

Camberwell and District Allotment Society
AGM Minutes of Main Society held at Scout Centre
Sunday 14 May 2023 at 10am

Attendees:

Grange Lane

Sarah Thurman, Tyrrell Evans, Peter Allen, Sarah Knight, Sarah Lyness, Mark A. Thomas, David Williams, George Levantine, Antonie Grieg, Don Marshall, Zoe Petersen, David Gupsill, William Marshall, Carol Henry, Frank Hogarth, Susan Miles

Gunsite

Philip Milner, Tony Robertson-Jonas, Mike Patrick, Judith Patrick, Phil Heeps, Kathy Heeps, Chris Hyde, Liz Brunton, Marjorie Loudt, Druid Fleming, Patricia Smith, Eugene O'Donnell, Bob Reeves, Alex Hamilton, Sarah Pietsch

Grove

Elaine Broadbent, Phil Daoust, Andy Whittingham, Phoebe Fraser, James Davies

There were 36 members present so the meeting was quorate.

Apologies for Absence

Maggie Jarman

1. Minutes of the Last AGM

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed and no objections were raised.

2. Chairman's Report

CDAS has had an extraordinary year.

The Officers and Committee are re-negotiating a new lease with the Dulwich Estate, which brought forward the renewal for Grange, Grove and Gunsite from 2026. The lease is nearly ready for signing.

We have also prepared Change of Status proposals for you to vote on today.

As summarised in the document 'Why become a Co-operative?', CDAS is proposing to change the Society's constitution to become a co-operative society, to limit our financial liability as members of CDAS.

As an unincorporated association, all members may be personally responsible for liability if any claims against the Society went beyond our reserves or were not covered by our insurance. We have adapted the National Allotment Society's (NAS) Model Rules to create a new co-operative structure, with amendments to retain our current structure as three separate sections (Grange Lane, Grove and Gunsite) under CDAS.

We hope you will support this initiative by voting in favour of this later in the AGM. If you agree, our proposals will then be sent to the FCA for ratification.

Next week CDAS is hosting the London Allotment Society meeting here at the Ismay Room on

Saturday 20 May at 10am, to discuss allotment insurance with the NAS legal representative, and the CEO of Chris Knott, the NAS preferred broker; there is a general feeling that allotments across the country need more say, understanding and information about their insurance needs.

All CDAS members are invited.

The CDAS Officers, Elaine Broadbent(Treasurer) Tony Robertson-Jonas(Secretary) and Officers from the three sites: Tyrrell Evans and Sarah Thurman of Grange, Andy Whittingham of Grove, and Maggie Jarman and Kathy Heeps of Gunsite, together with Martin Beard of Grange, who has provided hours of invaluable legal advice, deserve our heartfelt thanks; CDAS is very fortunate indeed to have such integrity, intelligence and energy at its disposal. We all owe them an enormous debt.

We will discuss all these items in more depth throughout the Agenda.

3. Treasurer's Report and Accounts

Elaine gave the Treasurer's report.

CDAS accounts are separate from section accounts.

The Statement of Accounts for the year 2022/23 is provided with these minutes (as an email attachment), with the following notes:

CDAS receives money from the three Sections as follows:

- Rent (which is passed directly to the Dulwich Estate)
- National Society of Allotments and Leisure Gardens (NSALG) membership fee (£3 per member), which is passed directly to NSALG)
- A 10% levy on the rent which is used for the CDAS insurance, payment for use of the room to the Scout Centre and any incidental expenses.

The CDAS levy is currently set at 10%. This covers the insurance, room hire and any incidental expenses with about £100 to spare. If the insurance costs increase significantly, we will need to look at raising the CDAS levy to cover costs.

The account surplus is misleading because Dulwich Estate has refused to accept five quarters rent from Grange Lane because of a dispute on structures. Grove and Gunsite paid one quarter last year in this year. The 10% levy is sufficient to cover CDAS expenses.

If the co-op happens the trustee account would no longer be needed, we would move the money to the main account.

Auditor requirements – The CDAS Membership Card and Rules states the CDAS accounts should be audited by someone who is not a member of the CDAS committee, ie a CDAS Officer. Kathy Heeps has checked the accounts and is satisfied with them.

The accounts were approved by the meeting.

4. Secretary's Report

The secretary said that the CDAS committee has met regularly and all meetings were minuted.

