

DORRINGTON ROAD ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION AGENDA

AGM 20th February 2014 19.30 Gregson Centre

Present: Committee- Catherine Hird, Sean Bolton, Ian Hartley, Peter Stanton, Claire Stevens and approximately 30 plotholders

1. Apologies: Were received from 7 plotholders
2. Minutes of last meeting: These have been available on the website for some time and were agreed to be a true and accurate reflection by all present.
3. A review of the previous 12 months was given by Sean:

2013/14 Review

- The last year has seen a number of new faces appear on the site, particularly in the last few months as we have welcomed a number of new plot-holders who have taken on vacant & 'vacated' plots.
- The committee also has some new faces; Claire joined us after the last AGM and, following Chris Duxbury's resignation as Secretary, she has taken on this role within the committee group.
- Sean thanked Chris for his efforts over the last few years in the role of Secretary.
- Thanks were given to Rob Walters for his maintenance of the website.
- Thanks also went to the committee members for their ongoing efforts.
- We have also seen progress in the last year in starting to tackle some of the backlog of 'to do' tasks on the site and the results of this can be seen in the strides we are now starting to make in improving general site 'tidiness'. Piccadilly have taken on some of the grounds maintenance to avoid the previous reliance on an overly small pool of 'volunteers' and this has been very successful.
- We have also tried to make greater use of email updates and 'refreshed' the notice board, which hopefully together are improving communication with plot-holders. Over the next 12 months, we hope to continue with these improvements.
- Financially, we have had a stable year. The focus planned by the committee over the next 12 months will remain building for a long term and stable future to meet the conditions of our Council Lease and SLA and most importantly, to secure the site for following years.
- We have introduced a simplified and rebased rent schedule. This is, as we outlined last year, necessary to correct years of piecemeal changes and a patchwork approach to inflationary increases. The tariffs have been based on a 'band structure' which charges all plot holders based on the area they have and the areas verified with a complete size measurement. The bands range from £20/year to £60/year depending on plot size and everyone is paying a fair rent based on their overall area. The rents now include NSALG fees (which were previously separate) in addition to including water charges. The total for the site represents a small inflationary increase over the previous year and if we have full occupancy will allow us to generate modest surpluses for future maintenance obligations. To put the rents in context,

70% of all our individual plots are actually in the 2 lowest bands of £20 and £30 / year and everyone's rent now has a direct correlation to their plot size – so it is very 'even-handed'. We have retained a discount for over 65's, in line with our previous policy.

4. Membership report: Catherine stated that there had been five evictions (for not working the plot) and also several resignations over the past year. At one point there were fourteen vacant plots but with the exception of two these have now all been re-let. This has totally depleted our waiting list. Catherine stated that we have advertised for more potential plotholders and asked that current plotholders ask around in addition to this.

5. Finance Report: This was given by Catherine and paper copies were distributed to all present. The "equipment for ground clearance and working days" was clarified as being chainsaw sundries - Ian provided free use of his chainsaw but was reimbursed for fuel etc. – and paraffin for lighting the bonfires (on a very wet day).

6. Site improvements: Ian gave an in depth report on the ongoing site improvements:

- The entire track is to be re-profiled and resurfaced entirely paid for by the council. This work will be starting shortly and will take several weeks. No plotholder vehicles should be taken onto site during this work please. Can any plotholder with fencing encroaching onto the track please remove it as the track width cannot be compromised and the contractors will remove it if you don't.
- New fencing is also planned near to the wood where the existing fencing is inadequate. This is also to be funded by the council.

The council offered a finite amount of funding for capital spending on allotments to all of the sites in Lancaster who then put in competing bids for works. It is entirely down to Ian's efforts with the bids that Dorrington Road has been awarded this money for these much needed improvements (that are worth far in excess of the funds that the association has available and we were in competition with many other allotment sites for the money).

