

Camberwell and District Allotment Society (CDAS)

Grange Lane Allotments AGM

Sunday 26th November 2023, 10-12 in the Ismay Room, Scout Hut, Grange Lane, SE21

MINUTES

1. Welcome and apologies

Apologies were received from Natalie Steed and Frank Kunna. 43 people attended the meeting. Sarah Thurman welcomed everyone and gave a few ground rules for how the meeting would be conducted.

2. Minutes of previous AGM

These were unanimously approved.

3. Co-Chair's report

This has been a funny year when things seemed to race along, only then to suddenly have problems arise to delay completion. So, let's start with the most important.

The lease with Dulwich Estate: we agreed the heads of terms quickly and easily and it was then passed to the lawyers to put it all into legal terminology. This has taken ages and the Estate lawyers have been adding clauses that had never been agreed, and it has taken months to get most removed or revised. Just one remains: the Estate's lawyers have sought to limit the implied rights which go with the land that were previously enjoyed by the Sites, even though this restriction was not part of the Heads of Terms.

Application to become a Co-operative Society: As we said last year, we have been listening to members and working on our rules and constitution so that they reflect the best interests of our wide membership. As you know, we became increasingly concerned that, as part of an unincorporated society, the trustees who hold the leases, the committee members, and all of you as plot holders, carry a potential liability risk if any claims went beyond our reserves or were not covered by our insurance. Whilst it has never happened in our 70 years of existence, it is a potential risk we do not think we or you wish to carry any longer.

We have been working with CDAS and NASLG (The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners) to become a Registered Co-operative Society and this too has taken much longer than we expected, but we are nearly there. The final draft of our application is with the legal team at NASLG, and we hope to hear back from them imminently. They will then support our application to the FCA (Financial Conduct Authority).

We give massive thanks to Martin Beard, who has done hours of work for us on these two major issues. Thank you, Martin.

Waiting List and numbers of new plot holders: Over the course of this year, we have let out 15 full plots and 5 half plots.

We reopened our waiting list a few weeks ago, which worked well, and have over 80 people on our waiting list. We have now closed the list until we see how quickly the list is taken up.

Dulwich Estate – fence alongside Dulwich Woods. A new green metal fence was installed very successfully and has opened the woods to us and improved the view for those walking in the woods. The London Wildlife Trust managing the woods are consulting on their ideas for improving the state of these woods and removing the invasive plants and bushes. We have suggested it would be a good idea to have viewing points marked out in the woods for walkers to see and enjoy the view. Ideally there might be metal plaques showing the key buildings visible. Although the new fencing has improved security, we are still finding people climbing over this fence.

Dulwich Estate - allocation of site woodland to local school. We have agreed to give up a part of our site for use as an educational woodland. The lease and our rental cost will be re-worked to reflect this. Because of the delays in agreeing the lease, this has still not happened.

Inspections – with 234 plots, the biannual inspections and follow up take ages. So, we have piloted a new online inspection process with involvement of line managers and committee members. In this way, we have divided the work up and all members will get a green, amber or red mark. Those with the latter two colours will get a MailChimp email informing them that they need to act. It has worked well so far, apart from a few errors, for which we apologise. We are reviewing the process now. Three plot holders were to be evicted because of persistent lack of activity. One has given up their plot anyway, and one is challenging the eviction.

Paths and Drainage We had our first ever work session last Sunday morning to help clear the main drain at the top of the site that runs along the edge of the fence with Dulwich Woods. Thank you to all those who attended, and an excellent clearance was achieved. It was fun as well and many took some of the leaf mould to their plots. You can see pictures of the work on the website. We have mapped the areas/plots particularly suffering with water excess after heavy rain and are going to pilot a draining system linking and crossing key plots and paths over the next few months.

Theft or damage We are monitoring thefts and damage on our plots to see if we can identify any specific patterns. We have sadly also had quite a few intruders, who we assume are climbing in over the lower gate and fence, and damage has been done to a number of plots, particularly those high up on our site.

Health and Safety: We have done a lot of thinking around health and safety issues and shared with you all in a recent Mailchimp our main areas of concern. The key areas for us to review in the coming year would be: short stakes (metal or wood) around the edges of your plot that need to be capped off, site and plot water logging issues, installation of covers/lids on water tanks and something similar by members on their own rainwater butts, knowledge of siting of ponds and pond protection; and removal of glass from the edges of plots.

