

THE MARLOW ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION

Minutes of the thirty- third Annual General Meeting, held at the Thames Room, Liston Hall, Liston Road, Marlow on 8th December 2016 at 7.30pm.

Members and guests: Chair – Ms D Bagge, Secretary - Mr P England, Treasurer - Mrs M Talbot. Committee - Mr B Kilner-Smith, Mr F Tillier, Mrs S Miller & Mr S Pickard, Special Guest - Mayor Cllr Bob Johnson.

Tenants and guests present: Mr R Bailey, Mr M Bolton, Mr M Blunkell, Mrs M Bunker, Ms L Bunt, Mr B Carter, Mr B Cheetham, Mrs R Crow, Mrs M Dabrowski, Mr R De Coverley, Mr M Deri, Mr N Duce, Mr P Edmonds, Mr N Garside, Mrs B Garside, Mr R Hockly, Mr J Holland, Mrs Y Holland, Mrs L Howell, Mr C Knocker, Ms A Lloyd & friend, Mr G Lomas, Mr R Maidment, Mrs R Maidment, Mr P Morgan, Mr S Pickard, Mrs S Pickard, Mr W Price, Mr J Prowse, Mrs J Prowse, Mr G Robinson, Mr A Ross, Mrs N Ross, Mrs L Spratley, Mr J Stephenson, Mr H Stevenson, Ms Monica Vann & Mrs R Wolton.

Introduction by the Chair, Denise Bagge

The Chair welcomed all those present to the 33rd Annual General meeting of the Marlow Allotments Association and introduced herself & the rest of the Committee, then welcomed the Mayor Cllr Bob Johnson and requested a raise of hands from tenants for each site.

The Chair notified those present that the first half of the evening would deal with the work of the Allotments Association, which would include a report from Peter England on the sites and from Maren Talbot on our finances. Then from about 8.30pm the Mayor would take over for the prize giving of this year's Town Council Allotment Competition and the Mayor's new prize for the plots with the most unusual feature on each site.

In her opening comments to the meeting, the Chair said that the best way to protect the future of the allotments was to keep them fully used and under active cultivation. In the course of this year the committee had made a big push to try to encourage new tenants to take up allotments and to try to ensure that they understand the work involved.

"We have run two exhibitions at the Marlow library to raise awareness about the allotments. There were free packets of seeds with the Town Council phone number attached to encourage new tenants.

We have put up posters in the town car parks and in Liston Hall.

We have re-launched the website, Scott has done a fantastic job in making it easier to find information about the allotments.

Sylvia has given talks on the local radio.

We have also produced a fact sheet for the council to give to newcomers with information such as taking certain items of waste to High Heavens."

The chair asked those present for ideas to promote the allotments and to make sure people were aware of what it entailed.

Ms Vann suggested putting notices in Garden Centres and at the Doctors surgeries.

No further ideas came forward, so the Chair said she would repeat the question before the end of the meeting once people had a chance to think.

Apologies for absence announced by the Secretary Peter England: Beate Billington, Denis Bird, Ann & Colin Bowles, Sally Brooks, Ian Brown, Lyn Cheetham, Sean Duncan, Marina Farrell, Stephanie Galloway, Sheila Gaunt, Wreford Gibbs, Guy & Sarah Greenhouse, Susan Harley, Anthea Hickman, David Holmes, Nicole Hockly, David Howell, Ms E Lowdon, Katherine Marshall, Bill Masser, Jenny & Graham Miles, Chris O'Connell, Doug Pounds, John Price, Peter Reynolds, Daphne Roberts, John Stilliard.

The Chair said that MAA are pleased to have a Council that recognises the community & health benefits of the allotments to Marlow people. This year the Association lobbied Waitrose to give the proceeds of one of their green token schemes to the allotments to help towards the tenants' investment in the water scheme, and have a cheque valued £324.00, which the Treasurer will present to the Mayor. The Chair requested that this payment is recorded separately on the Council's website to give recognition to the generosity from Waitrose in helping to pay off the water system debt.

Address by Mayor Cllr Bob Johnson.

