

DORRINGTON ROAD ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION AGENDA

AGM 19th February 2015 19.30 Gregson Centre

Present: Committee - Catherine Hird, Sean Bolton, Ian Hartley, Peter Stanton, Claire Stevens and approximately thirty plot-holders

1. Apologies: Were received from 7 plot-holders

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:

2014/5 Review

- The last year has seen a number of new plot-holders as we have managed to successfully develop a large number of under-used plots and has also seen a welcome increase in general cultivation and use of the site. We have welcomed a number of new plot-holders who have taken on vacant & 'vacated' plots and who have been making a fabulous effort.
- Thanks were given to the committee members for their ongoing efforts in helping to strengthen and professionalise the management of the Association, laying foundations for a long lasting, well used, well maintained and vibrant site.
- Thanks also went to Rob Walters for his maintenance of the website.
- We have seen great progress in the last year in some of the more visible aspects of the site development, especially the new track and the woodland boundary fencing at the start of the year. We had two very successful working days.
- We have made greater use of email updates including general gardening hints and tips. We used the internet to undertake our first satisfaction survey which was very successful in terms of number of respondents and also in the identification of further improvements that the plot-holders would like to see happen. Some of these such as bird boxes, bike stands and picnic tables we were able to put into place on the second work day. Other such as perimeter security (this coming year's big task) will take a little longer (and cost a lot more). It was reassuring to receive all the kind comments from members on the things that they appreciate and also to see an overall score that suggested that the majority of plot-holders are happy with how the site is being managed (with 82% respondents either satisfied or very satisfied with site management).
- Financially, we have had a stable year, albeit one where we have invested a little more of our income in developing and maintaining the site. Maintaining a sensible buffer for future 'unknowns' is a vital component of delivering stability and security.

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 as indicated last year implemented a modest rent increase to reflect the fact that our key expenses – water, insurance, affiliation fees, etc. will rise and we must be in a responsible position fiscally when the lease renewal comes round in a few years.

4. Finance Report: This was given by Catherine and paper copies were distributed to all present.

There was a question from the floor – ‘Is the water metered?’ A – Yes. The committee mentioned that as we live in a wet area it is desirable for plot-holders to use rain butts as much as possible to help control the water bills. Catherine also explained that since the site had undergone its biggest tidy up in years we spent money on 3 very large skips. In future it is expected that we will only be ordering one large skip a year (to coincide with the spring work day).

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

During the summer whilst repairing a part of the water supply the opportunity was taken to extend the water system onto some plots that were previously without a supply.

The ongoing work on problem trees was partially dealt with in the Autumn prior to the second working day: the birch tree by the track on the right was transformed with a crown lift and balance while the dual stem sycamore beside it was removed; some small trees were removed from plot 1 to enable the new plot-holder to cultivate the top of his plot; a tall dual stem ash was removed before work commenced on the picnic area (whilst straight felling without damage was still possible).

The clearance of two derelict plots at the far end of the site is to happen when the fencing contractor is likely to have a mini digger available for additional work at minimal cost.

In the future we will need to keep in control of potential nuisance vegetation, especially trees, before they get to the size or stage of decline where (high cost) professional help is required. The results of the satisfaction survey show strong support for extending the present coppice and standards tree management routine.

There is also some support for enhancing and developing the communal picnic area and the committee will look into this.

There is also support for laying parts of the boundary hedge. Although we have missed the opportunity to do so this winter we will look into combining this hedge work in with the future coppicing program.

There have been requests that we chip woody tree brash instead of burning it. We need to investigate the costs and the insurance requirements of this. A plot holder had some knowledge of this and stated that employer's liability insurance is needed. Ian is to discuss requirements and implications with said plot holder and other knowledgeable members.

6. Site maintenance: Ian gave an overview of site maintenance.

He stated that his ongoing health issues mean that he would like to take a less hands on role in future. For example he has been the only person responsible for the water supply for some time. He requested volunteers (of either gender and of any level of expertise) to help him and to gain some knowledge of the rather unconventional system while he is still available to give advice and help. We are planning to turn the water supply on at the next working day as there will be a number of people available to help. This would be an ideal opportunity for anyone interested to familiarise themselves with the system, to clear airlocks and to check for leaks.