5. New lease arrangements

Philip read out Martin Beard's summary of the lease arrangements (below) which are still subject to negotiation.

“In most respects the leases follow the existing leases. CDAS is working on Grange Lane’s lease to iron out the issues which will apply to all three leases, save for any Site specific requirements.

The terms will be 25 years which is about ten years longer than the current leases. The leases provide an element of security of tenure to allow renewal at the end of 25 years.

The rent chargeable, when the leases are signed, will be the existing annual rent increased by the rise in CPI since the last increase. For Grange Lane, I understand that would be £6,923 increased by more than 27% if the Grange Lane lease is completed soon. Grange Lane’s figure for rent has been reduced by about £350 in relation to the area of woodland it is surrendering to be a forest school for Dulwich and other schools. The annual rent increases every five years by the increase in the CPI.

The Estate are requiring to elect to add VAT to the rent which, if it were to happen, would add another 20% to the rent. CDAS is looking for ways to avoid this imposition.

CDAS is required to provide adequate insurance, but CDAS is negotiating over the details of the Estate’s requirements.

The lease repeats most of the previous terms of the Allotment’s use of the Site: for allotments to be well cultivated and managed; there is to be no market gardening so ploholders are forbidden to grow for onward sale; each Site can sell products required for maintaining plots; each Site should maintain its facilities, paths and the Grange Lane fence in good repair; ploholders are to cultivate/maintain at least 75% of a plot. No plot can remain uncultivated for more than three years.

The Estate will maintain the larger trees (ie, non-fruit bearing) and the Allotment must not damage them and would need the Estate’s express authority to cut them.

Each Site can have its own more restrictive rules on structures on plots provided no plot structures exceed 2m in height, don’t have a concrete base, there are no more than one hut/shed, one toolbox and two cold frames. None should cause a nuisance.

No excavation of clay or dumping of outside rubbish is allowed. Each Site is to have a dedicated refuse disposal area. Fires must not be left unattended or started by any accelerants. No general domestic waste, painted or treated items and processed materials (eg. MDF, plywood) can be burnt. Hedges and ditches on a Site must be cared for.

Beekeeping is required to follow the advice of the British Beekeepers Association.

Ploholders are not to cause a nuisance or impede rights of light for neighbouring properties. CDAS is negotiating for a reciprocal right, which, contrary to the existing lease, the Estate want to exclude. The Estate has added the right to build on a boundary which CDAS is opposing.”

Dulwich Estate is aware of the proposed change in structure to a cooperative and is agreeable. If the lease is signed before the cooperative Dulwich Estate has agreed to the necessary change in the lease.

Tree maintenance - we are trying to maintain the current arrangements in the new lease.

Dulwich Estate has proposed charging VAT on rents which would have to be passed on to members. We are vehemently opposing this.

We will check if the lease allows sections to build facilities for the section (not individual plot holders).

Insurance - CDAS is negotiating with insurers on their requirements including inspections of trees and safety around ponds and water butts. This has increased the health and safety requirements on sites. Insurers have asked for tree inspections yearly which is very costly though Dulwich Estate

believes every three years is sufficient. The CDAS committee is meeting with the insurers to clarify their requirements.

6. Change to cooperative structure and rules

The change to a cooperative is proposed to remove a serious risk for members that exists with the current constitution. Presently CDAS is an unincorporated association without a formal structure. This means that all members are personally responsible for any debts and contractual obligations. Trustees who hold the lease, committee members and all plot holders carry a liability if any claims against the society went beyond our reserves or were not covered by our insurance.

The CDAS committee believes that a cooperative structure is the most appropriate for CDAS. Kathy Heeps explained the process of creating the cooperative rules. The National Allotment Society (NAS) has model rules that are acceptable to the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) which must approve the new CDAS rules. However we have to amend the model rules because of our three-site structure where each site has its own set of rules. We are ensuring the new rules allow a similar level of site autonomy to the current CDAS rules card. We have been liaising with NAS and we have sent them a first draft of the proposed rules. They have accepted the majority of the rules with some queries on minor points which the committee is considering.

There will be a one off registration fee of approximately £1000 due to our changes to the model rules.