The Mayor told those present that in the past he has had an allotment and is in awe of the hard work the tenants put into their allotment plots. He explained that the Council has available funds of £300-£350k per annum which after covering the fixed costs must then be divided over the district. The Allotment sites are well used by Marlow residents and MTC appreciates the hard work that people put into this, supporting the health & wellbeing of those participating and support the continuance of both sites. A large number of plots are very well kept and tenants probably treat this as their second home. When he visited the site to find the most unique plot on each site he was very impressed with the high standard of the majority of plots, emphasising that the Allotment Sites are a vital commodity to the Town and it is important that all the plots are worked. MTC acknowledges those who contribute to keep them at this level.

The Chair asked for any question to be presented to the Mayor.

The Mayor took this opportunity to thank MAA for the donation towards the water levy and confirmed that this sum would make a difference towards reducing this debt which started at £12,500 and would reduce this year to £5,700.

Mr F Tillier asked what the policy is for acts of theft on the site.

The Mayor replied that if theft is proven there would be a process of investigation and likely a prosecution, which would need to come from any private individual.

Mr R Hockly mentioned that items stolen from individuals are not the responsibility of MTC.

The Mayor said, yes but depending upon who owned the property that was alleged to have been stolen as they take a dim view of acts of theft and support any action that could deter & discourage this.

Mr B Kilner Smith said that the main gate at HH site is frequently left unlocked & what could be done to stop this.

Mrs B Garside said that is also a problem at FP site.

The Mayor replied that sometimes there is a reason and we need to consider both sides of the story.

Mr P Edmonds asked about the parking by the flats as Red Kite are placing unpleasant notices and threats of towing for anyone that parks there, is there a possibility of tenants having short term permits to allow delivery & collecting.

The Mayor advised that he will arrange for this matter to be looked into further.

The Chair asked what the plans are for the derelict playground area.

The Mayor advised that MTC have an Asset Working Group which will assess & evaluate all council assets to ensure they maximise their potential, there are 50 or 60 assets & equipment to be considered so it will take a while to process. There is a need to maximise income and resources.

The Chair asked if the playground area could be made part of the allotments site.

The Mayor responded that the decision will be made by the new Group considering how it can work better to produce more funds for MTC.

Mr W Price mentioned his concerns regarding the track & width restrictions that are now in place at HH, he has a problem of dust created by vehicles passing by too fast.

Mr R Hockly mentioned that he helped construct the track in 1990 and it now needs to be repaired. He also said that the width restrictions were a silly & unnecessary idea as this is an allotment site & he felt that HGVs should not be prevented from gaining access to the site.

Mrs R Crow said that emergency vehicles should be able to get on the site, several years ago, there was an incident and the ambulance could not access the site.

Mrs S Miller advised that Barry from MTC is considering the possibility of arranging for repairs to the track.

The Chair closed discussions to move to the next point.

Minutes of the 2015 Annual General Meeting.

Acceptance as a true record was proposed by Mr. R. Hockly and seconded by Mrs. R. Crow.

Matters Arising.- There were no matters arising.

Secretary's Report.

This year we achieved a total of 143 members, which was our 3rd highest. Unfortunately we were unable to reach last year's record membership of 151, despite reminders through our Newsletter, personal contacts and notices displayed throughout the year at both sites.

Turnover of tenants at both sites is still significant. During the year 12 gave up their tenancies at Hanging Hill and 9 at Foxes Piece. Some of these were in response to letters from the Town Council to those whose plots were clearly neglected, whilst others were those who felt unable to cope or were moving away from the area. Against this we welcomed 20 new tenants at Hanging Hill and 19 at Foxes Piece. Currently we have 4 vacancies at Foxes Piece and 9 at Hanging Hill. The waiting list of those ready to take on a plot stands at 4 for Foxes Piece and none for Hanging Hill except for a few existing tenants who would like a second plot for a family member. In respect of tenancy renewals, as of this afternoon there are 19 at Hanging Hill and 18 at Foxes Piece who have not yet responded to their renewal letters. At this point I should mention that the non-renewal figures were compiled today by Sylvia who is spending Thursday afternoons in the Council office, dealing exclusively with allotment matters. This temporary measure follows the departure of Sam Townley who has not yet been replaced.

Following the circulation to all households of the draft Local Plan for Wycombe District, the Association checked the proposed development sites and received confirmation from a representative of the District Council that there was no intention to include either of our two sites. We will continue to monitor the situation, however, and remain vigilant as the pressure to provide for housing development is relentless.

