathan Clarke, (website, shop, photos); Robin Nicholas (water); Richard Gordon (pest control); and **24** members.

Apologies were received from:- Chris Beckett, Judith Pettersen, David Kewley, Sarah Mitchell, Thalia Carr, Chris Goodall, Gill Shute, Rachel Cucknell, Carol Jarvis, Joanna Hamilton, Michael Wynell-Mayow, Julie Jack, Meg Movshon, Ian & Shelley Salisbury, John Farnell, Gillian Skyte, Virginia Wallis, Jeanette Hebert.

The Chairman welcomed those present.

Matters arising from the AGM Minutes of 2023.

There was a brief discussion about elderly members who might want to continue to visit the allotments without having a plot to tend. The treasurer pointed out that there was already provision for them by opting for membership status without a plot.

Chairman's Report.

Our changing climate has not, so far, imposed too much alteration to our crop species and yields. Protected by the water system from the difficulties of drought, our current burden is waiting for the water table to subside to a workable depth to enable spring to tempt us back into activity.

Since the last AGM, the committee has met three times to deal with routine maintenance and unfortunate break-ins and thefts.

Virginia Wallis retired from her position of Lettings Secretary in June 2023. We thank her for her devoted activity since she took on the job in June 2016.

We are very grateful to Martin Fleminger who agreed to undertake this work.

Since 2019 we have had no committee member looking after Pest Control. In response to Rachel's message last month about committee positions, Richard Gordon has offered to take this on and has ordered equipment to seriously deplete our rat and rabbit populations. We will need to help support his efforts.

Philip James has given up his allotment and has retired from the job of looking after the communal machinery. He has dealt with maintenance, repairs and replacement and the supply of petrol since June 2021 and we owe him very many thanks for this essential work.

Andrew Van Hamel-Parsons has offered to take on this job for a year. We need to make his work as easy as possible by caring for machinery and returning it in good order after use.

Added to these committee positions, our collective activities are run by teams of volunteers who support the association by running the shop, mowing the paths, supplying and delivering surplus produce to the Cutteslowe Community and assisting with keeping the site in order. Apart from our individual gardening efforts, this collaboration helps many of us restore our spirits on this beautiful site.

David Haynes's has worked on the compost bins and raised path levels with rubble and plot levels with soil. He also cleared the ponds so far as his machinery could reach to restore open water and remove intrusive willows and reeds whilst leaving enough cover for the breeding moorhens.

Outside organisations have not shown much constructive activity this year. The access path to Port Meadow remains unrepaired as gabions continue to leak their contents and the path surface erodes, perimeter trees are unpollarded and Scottish and Southern Electricity is silent about their plan to lay a cable through the car park.

We will continue our efforts to have these things dealt with and avoid long term damage and inconvenience.

The Chairman requested that members let him know if they need any trees felling or removed from their plot. He has already pruned the communal fruit trees near the bonfire site. Gaps and holes in the perimeter fence will need to be repaired to prevent other fruit trees from having bark stripped or eaten by rabbits etc.

Treasurers Report

The net income (income less expenditure) was £647.85. The income from fees was slightly higher than in 2022 due mainly to the higher turnover of plots. The water project cost of £1282.17 refers to the replacement of equipment following the theft of the solar panels and hopefully this cost will not be repeated. The shop showed only a small net income (adjusted for stock changes) reflecting a reduced mark up policy.

The accounts do not take account of the rent to Oxford City Council which was not collected in 2023. This situation has occurred for a number of years and steps are now being taken to rectify the issue. Any backlog in rent can be covered from the end-year bank balance which on January 1st stood at £15,099.46. While this may seem large it is important to keep a large reserve to cover the rent arrears, the finance needed for mower replacement and the substantial costs of tree pruning and additional fencing.

I wish to thank Jim Moore for examining and approving the accounts.

A short discussion followed regarding the rent arrears. The Chairman also informed members that despite contacting the City Council on several occasions they continue to procrastinate regarding tree pruning and fence repairs.

