

Hackney Allotment Society

Minutes of AGM held on Wednesday 1st October 2014 at

St Mary's Church Rooms, Stoke Newington, N16.

Present:

Penny Miller (Chair) Hugh Naylor (Treasurer), Nancy Korman (Secretary), the following site representatives: Vikki Yapp (Aden Terrace) Jane Hough (Overbury Street and minute-taker), Henrietta Soames (St Kildas), Philip Turner (Queensbridge Road) and approximately 30 members.

Apologies:

Received from Hilarie Kerr (Vice-Chair), Jack Eldon, Sue Fareweather, Neil Purvis, Gill Harris and Al Wallace, Oisin Hanrahan, Wayne Minter, Zebbie Patel, Eugene Clerkin, Jon Fuller, Sofia Craxton and Victoria Harud.

1. Speaker: Stephanie Irvine

Stephanie Irvine spoke on what vegetables could be grown over winter, the use of green manures and the importance of making places for wildlife to survive over winter on allotment sites. Notes of her talk will be put on the website.

2. Minutes of the 2013 AGM

It was pointed out that two questions raised by Rowena Altheer were not recorded in the Minutes and therefore not responded to. An apology was given for this oversight and the Secretary will take this up outside the meeting. With this proposed amendment, the Minutes were accepted.

3. Chairman's Report

During the year, 7 plots were relet and 2 new plots were created at Overbury Street. There were 4 Neglected Plot Letters, resulting in 1 plot being surrendered and three others improved upon re-inspection.

A Working Group was set up to encourage the finding of new sites for allotments. Steve Newsome led this group and also represented waiting list members at the Managing Committee meetings. Steve reported that the issue of the waiting list and potential new sites was discussed at every meeting of the Managing Committee. He,

however, is now stepping down as the leader of the Working Group, and a new person will need to be recruited.

During the year four sites were identified but there had been no success in converting these into allotments. One site had been leased to London Wildlife Trust, another is reserved for housing, and two others are being pursued, one with Hackney Council and the other with the Canal and River Trust. There is strenuous competition for land in Hackney, and even some of the other organisations concerned with growing food which have been successful in getting land in Hackney have reported that it is more difficult here than in many other boroughs. A suggestion from a member was that the sites under discussion should be put on the website so that members could write in supporting the request and this will be followed up.

4. Treasurer's Report

Hugh Naylor presented the audited accounts to the meeting. He noted that the accounts have been signed off by two members who are not on the Managing Committee. Hugh drew attention to the imbalance between income from sites and expenditure on sites, following a trend of previous years. There were no questions about the accounts from the floor.

The accounts were then accepted by the meeting.

5. Election of Officers

There was no election for the posts of Chair, Secretary and Treasurer, as the number of people willing to be considered was the same as the number of posts available. The incumbents will carry on.

The Chair also reported that the Vice-Chair has resigned; Hilarie was thanked for her work during the year. It was thought that this was a useful post to have and with some encouragement, Ruth Gladwin volunteered. Without any opponents, she was declared Vice-Chairman.

Lastly, Jason Cole has resigned as site representative for Spring Hill, and Jon Fuller has agreed to become a site representative there. But this is our largest site, with 40 plots and we are looking for another two representatives.

6. Resolutions

1. An increase in plot rental fees, of £5 each year until income and expenditure are in balance, proposed by the Managing Committee and introduced by the Treasurer.

The Treasurer made the following points: that over the years, income has fallen as people withdrew from the waiting list; that we need to ensure the reserves are available for permanent improvements to sites rather than being used to balance on-going expenditure; that our plot fees are well below the London average of between £25 and £125, although it is hard to compare precisely because of differences in size, etc.

Comments from members were broadly favourable. The rental fee was excellent value for money, even if increased, and the proposed increase was compared with the cost of two cups of coffee. Members also expressed the view that it was a privilege to have a green space. There was support for the idea that current plotheolders should pay their own way and ensure that the reserves remain available for permanent improvements. One member, however, thought that the reserves should be spent as necessary and any increase delayed until it is actually needed.

