

Hackney Allotment Society
Minutes of the Annual General Meeting
Held Thursday 6th October 2005 St Mary's Community Centre N16

Present: Maggie Wilkinson (chair MW), Sue Carling (secretary, minutes SC), Jackie Breakwell (treasurer), Committee members; Joss Bany, Eugene Clerkin, Sarah Mott, Ian Dick, Mary Connolly + 32 ordinary members of the Society.

1. Apologies

Apologies received from June Lancaster, Guy Dehn, Pat Corrigan, Christine Hathaway, Christine Wildhaber

2. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the AGM 2004.

3. Minutes Agreed

Proposed Diana Whitworth, seconded Joss Bany.

4. Report from the Chair

This year has been an interesting one.

Soil contamination issues dominated the year.

The committee began its involvement in May 2004 and has been very busy ever since. There have been additional committee meetings as well as several meetings with members of the Council, constant emailing, phoning and writing.

The suggestion that the soil tests indicated a serious problem arose just before the last AGM, when there seemed to be a recommendation that crops were dangerous to eat. Shortly after that, at a meeting on 20 October, this advice was softened to "safe to eat but peel or wash your veg and wash your hands, avoid children touching soil or getting it in their mouths" – advice given in the context of short term remediation. By mid November the sites affected, following further tests, were narrowed down to Aden Terrace, Church Walk, Queensbridge Road and parts of Spring Hill; others in the clear.

Committee members explored other methods of improvement such as using brassica crops to take up the contamination or improving the Ph level, but by early November the committee feared that dig and dump to a depth of 600mm was the inevitable outcome, causing major upheaval to the fabric of sites affected and likely loss of carefully nurtured soil structure and numerous plants, bushes and probably trees. It was expected that this would be funded by Defra.

A surveyor was to be appointed to map the sites with this in mind. More visits to sites, more work for site reps. By mid November it was hoped that a full schedule of works would be clear by Christmas 2004. However it was only in January a surveyor was in place.

The committee became concerned about whether DEFRA **would** fund work, and if not what would happen. Two ploholders at Church Walk then contacted DEFRA and was told that dig and dump was an unusual and extreme last resort measure, which was communicated to the Deputy Mayor and the council. February: more tests. By March remediation work was more likely to be delayed until the winter as growing season was approaching. April: council thought to be rethinking. May: still no news but meeting at Town Hall arranged for 18 May. At this meeting Donal Fitzgibbon

suggested there be a quantitative risk assessment with alternatives to dig and dump now being considered. End of May – more tests.

August: Donal Fitzgibbon attending committee meeting to present results of quantitative risk assessment tests. It was a struggle to understand the figures, but it became clear that the tests indicated that the majority of the contaminants could not be absorbed by the human body, and so presented a lesser threat than was first thought. Any remaining risk could be countered by improving the soil by addition of good compost, to be provided by the Council between September and February. A letter saying this has now gone out to all affected, copy available.

It has been a year of doubt, worry and delay. Some continued as before, some – especially those with young families – stayed off their plots. No-one knew when or whether to plant; the committee was in regular debate as to procedures over letting and neglected plot letters. Not to mention the science, and which results of which tests to believe. At the resolution the council has agreed no rent should be charged for 2006 as a gesture of compensation for a year of uncertainty and worry. In 2007 the new agreed rent will begin, which the Treasurer will speak about later.

Thanks on remediation work to Joss and Ian for understanding the science and the context, Malcolm and Martina for exhaustive web surfing research, site reps for frequent attendance on sites and most of all Sue for continual, terrier-like chasing and questioning.

We all look forward to less interesting times when more effort can be devoted to other more creative developments. And fewer meetings.

Achievements

Tenancy agreement – heads of terms have been agreed copies can be supplied on request we are currently awaiting a response from the Council's legal department. Agreed rent of £560 per year, agreement to last for 12 years. Negotiation took place whereby Council suggestion of £8 per plot was beaten down to £5 per plot. Two other useful points:

The Council will continue to provide and maintain the perimeter boundary fences of the site.

Use enshrined:

The land is not to be used other than as classified as allotment sites. The land is Statutory Allotment Land and protected by the conditions of the Allotment Act, 1925 and subsequent related Acts of Parliament. This gives us protection against any future council development but also commits the Society to ensure proper use of the plots. Our thanks to Sue Carling and John Hudson for pursuing this long drawn out process to a successful conclusion.