Secretary's Report

In November we enjoyed the annual Harvest Supper at the SMI where once again we had a full house. It was good to welcome several new members as 64 of the allotment community came together at the end of the gardening season. The food was plentiful and tasty and generously given. The photo competition entries were seen and admired by everyone. This year the Harvest Supper will be held on Saturday 16th November.

It is immensely helpful if members display the number of their plot. There are many creative ways of doing this and homemade signs are usually very effective on sheds and posts. Alternatively a sign can be purchased online. Finally a reminder about the bamboo clump in the north west corner of the allotments....The bamboo was planted many years ago and each year produces strong canes which members can take freely for use on their plots. This in turn helps to keep the bamboo contained and from spreading further.

NB The Secretary emphasised the importance of displaying a plot number ASAP. This is particularly helpful to the new Committee members when doing plot inspections.

The Harvest Supper is always a happy and successful occasion and it is well supported by the members.

Machinery report

The Chairman thanked Philip James, who has now given up his plot, for his work in caring for the machinery and making sure everything worked and was serviced regularly. Philip submitted the following report

2023 has been another successful year for the equipment which continues to be well used and allotment holders continue to request training before using it. The ride on mower was repaired and serviced during the year and following the demise of the small push mower a significant investment was made to replace it with a Honda push mower. This proving to be a success as it is easy to start and is more robust than its predecessor.

We still have equipment returned to the shed which has not been cleaned. Please make sure that when it is returned all mud and grass is brushed off and removed. Doing this will increase the life of the equipment.

If convenient members are also asked to take an empty fuel can, fill it with high grade petrol and put it back in the shed. The treasurer (Bob Crabtree) will happily reimburse you for the fuel if you send him an email of the receipt and your details. Doing this simple task makes the management of the equipment shed much easier.

Finally the equipment is there for all to use but please ensure that you are trained on the equipment beforehand.

Andrew Parsons emphasised the importance of recording in the book when members have used a piece of equipment so he can monitor how frequently each device is used. This is helpful when organising regular maintenance.

Water Report *(An extract from the full report previously received by members)*

This year we had a new challenge, when near the end of April a significant part of our system was stolen. The solar panels were taken from the roof of the shop along with the pump controller and various tools and other electrical fittings which were taken from inside. Following the thefts the system was restored in 3 stages

1. The system was backfilled by pumping directly from my rather deep well on plot 41 using small solar panels charging a battery, with some water pumped in also from Chris Beckett's similar system. This ran for about 2 weeks and kept all of the troughs filled in a period where it was raining a lot, the water table was high and demand was low.
2. The company who supplied the original pump and controller were very helpful and we quickly obtained a replacement for the controller which was installed, the wiring replaced and the borehole pump was re-connected. This was then powered by a refurbished old solar panel lent by Chris Goodall. This ran the system normally for about a further 2 weeks at a time when demand was still low.
3. New solar panels were mounted onto robust steel angle iron sections and bolted into two railway sleepers sitting on the roof of the shop using 32 M8 bolts fixed with 48 security nuts. I think that the chances of anyone removing them in one piece are now pretty low.

The cost for the new panels, secure mounting, controller, wiring, electrical fittings and tools plus a spare small back-up pump was a total of £1282.

Robin Nicholas told members that help with some pollarding of the trees overhanging the solar panels would be welcomed later in the summer.

One water trough still remains unused. Please contact Robin if you would like it on or near your plot.

Reminder *If a major leak occurs on site the blue taps located on the side of the storage container (shop) should be moved to the OFF position.*

Communal Composts Report

The composters serve to help members with no room for on-plot heaps or wish to dispose of larger quantities of greenery.

Michael Wheale urged members to create their own compost heaps using pallets if they have the space and inclination although we get higher temperatures in the big heaps and have them turned over with a JCB periodically.

