

MINUTES OF THE 1ST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE CITY OF ELY ALLOTMENTS AND GARDENS ASSOCIATION

Held at Centre 'E', 24 Barton Road Ely, on 11th March 2019 at 7.30 p.m.

Apologies

Julie Elsey, Kirsten and Sean Berrigan, Rachel Winkel, Hillary Kirby and Roy, Lesley Bishop, Stewart and Teresa Bye, Teresa Aslett, Dominic O'Sullivan.

Present – Committee members: Graham Bond (Chair), Ken Brown (Vice Chair) Katie Taggart (Treasurer), Linda Adams (Minutes), Ian Kearney, John Mitchell, Tamsyn Hardy, Peter Clarke. Andrew Stephenson, Jenny Warren, Vicki Holden. Peter Holden, and 28 members.

Opening comments - Graham Bond, current Chair of the Association, welcomed to the first AGM of the new City of Ely Allotments and Gardens Association.

Apologies for absence - Were not read out and are listed above.

Minutes - As this is the first AGM of the new Association, we have no previous minutes to be confirmed and signed, but the minutes of last year's Allotments Association AGM will be made available.

Site Report: This was just a brief outline of what has happened over the last year.

General: As we can all remember during last year, we had very hot and dry period, which was greatly appreciated but also caused problems on the allotments.

Watering was a priority, and whilst it gave us bumper crops in some things, others did not do so well, but it was noted that incidents of blight were greatly reduced.

All the sites were subject to changes in tenants, some very sad due to the passing of longstanding tenants, others due to people moving away and a few evictions due to their non-compliance with the Tenancy Agreement.

The popularity of having an allotment continues to grow (excuse the pun) and so does our waiting list, which at present has 30 people on it, and it is because of this situation that all tenants should keep their plots tidy and well stocked.

It is expected that all our sites will be fully tenanted in the next few weeks.

Bridge Fen: This site has seen the biggest changes over the year.

The completion and opening of the Southern Bypass caused some reservations and meant the closure of the existing site entrance.

Any increase in noise and pollution levels should be mainly nullified when the trees and shrubs planted on the banking have grown.

After much discussion with the City Council and Cambridgeshire Highways a new entrance and car park were constructed at no cost to the Association.

There is still some work to be completed, the replacement of a section of boundary fence and additional signage and road markings to make vehicle and pedestrian access to the site safer.

The new fencing along the side of the car park is to be extended to the dyke, and a further section built along the dyke bank top.

New Barns: There were some unwanted visitors on the site, this year, in the shape of a fox and a muntjac deer, and we are in the process of checking and repairing, where necessary, the boundary fencing in order to keep them out in future.

A wild flower garden has been planted at the bottom of the site, adjacent to the site orchard, and we are hopeful of plenty of flowers this year, thus increasing the presence of pollinators for our crops.

The communal shed is also proving a great benefit in the storing of items for site maintenance.

Upherds Lane: The length of wooden boundary fence along Saxon Close continues to give trouble. It is not our responsibility, and when a section is blown down, we are having to wait until the housing association get it repaired, during which time the site is insecure.

After several years of requesting and waiting a tall tree, in an adjacent garden, has finally been removed, along with its shadow, giving significant benefit to the nearest plots.

Investigation into the surface water emerging at the lowest part of the site and running across the footpath into Upherds Lane is still ongoing.

A shared scheme, with Bridge Fen, to have regular deliveries of horse manure has been well received, and it soon disappears on to the plots.

It is hoped this year to carry out further improvements to the site paths.

Back Hill and Canterbury Avenue: The site in Back Hill is probably our best kept secret, only coming to prominence when a new boundary fence had to be constructed along one side, it has only two plots, and both are very tidy and well stocked.

Canterbury Avenue is also proving very popular, its plots are small and ideal for first time allotment holders.

It is hoped this year to slightly alter the layout, of the plots, to improve the site for the tenants.

Trading Stores: With the merger of the two original organisations it has provided the opportunity to give the stores a makeover.

Several items associated with the old annual show have been removed and other products reorganised to give more space for sales items.

Many other things have been improved or added, a new sign erected, original outside noticeboard smartened, a new 'Stores Open' sign made, a new post box fitted, outside flower tubs refreshed and gutters and downpipes cleared.

Following a visit and advice from the fire service, safety items have been installed and escape procedures posted thus ensuring that the stores complies with the fire regulations.

A new membership card has been introduced for use at the stores to ensure you get your discount.

The annual schemes, that we run, for both seeds and seed potatoes are well used and have enabled the Association to make a profit on both, which is used towards the cost of running the stores, including the lease and the electricity.

In all the stores is thriving, which is thanks to the customers, but mainly due to the group of volunteers, who have carried all the improvements and maintenance, and man the stores, on a rota system, when it is open and assist with deliveries.

There is always room for more, both customers and helpers, so if you have not been and want to buy or feel that you can help please come along have look and a chat.

The Stores are in the Ely Beet Club car park, in Lynn Road.

St. Mary's Garden: The Association also look after the small garden in front of St Mary's church on behalf of East Cambs District Council, who cover the cost of maintenance.

During this year a beacon was installed by the City of Ely Council, and was lit on Sunday 11th November, to commemorate the end of WW1, one hundred years ago.

The garden is replanted twice a year and it is hoped that this year its appearance will be improved with the fitting of metal edging to retain the grassed area and eliminate damage caused by mowing.