During the year a good working relationship has been built up with the Council's Commercial Manager in Property, Tim Douglas, who will be in charge of supplying the compost promised to those on affected sites. It is hoped this relationship may lead to other benefits such as investigation of new sites for allotment use.

Website – set up by April. Big thanks to Bob Geater for setting this up and updating it. Please visit www.hackneyallotments.org.uk

Much more regular **Newsletters** on a well organised basis, thanks to all concerned in getting them out especially Sarah, the editor.

Sites: main development work was a group clear up achieved at Overbury Street, leading to building of new raised bed, led by Sarah and Gene. Ivy trimmed at Church Walk. Site reps at Spring Hill have coped with blocked drains, sub-letting, queries over boundaries, rubbish dumping and break-ins, at Leaside with plumbing problems and at Spring Lane with pump repairs. New site reps at Springdale and Queensbridge

Aims for next year

- We should save money and time by sending Newsletter out by email whenever possible. Let's try to achieve 80% by this time next year.
- We should conserve the Society's funds by saving money on tree work by professional tree surgeons. Plot-holders are urged to take early action by removing seedlings themselves and by cutting back or digging up while it is still possible. For example, a sycamore at Aden Terrace between 20 and 21. Major tree work must of course still be done by professionals.

The Society will then have more money for more creative projects.

- We should be mindful, following the contamination debate, of what can damage the health of the soil, and avoid importing treated or painted wood, for example, as edging, or burning it. Old paint can contain lead, old wood preserver can contain arsenic.
- Work needs doing at St Kilda's on the damaged wall of a raised bed which looks unsafe.
- The Committee needs to find a way forward over regular recipients of Neglected Plot Letters who annually neglect their plots and then do the bare minimum to stay on board. There is motion on the agenda regarding this issue.
- The Deputy Mayor Jessica Crowe has invited the Society to make bids on capital expenditure with a recommendation that modest bids would meet with more success at this early stage of assistance. We suggest therefore that we bid for help with three or four old problems, providing water at Queensbridge, and improving perimeter fencing at Spring Lane, Springdale Road and Spring Hill. All of these have been discussed at committee meetings for a long time.

To do this we need more committee members and particularly, more site reps!

Questions to the chair

Sarah Kissack asked when the promised compost would be delivered. SC reported that a meeting with the Council was arranged for 12/10/05.

Tim Maby thanked the Committee for their dogged work and the fact that we one the argument in the end.

5. Treasurer's Report

Jackie Breakwell present the statement of accounts and reported there were no major issues of concern except that rent is likely to be increased from October 2006 as a result of the new tenancy agreements currently being agreed with the Council.

Questions to the treasurer

Aleja Gomez-Quintero asked about the possibility of felling trees at St Kilda's site that are shading her plot. The Chair pointed out this was a matter for the Committee to discuss and invited representation from St Kilda's to attend the next Committee meeting on November 3rd.

Accounts agreed. Moved Joss Bany, seconded Mary Connolly.

6. Election of Officer

Chair: Maggie Wilkinson proposed Joss Bany, seconded Ian Dick.

Vice Chair: Sarah Mott proposed Mary Connolly, seconded Diana Whitworth.

Secretary: Sue Carling proposed Maria Frasca, seconded Maggie Wilkinson.

Treasurer: Jackie Breakwell, proposed Sarah Mott, seconded Joss Bany.

Newsletter Editor: Sarah Mott, proposed Sue Carling, seconded Maggie Wilkinson

Auditors: Maggie Henton & Bob Geater, proposed Sue Carling, seconded Jackie Breakwell.

Site Reps elected unopposed:

Aden Terrace: Martin Klurowicz

Leaside Road: Ian Dick & Lou Crisfield (in absentia)

Overbury Street Sarah Mott & Gene Feder

Queensbridge Road: Keith Osborne

St Kilda's: no nominations Mr Jeffryes has offered to keep an eye on the site.

Springdale Road: Annie Wilson

Spring Hill: Eugene Clerkin & Joss Bany

Spring Lane: Gavin Everall (in absentia)

Other Committee Members

Mary Connolly

Guy Dehn

7. Plot Awards

Plot inspections were held in July, criteria for the awards were variety of produce, creativity, productivity, most improvement.

