

Grange Lane Allotments AGM 28th October 2018, 10.00am in the Ismay Room, Scout Hut

Minutes

Present: 46 members. A number of apologies were received.

2017 minutes: these were approved. It was noted that it was Tony Parker who did the guttering on the Hut.

Chair's report (Nigel Grant)

Committee members were thanked for their hard work during the year. Vic was thanked for his work and special thanks to Sarah and Jill for the huge amount of work they put in. Line managers were thanked. Tony Parker was thanked for putting guttering on the Hut, Mike Mellor for putting preservative on the Hut and toilets, Emma Rowley-Conwy for organising plant sales, Iris for helping with skips and Dave Scholey for now taking over this role, Paul Widdecombe for collecting coffee grounds for the site. Adrian Hill was thanked for his liaison with Dulwich Estates and the main committee. Plot holders were thanked for their positive contributions. Our vision of establishing a sense of community across the site is beginning to happen, enabled by our monthly social events at the Hut, the involvement of line managers in running the site, workshops we have run, etc. All plot holders are encouraged to get involved.

Secretary's report (Maureen Erny)

General - Deluge and then drought sums up the year! Lots of challenges, but good harvests.

Gates For years there has been discussion about recessing the top gates. Well, this year we finally did it! It has made it much safer to get into and out of the site and we took the opportunity to build in an area for the green waste bins.

Skips and waste management - Iris gave up organising skips during the year and Dave Scholey has kindly taken over from her. Iris was thanked for her past help and Dave for taking over this task. Normally there are three or four skips a year for non-organic waste. At the AGM last year, Joe Crilly suggested trying to get Southwark to collect our green waste and he kindly managed to set this up for us. It's a brilliant facility and saves countless bonfires on the site. Joe has been investigating general waste management and we will be looking into this over the coming weeks.

Toilets - Jill Panni and Sarah Knight were thanked for cleaning and looking after the toilets for another year. A request was made for one or two volunteers to take over this task.

Community Hut - The hut came into its own this year and has been used for regular social events open to all plot holders. These have provided the opportunity for us to get to know one another and has led to several offers of help with various things and some good ideas about others. Emma Rowley-Conwy has very kindly held two organic plant sales at the Hut and recently there was a display of paintings by the group of artists that come to the site to paint. Earlier in the year there were a couple of sessions on how to prune fruit trees. Jill Panni, Sarah Knight and Peter Allen helped to make these events happen so our thanks to them.

Renewals Peter Allen and Martin Beard were thanked for their hard work on renewals – checking email addresses, sending out information, collecting the rents, chasing late payments, dealing with queries. If payments haven't been received by the end of November, it will be assumed the plot can be re-let.

Lettings Sarah Knight was thanked for her work on lettings. 85 people are still on the waiting list.

Line Managers Jill Panni did a brilliant job of building up a team of line managers and has now handed on the baton to Sarah Lyness. Each row of plots from the gates to the wood has its own line manager. Details are on the website and on the notice boards. If you have any plot or site issues, then in the first instance please contact your line manager.

Inspections We normally aim to have two inspections a year. A warning is given to plot holders who are not keeping their plot in good order and if no progress is made, then they are evicted and their plot re-let. A team of three or four people from the committee carry out the inspections and then re-inspect the plots that have had a warning.

Website Tony Heal was thanked for his work on the website www.grangelane.org. A request was made for someone to take over this role from Tony.

Plot numbering Members are to display numbers at the top and bottom of each plot.

Paths We carried out a trial of putting down rubber matting along some paths to prevent them getting so slippery and dangerous. We have started marking out the paths. Plot holders should move any structures and reinstate the edges of paths where necessary. We are aware that drainage is a real issue on the site. We have had site visits from two companies specialising in drainage and paths and we have put in a funding application to Southwark for the cost of the drainage and two proper paths. We will be looking into further funding opportunities during the year. All of this takes a great deal of time and hard work and happens 'behind the scenes', but for the benefit of all.

Meetings The committee meets regularly during the year to try to keep the site running well and we now have three separate sub-committees that also meet regularly. Nigel and Martin also attend the Camberwell and District Allotment Society meetings – we are one of three sections of the Society with the Gun Site and the Grove.

Volunteers All members are encouraged to volunteer to help in various ways.

Thanks Adrian Hill was thanked for his help and support during the year. Nigel was thanked for being such a good chair. On behalf of all plot holders, the committee and other volunteers were thanked for giving their time freely during the year and working very hard.

Site development

Martin Beard gave a report on Dulwich College's requesting the use of the woodland at the lower north west corner of the site for the use of the prep school. Plot holders affected will be consulted once further details are known. A number of members at the meeting expressed concern at how part of the wood has been fenced and the adding of floodlighting to a rare piece of natural woodland in the area where there are bats, woodpeckers and other wildlife. The development may be relevant in negotiations to get the Estate to repair fencing and reinstate drainage at the bottom of the site.

