

## **Interim Annual General Meeting of Exmouth & District Allotments Association**

Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> September 2021 10.30am.

St John the Evangelist Church Withycombe Village Road EX8 3AE

### Minutes

Apologies: - J Barwick, J Cuff, D Conduit, O Davey, G Elliott, J. Ingram, C Newton, E Prowse, B Prowse, D Poor , K Wilcox, J. Singleton, A. Taylor- Broadhurst, I Stewart, M Stewart

Attending: - 26 members

Minutes were proposed as accurate by John Hills and seconded by Dawn Witkiss.

- 1) Chairperson/Membership Secretary Welcome and Report
  - a) Cheryl Chessum welcomed the Members and thanked them for attending this AGM.
  - b) She introduced the Committee Members to the membership. The membership was informed we have a Committee Secretary now Dianne Conduit who unfortunately cannot be here today. Tony Hunter has stood down but was thanked for his ongoing valuable contribution as a plot coordinator on PL. We also are well supported by two members of the Town Council Oilly Davey and David Poor who attend our committee meetings and act as our link into the wider Town Council.
  - c) The Membership were thanked for their support in upholding the emergency guidance put out to the Membership in March 2020 due to the pandemic and the lockdown imposed across the country. The local guidance followed that provided by NAS. The guidance has not yet been rescinded as covid rates remain high. The membership was collectively thanked for their cooperation and support in keeping the Allotments a safe place to visit. Special mention of thanks was made to the gate lockers who, for a whole year, came out to lock gates to reduce contact for others and have now stood down. Unfortunately, there remains a problem with some Members not taking responsibility for locking gates after themselves in the evening reducing security to HL site.
  - d) The financial year has been changed to run from 1<sup>st</sup> July to the 30<sup>th</sup> June as the workload of the Treasurer is spread more evenly than if we retained the yearly accounts being presented in November.
  - e) Over the past year the demand for Allotments has grown nationally and both sites have been fully let. The current waiting list for Pound Lane is 23 and Hamilton Lane is 75 and for the first time we do not have to leave people on plots if they are being neglected without good reason or not being used.
  - f) The committee is continuing the work of previous Committees and trying to address historic problems, but it will take time. Regarding security gate locking remains a problem on HL but fortunately we have had no recurrence of serious security breaches and the incident of arson on HL was highlighted. Although we have pursued various companies to improve some of the gates, we cannot find a contractor to take on the work.
  - g) The membership was thanked for their cooperation with the changes in the approach to bonfires and were told that over the past 18months we have received no complaints about them at all. Context behind the decision was provided about moves to improve clean air and pollution, especially in the pandemic when outdoor space was even more important. It was highlighted some Allotment sites do not permit bonfires at all. We can have them October to February once per month.

- h) The community space at Hamilton Lane is currently being upgraded and developed as a community space for social, education and small group activities including Committee Meetings and hopes to be ready to use by the end of the year but that cannot be guaranteed. It is available to members across both sites. Nearer the time activities will be shared with the membership. People were invited to contribute and to let us know if there was some knowledge or skills they would like to offer share or present to others in small group format.

## 2) Treasurers Report – John Barwick

- a) The Accounts presented to the Membership in respect of the Management Account and Club Account for approval were as at the 30<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

### Some clarification in the Management Account

- South West Water had been very lax in their statutory requirement to read the meters and thus there had been an impact on the correct billings with a lower figure than anticipated at £4750.00.
- The year in question reported a surplus of £9.5K against a deficit of £1k approximately the year before as reported at the time.
- Elaine Lamble raised the question about whether the money for Plot Deposits in the Management Account was protected – this was clarified at the previous AGM and they are within the Balance Sheet.
- It was also clarified that all the rental income to EDAA is managed by EDAA and none of the rental income goes to the Town Council, but our annual Accounts are given to the Town Council as a record and evidence of fiscal management and responsibility as they have responsibility to ensure they are being managed responsibly. The Accounts could be audited as part of wider Town Council financial audit if required.
- Graham Bell enquired if the HL shed is insured - he was informed it is and while we arrange that from our account both PL summerhouse and HL shed are listed as assets but have no Balance Sheet value as such.
- Elaine Lamble raised the question about whether some of the Management account was held in an account that would earn interest such as a bond. The response was that at present it is not as money was transferred in from matured bonds and this can be discussed further for the next financial year when interest rates improve.

