**DRAFT Minutes of the Annual General Meeting**

**Ash Road Allotment Association**

**Held at Heart, Bennett Road, Headingley, Leeds LS6 3HN**

**10th November 2021**

***[These Draft Minutes will need to be agreed at the next AGM]***

**Chairman:** Chris Martin introduced himself and opened the meeting.

**Item 1. Members present:** 52

**Item 2. Apologies received:**

Janice Bairstow (Treasurer), John Bland, David & Julie Grindrod, Lesley Jeffries, Richard Hawkins, Steven & Jo Humphris, Mary Maslin, Rebecca Mottram, Andy Smithson, Lynne Snowden.

**Item 3(a). Draft Minutes of the 2020 AGM**

The draft minutes of the 2020 AGM were read by Chris Martin. Acceptance of the minute was proposed by Adrian Luke and seconded by Kate Evans

**The meeting approved the minutes as a correct record**.

**Item 3(b). Matters arising from the minutes.**

Helen Gee introduced herself as a Trustee of Ash Road Allotments and Chair of the Ash Road Area Residents Association and raised the issue of “drones” being launched from the allotment site during some cricket matches. It was explained that some people were unhappy about them and the Residents would like to discuss their concerns with the Committee. Chris Martin noted the request for a discussion and waited to hear further. He noted that using our site to get “shots” of the cricket raised a lot of money, from which we have been able to fund improvements to the site, including installing solar panels and renewing the awning and servery area at the back of the Hut. We would certainly ask for much earlier notice from the drone company about requests to fly so that we can be open with everyone and also insist that the quieter drone is used.

**Item 4. Chair’s report.**

The Chairman’s report was sent out to plot holders in advance of the meeting. A copy is kept with these minutes. Chris stated that 2022 would be the centenary of the site. He gave his report, talking about how ARAA had progressed in recent years. Over the last couple of years many more plots are being actively used and this is good to see in an era with greater focus on climate change, food security, reduction of food miles, etc. We have also seen improvements to the site include the water supply, solar panels, storage for supplies, improved awning and catering facilities at the hut and upgrading of the toilets.

In order to meet demand for plots we are increasingly letting smaller plots and we now have a greater diversity of plot holders. We are endeavouring to improve the site overall and particularly to re-establish the ‘communal’ paths between plots. Next year we are hoping to start work to turn a number of our unlettable plots into proper, managed, wildlife sites.

An important aspect of the site are our events, held on The Green. These help to build our community. Unfortunately, these stopped due to Covid in Spring 2020, although we did have a McMillan event in August 2021 that raised £560. We hope to resume our programme of events in 2022, including our Annual Show.

Chris thanked everyone for their efforts over the past year. He thanked the members of the Committee for work done, and other plot holders who have helped on work parties and maintenance tasks around the site. Specific thanks were given to Val Johnson, Sally Dowell and Alex Paton for the significant amount of time they have spent helping with maintenance (Val and Sally with the toilets and Alex with mowing).

Chris also thanks people who have responded to our request to help with specific tasks on site. However, he noted that the Committee may still need to retain the services of a handyperson to ease the situation with regard to maintenance.

Chris also reported that following a discussion with the Trustees, the Committee proposed to re-introduce a system of annual ‘honorarium payments’ to recognise the significant time and effort voluntarily given up by particular individuals to help keep the site running. He hoped the meeting would endorse this proposal.

Discussion and Questions

Q. Why was the paper just put on the chairs and not emailed out to everyone, giving little time to study it?

A. Chris apologised. He had hoped that the matter would not be controversial and be supported given that Honorium payments had been made over a number of years previously.

Q. The total cost would be £700 not £600 as stated in the report.

A. Chris noted and apologised. [post-meeting note – the correct figure is £650]. Any one individual can only receive a maximum of £100

Q. Concern was expressed that the payments might justify people thinking all the work could be left to the Committee. It should be about others offering to help too.

A. Chris pointed out that in response to an email asking for help with tasks around the site we had only three offers of help out of three hundred people . However, three of the Honorarium payments would likely be to to non-Committee people.

