
Minutes of Annual General Meeting held on Thursday 29th September 2016 at 7.30pm in Brentham Club.

Attendees 46
1) Apologies received from: Clare Byford, Sue Charlton, Hilda Platje, Cressida Miles, Doig Simmonds, Shirley Smith, Ruth Wheatman
2) Minutes of AGM held 24th September 2015
   These were accepted as an accurate record. It was agreed to take issues relating to recent works later in Agenda. Charles Vaughan Jones (CJV) asked about Minutes of Special General Meeting held on 4th February 2016. David Housego (DH) : These were circulated afterwards and the implementation of agreed actions contained in Chair’s report.
3) Chair’s Report
   DH introduced his report highlighting the following: Agreed works carried out in April and within agreed budget. Total cost of just under £16,000 assisted by £2000 grant from PCA. Bollards now installed and designed only to be used in severe weather conditions in which damage to roadway might be caused. In this event, keys available for emergency vehicles or disabled drivers.
   DH acknowledged problems of excessive heaping of soil onto plots and the removal of bridges. Most plotholders had been able to make good. He thanked members for their patience during and after the work period.
   Roger Davies (RD) now installing extra standpipes with goal of one for every 4 plots. Volunteer help with this sought. Hedge layer had returned to site for maintenance on southern boundary and to survey need on northern boundary.
   DH thanked organisers of 2 annual social events (show and seedling swap) and congratulated Robert Reynolds (RR) on being overall winner in Show.
   The website now fully operational thanks to help from Stefan Jasinski. Link to Ealing Allotment Partnership now installed and recommended.
   **Report Accepted**

4) Accounts
   RD presented full accounts for period to 30th June 2016. These were accepted without discussion.

5) Election of Management Committee Officers
   There being no new nominations, the existing postholders were proposed en bloc by Brian Field (BF) Seconded Jan Anderson (JA) to serve for a further year; viz:
   Chair, DH, Secretary, Amin Mawani (AM), Treasurer, (RD), Membership Secretary Kathryn Clutterbuck (KC)
   **Agreed.**

6) Election of Management Committee Members
   Three existing Members: RR, Malcolm Paice (MP) and Anne Bishop (AB) and two new members Neil Fretwell (NF), supported by Shafeeq Jassim, and Tom Lafferty (TL), supported by Jorge Perez Vidal, were proposed en bloc by Paul Mulaty (PM) and seconded by JA.
   **Agreed**

Anne Harrison (AH) agreed to be co-opted for a further year as Minutes secretary.

7) Appointment of Merchant and Co as Independent Examiners of Accounts for further year.
   Proposed, RR: Seconded, Bea Thompson (BT)
   **Agreed**
8) To agree rental charges for plots for 2017/18 as £18 per rod with concessions on first 10 rods of 50%

Elizabeth Cave (EC) queried whether rent increases might be needed to cover growing need for maintenance and site improvements. RD: Not necessary as we have enough money for immediate projects and would expect a substantial grant within 5 years.

EC: Do we want to wait that long?
RD: Please submit list of site improvement ideas for committee consideration.

9) Rental Subscription for raised beds 2017/18 to remain at £15.

Agreed

10) Associate member Subscription for 2017/18 to remain at £10.

Agreed


NF: Why do we have annual rather than longer term lease?
RD: We are in process of trying to draw up our own lease acceptable to council, with help from plotholders with legal experience. Longer term leases not possible.

Most sites in Ealing are directly managed by the council.

Extension proposed: Mrs Goodearl, Seconded: BT

Agreed

12) Ealing Council’s Grant to be Paid in Kind.

RD: We don’t receive a cash grant. As the rent we pay is “notional” the grant has a similar status. We do however continue to “ringfence” this notional amount in case of changes in council policy.

Proposed Maggie Field (MF): Seconded, BT.

Agreed

13 Business Plan 2017/18

This was presented by RD. He highlighted the current work on standpipes (see item 3)

RD requested advice on how to present Business Plan more effectively.
EC: Should we be spending to improve Trading Hut doors and electrical works inside?
RD: PAGS will pay for electrical work and I don’t recommend making doors smarter as invitation to thieves.

JA: Have Smart Water markers been considered?
RD: These do not deter determined thieves and have not been recommended by police. Thefts have reduced slightly and are less frequent than on other sites.

Plan proposed: R Veryard (RV) Seconded RR.

Agreed

14) Resolutions

( NOTE: As a number of the resolutions are quite long they are not being reproduced in full here. If you were unable to attend the meeting please request a copy from the Secretary)

Resolution 1

To allow disabled badge holders to park on site for unrestricted time provided no obstruction caused.

Proposer AH: a necessary amendment to rules to comply with Disability legislation and unlikely to be abused as blue badges only given to those with considerable mobility problems.

Christie Archer (CA): Where will cars park as no designated spaces?
MP: There is limited space at top end of site and where road has been widened at northern end.
AB: Will bollards cause a problem?
DH: Unlikely as bollards only operational in severe weather.
RR: Who keeps keys?
DH: There are three keys.
RR: Every committee member should have one.
PM: Is parking such a big problem on site?
RD: 20 minute rule is a guideline for good practice and if persistently abused, offenders will be referred to Committee for action.

Resolution carried on show of hands.