The renovation of derelict areas of the site has begun in earnest:

- The tenants of untended allotments were given notices to improve which has resulted in either improvement or eviction
- At the far end of the site overgrown trees were coppiced (not removed) and hedges pruned back - both at the work day and also by members of the committee in their own time

The committee is aware that several plotholders felt that the clearance appeared quite radical. The reason for this is that it has been overdue for such a long time. We intend that trees and hedges be maintained to suitable heights (for an allotment site) in future. Ian explained that trees cause shading of neighbouring plots and that any new trees planted should be on semi dwarfing or dwarfing rootstocks (and existing trees maintained to a similar height to trees on dwarfing rootstocks). Tree and hedge heights on plots will be

checked during routine plot inspections. (Please see the site rules on the website for further information about trees). Sean gave the example of a plot that was 'rediscovered' during the site re-measurement which we had to hack a way into as there was no opening at all in the hedge.

Some of this clearance work was done to help new tenants with derelict and badly overgrown plots. Ian stated that these new tenants were doing a fantastic job of getting derelict plots back into production.

7. Site maintenance: Ian gave an overview on what was needed to maintain the site. He stated that the council expect us to run the site as an allotment site and that it needs to be run in line with the conditions of the lease: We need everyone to play a part in general site maintenance by:

- Looking after their own plots including boundary hedges and fencing, clearing their own rubbish off site and cultivating to the extremities of their plot.
- Not bringing rubbish onto site in the first place e.g. bits of wood etc. brought to make raised beds should actually be used to make raised beds, not left to rot in a corner. Carpets should not be used as weed suppressant. They come to site clean in the back of a car but after use end up taking up lots of room in the skip as no one wants to take them away again in their own car. They also have chemicals in that can leach into the soil (and into your fruit/veg). Used tyres should also not be brought onto the site as we are unable to put them into the skip.
- Attending working days where problems affecting the whole site can be tackled. There is an expectation that all plotholders should take part in at least one working day per year. If this is a problem for you please see a committee member about tasks that you could undertake instead e.g. helping with the maintenance and repair of the water supply or of the main gate and locks.

Any work undertaken needs to be voluntary as even a small fee would cause problems with the insurance. The committee do a lot of work already for the site and should not be expected to do it all. If there are not enough people willing or able to do a task then the association will need to pay professionals to do it e.g. Piccadilly Gardens now do all the grass cutting on site. This grass cutting is relatively low cost but if expensive work needs doing then rents would need to be increased to pay for it.

8. Security matters: 'Be aware, take care'

- Don't leave the main gate unlocked, anyone could get into the site and the unlocked padlock displays the code. This can result in eviction. You must lock the gate for even a short visit.
- Be on the lookout for breaches in the fence line and report them to the committee ASAP.

- Lock tools out of sight in a shed.
- If any theft occurs report it to the police so that it will be logged.
- Don't open the gate the wrong way – i.e. outwards into the road – as this damages the trellis at the top (and also causes insurance issues).
- It is essential that the drop bolts are used to secure the bottom of the gate as otherwise it could blow open in the wind – causing damage to the gate (and possibly to cars) and also making the site insecure.

9. Working days: Claire thanked those who attended the last working day (18th January) for all their efforts. A lot of clearance work was done and the site looks much tidier for it. The next working day will be Saturday 12th April from 10am onwards. It is likely to involve more of the same. There will be email reminders and we will give you an idea of what tools to bring nearer the day. Refreshments will be provided. Please make an effort to attend.

There will be a skip ordered for the 12th April. Priority is to be given to the rubbish from the recently re-let derelict plots. There is likely to be a second skip later in the year probably September. Please do not dump any rubbish near the main gate – keep it all on your own plot until the skip arrives. Especially do not add to the unsightly and unofficial pile of rubbish by the gate (this is also an eviction offence). Also no tyres or chemicals to be put into the skip. Any waste wood can be burnt on the day – please keep this on your plot until the day as we will decide then where the bonfire will be.

10. Committee nominations: the existing committee confirmed their desire to continue. No written committee nominations had been received from any additional ploholders. An appeal was made for anyone interested to put themselves forward but no one did. There was no dissention to the existing committee being re-elected.

11. Any other business: none.

12. Gate numbers: were handed out at the end of the meeting.