Q. Has any thought been given to the number of hours and the cost of a handyperson and what would the person do?

A. Chris expected the cost would be around £1,000 per annum. Typical tasks might include maintaining gates and structures, locks, gutters etc. However, it is the only way we can get around the problem of not enough people volunteering. We do not want to go down the route of compulsory work commitments as part of a tenancy.

Judith Georgas volunteered to head up a team to deal with plumbing.

Q Someone asked whether plot rents could be raised by £5 per year in rent to pay for a handyperson

A. Chris said he didn’t think we needed to raise rents. We would monitor how things go.

Malcolm Cuthbert noted that honorarium payments had been paid in the past and that as he used to do all the maintenance he was offered an annual honorarium of £1,000 – although accepted £500.

Adrian Luke (one of our Trustees) noted we are a self-managed site and if we don’t keep the site properly maintained the alternative is that the City Council will take over and manage things directly.

Chris Martin said he would like the meeting to note his report and vote to support the proposed Honorarium payments for the coming year. The vote was a show of hands.

**A majority voted FOR the proposal for honorarium payments with one abstention.**

**Item 5. Treasurer’s Report.**

Chris gave an overview of the report and accounts prepared by Janice Bairstow, our Treasurer, a copy of which has been sent to plot holders in advance of the meeting. He noted that we made a profit of £226.77 for the year despite spending on various improvement projects.

Discussion and Questions

Q. Why is there a large difference in profit for the seed scheme?

A. Because of Covid, far more people ordered seeds through the Kings Seeds scheme as they were unable to “shop” as normal.

Q. Is it clear where the item marked ‘donations’ is coming from and going to?

A. It was stated that we have a “Charity of the Year” and also Macmillan and we have events to raise money for them. Money raised from such events is shown as ‘income’ in the accounts and the subsequent payment to the charities is what is shown under the heading ‘Donations’.

**The report was received and noted.**

**Item 6. Proposed Rules Changes.**

Chris introduced the item and the report previously circulated and emphasised that a number of the proposed rules are based on either existing Leeds City Council rules or our own Association rules and the changes are largely for clarification, although there are some new rules. We are trying to resolve particular difficulties we have found over the past few years. He suggested we look at each section at a time.

Discussion

Q. A question was asked about whether there could be a general discussion? Points were made about the need for less ‘aggressive’ wording of policies and whether better dialogue was needed between plot-holders and Committee.

A. Chris noted the concerns. He said that in some cases the wording was the same as existing rules and the proposed new rules were drafted on the basis of wording commonly used across the country by Allotment Associations and Councils. The intention was to be clear.

**1. Water Butts**

Chris introduced the proposed rule (Line 1 in the Table in the report) that was a clarification of an existing rule about the need for water butts on sheds.

Discussion and Questions

Questions were asked about how long you had to you do the work and how can it be made easier to be inclusive of people who cannot afford the work? Someone asked whether the policy should say ‘should’ have a water butt and not ‘must’.

Chris responded that the wording on the water butt rule is the wording we already have. We are simply confirming that the rule should apply to all sheds and not just newly-built ones. The rule would apply to existing plot-holders from 1st October 2022.

Points were made that everyone seems in favour that we should collect water but maybe the Committee could help people who are struggling and to make it more affordable.

Chris accepted that water collection need not mean having to purchase a water butt new – it could be any suitable container and the proposed policy wording could be changed to reflect that. He noted that the Committee would be happy to support people - when we clear plots there are spare containers, bath tubs etc we could let people have.

Chris proposed acceptance of the proposed rule, subject to amendment to make clear to that ‘other options for containers, for collecting water’ would be allowed and not specifying it must be a water butt**.**

 **On the vote – the majority voted for the proposal, one against**.

**2. Plot Clearance.**

Chris introduced the proposed new rules (Line 2 in the Table), which he said was to try and promote more environmentally-responsible storage and waste disposal. He said the background to this was the huge amount of waste pollution left behind by some plot-holders who leave. This means we have to ask other plot holders (through work parties) to clear other people’s waste. It also is unfair to new tenants who may not have a car to be left with waste to remove. So far this year the Committee has had to spend more than £1,000 on waste disposal.