### Some clarification in respect of the Club Account

- Some £12.00k worth of stock was sold across both sites since the last accounting period. We pass on the savings from purchasing in bulk from a horticultural supplier with a small mark up of approximately 4% which then allows us to invest in those infrastructures.
- Membership increased by approximately 100 people in the past year to 473. This is calculated in February after the deadline for rental income has passed in Mid-February. The National Allotment Society then receives £3.00 per head for each member as part of the collective Membership. This increase in numbers increases revenue into the club account.

- We were able to report a surplus of £287 (£172 previous year) for the year which is within the margins we were looking to achieve.

b) The membership were informed that a discussion would follow around Budgets and Finance generally in the coming year in the second half of the AGM. Meanwhile Members were asked to propose and agree the Accounts.

- Management Account - proposed by J. Hills, seconded by G Wyatt – Passed
- Club Account - proposed by K Taylor, seconded by A. Goodman – Passed
- That Mark Hazel of Sovereign Accountancy be retained as Independent Examiner - Proposed by G Wyatt, seconded by G. Bell – Passed.
- Increase in membership cost ( not rent) will rise by £1.00 to £6.00 per Member annually. This is needed to recoup costs for investment and development of assets. This is a local increase and does not reflect increases by NAS although that could happen in future. Proposed by M. Taylor and seconded by T Hunter - Passed.
- Councillor David Poor requested in his absence we inform the membership at the AGM how well the Association is being managed.

### 3) Vote on Honoraria proposed by Cheryl Chessum

a) Management Honoraria were proposed for:

- Treasurer - £500
- Secretary - £500
- Site Coordinators
- PL - £75
- HL - £100.
- Shop Managers
- HL - £75
- PL - £75

- The Honoraria were voted on and agreed by majority.

4) Resignation of all Officers and Committee followed by Election of Officers & Committee for 2022 – Deferred until 2022 AGM in view of the proximity of that meeting.

5) Presentation of awards: – deferred until next AGM

### 6) Part Two – Chair

Range of topics and updates for members.

- Exmouth in Bloom visited HL site in July and decision on outcome of the RHS award will be known by 13<sup>th</sup> October 2021. Next year Pound Lane site will be entered into the judging and the nature of the entry will be decided by PL members.
- Update given on rodent management across both sites. We have an identified persons for rodent management and a LANTA Certified Officer who both advise and oversee the use of

rodent bait in a responsible way to any member requesting this and identifying an issue. We must be careful in use of bait as it is a poison, and a record is now kept of where the poisons are laid on site and this is tracked. Members also have advice on managing their allotment to reduce encouraging rats and although it is a significant problem at HL it exists on both sites. Realistically, we aim for containment of the problem as eradication will not be achieved. G Bell reported he had seen mice and voles as well as rats and these would be considered a problem.