- Moreover, they are a “green” way of avoiding having to burn material.
- And the end product can be returned to the soil adding a large biome of useful bacteria, yeasts, small creatures, fungi etc which enrich topsoil.
- Even the coarse bits help to improve drainage and bring air into the ground.
- When opened periodically steam rises and many of these living things can be seen (birds home in on them very quickly)

Michael also asked members to help by breaking up or chopping up any big roots, stalks or sticks with a spade and throwing material to the back of the heaps.

Sprout stalks and similar thick green bits can be left on the drying racks behind the bonfire.

Most things will compost and diseases like blight will be killed off. However don't add potatoes tubers or tomatoes as these can overwinter.

Bonfires Report

- OCC prefer well managed communal bonfires and we have again this year had no complaints.
 - Fires:23/02/23; 27/04/23; 03/06/23; 29/08/23; 09/10/23; 28/02/24
 - We try to have quick fires with minimal smoke blown away from houses -the weather is not always helpful. A few dry days and a wind from the East or NE is ideal but rare at times.
 - A fire usually lasts 2 hrs or less but in wet times e.g. over winter we get left with a big stack and little chance to burn it.
 - Members are asked not to dump piles of wet greenstuff there-put it in the composters as it creates smoke.
 - Never bring asbestos nor plasterboard to the bonfire!!!! Take it to Redbridge (check their rules)
 - Stones and rubble don't burn-put these in the big rubble bags on the left of the shed-the JCB buries this
- My thanks to Jonathan and Tony who regularly show up to help.

NB *Michael emphasised the danger of dealing with asbestos. This should be double bagged and taken to a Council tip. If anyone has any used cooking oil please let him know as it is useful for starting a bonfire.*

Lettings Report

There are currently 55 people/couples on the waiting list. A year ago there were 87 people on the waiting list. Those who have now reached the top of the waiting list joined in April 2022, so just under two years ago I took over as Lettings secretary from Virginia Wallis in mid-October 2023, since then I have let 9 plots. 8 people declined plots when offered them, and their names have also come off the waiting list.

In November the committee undertook a review of all plots.

I wrote to all those whose plots were judged to show lack of satisfactory cultivation during the previous growing season, a total of 18 people/groups, and asking them their intentions regarding their plots.

All except 3 replied.

The majority wanted to keep their plots and pledged to 'do better' next growing season.

3 plots were handed back.

There will be a further check of the uncultivated plots early in the growing season in April.

Martin Fleminger is pleased that the waiting time for a new allotment is now down to two years. There will be an inspection of all the allotments when the ground has dried out.

The Chairman described the criteria used for scoring during an inspection:-

0 = no visible cultivation of the plot

1 = less than half of the plot is cultivated

2 = half to three quarters of the plot is cultivated

3 = between three quarters and the whole of the plot is cultivated

NB. Please ensure your plot is numbered clearly ASAP.

Allotment Lease

The report prepared by Jonathan Clark was exactly as he had written for the 2023 AGM.

Jonathan told members that ODFAA (Oxford and District federation of Allotment Association) had been in discussion with OCC (Oxford City Council) about renewing the leases for the city owned sites which expired in 2021. The situation remains the same and TGAA is waiting for the lease negotiations to conclude. He expects that we will recommend we become a co-operative. Members of the existing Association would be invited to become members of the Co-operative. No trustees would be needed.

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.

Shop

Jonathan continues to organise and run the shop with the help of a group of volunteers . They also continue to hold the membership cards which give discounts at various garden centres (details on website), and Dobies seed catalogues in support of the discount(50% on seeds)

Jonathan confirmed that the shop is designed to make a modest profit. A member asked if a non plastic ground cover could be sourced and Sue Ledwith suggested using cardboard instead.

Manure was back in stock and a new order would be made for the general compost.

NB. A skip will be on site from March 28th

Cotteslowe Larder Report

Cotteslowe Larder is a food and community event that meets every week at the Cotteslowe Community Centre. It is run by volunteers. In order to access the service all that potential members have to do is sign up and agree to pay a monthly nominal sum by direct debit. They are then able to use the larder and also obtain discounts from a number of local retailers. The food had mainly been store-cupboard items, with some fresh food coming from supermarkets but fresh, locally grown and largely organic produce is highly valued.