Films and Television work: We are registering our site with several film location companies in London in the hope of increasing our income from filming. We hope you all don't mind this as it helps keep our finances in good order, and Dulwich Estate has no objection to this, provided all companies have the appropriate public liability cover. We must therefore ask you all to ask our permission before arranging any commercial filming on site.

Teas and the Sunday social events: These occur on the second Sunday of every month and a number are associated with plants sales. They have become increasingly popular, one recent one – with cream teas! - having over 50 attendees. Several people have commented how they are enhancing our sense of community, alongside an opportunity for cake and chat.

Communal composting site: we are trialing a general access composting site to see if we can reduce or even eliminate the need for the brown bins. We need to see how things go with this and will keep you informed.

Guardians Worldwide. We are working with Nic Salaraz of Guardians Worldwide setting up an oak tree saplings nursery on two of our wild plots. This project is linked with Dulwich Estate and Oliver Stutter with the long-term intention of planting the saplings along the South Circular and other parts of Dulwich Estate once they are well established and moveable.

Open our site to the Public. We had a request last year from the Dulwich Society to open our allotments for viewing by their garden group. We did this and had around 12 people visit and walk round our site looking at different types of allotment gardening. They also joined us for one of our social sessions of tea and cakes. It went very well and was much enjoyed by the visitors and the plot holders. We plan to repeat it in this next year.

Asylum seekers. We have given one of our plots to a group of asylum seekers based at the Queen's Hotel in Upper Norwood. They are enjoying greatly the opportunity to grow vegetables there and the space and tranquility it offers them.

Bee keeping: We lost all the bees in one of our sets of hives last winter, so now we have only one set of working hives. There have been concerns expressed to CDAS that honey from the allotments is being sold commercially, and no commercial sales of any sort are allowed under our lease with Dulwich Estate. We are checking up on this now, as are the other sites, to ensure we are all conforming to the rules in the lease.

Local food bank: We still take any spare vegetables plot holders have to a local food bank on a Thursday morning. They are so grateful for fresh produce and ensure it goes out the same day.

Thanks

National Allotment Society: We are very grateful to the National Allotment Society and to our neighbouring allotment sites and CDAS for all their advice and help throughout the year.

Line Managers: We are grateful to all our line managers for their help and support through the year. Details of line managers are on the website and on the notice boards. If you have any plot or site issues or anything that is preventing you from managing your plot as you would like, then in the first instance, please contact your line manager.

Some specific people we would like to thank are:

Vic for all the mowing of common parts and keeping our water supplies running efficiently, attending to leaks and damage very quickly.

Paul Widdecombe and Mike Mellor, who help us manage overgrown plots and practical problems around our site in various ways.

Dan Shepherd, who is our contact with Buckingham Palace re our stable manure deliveries.

Mark Aeron-Thomas for organising deliveries of well-rotted stable manure from Shannon Leigh stables, managing and sending out all our Mailchimps, and our waiting list activity.

The Volcano/coffee bean chaff rota team who, regardless of weather, collect heavy wet sacks of the chaff, which is excellent for compost.

Sarah Knight and Jill Panni for all they do managing the hut, the site in general, and the teas and socials.

We continue to be very grateful to *Amy Aeron-Thomas and Paul Widdecombe* for heroically keeping the two eco toilets clean, well-stocked and functioning well.

To *Don Marshall and Susan Miles* for all the extra work they have had to do on renewals because of the problems with PayPal and Love Admin. Apologies to you all as well.

Thank you all so much.

Nearly finally, and most importantly, a huge thank you to *Sarah Thurman*, my co-chair, who is changing her position to Vice Chair as working full time and doing this job is difficult.

And to your committee team: *Maureen, Jill, Sarah Knight, Sarah Lyness, Mark, Frank, Susan, Don and Alex* for all their help and wonderful work in getting us through this year.

But really, *a thank you to you all* for making this such a unique, special, and peaceful place where we can all unwind and relax and focus on those pesky weeds! Enjoy 2024 there...

4. Finance report

Sarah Lyness talked through the 2022-23 finance report (circulated). Income was just under £20,000 and expenditure nearly £22,000. Income is largely membership fees, with a small contribution from donations at hut socials. Expenditure is largely rent to Dulwich Estate, water, skips, maintenance and plug plants for sales. The deficit from this year will be taken from our reserves.

We have introduced a Reserves Policy this year which is on the website. The policy is based on 8-16 months of reserves, and we currently have 13 months of reserves.