- There is an ongoing programme of improvements across both sites and we have a new contractor working with on hedges, boundaries, trees and landscaping in a programme that will take a minimum of 5 years to realise. We are catching up with some urgent work which needs to be done including removal of dead Elms, particularly on PL. S Bentley, J Collett, commented that the hedge work near her plot left garden waster uncleared and so this will be noted for feedback to contractor.
- The Membership was informed that the standard of allotments is generally going up on both sites. C Sturgess disputed this as he has several locally neglected plots and disagreed very strongly and said he did not think letters went out quickly enough. He was informed that although he may not think they are being dealt with we are aware of them and the circumstances of some plot holders, particularly in the pandemic and a lot of work is going on behind the scenes he would not be aware of, and sensitivity is needed in some cases. The membership was being encouraged and reminded to report if they notice problems on plots and they do not see a neighbour as they used to or if they themselves are having problems as it is easier if these issues are flagged up quickly wherever possible.
- EDAA has a lot of historical rubbish accumulated on both sites that needs to be cleared and where plots are abandoned often rubbish has not been removed. This can render plots difficult to let and work by volunteers and cost incurred to get it removed. There is an ongoing plan to work on this, but it is a problem as tenants over decades have thrown rubbish into hedges or buried it in heaps. The rent of new tenants and responsible tenants' rents as an Association has to be used to clear the legacy of the mess. The treasurer responded to S Bentley and it was made clear that tenants leaving rubbish do not get their deposits back. It goes into a fund towards this but rubbish removal is expensive and can be part of several hundred pounds worth of expenditure.
- A community room is being developed at HL site for the use of the whole Association and we hope to offer a range of small group educational and community events with everyone welcome. C Sturgess commented he had only been to HL site once and did not feel very welcome but did not elaborate why and also expressed the view that it was still 'them and us' meaning we were 2 very different sites and Associations. The Treasurer JB challenged his view and made it quite clear to the membership that it is managed as one and this is an old, outdated perception not shared by many from feedback when we talk to the wider membership, but people do have an affection and closer tie to where they garden which is understandable.
- J Pettit raised the issue of the state of the bank near Henley Road plots and the state of the disabled beds being unmanaged and overrun with weeds. This was acknowledged as very much the case and a plan to improve the area was needed and will be implemented in the coming year. CC informed the membership that we are trying to raise funds for a sustainable, environmentally friendly toilet once area improved as the membership and people with any disability are the furthest from facilities and it would improve the area for the membership.
- G Bell also raised concerns about the hedge and bank adjacent to his plot on HL and has ongoing issues with complaints from residents neighbouring his plot and CC/JB agreed that work would be done to address this in the coming round of works.

### **Part two – Treasurer**

- JB expressed frustration and impact of a small number of people continuing to fly tip unwanted items across both sites and confirmed we will act where the offenders are known through site management protocols within the rules and if necessary to East Devon District Council. This

step has already been taken in one instance and they were very proactive and supportive. We will use signage to remind people as a deterrent and ask members to self-police areas and report where needed.

- Financially JB confirmed we need to raise £11K for the waterless toilet and he wants us to raise 75% of funding from external sources so bids will continue to be made.
- Looking to the future we plan to develop an area for people with a range of access issues to continue or begin to garden that is future proofed and fit for purpose, nearer to facilities, so it is more inclusive and safer to walk on. Once again, we need to raise 75% of costs from external funders towards the initial quote of £8.5K.
- Both sites will have chippings bins installed.
- Costs for dealing with dangerous and dead Elms has increase the spend but we need to catch up as part of improving both sites -some £25K will be spent over the coming 18 months.
- Rent renewal process in the coming year will be the same for 2022 as 2021. JB acknowledged this was a big change for some members but was much more efficient in terms of collecting funds and the time taken to do this was reduced plus we have made a large saving on stationery and postage to invest elsewhere. C Sturgess was upset as he does not get a reminder letter now and said he is not on the internet. He was advised as a long-term tenant he knows the rent is due every year and reminders are on the noticeboard by the shop. C Sturgess stated he did not walk to the noticeboard and did not know why he should. He was informed that local rent collection would be improved at PL this year with a weekend timetable for tenants to pay their rent in person by cash or cheque at the shop (opposite the noticeboard). S Bentley was assured she did not have to print off her rent invoice, it was only for checking the amount owed.
- J Hills requested a noticeboard for area by Gates 7 and 8 for information such as the process and dates for rent renewals and this was agreed by JB/CC to be a reasonable request we would action.
- D Witkiss said she felt she spoke on behalf of the majority of ploholders for the work they do on behalf of all the ploholders and members of EDAA, it is a lot of work and often not appreciated how much time goes into this by volunteers. Her thanks were appreciated and noted.

Meeting closed at 12.10pm