Chris Hyde queried whether all members are liable under the present unincorporated structure. Under the cooperative structure members' liability would be limited to the share value (£1). He suggested that the FCA could theoretically remove cooperative status in certain circumstances (unspecified) thus making members liable to a greater extent.

The CDAS committee will be meeting with insurers on 20 May to clarify insurance liabilities. Chris Hyde was asked to write a paper detailing his concerns in advance of the meeting.

Members were asked to send their queries on the rules to the committee so the committee can review, discuss and resolve them.

The chair read out the motion:

“The meeting approves the change of status of the Camberwell and District Allotment Society to a Cooperative and delegates to the committee the task of responding to any comments from the National Allotment Society and the Financial Conduct Authority and finalise the change of status subject to any material changes that would require a special general meeting.”

There was a discussion on the meaning of “material” in the motion. It was agreed that for the purpose of this motion “material” means “anything that has an impact on members”.

The vote was unanimous, 36 in favour, 0 against, 0 abstentions.

7. Election of Officers

The following officers were elected (as proposed at the meeting):

Chair - Philip Milner proposed by Elaine Broadbent, seconded by William Marshall.

Treasurer - Tony Robertson-Jonas proposed by Sarah Thurman , seconded by William Marshall.

Secretary- to be nominated.

Other CDAS committee members are nominated by Sections on an ad hoc basis for each CDAS committee meeting.

8. Any other business

The chair highlighted the importance of biodiversity and the contribution that allotment holders can make. There is more information at this website:

<https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=31684&p=0>

9. Section Reports

GUNSITE ALLOTMENTS REPORT FOR CDAS AGM

Dulwich Estate (DE) Earthworks: the green waste dump area, used by Estate's and Southwark's contractors, has been dug up and re-tarmacked. The DE has also installed a new gate. It will still be without a lock; logistically, it has proved impossible to keep one operational.

Paths: over winter, these have not been waterlogged, so none have been closed off, a tribute to the maintenance work done last year.

Water leak: by our water meter in Grange Lane (outside Grange's gate!). This first sprang in January 2022, when Thames Water fitted a new digital meter. It was finally repaired in November, only to return in February. It does now seem to be cured and Kathy (our Treasurer) is trying to claim back the money spent on leaked water, from Castle Water.

Plots: There has been a relatively high turnover of plots during the past 6 months. 23 half lots have been reallocated. Waiting list has gone down to 173 but remains closed.

All on the waiting list know that plots will be only 2.5 rods but the recently agreed restrictions (living in a South London postcode, the applicant and any member of their household not having a plot elsewhere...) have been challenged; if they are not applied to the current waiting list, it will be several years before change is implemented. We are advised that Gunsite has not made any guarantees to those on the waiting list. It was unanimously approved by the committee that all those on the waiting list will be written to, advising them of the new restrictions and the need for them, and asking for conformation that the recipients wish to remain on the waiting list.

Shop: This shop continues to trade profitably; prices are significantly lower than those of commercial shops. However, some prices have had to increase as a result of increased wholesale prices and transport costs. Surplus generated is paid into the main allotment account, helping keep rents at their present level. The voluntary shop manager, Mike Gavin and his helpers, Rosemary Daniellin, Philip Milner and William Marshall, encourage us all to use the shop, which is open from 10 .00 am to 12.00 noon on Sunday mornings for the benefit of all members of CDAS

Bee Policy changes: For three important reasons,(ecological, health and safety, DE prohibiting the sale of honey), our Bee Policy requires two modifications. It proved impossible to ratify them at the AGM in December so there will be an EGM on 21st May. Importantly, we aim to encourage plot holders to grow many more forage plants, to ensure that not only honey bees but also other bee species present, and all other pollinators, have adequate forage. Work on this has already started.

That we build bee hotels has also been suggested.

Risk Assessment: This continues to evolve and, thanks to Mike Patrick, all water tanks are elegantly covered with metal grids that are easily removable if necessary.

GROVE ALLOTMENTS REPORT FOR CDAS AGM

Summary: Overall a good year, with the site well-maintained, all vacated plots let and finances healthy. However, the extreme weather meant many plots were not as productive as normal.

Finances: Currently £5,500 in the bank. Planned expenditure this year includes:

- A new gate at the main entrance to the site, a metal one to replace the current wooden one which is past repairing. Estimated cost £1,000
- Attaching standpipes to the water butts across the site to prevent leaks, estimated cost £400.