The financial report was unanimously accepted – proposed by Martin Beard and seconded by Simona Springer.

5. Election of the committee

The chair of CDAS, Philip Milner, led the election of the committee. The whole committee stood for election: Tyrrell Evans (Chair), Sarah Thurman (Vice Chair), Mark Aeron-Thomas (Communication), Maureen Erny (Secretary), Sarah Knight (Lettings), Sarah Lyness (Treasurer), Don Marshall and Susan Miles (Membership – joint), Alex McGillivray, Frank Kunna and Jill Panni (Site Management). The committee was unanimously re-elected, with none against and no abstentions.

6. Key messages

Alex read out a statement on glyphosates; this will be put onto the website. A plot holder commented that bindweed comes back even after treating it with glyphosate. Concern was also expressed by a plot holder about the carcinogenic effects of glyphosates in the soil when used by other plot holders. The position of Grange Lane Allotments is that glyphosates should only be used sparingly and limited to use within a person's own plot – nowhere near the common paths and definitely not on any of the common paths. If any plot holder has a concern about the use on neighbouring plots of glyphosates, they should speak with their line manager. Alex was thanked for his work on this.

7. Priorities for 2024

- The lease with Dulwich Estate to be finalised.
- Registration as a co-operative ongoing with CDAS.
- Need to address plot trespassing. Sometimes children of plot holders have partied on the site – as many as 20 or 30 on one occasion. People have been seen climbing over the main gate and especially the lower gate. If anyone sees any suspicious activity, please let the committee know.
- Continuing with drainage plans. Frank has identified where the water pools. Drains needed below the surface and water enabled to flow down the hill.
- Faster action needed on neglected plots. Remedial works cost the site a lot of money. Line managers are crucial in this. If anyone becomes aware of a neglected plot, please let your line manager know.
- Increase number of volunteers, eg for ad hoc work, working party on plot labels, taking produce to the food bank, improving paths, clearing plots, collecting coffee chaff, IT help.
- Health and safety issues, eg the covering of water tanks.
- A third eco toilet.

8. Questions and suggestions (following refreshment break) – attended by 30 people
Tony Heal, plot 92 – paths should be a priority. In a bad state. Some overgrown plots.
Joe Crilly, plot 159 – ask if people want somewhere to lock bikes. Tyrrell responded that we are already looking into funding for this.

Simona Springer, plot 155 – suggestion to have a working party every 2/3 months for something specific. Maybe have a bank of people to do things as and when needed.

Joe Crilly – have a newsletter about the ditch digging. A regular work party would be good, eg to work on security at the lower gate.

Frank Howarth, plot 110 – working party on paths would be better than asking individuals to address issues.

Martin, plot 27 – what would be the cost of green metal fencing along Grange Lane? Tyrrell advised we will get a quotation when this fencing is installed around the lower wood (for the Forest School). He also advised that we are in discussions about getting a 100m living hedge along part of Grange Lane and are also looking into increasing the height of the lower gate. George Levantis, plot 172 – suggestion to read out at AGM names of plot holders who have died.

Tony Heal – evicting plot holders seems a long drawn out process. Knows a plot that has been overgrown for over a year. And some plot holders only do a bit of work now and again. Tyrrell advised the process is being reviewed. There is a full inspection in May, with follow up in September. But there needs to be follow up inbetween May and September with problem plots. The help of line managers is needed with this.

David Langley, plot 30 – would like to hear from his line manager, eg quarterly. Line managers should communicate with every plot holder in their line. Tyrrell explained that we are currently addressing the challenge of providing line managers with an allotment email address.

Frank Howarth – could lines be labelled?

Dan Shepherd, plot 162 – could help be given to clear paths between plots? Branches, weeds, etc.

Tony Heal – bonfires are a health and safety issue. Smoke blows across the site. Dangers of particulates are being highlighted. No good reason to have bonfires. Tyrrell said we will look at reducing the use of bonfires further.

Simona – use of glysohates on the site is very worrying due to its links with cancer and contamination of plots around those where it is being used.

Andrew Dymond, plot 42 – can diseased material, bindweed and couch grass be put in the communal compost bin? This would reduce burning. The response to this was: Yes, all weeds and diseased plant material can go in the communal compost bin. ‘Don’t burn it, compost it.’ Also a solution to overfilling bins as some of the green waste put in there could be composted.

Tyrrell thanked everyone for the session and the ideas.