This work is again carried out by a small number of volunteers, on a rota system, and includes the weekly tasks of weeding, dead heading and general tidying of the area.

We thank them, very much, for their efforts, and again if you feel that you can help then please let us know.

Treasurer's report: The Annual accounts run from January 1st to December 31st. The accounts shown are for the period from the amalgamation of the Allotments and Horticultural Society to the end of the year. Because of the merging of funds, the bank balance is now in a healthy condition. The money will be spent on improvements for the sites and stores, rents and water charges for allotment sites, stock for stores and the lease when it is sorted. The treasurer thanked Tony Edmondson for his assistance with banking the stores takings.

Point raised- Statement of Accounts for the period 1 September 2018 to 31 December 2018 (Should this be 1 October?)

Explanation re the Balance Sheet item 'Accruals (3,855.00)'

This is income received in advance relating to a subsequent accounting period. Allotment rents for 12 months received in October are treated as 3 months income in one account's year and 9 months income in the following year. This figure is the portion of 2018/19 rents received held over to appear in the 2019 accounting year.

Election of officers: The current officers are Graham Bond, (chair), Ken Brown (Vice chair), Katy Taggart (Treasurer), Linda Adams (Secretary).

No-one else has come forward to stand as an officer. The current officers have all indicated that they are prepared to continue.

It was proposed that they be elected to serve for another year.

Proposed Andrew Stephenson. Seconded Jennie Warren. Carried unanimously.

The Chair introduced the officers and explained that the committee is composed of allotment site reps and former members of the horticultural society so that all interests are catered for.

Honoraria - An honorarium is an ex gratia payment, i.e., a payment made, without the giver recognizing themselves as having any liability or legal obligation, to a person for his or her services in a volunteer capacity or for services for which fees are not traditionally required.

The decision to award them was made some years ago at an AGM by members of the Allotment Association and has been voted to continue at every AGM since then.

Currently the awards are as follows.

Chair - £500. Secretary - £400. Treasurer - £200.

Vicki Holden stated that she considered that this system is outdated and no longer appropriate.

Following some discussion, it was proposed that the honoraria will continue as it is for another year. The matter will be discussed in committee.

Proposed Peter Clarke, seconded Owen Howe

For 31, against 3, abstained 2. Proposal carried.

Allotment rents for 2019-2020 season.

Plot Size in Poles.	Standard	Pensioner
Less than 5.	£21.00	£18.00
Between 5 and 9.9.	£26.00	£22.00
Between 10 and 14.9.	£31.00	£26.00
Between 15 and 19.9.	£43.00	£36.00
Between 20 and 29.9.	£54.00	£45.00
Between 30 and 39.9.	£77.00	£63.00

As before: Tenants with multiple plots will pay for the total size of the plots they rent

Non-Allotment Holders: Their membership fee to remain at £5.00.

Site reps mentioned that Baldock pay £150, some London boroughs over £200 a year and waiting lists of over 9 years. New tenants often ask if our rents are per month.

The rents were proposed by Graham Bond, seconded Ken Brown, carried unanimously.

Website

The Association website is www.elyallotmentsandgardens.org. This provides the public face of the Association and a channel for the public to get in touch with us. This year we are seeing between 30 and 40 unique visits per day.

There is an online form for submitting applications for plots, through which 60 applications have been received to date since the site went live at the end of January 2018.

The site was rebuilt and moved to a different hosting company in early 2018, to provide an easier maintenance interface. Following the merger, a new domain name of www.elyallotmentsandgardens.org was registered and the website recently adopted this web address. The previous addresses still work by redirection to the new address.

Email

The Association email account is currently cityofelyallotmentsassoc@gmail.com. Officers and site reps are encouraged to use this for Association business rather than their personal email accounts. Email is the default method of communication with members although personal chats on site are still allowed. Special provision is made for members without email addresses.

The 2018 allotment rent renewal requests were all generated by an email mailmerge to produce a personalised email or letter.

Unfortunately, this type of free email account is prone to 'spoofing' by unknown and untraceable miscreants. This sends forged emails appearing to have originated from a legitimate source. Email spoofing is a tactic used in phishing and spam campaigns with the goal of getting recipients to open, and possibly even respond to, a solicitation which is usually loaded with malware. Our gmail address has fallen victim to this abuse and there is nothing we can do about it from the sender/owner side. A number of alert members have reported receiving these fraudulent emails and there have been several waves of this nuisance.

Although this is 2019 news, action is in hand to overcome this problem. After a trial, the committee has decided to adopt a robust business-standard email system and move off the free gmail account. This paid-for system provides additional behind-the-scenes technology to assist the recipients' machines to identify that the emails are from a genuine trusted sender. If spoofed emails continue from the rogue sender using our previous address, they will not benefit from this increased validation and should be rejected by the recipients' email filters.

This change also allows us to bring the email address in line with the website address. Our email address will be <sitename>@elyallotmentsandgardens.org Full details will be issued shortly.

GDPR

2018 was notable for the arrival of tightened data protection regulation amidst massive hype. The world of e-commerce did not stop the day after, and now the dust has settled life goes on amidst a plethora of intrusive consent boxes. The Association is aware of our responsibilities and the requisite documents are being produced as part of the shake-up of all administration following the merger.

Any other business: Thanks to Katie for serving the drinks and providing us with delicious cakes.

Meeting closed at 9.42 pm