The security fencing at Hanging Hill alongside the footpath was completed. Further fencing is required along the Berwick Road Perimeter as well as repairs to the main track. Work to complete the muntjac deterrent barrier at the north end of the Hanging Hill site has recommenced and should be completed soon. We await a decision from the Town Council on the fate of the ex children's playground at Foxes Piece, which we have suggested might be incorporated into the allotment site. Our concern is that any development of this area does not impact negatively on the allotment site.

The Community Pay Back group continued to do clearance work at both sites and we hope that this will continue. We once again held a summer barbecue at Hanging Hill in June, a barbecue and bonfire in September and a bonfire on November 5th. Attendance at these events has been disappointing and your committee has discussed how to respond to this.

The National Society (NSALG) seed scheme makes a contribution to the Association's finances and catalogues are available here. Prices compare very favourably with other suppliers. We have negotiated a discount at Toad Hall Garden Centre and the discount at Hunts continues. Chicken manure pellets at a competitive price again sold well and this has become a regular offer. Rabbit manure is also available on request at no cost, although donations are always welcome. Wood chippings, delivered to Hanging Hill, are available to tenants of both sites.

During the year your committee met 5 times. I should like to thank members of the committee who have made the Secretary's job easier. Sylvia at Hanging Hill and Fred and Denise at Foxes Piece for contacting and showing round so many prospective tenants, Maren for looking after our finances and the seeds scheme, Sylvia for taking minutes and Scott for his work on the website. I should also like to thank the volunteers who continue to help out on the triangle

project. There are other people who have given us their time and effort in a variety of ways. So thank-you to all of them. During the year we published 4 Newsletters. Our emailing list has increased but there are still more than 50 Newsletters delivered by hand, so I should also like to thank the loyal team who deliver them. Finally I should like to thank the Mayor for attending and Marlow Town Council for booking this facility for us.”

The Chair asked for any questions for the Secretary.

Mr B Carter said that he was glad that there were improvements & volunteer work at HH but what improvements are planned to FP infrastructure. The gates are shabby and the main gate area & fencing by the hut needs repair.

The Chair asked what needs doing.

Mrs A Lloyd mentioned that the fence by the play area needs repair.

The Secretary responded by confirming that several years ago MTC installed solid fencing along 2x sides of the site leaving the area around the hut & play ground, which had adequate fencing and the side of the site backing onto residences, where there also is adequate fencing. After ensuring the site is secure, MTC have since been doing the same at HH.

Mr G Lomas asked if the payback group could sort out the nature reserve which has nettles spreading.

The Chair said that there is a need to get a list of requirements needed for FP. She undertook to organise this with site representatives.

Mrs S Miller suggested that they organise a work party with volunteers from FP site.

The Chair closed discussions.

Acceptance of the Secretary's Report was proposed by Mr B Carter and seconded by Mr J Holland.

Treasurer's report

The Treasurer presented a detailed Financial Report, which is attached to these minutes, the most important point is that the year's accounts have ended in the black with a small gain of £2.69. She then reported the sums received and paid over the year; the NSALG fees were increased to £2.75 which meant that for each subscription received 25p went to MAA. She thanked Mrs S Miller for storing the Chicken Manure Pellets in her garage and for her efforts to achieve an impressive income of over £70 from donations received in respect of the rabbit manure. Income from events was only £25.00 compared with the insurance cost of £112.00. Unfortunately, the seed scheme has not done so well this year; she recommends this scheme which has items at very attractive prices when compared online. The Treasurer then said that we need to find other ways to generate more money. She asked those that drop their memberships to her house to wait for her to answer the door so that they can have their card and seed catalogue.

Mr B Carter said that the fee of £3.00 per year is less than a pint of beer.

The Chair then stated that the financial report for the Association sets the scene for two items on which she needs to get a steer from those present.

The first item relates to the payment of insurance to cover liability for events held, which is currently £112 and will be due again in June 2017.

The Chair then asked of those present how many attended the BBQ & other events during the year. There was a small show of hands for each event. The Chair then stated that the Committee is concerned that not enough people are attending events to justify the money paid for insurance, and that the Committee decided at the last meeting that there is to be a further round of events this coming year, but if they are not supported MAA will stop paying the insurance, which means in turn this will stop the events.

Mr J Holland said there is a need to send out the message to prevent this apathetic approach. We need more people to let us know what they want.