AGM: Our first AGM, held in November 2022, was not quorate, so we reran it on 23 April 2023. The April meeting was well attended and was quorate and we were able to pass two policies: the Code of Conduct for plot-holders, and an updated lettings policy. The proposed change to a cooperative was explained at the meeting, and we updated on progress with the lease negotiations. Finally, we had a discussion about health and safety onsite.

Health and Safety: Two plot holders experienced injuries on the site in 2022, one a badly twisted ankle and the second a broken ankle, caused by trips on paths which the adjacent plot-holders had not kept trimmed. Also, a dead tree came down in one 2022's major storms.

The committee has increased scrutiny of potential health and safety hazards, and now conducts quarterly reviews across the site of the state of paths, of the trees for potentially dangerous branches or other issues, and checks that all ponds and water butts are appropriately covered. There is also greater attention given to these issues during the plot inspections.

Trees: We have continued to engage with the Dulwich Estate over the trees on site. The Estate has agreed that it is its responsibility to remove dead trees and we are currently arranging for three remaining dead elms to be removed. We have raised issues with two large trees growing in the gardens of two houses adjacent to the site which have dead branches overhanging the site.

Other matters:

- The three workdays over 2022 were well attended and productive.
- We had no fails at the first plot inspections of 2023, which is a first.
- We currently have 33 people on our waiting list.
- We have continued to receive a steady supply of chippings and manure.
- We were hoping to start a shop onsite, selling basics such as compost and chicken manure, but unfortunately the member taking this forward had to stop because of personal issues and we are still looking for volunteers to pick this up again.
- We are encouraging members to reduce or stop burning on their plots and to try and greatly reduce the amount of old wood that is placed in the communal burning area. We are doing this to minimise health and safety risks onsite, and in anticipation of burning becoming further discouraged or banned across urban areas.

GRANGE LANE ALLOTMENTS REPORT FOR CDAS AGM

Its been a busy year at Grange Lane. Summary of the main/most relevant activities below:

- In May last year, we temporarily re-opened the waiting list which had been closed since 2017. Within quarter of an hour we received nearly 40 applications. Many have already been offered a plot. We are planning to re-open the list again this summer.
- 32 new plot-holders in the last 12 months. 24 took full plots and a further 8 half plots. We are slowly increasing the number of half plots in line with demand.

- We have given one of our plots to a group of Iranian Asylum-seekers who have been based in the Queen's Hotel in Upper Norwood for 2 years, with no access to any outside space and not allowed to work until their asylum applications have been processed. The tenancy agreement is held by a local couple who have been working with the Iranians for 18 months or so.
- We hosted two film companies on the site – Gardeners World did a lovely piece on one of our ploholders who successfully grows a range of South Asian vegetables. The Cooperative Bank filmed an advert (just few seconds-worth) which generated £2k.
- We organized – and paid for - several rotted manure deliveries from Bexleyheath while our normal supply was paused.
- In April 2023 the Dulwich Estate replaced the fence along the top of the site. This had fallen into a terrible state of disrepair, and we were constantly experiencing problems with dogs and trespassers coming in from the woods. We'd like to thank the Dulwich Estate and its contractors Acacia for doing such a fantastic job.
- Our new Joint Site Manager, Frank, produced an excellent Health and Safety Risk plan for the site, to ensure that we comply with our insurance obligations and keep the site a safe place for all.
- Two water/drainage specialists (recommended by Gunsite) came and carried out an assessment of our drainage problems and offered some solutions. We are starting to pilot some of their recommendations to see if drainage improves.
- We piloted a new approach to inspections – dividing responsibility across the committee and involving line managers.
- We carried out extensive consultation on some of our existing and long-standing site rules and at November's AGM a significant majority, of the 88 members attending, voted against changes to the rules on structures (sheds/polytunnels and shelters). So, we will not allow any new structures on site. The members did, however, agree to some changes in relation to the size of toolboxes and the number of compost bins. They agreed that no existing plot-holders could apply for second plots because of the high demand for allotments, and agreed to a ban on fixed cameras/CCTV on the allotments.
- We welcomed two new committee members – Don Marshall and Susan Miles. Susan is mastering our online membership data-base, Love Admin.

Minutes produced by Tony Robertson-Jonas (CDAS Secretary)