Q. A point was made by one plot-holder that it was unfair that the Committee was spending money on clearing and preparing plots for new plot-holders when they had to clear their own. Perhaps a neglected plot could be let at half rent for a while instead of requiring a bond payment from everyone. Another point was that is there a way to address this before the waste builds up on a plot?

A. Chris responded that the proposed new rules sought to prevent waste build up and seek to recover costs from the person leaving the waste on their plot rather than it become a burden on the Association and other plot-holders. He also thought that giving a rental discount to a new tenant to clear the plot still shifted the problem away from the person who had caused the problem to the new tenant and we have often had difficulty getting new tenants to deal with mess left by previous tenants.

Q. Particular concern was expressed about the proposed £40 ‘bond’ to be levied because of the impact this could have on people with very little money. There were also questions about how we would keep financial record of the bond payments and whether this would be the same for any size of plot.

A. Chris said we keep financial records and we could have a separate account for bond money held, plus we could refer to in your yearly rental bill – to confirm each year that you have a deposit with us. This would be a ‘one off’ payment, not each year. Some people do just walk off the site without telling us and without removing rubbish. LCC itself has a policy that allows a charge to be levied on people for plot clearance, but that is difficult to enforce once they have left a site.

Q. Other points were made about recycling waste materials and use by other plot-holders. How much would it cost to have skips more frequently for people to use?

A. We do try and have one or two ‘general skips’ on site each year. However, we do have problems with mis-use - some people find it is easier to bring things in rather than going to the waste tip. We have had lockable skips but that means a member of the Committee has to be on site to supervise and is not always practical. On recycling we do have a table for donations of items that could be of use to others and the Facebook page offers opportunities to advertise.

Q. Point was made that these proposed rules were ok, but not the £40 bond. Perhaps we can lift the bond part of the proposal and consult more widely on ideas and come back to it at a later date?

A. Chris accepted the point and proposed that the new rules be accepted, with the deletion of the rule relating to the £40 bond. Further thought and consultation would be undertaken on that matter.

**On the vote - All voted in favour of the proposal except for one person**.

**3. Trees/Fruit Bushes/Canes**

Chris introduced the proposed rules on trees on site (Line 3 in the Table in the report) that sought to have some control on the size of trees on site. He noted that we already have an existing rule that requires trees to be on dwarf rootstock and that plot-holders are required to ensure that any trees are kept to a reasonable size so fruit can be harvested and neighbours aren’t unduly shadowed. We spent £1,600 of Association money three years ago on pruning trees, but this may have been wasted as oversize trees continue to grow. The new rules seek to be much clearer in terms of sizes. These sorts of policies are almost universal on allotment sites elsewhere and many have much stricter rules.

Discussion and Questions

Q. There is a row of trees along the north edge of the site which block out the houses. They are good trees and block out our allotment from students. The have birds, etc. and border the site. Would they be affected.

A. Chris noted that this is an important line of trees. They could be designated as ‘legacy trees’. If plot-holders have inherited older and larger trees they can apply to the Committee to have them designated as ‘legacy trees’

Q. A question was asked about the very large tree on Plot 127 tree and concern expressed that the Committee was apparently proposing to cut this down – it does not need to be down.

A. Chris answered that it is a particularly large tree and it is in the middle of a vacant plot that we would like to let to a new tenant or tenants. The spread of the tree, roots etc, significantly prejudices the use of that plot. We are a site of only nine acres and the space should be used to grow food, particular when hundreds of people are on the waiting list for allotment sites in north Leeds. We have already agreed to set aside seven half plots which are to be special wildlife plots. We have also planted 400 saplings on the borders. The priority now should be to get the plots growing food. We want to cut down the tree on 127 and will plant three others to replace it, but on dwarf stock.

Q. Concern was expressed by the decision taken by the Committee and could the AGM vote?

A. Chris said that decision had already been made by the Committee meeting on the plot to discuss it. [Post-meeting note: the plot has been re-let with the tree remaining]

An amendment was tabled to seek consultation if mature fruit trees large trees were to be removed in future. The proposed wording was:

*“Where the committee were planning to completely remove a mature fruit tree, they would consult members; for example, by emailing them. They would give details of its location and ask people interested in saving it to meet and see if they could prune it back.”*

The amendment was proposed by Judith Georgas and seconded by Rosa Dunton.