Ian stated that he will put tasks onto the noticeboard for plot holders to take on if they are willing but that failing that expensive outside help will be required.

If any individuals or groups have an interest in adopting and improving any area of the site they need to put their ideas before the committee for approval before any action is taken. Any individual or group would need to be aware that the committee retains overall control (and power of veto) as it is the committee who are responsible to (and answerable to) the council.

7. Security matters: Peter highlighted the main issues:

- Always lock the main gate (even if you are not planning to stay long)
- 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.
- There is to be new fencing at the far end of the site (gate numbers will not be changed until after the contractors have finished).
- The fencing on plot 1 cannot be addressed until the council set the boundary line (there is an ongoing encroachment issue between the end house and the council)

8. Membership/waiting list: Claire gave a rundown of the year:

We had regular plot inspections over the course of the year resulting in improvement notices being sent to 8 plot holders (an improvement of the previous year when improvement notices were sent to more than double this number).

The improvement notices resulted in 3 out of 8 improving and getting back up to standard which is great. There were 5 evictions (but only after multiple letters, chances to improve, offers to reduce plot size, etc.). In addition to this a number of people gave up their plots for personal reasons.

Claire stated that if anybody had any mitigating circumstances such as illness or if they wanted to reduce the size of their plot but still continue gardening please let a committee member know. In that way we can support you and help you to stay a member of the association.

We currently have 3 vacant plots and 12 on the waiting list.

9. Working days: Claire thanked those who attended the two working days for all their efforts. A lot of clearance work was done and the site looks much tidier for it. It was good to get people together, meeting up and doing something towards the common good. As previously stated we were able to put some of the plot holder's requests from the survey into reality (picnic tables, bird boxes and bike stands). Hopefully the new noticeboard will be up soon for communal matters such as seed swaps.

We provided 3 large skips over the course of the year and were able to clear a lot of pre-existing rubbish including a lot of rotting carpet. Plot holders were reminded not to bring any carpet onto site.

The next working day will be Saturday 11th April from 10am onwards. It is likely to involve a general site tidy up, a skip and a bonfire (as well as the planned water turn on). There will be email reminders and we will give you an idea of what tools to bring nearer the day. Light refreshments will be provided. Please make an effort to attend if you can.

Please bear in mind that if you cannot attend an official work day you can always approach a member of the committee for an anytime job. The more people who participate the less work each will have to do.

There will be a skip ordered for the 11th April. 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 (dumping rubbish on communal areas is an eviction offence).

10. Committee nominations: the existing committee confirmed their desire to continue. No written committee nominations had been received from any plot-holders. There was no dissent to the existing committee being re-elected.

11. Any other business: The committee answered queries from plot holders on several topics

Security:

A plot holder asked that members be reminded to put the padlock through the last links of the chain as if it is put through links further up it is difficult to pull from one side to the other and people can become locked in. (Claire to send a reminder email).

Problem trees:

A plot holder stated that he believes the large leylandii next to the track where it forks to the left to be a problem tree – Ian to look into this.

Two plot holders expressed concerns that there are branches from the neighbouring woods overhanging into their plot (safety and security concerns) and also that there is an issue with the fencing around where the old gate towards the top of the site is. Ian stated that he will liaise with property services at the local council to see if they can sort the overhanging branches and also that the fencing issue would be addressed in the next few weeks when contractors are due to do some work at the far end of the site.

Contact details:

A plot holder asked to be supplied with plot holders personal contact details. The committee reiterated that this is not possible due to the Data Protection Act. Facebook was suggested as a means of contacting people. Claire to look into creating Facebook page to act as an (extra) online noticeboard (although all personal/important/member's only messages will still be sent directly to the plot holders by email or mail). The committee also offered to forward on email from plot holders to all members (if appropriate) (e.g. seed swaps) and the communal noticeboard is due to be finished and available for any member use soon.

12. Gate numbers: were handed out both before and after the meeting.