Website and database

Peter Allen said how pleased he was to have already had 100 renewals, 60 being online payments. We are looking at automating the renewal system. We are using an external consultancy. Members may get a request to confirm their details over the next few months.

Treasurer's report

The rent increase reflects the increase in the Retail Price Index since we last set the rent in November 2012. The increase is in line with the increase in rent we pay to Dulwich Estates.

From December 2017 our annual rent payable to the Estate increased from £6,475 to £7,212 and the levy from £647.50 to £721.20. They, together with the membership fee of £3 per member (which goes to pay our membership of the National Allotment Society), represent over half our outgoings.

The rent is £1.35p per week, up from £1.12p per week. The increase is 23p per week. For the privilege of a plot on our site for this payment it is, in this day and age, very cheap.

A few asked if there are concessions. We have a discretion to accept lower contributions and will consider cases, eg, those who are on a basic State pension only or on welfare only.

The water charges were substantial as a result of the long dry summer and autumn.

We dealt with the upper gates which accounts for most of the project expenditure.

Save as above, our outgoings are on budget. Next year we will easily spend the increased rental income. We have various projects to deal with, eg. the fence down the road, work on paths, the need to update the membership and payment systems, etc.

We are dipping into our reserves, but they are more than are strictly needed – according to what is generally advised, £6,000 should be enough for our reserves.

The accounts are audited each year by a professional person who prepares accounts for a living. He carries out a thorough audit and demands evidence of each item of expenditure. The audit for this year's accounts will happen soon. Last year's accounts have been audited.

Last year we were asked if the water provider offered a discount for community associations. We enquired, but we would have to be a registered charity to qualify.

The treasurer expressed thanks to all who do tasks which save us money. Members who volunteer to help with the upkeep and improvement of the site substantially subsidise the rent we each pay.

The accounts were approved, subject to audit.

Adrian Hill's report

The use of the woodland by Dulwich College would be subject to a fee. The area would be preserved as woodland and used for nature study.

Our lease runs to 24.03.2026. There is a rent review every five years, linked to RPI. As part of redefining the boundary between The Grove and the adjacent tennis club, the Estate is offering to extend the lease. It is possible the same could be done to all three sites. Dulwich Estates are responsible for dealing with dangerous trees and maintaining the fencing on three sides.

Adrian is liaising with Dulwich Estates about flooding at the bottom of the field. Concern was expressed about our possibly losing the drainage eco-system there.

Adrian was thanked for his many years of work and support and was presented with a watercolour painting of the allotments.

Election of the committee

Nigel Grant, Maureen Erny, Martin Beard, Peter Allen, Verney Montoute, Jill Panni, Sarah Knight and Sarah Lyness were all unanimously re-elected. Proposed by Adrian Hill, seconded by Yasmin Hashim. Sarah Thurman was elected onto the committee. Proposed by Jill Panni, seconded by Yasmin Hashim.

Frank Howarth and Tony Heal stood down from the committee. They were thanked for their seven years and three years of service respectively and presented with a card and gift.

Any other business

- The question was asked whether bonfires could be reduced. There was general discussion with diverging opinions. It was agreed that bonfires would be kept to the first Saturday and last Sunday of the month but reduced to just one day during the week – Tuesday only rather than Tuesday and Thursday.
- Safety of driving out of the top gate was raised. It was agreed to ask Dulwich Estates again about getting double yellow lines put to the left of the gate as you go out to increase vision and therefore safety. Otherwise to investigate putting up a mirror.
- There was a request by members not to wind the chain round and round the gate.

Discussion

- We are to look into our having designated areas, with for example wood, to attract wildlife, especially hedgehogs.
- We are to look into having a communal compost heap.
- We will clarify the arrangements concerning green waste.
- Concern was expressed about wood being burnt due to health issues; also toxic chemicals if wood has been treated or painted – creating a lasting adverse legacy for future plot holders.
- We will look into having Charles Dowding of ‘no dig’ fame to speak.
- We will look into having Dr Compost to speak.
- It was agreed to change the wording in the rules from dogs needing to be kept on a lead at all times to needing to be with their owner and under control at all times. Any concerns about dogs should be made known to line managers and not tackled individually.
- It was decided that the top gates will be kept open on the afternoons of social events at the Hut.
- It was agreed that slug pellets containing metaldehyde would be banned on the site due to their toxicity to hedgehogs and birds.
- It was requested and agreed that the rent would be increased regularly by RPI rather than waiting several years and then putting it up by the necessary amount.
- A number of comments were made by members about how the new fencing, the wood clearance and floodlighting in the wood in part of the north west corner was harming the natural woodland environment and likely to harm the existing wildlife such as hedgehogs, woodpeckers, bats, etc. One member proposed that we contact local groups who monitor local natural habitats to obtain their advice and support.
- Any further comments about Dulwich College’s proposal to use the lower corner of the wood for the prep school should be sent to Martin at grangelanehonsec@btinternet.com.