**The amendment was carried by vote**

**There was then a vote on the substantive motion to agree the new rules (as amended), which was carried with 17 in favour and 8 against.**

**4. Fences Around Plots**

Chris introduced the proposed new rule to prohibit new fences around plots on site (Line 4 in the Table in the report). This was in order to keep the traditional open-look of allotment sites. Fences also sometimes made it difficult to get wheelbarrows and mowers along the public paths. Existing plot-holders who already had fences would not be affected.

In discussion concern was raised that this was unfair and fences may be appropriate in some circumstances. It was suggested that the rule should be amended to say instead ‘no new fences be put up without permission of the Committee’.

The amendment was proposed by Kate Evans and seconded by Chris Bulmer.

**The proposal to accept the new rule subject to amendment was carried unanimously**.

**Item 7. Election of Officers and Committee.**

Chris noted that Victoria Burley had stepped down from her roles of both Trustee and Committee Member and he would like the meeting to record our thanks for the years of work she has given to Ash Road Allotments. Thanks were recorded for Victoria.

Trustees

Chris noted that we have had three Trustees for many years and we now have just two - Adrian Luke and Helen Gee. Two Trustees are sufficient but it would be prudent to have another one, or preferably two more.”.

A question was asked about the role. Chris reported that from a legal perspective the role was that our site Lease is between the City Council and the Trustees (on behalf of the Association). He asked whether someone would like to volunteer?

**It was agreed to confirm Adrian Luke and Helen Gee continue as Trustees and to endeavour to recruit more**.

Association Officers

The proposal was to re-elect the existing post-holders for the coming year (Chairman – Chris Martin, Vice Chair – Kate Evans, Treasurer – Janice Bairstow).

This was Proposed by: Darren Turnor and Seconded by: Susan Frost

**The meeting agreed to the proposed appointment of the Officers**.

Other Committee Members

Chris noted that Lynne Snowden is also stepping down from the Committee. We extend our thanks to Lynne for her many years on the Committee, and not least for her excellent work as Show Secretary each year. Thanks were recorded for Lynne.

Chris also reported that Rosa Dunton had stepped down as a Committee Member during the past year. Thanks were recorded for Rosa.

Chris noted that the following existing Committee members had all agreed to serve for another year (Susan Frost, Paul Hudson, Andy Smithson, Darren Turnor, Chris Bulmer and John Bland) and, in addition, Paul Millner had also offered to be a new member of the Committee. [Post-meeting note – Andy Smithson subsequently stepped down from the Committee]

**The meeting confirmed the Committee members.**

**Item 8. Any Other Business.**

We do need a Co-ordinator for the Annual Show – Chris asked if anyone would offer to be our new Show Secretary? Plot holder Martin Hemingway said he would take on the role provided someone else would volunteer to help him form a “Show Team”. Disappointingly, despite a lively and interactive meeting, no plot holder offered their help. Kate Evans, Committee Member did offer her help. [Post meeting note: Paul Millner, new Committee Member asked for information about the Show and offered his services].

Wildlife Plots. Helen Gee offered to get a team together to take forward a Committee proposal for more proactive management of our unlettable plots as wildlife habitats.

Q. When will the toilet near to The Green be working again.

A. Chris said that it will be done as soon as possible. Two Committee Members have so far spent eight hours to unblock the toilet and to create a new soakaway and waste pipe connection. There is just some final prep work to do. This is the type of maintenance and upgrading work we have to do. Much of the site would fall into abandonment if we did not step up to do the work.

Q. We have a locker room at the back of The Hut and one lock is missing.

A. Chris reported that we may need to order some more locks for these and this would mean new keys.

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and contributions and the meeting was closed.

Kate Evans proposed thanks to Chris for chairing the meeting. Agreed.

The meeting closed at 21.30 hours.

END OF MINUTE