TGAA recommenced donations in May, and all through the summer and autumn a steady stream of produce was left in the cupboard at the bottom of the ramp. This included, marrows, squashes, edible gourds, courgettes, cabbages, cucumbers, lettuce, chard, spinach, beans, tomatoes, raspberries, carrots, swede, turnips, onions, potatoes, apples, plums and some watercress type salad. (I am sure to have forgotten some others). Naturally enough the supply dwindled as winter approached. It has been well received by the Larder and even the occasional glut has been most welcome, with members using monster marrows for curries or soup.

I have been helped with collection and delivery by Chris G and Vibeke, as well as the other members who volunteered to be on the delivery rota. Thanks to you all and to those who kindly donated their surplus produce. As soon as the growing season gets under way, produce will be collected weekly. In the meantime, if you have any surplus greens you can't use during this fallow time, can you kindly let me know. You can do this by email: mary.gurr1@btinternet.com or via the allotment WhatsApp group.

Mary Gurr, the TGAA coordinator of the Cotteslowe Larder repeated her thanks to all those who had donated and transported the produce to Cotteslowe during the growing season. A kind person has donated a larger box container

for storing the contributions. Vibeke Mannion emphasised how much the contributions were appreciated with recipes being exchanged and food shared, bringing the whole community together. The Chairman thanked Mary for leading the initiative.

Website

The website can be found at <http://www.trapgroundsalotments.org.uk>

Jonathan Clark urged members to access the website. The wonderful photos taken by members are a great feature..They rotate and change regularly.

Pest control Report

We have a number of new lockable bait boxes ordered for rat control which I will distribute round the allotments. They are all numbered and tamper resistant with the poison bait blocks secured on a central rod. The design complies with the new regulations on the safe use of rodenticides, and enables the safe placement of bait boxes in internal and external environments. Please do not move or otherwise interfere with them. If you do not want them on your plot, please ask me to come and place them elsewhere, mentioning the number on the box and your plot number. Equally if you are sure you have a rat infestation, please let me know so I can plan to site them where they are most needed. The boxes will be checked every three days in line with recommended best practice. When rats are affected by the poison they tend to retreat under cover or to their holes, so are unlikely to be found dead in the open. However it is really important to remove any rodent carcasses seen, best double bagged and put in any bin, to prevent other animals eating them.

Richard Gordon emphasised he wanted to operate on a consent basis ie the plot holder is happy to have traps or bait boxes placed on their plot.

While the bait boxes are all in use over the next few months, please do not bring your household green waste down to the allotments unless you have a fully self contained compost bin. If the rats continue to have access to a usual, accessible food source, there is little incentive for them to search out new food sources. The intention is to systematically reduce the present infestation considerably so that the continued total loss of crops such as broad beans, beetroot and carrots is prevented.

We will also have a number of traditional rat traps, very easy to set quickly and safely. If you wish to have one on your plot for a couple of weeks, and are prepared to check it daily, Richard will show you what to do. Peanut butter required!

We already have four live catch rabbit traps. These will only be used once the fence has been checked and repaired, otherwise any poor rabbits currently confined inside the allotments might simply be replaced by others who should be enjoying complete freedom on Burgess Field's 75 green acres."

NB Please ensure your plot is numbered clearly ASAP so that Richard is able to find your plot when laying and retrieving bait boxes and traps.

Election of the Committee

Stuart Skyte asked if the Committee had come to a decision concerning the suggestion voted on at the last AGM that the tenure of Committee members be changed. The Chairman said the Committee had come to the conclusion that the current process worked well, was the most appropriate, and should remain in use. This year three new volunteers had joined the Committee to replace long-standing members.

Guy Williams then proposed the re-election of the existing Committee, seconded by Vibeke Mannion and accepted by the meeting.

Clare Brant proposed a vote of thanks to the Committee which was applauded.

The meeting closed at 9.35pm.