A vote was taken and with one exception all members present approved this resolution. There were no abstentions. This will apply to the 2015 fees.

2. This AGM agrees that bylaw 14 be amended to read:
“The site must be kept clean and tidy, with each plotheolder responsible for removing non-compostable rubbish from their plot as quickly as possible. The site will be inspected from time to time to ensure that this requirement is respected. HAS funds will not be used for ongoing rubbish removal, but the HAS mailing list may be used for organisation, such as arranging for plotheolders to contribute towards skip or van hire, and requests to the Council for rubbish/recycling/brown waste bins.”

Proposed by Sarah Kissack who will introduce the resolution.

This resolution would amend Bylaw 14 to specify that plotholders are responsible for removing from the site their own non-compostable rubbish. In addition, plotholders may wish to share the funding of any extra resource (skip, hippobag, zipvan, etc) needed to accomplish this. Some members pointed out the need for flexibility as some sites (e.g. Queensbridge Road) did not have garden waste recycle bins, due to their location. There are also occasions when rubbish appears on a site which does not belong to individual plotholders (a fence blowing down in a storm, for example). In these cases, the site rep may ask for help from the Managing Committee, depending on the circumstances, and some financial help may be given for the cheapest solution. The meeting decided to take the resolution in two halves.

The first emphasised the individual's responsibility for the removal of rubbish from their plot and to join with others on the site to ensure that all other rubbish was also removed. This was accepted unanimously by all present.

The second was concerned with HAS payments. The resolution stated that HAS funds would not be used. There was general agreement that HAS funds should not automatically be used for the removal of rubbish but might in certain specific instances. The vote was three in favour, three abstentions and the rest against. This part of the resolution was not passed. The Managing Committee has noted the views expressed during the debate and will ensure that those views are taken into account in dealing with any relevant situation.

3. That the waiting list be re-opened, that prospective members be told an approximate time they would be waiting and that efforts be made to widen recruitment so as to be more inclusive of Hackney residents. Proposed by the Managing Committee and introduced by Nancy Korman,

The waiting list now stood at 50, which would take approximately 5 years to clear. Re-opening it would give us some idea of demand and might help in discussions with Hackney Council. Some members suggested that re-opening it for just one year would give such an indication of demand but avoid building up a huge waiting list as before. It was noted that the state of the waiting list could be reviewed at the end of a year regardless. Almost all members were in favour of advertising the opening of the waiting list, through such means as an article in *Hackney Today*, laminated signs on the gates of the allotment sites, and contacts with ethnic groups in Hackney. All of these ideas need to be pursued before the waiting list re-opens.

A vote was taken, with all in favour and 1 abstention.

7. Best Plot Awards

Aden Terrace: Best Plot - Sue Carling
Most Improved - Susan and Richard Kay

Leaside: Best Plot - Patsy Hans
Most Improved - Liz de Monchaux

Spring Hill: Best Plot - Jon Fuller
David Harradine

Spring Lane: Best Plot - Roweena Altheer
Best Newcomer - Joanna and Desmond McAllister

Small sites: Best Plot - Anna Harding (Overbury Street)
Best Newcomer - Kerry Morgan (Overbury Street)

8. Any other business

- a. The height of fruit trees. Members complained that other members' fruit trees were casting shadows on their plots. The Chair reminded members that fruit trees are supposed to be on dwarf root stock, which is slightly more expensive but ensures that the tree remains of manageable proportions. Secondly members who have placed fruit trees on their plots were reminded that it is their responsibility to ensure that these trees were regularly pruned to keep them a good size and that they were responsible for paying for this.
- b. Could HAS undertake fundraising? Absolutely! It was suggested that a notice be put in the newsletter asking if any member had experience of fundraising to help with this.
- c. Seed orders - due to be with Sarah Kissack by the end of November.

9. Date of 2015 AGM

This will be held on Wednesday, 7 October 2015, at 7.30 pm, venue to be confirmed.

The meeting ended at 9.30pm.