Leaside Road best plot 8 Christine Wildhaber

Special commendation for neatness, plot 1 Mr Saha

Spring Lane best plot 12 Elsa Hamaz

SpringHill best plot- 31A Emily Mytton

E5/E8 small sites best plot- 7 Jane Christie

Aden Terrace best plot 11 Martin Klurowicz

Special commendations Plot 1 Fran Walker & Plot 5 Chris Coe

N16 Small sites best plot St Kilda's plot 1 Marie McShea

Special commendation, most improved plot Springdale road plot 3 Rosanna Preston

8. Neglected Plot Policy and Use of Half Plots

Neglected Plot Policy –Motion proposed by Joss Bany

The society has developed mechanisms for dealing with dirty plots where little or no effort is visible on the plot.

Situations arise where due to health or other circumstances a plot holder is unable to adequately cultivate and keep weeded a full plot. What the society needs is a similar mechanism wherein exceptional circumstances can be taken into account while at the same time, opening opportunities for members on the waiting list to gain access to begin gardening a half plot.

**I propose that the site reps in conjunction with the full committee be empowered to require full plot holders to divide their plots in two, where it is clearly demonstrated that all normal efforts to encourage or compensate for special circumstances have still resulted in a neglected plot.*

This reduces their work loads by half and simultaneously opens an opportunity for a member on the waiting list to begin gardening.

**Wherein a member refuses to divide a plot and still is unable to work a plot successfully, the committee will have no option but to ask for the return of the whole plot.*

**The time for enforcement should be no more than 4 weeks from issue of a letter requesting such a division to its completion. This time is short because the history of the lead up to this decision will probably have taken 2 - 3 years.*

It was reported there has been leniency on the neglected plot policy due to the soil contamination, however this was not an issue at OS site who reported one plot holder had consistently not maintained their plot year on year, the current neglected plot policy is lengthy and means it is not easily completed in a single season thus the situation has continued.

It was asked if there was a mechanism for the plot holder to regain a full plot at a later date.

It was clarified that if a half plot fell vacant the other half would be first offered to the half plot holder.

It was also clarified that if a half plot was accepted by a waiting list member, they could remain on the waiting list for a full plot once available.

The motion was carried by a clear majority of hands and the Committee were asked to clarify the detail of the policy at the next Committee meeting before publication.

9. Bee Keeping

David Shenton asked if it was possible to keep bees on allotments. SC said the Society did not currently have a policy and referred to DTLR guidance.

“Bee keeping is allowed on some allotment sites but not all will be suitable. You will need the Council’s consent. You should also consider joining the bee keepers association and taking out insurance.”

Diana Whitworth informed the meeting that Guy Dehn plot holder at Leaside had experience of beekeeping and mentioned that bees can be affected by flight paths. Queries were raised about bee stings allergy and liability.

SK asked if the Council could be asked for information. SC felt it unlikely they would have such expertise.

Agreed David Shenton & Guy Dehn to investigate the possibilities.

10 Cultural Diversity

This item was raised by Anna Harding was not present at the meeting.

SC reported that most new contacts come via the Council or the website and the Council has facilities for interpretation and translation. There are also community organisations that will provide this support on request.

It was asked if we had a sense of the cultural make up of the Society and SC reported that we did not request or record this data currently.

11.Green Waste Collection and Composting

SC reported the intention to arrange for green waste collection (brown bins or biodegradable sacks are available) from the sites and that she was currently liaising with the Council's recycling officers to achieve this. Currently only Spring Lane site have brown bins. The intention is to arrange for the collections to be from within the sites by arranging keys for the contractors.

SC and JB have applied for a grant from the NLWA to fund compost bins and a shredding machine in order to develop community composting on two sites. Hopefully this funding bid will be successful.

12. A.O.B

A **waiting list** member asked how they could find out where they were on the waiting list. SC reported that the renewals were currently being processed, once this was complete in about two weeks accurate information would be available. Some waiting list members drop out at this time of year. Any one enquiring should email the secretary on **secretary@hackney allotments.org.uk**

It member asked how **tree work** was agreed. MW reported this was discussed at Committee and funding agreed on a priority basis once three quotes had been obtained. The next Committee Meeting is on Wednesday 2nd November 05 at St Mary's Community Centre, Defoe Road. MW informed the meeting that any member of the Society is welcome to attend the monthly Committee meeting's.

The meeting closed at 9.20pm