Resolution 2
This resolution asked committee to make PACA’s commitment to Equal Opportunities and Anti Discrimination Legislation much more overt and to adopt a “zero tolerance” approach to any infringement.
NF, the proposer, outlined the necessity for complying more specifically with relevant legislation and for doing what many other organisations do in making policy commitments more visible. He queried whether PACA even had such a formal and widely circulated policy.
DH: We do not need a separate rule on this and our policy is stated in the lease that all members receive.
NF: I did not receive this.
DH: “zero tolerance” is not easy to define and harder still to reinforce. Such a policy might open a minefield.
BT: We should not be discussing this as the issues raised are enshrined in Law.
EC and JK reinforced this point.
RV: I think we do need to have our own written policy and put down a “marker” of our collective values as an Association. This is an important issue.
MP: As Lettings Officer, I feel somewhat upset at the implication in the resolution that I might “discriminate” in letting plots.
At this point, NF conceded that wording of resolution was at fault and some revision would be needed if approved.
RD: Suggest a more tightly worded resolution be submitted for consideration next year.
RR: If plotholders as individuals argue or abuse each other in a way that infringes legislation it is a matter for the police and is clearly beyond the scope of the committee to adjudicate.
NF: Only suggesting reinforcing rules that all associations should explicitly adhere to.
PM: A “family” such as the collective membership of site should be able to get along in a friendly supportive way without recourse to such formal rules. Something important would be lost by imposing them.

Vote Taken on show of hands. For the resolution: 16. Against: 24. Abstentions: 4

Resolution not carried
DH suggested a reworded resolution be submitted for future consideration.
RD reinforced importance of equality and non-discrimination for the well being of the Association.

Resolution 3
This asked the committee to find improved ways of dealing with the number of “derelict”plots on site.
TL, the proposer, explained his concern at seeing a relatively large number of untended and deteriorating plots on site. He suggested a closer system of guidance and monitoring and a more clearly defined “use it or lose it” approach.

RD: We have clear cut systems in place but implementation through the prescribed stages cannot be achieved quickly as procedures leading to a Notice to Quit have to be followed sequentially. Process is often tortuous, involving personal issues. Agree we should keep procedures under review and improve where necessary.

TL: Should we do more to offer strugglers help? People don’t know who to turn to for help.

RD: A mentoring system would be good but again time consuming to implement.

DH: We have started a programme of introductory meetings with a view to giving new or potential members more insight into what having a plot involves.

MS: We can offer help but often the problems of non cultivation are not so easily resolved. Should we charge a deposit when taking on a plot?

RD: Can’t do this as well as getting deposits for keys.

John Kane (JK): Propose that committee revisits this issue and clarifies strategy.

RV: If newcomers given plots in reasonable state or offered help to bring plot to fair condition then motivation to maintain standard would be greater. (virtuous circle effect)

CA: Why not offer people near top of waiting list the opportunity to “help” with a difficult plot to try their skills?

JA: The committee should provide more emphatic leadership on this and have more regular inspections.

AB suggested JA join committee.

TL: More opportunity to have half a plot might help with problem.

MP: We routinely offer half plots when available.

RD: People reluctant to share or abandon part of “their territory”

Resolution 4

EC proposed that letters relating to non cultivation difficulties following inspections should be made less threatening and take account of the many second language speakers on site. She offered to assist with reviewing style and content of the whole communication sequence.

RD reiterated that whole process took a long time and adopting a gentler approach might make dealing with defaulters difficult within a single tenancy year.

AM: Our letters are pro forma therefore not intended to be personal. We should review our approach and perhaps offer more support.

JA: It is a problem if plotholders do not understand the letters they receive. Should translation be considered?

CA: What actually are the problems?

RD: People move, accidents etc.

Nicola Green: Should we change keys twice a year?

RD: Not possible.

AH: Induction meetings are an excellent initiative and should be continued on a regular basis.

TL: Do we really know what problems are causing persistent neglect of plots?

RD: We do our best to contact people but it’s not easy. If a plotholder cannot tend plot for a substantial portion of year then plot must be given up with plotholder rejoining waiting list when/if able to.

Resolution carried on show of hands. EC asked to look at letters as offered.
15) Date of Next Meeting
Thursday 28th September at 7.30pm at Brentham Club

16) Any Other Business
Proxy Voting
CVJ suggested this be considered for future meetings as evening attendance difficult for many members.
AM: Proxy voting widely used for much larger organisations with a geographically widespread membership. Might lead to actual meeting being non-quorate if we implemented proxy system.
JK: System would be relatively easy to implement if agreed
RD: We should follow guidelines for voluntary organisations and it’s important for members to listen to arguments as presented in meeting place before voting.
Issue deferred for committee discussion and possible resolution next year.

Site Works in April 2016
NF spoke of the amount of work he had had to do on his plot to prepare for road and drain improvements in April and on the state of his plot afterwards.
Concerned that numbers of plotholders ignored all letters about preparation required for works. What sanctions applied?
DH conceded problems had been caused and apologised:. Obviously lessons have been learnt about managing such a relatively large project with outside contractors. Future projects will require more careful planning.
RD also conceded that powers for enforcing instructions and issuing sanctions were very limited.

Other Matters
BT: I love my plot and I would like to thank everyone who makes such enjoyment possible (Warm Applause)
AM: Concerned that notices recently placed on inside of Main gates have been removed. These are an essential tool of communication, please respect them.
Paul Hamill: Would it be possible to display notice on gate about current vacancies at Brentham allotments?

Agreed

DH: EC had requested a vote of thanks to John Dos Santos for repairing small gate.
Agreed.

Meeting closed at 9.40pm