

WILDMOOR ALLOTMENT HOLDERS' ASSOCIATION

Extraordinary Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 31st May 2022
Abingdon United Football Club, Northcourt Road, 7.30 pm

APOLOGIES –

Jane Cadogan, Jude Wright, Alastair Lee (lettings sec), David Bartlett, John Hardie (seed sec), Stephen Phipps, Paul Hogben, Sue Russell, Brigid Sundaram, Ken Wood.

MINUTES from AGM 2019 –

Minutes have been circulated by email to members and were accepted unanimously as a true record. Reports from the officers have been circulated each year in a virtual AGM in November 2020 and in November 2021.

Short Talk and Demonstration from Permaculturist Brigid Sundaram entitled “Simple and Cheap Ways to Save Water”

Unfortunately, Brigid was unwell on the evening, but has agreed to present this short talk at the November AGM.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT (Rob Harrower) -

Rob Harrower gave a summary of activities of the past two years of COVID lockdowns. Rob accepted the chairmanship at the beginning of 2020.

Rob talked about the events of the past 2 years –

- Flooding, and the hours taken to talk to Biffa, Vale of White Horse and Highways Agency. Hopefully the culvert will be cleared out later this year.
- COVID and the extra leniency on plots for the past two years, making it harder to get some plots back under control now.
- Deer Fence, and Andrew James' hard work in procuring the contractor.

Rob obtained 10 percent off goods at Oxford Garden Centre and £12.50 off a bag of top dressing from Apsley Farm - as we are just outside their free delivery area. On the notice board will be discount values offered by certain firms (on line).

Our bark chippings tailed off, but, with great difficulty, Rob found another source, who has since delivered 20 loads.

The usual things have cropped up – please keep to the speed limit to help the roadway. It now costs £1,000 to get a load of chippings delivered and hire a roller to tamp down. The security and rabbit gates get left open, making the triangular field accessible illegally, for which we would have to pay eviction and clear-up costs. It could finish our allotments. Please keep to the rules re fires - what you can burn and when etc. Make sure little ones are under supervision - there are cars, pesticides, poisons, ponds and equipment around, all bad things for youngsters.

Equipment -

- Nearly all the 72 angle iron stakes from plots have been retrieved and will be used if we start on the A34 deer fence.
- The committee have approved the purchase of a brush cutter/strimmer, but purchase is on hold until we get a more secure shed (agenda item)
- We managed to acquire an old rotavator in working order for use by plot holders, but that and the existing second mower have been returned, used, broken and dirty. May not be possible to repair them, sorry.
- We are discussing the purchase of a sea container, to store our machinery, for service and repair, it would last 50 years - it could be used for tea-shop, fertilizer store, part of BBQ area, for meetings - your imagination can run riot (Agenda item 2)

Finally there have been recent suggestions, still being examined, to help people with mental health difficulties, school-children and Ukrainian women with any spare plots. The committee will discuss, but do let us know if you have any thoughts.

Committee changes during lockdown – David Cooper left as secretary, and Julie Edge took it on. Ian Cade started on the committee. Thanks to Eric Nuttal for keeping our taps and water flowing, Liz for a very healthy bank balance, John for his seed and potato ordering and distribution, Alastair for the lettings and of course Julie for the hours of work put in to make things tick over nicely. Please help with the committee if you can.

Rob thanked all the committee for their hard work over this year, and special thanks (and a small gift) went to Elizabeth Mercer, retiring as Treasurer at this meeting.

SEED SECRETARY'S REPORT (John Hardie, in absentia) -

For the benefit of recently joined members, this is a quick description of how the seed scheme works. Its purpose is to enable plotholders to buy seeds at reduced prices while, at the same time, providing additional funds for the Association.

Prices in the Members' Catalogue are approximately 60% of those in the general Catalogue. As well as flower and vegetable seeds you can order seed potatoes, onion and garlic sets, fruit bushes and various sundries.

In July John delivers the seed catalogues along with an order form and accompanying letter, to every household. If you wish to participate in the scheme you must return the order form by the date specified in the letter along with payment. He then aggregates the orders and sends them off applying a discount of about 15%. The seeds arrive sometime in October or November and are normally distributed at the AGM in November.

In 2021 75 plotholders (roughly half of the total Wildmoor membership), submitted orders worth £3285.54. Because of the discount we then claim off Kings Seeds this generated a profit of £585.26 for our accounts.

TREASURER'S REPORT (Elizabeth Mercer)-

- Official balance sheet not presented this time – will be done at Annual General Meeting in November.
- Balance sheet was available for inspection at the meeting and can be sent to anyone interested in seeing it at any time.