The Chair announced that there will be an item in the next newsletter asking tenants this.

The Mayor agreed that it is not cost effective to continue with the insurance if so few attend.

Mrs L Spratley asked why there are no events at FP site.

Mrs S Miller said that volunteers from the site need to organise this.

Mr S Pickard said that we need to identify an area on the site that can be used.

The Chair said that with Libby's help they can do this; they need an area for events, as there is at HH, and the playground would be ideal.

Mr R Hockly asked if the insurance covers events at both sites.

Mrs S Miller confirmed that it does.

The Chair mentioned the second item which regards the membership fee and is on the agenda as item 9.

The Chair said that from the £3.00 subs that each member pays of this £2.75 is paid to NSALG and did everyone know this?

Mr J Holland said he did not know that prior to this evening.

The Chair advised that on 1st January 2017 the fee will increase to £3.00. At each AGM the fee can put up by MAA for the following year and this year the Committee all voted for it to go up to £3.50 wef 1.11.17, except for her who would like the increase to be £4.00. She explained that putting up the fee to £3.50 on 1 Nov 2017 meant in effect that for the bulk of this coming year (10 mths) the membership fee of £3 is swallowed up by the National Society.

Mr B Carter asked when do we know of the increase from NSALG & how much warning will we get.

Mrs M Vann asked how much notice is given by NSALG.

The Secretary replied that we are notified some time in advance, but we missed the last notification and did not know until it was too late to put up the subscription fee.

The Chair said that we need to review this.

The Treasurer said she felt it should be £4.00.

Mr W Price also said he felt it should be £4.00.

Mr S Pickard said that just the discount at Hunts each year justifies the cost of the subs.

The Secretary indicated that the motion to raise the membership fee was agenda item 9 and we had not reached that point.

The Chair responded that she had brought forward the item as it made sense immediately after the Treasurer's report which set the context for the Association's finances and would now raise the motion herself. She asked for those present to give a show of hands in favour of an increase to £4.00 and then against. The majority were in favour, some abstained and one member voted against the increase.

The Chair confirmed that this had been passed.

Elections to the committee

The Chair told those present that the Committee prefer to keep meetings to a minimum and just get things done, which is why there are two each year on site in the cold, then listed the Members for each site & put forward the Committee Nominations for election. The nominations were:

Committee Members Mrs S Miller, Mr F Tillier, Mr B Kilner Smith & Mr S Pickard

Officers Treasurer – Mrs M Talbot, Secretary Mr P England and Chair Miss D Bagge

All present gave majority votes in favour of each nomination in turn by a show of hands, there were no votes against.

AOB

In response to the Chair's invitation for more ideas on raising awareness of the allotments the following points were made.

Mr P Edmunds suggested that we hold an Allotment Open Day to encourage the public to get an interest in allotments.

Mr R Hockly said that if people are pushed into getting an allotment they would very likely fail.

Mrs L Spratley said that being the new girl she appreciates all the help & support that she has received from those on the allotment site & we need to put the word out there so that more people know about this.

Ms M Bunker asked if anyone thought about promoting on Marlow Parents.

Mrs S Miller said that there has been a posting on Marlow Parents, and that she goes on Marlow FM each month to promote the allotments by discussing seasonal vegetables, mentioning what is to be sown, planted or cropped and covers different matters relating to allotments in the hope of encouraging people to want to get an allotment.

Mrs S Miller told those present that we welcome new members onto the Committee and need new ideas and fresh energy to give us valuable input, most of the meetings are held at her house. There are notices on both sites so if anyone is interested please speak to a Committee member.

Mrs S Miller reported on the Triangle Project, which over the last year has benefited from improvements to the pathways enabling wheelchair access and a donation from Marlow Thames Rotary Club enabling the construction of several raised beds on the site, along with the help of her Keen Volunteers, these will now help those less physically able.

There are 5x tenants that bring their groups onto the site to benefit from this allotment project. One of these is a new club, run by Marlow Thames Rotary that is aimed at helping those less capable who live in Marlow.

The Chair thanked those for attending and handed over to the Mayor.

Close of meeting. As there was no further business and after the presentation of the prizes in the Best Kept Allotment Competition, and the Mayor's Award for the most Unique Feature at each site, The Chair closed the meeting at 9.00pm.