When I took over the accounts in 2013 the rent of £24 (or £15 for a half plot) and a deposit of £20 had already been established. This year we increased the deposit to £30 instead of £20 but the rent remains the same. We have had an average annual income of £3602 over the nine years.

Up until 2020 we had an average annual expenditure of £2976, giving us an average surplus of about £600 a year and thus an increase in our bank balance of about £5,000 over this period. However this is largely due to the fact that in 2015 the Town Council agreed to a concessionary grant of up to £2,000 per annum to cover maintenance costs. Without the grant, which amounted to £6,486 between 2015 and 2020, our average expenditure would have exceeded our income. It has enabled, amongst other things, the vital work on road maintenance over the period. I do think we are fortunate in being able to keep the annual rent so low and therefore accessible to anyone.

Given the healthy state of our finances, it was agreed last year to spend money on a deer fence and the Town Council agreed that we could use two years' grant toward this. Last year's balance sheet, circulated to all members in November 2021, showed the net expenditure of six and a half thousand pounds last year, including the deer fence, road and site maintenance and the other routine costs.

There are currently other projects under way or under discussion, notably:-

- A hedge trimmer around £350 necessary to keep the rabbit fence clear along the A34
- A secure storage shed c £2000 plus the cost of the base (£1200) rising to £4000 if we decide on the sea-container (later agenda item)
- A notice board to replace the middle one which is not suitable for outdoor use - around £400
- Laying the hedge £280

I would like to say thank you to everyone because I have enjoyed my 9 years as treasurer with the opportunity of getting to know plotholders and working with other committee members.

I am very grateful to Oliver for volunteering to take over which has made it very easy to pass on the job. He has been co-opted onto the committee for the last few months, has joined in the meetings and I am sure that he will be a very good treasurer.

Discussion point – how much is in our account at present? – Around £8,50, with a separate contingency account of around £1,600. This is before scheduled costs this year.

LETTING SECRETARY (Alastair Lee, in absentia) -

2021 saw an unprecedented number of applications for allotment plots at Wildmoor, with the waiting list at times approaching 40. However, when making offers of plots, there were a number of people whose circumstances had changed, or had found a plot elsewhere so it is fair to say that the 24 months wait we have been advising people they may have to wait has dropped to around 12 months recently.

We welcomed 18 new members in the calendar year 2021, and so far this year have been joined by a further 5 members. The waiting list now stands at 34, after a flurry of applications in the past week.

One further point, if anyone is in need of a tap key please let me know (wildmoorlettings@gmail.com) as I have managed to finally obtain a stock of suitable replacement tap keys. Who would have thought that global supply chain issues would make it so difficult to get replacements!

We have updated the warning letters to plot holders at plot inspections plots were becoming overgrown and uninviting to new plot holders.

There are now a total of 155 plots; 59 full and 96 half plots, because of the policy of largely letting half plots.

Discussion Point – Why has plot 100a been allowed to remain empty for a whole year? In fact the plot has been let until this month and the plotholder has only just left. It will be let again shortly.
Could we take on the triangular field next to the A34 as it is unused? We have looked into this before and it tends to flood.

SECRETARY (Julie Edge) -

I took over during COVID and we continued with committee meetings, on Zoom, and in the open air at the allotments to start with. We are hoping to purchase a new notice board to replace the one that is decaying so that we can display committee meeting minutes for all to read.

The agreement between the Landlord of the site (Binnings, the farmers) and the Town Council was outlined. This is a Lease, and has only been renewed for 5 and not 10 years this time, in 2021. The agreement between this Association and the Town Council is a Service Level Agreement (SLA) as a lease would pose a legal requirement for the members of the association to be trustees and to take on personal financial risk, and the SLA does not.

This was updated and renewed last year. It was not sent round to all plotholders as it was an update of a previous document in the files, written in 2013 but unsigned, between Mr Alex Armstrong and the Town Council. The Constitution is a new document and was written as it was referred to in the previous and the current SLA, and was requested by the Town Council. This was sent round to all plotholders last year, and again this year for approval (agenda item).

We have been trying to arrange a Risk Assessment with the Town Council, as this is required for our insurance policy.

Discussion point –The secretary was accused of lying about the SLA and was told that we had never had an SLA and didn't require a Constitution, but that we had a lease with the council. The secretary tried to explain that this was instead of a lease (as outlined above), and was just an update of the previous SLA in the files. The SLA will be distributed to all members before the next AGM for comment in case future versions need to be amended.

AGENDA ITEMS -

1. Allotment Constitution for approval –

The Secretary asked if the members were happy with the Constitution which had been sent round beforehand. Alex Armstrong was not happy with it and asked what would happen if there is a conflict between the Constitution and the Rules of the Association? Eventually he pointed out that the rent setting was mentioned as a role of the committee in the Constitution but of the AGM in the rules. He prevented a vote being taken and this will be brought again to the AGM in November after the phrase has been discussed with the Town Council. He also asked how the Constitution would be altered and we said that it would be changed by agreement with the Town Council and a further vote at an AGM.

No vote occurred – to be brought to the AGM in November with possible changes.

2. Rules to be ratified - (approved by online vote during 2021)

- Rule 9 – Sheds animals and trees – all agreed by unanimous vote – now on the website.
- Rule 11 - Water rule for drip feed systems – agreed by majority vote – now on the website. At present 2 members have drip feed systems and 2 more are thinking they will do this. Water usage will be monitored and systems will be examined during plot inspections.

3. Possible New Rule about trespassing on plots –

This vote was brought about as a petition was signed by 42 members to prevent members walking on other members plots, after one member had

been around the allotments looking into sheds and polytunnels to look for evidence of water abuse. Other members may also have trespassed as locks have been broken and produce taken.

Discussion – this resulted in a useful discussion. In the end, it was agreed by a majority vote to keep the status quo, which is that the etiquette of the plots allows people to walk between plots with permission, but not to go onto the plot without express approval from the plotholder. It was felt that mutual trust should outweigh bureaucracy, and such a rule could not be policed.

4. Children on the plots –

Rob reminded the members of the need to keep children away from the dangers around the plots and to keep them on your own plot, after one member's child has been cycling around the allotment and had a bump with a car.

5. Storage container for grounds equipment –

The groundsmen have asked for more secure storage so that we can purchase an item of equipment – a brush-cutter/strimmer – and have a secure place to store the new mower. The old mower and a rotavator given to us have been borrowed by plotholders out of the association shed, and brought back broken and may not be mendable. This will become very expensive.

Rob outlined the case for purchase of a 20 foot shipping container which would be placed by the woodchip bays. It would cost around £4,000 and we believe that the council would allow us to apply for the usual grant of £2,000 for this purpose as they are keen on greater security. A smaller shed with solid base was already going to cost around £3,600.

Discussion – many members contributed. It was felt that condensation would be a major issue although Rob had asked about this and been reassured. It was also felt that the container could be targeted from the pathway and that no container is secure enough to evade the determined thief.

Vote – if we could ensure the £2,000 grant from the Town Council should we purchase the container? – vote approximately 18 for and 16 against. Therefore it was felt this was not sufficient mandate for such expenditure.

6. Hedge laying (Ian Cade) –

Ian gave an update to members of the plan to lay the ancient hedgerow which runs to the left of the ditch on the left of the roadway to the right from the rabbit gate. We have members of the Earth Trust who have kindly agreed to come along and do the work for free, and show any members who are interested in helping how to lay a hedge. The only cost will be £280 for 140 each of stakes and binders. A date in October will be circulated to those who express an interest.

Discussion – some members felt this is unnecessary. Our agreement with the council is that we will maintain hedges and boundaries. It was pointed out that this will be much more windproof and have a much greater variety of wildlife once the hedge is laid and re-growing. Members have asked that we preserve the apple tree – this will be passed onto the working party.

7. **BBQ** –

The majority of members would like a BBQ again this year. The date agreed is Saturday 27th August. Several members kindly offered to help – they will be contacted by the secretary nearer the time.

ELECTION OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS -

			Proposed by	Seconded by
Chair	Rob Harrower	Willing to continue	Julie Edge	Tim Hunt
Secretary	Julie Edge	willing to continue	Tim Hunt	Liz Mercer
Treasurer	Oliver Harker-Faraon	willing to take this over	Liz Mercer	Mike Hemsley
Lettings Secretary	vacant			
Seed Secretary	John Hardie	willing to continue	Rob Harrower	Andrew James

All were approved by general votes.

Committee members willing to continue –

Bernard Fletcher, Andy Lovegrove, Tony Hammond, Tim Hunt, Ian Cade.

Lettings secretary – Andrew James has offered to do some of the job but would like more helpers. Lynn Barrand (plot 76b) and Ian Manthey (plot 59b) kindly offered to be new lettings secretaries with Andrew.

A plea for an ex-officio groundsman to assist Digger was made as Andy Lovegrove cannot continue in this role because of health at present, although will continue on the committee – Bob Jones kindly offered to help.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Plot to Plate – An event held at Abingdon Abbey Buildings on 7th July – is anyone able to help? Bob Jones kindly offered to represent Wildmoor.

The meeting was closed at 9.30pm and a date for the next AGM will be in the third week of November 2022.