**Highbury South Allotment Association**

**Minutes of the AGM 15th February 2024 – 19:00**

Empire Club, First Floor, 32-34 Salters Road, Gosforth

**Present:** There were 30 members present. Bob Heyman was Chairman.

Bob welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were given to Pam.

**Apologies for absence:** Tim Cook, Jo McSwaine, Olga Mcfall, Jenny Wigston, Andy Trevellyan, Peter Wilkinson, Sharon Gould, Alan Dordoy, Dave Saddington, Nicola Sugden, Edmund Smith.

|  |
| --- |
| **Minutes of 2023 AGM and matters arising.**  The minutes of the 2023 AGM were adopted.  Matters arising. Bob Heyman (BH) directed Stephen Tyrer (ST) to cover the £2k grant. Dog waste – signs were added to each gate, BH asked the meeting to let him know if the problem still existed.  **Chair's Report**  **The Year 2023-2024**  In 2022, we were warned that another dry winter might lead to the demise of fruit trees! Au contraire, we have experienced the wettest weather for many years, resulting in waterlogged ground and raising concerns about drainage. The climate emergency is generating greater weather extremes, although warmer, wetter winters and hot summer droughts seems to be becoming more likely. All we can do as allotment-keepers is to cultivate resilience, e.g. through water storage in case of drought, and raised beds in case of flooding. We did have some warm sunny weather, and, overall, enjoyed excellent crops of both soft and hard fruits. Plums and pear crops which are intermittent in our chilly climate flourished this year, and we produced yet another excellent crop of apples.  Following the transfer of landlordship from Urban Green Newcastle to the Freemen of Newcastle, the Committee were faced with negotiating a new lease (to be discussed by Stephen, our secretary). We also reviewed our legal status, as the new lease contains terms involving large financial liabilities, particularly for the restoration of the site to grassland if we are evicted from our site. Following unanimous supportive votes at EGMs, we have become a not-for-profit Co-operative recognised by the Financial Conduct Authority. Our liability is now limited to our financial and material assets, and we have changed our title to Highbury South Allotment Society Limited (HSASL). Society members, initially one person per plot, will receive nominal £1 shares, and four honorary Directors from the Committee have been appointed (Stephen Tyrer, Secretary, Pam Brown, Membership Secretary, Roger Blight, Treasurer and Bob Heyman, Chair). The Society has adopted standard Model Rules and Constitution which will co-exist with our Highbury South Constitution and Rules, as well with as the terms of our Lease and associated Buildings and Structures Guidelines as and when these are agreed with the Freemen. Our Society will be required to file annual and financial brief reports, to be produced by our Secretary and Treasurer respectively.  Finally, in order to facilitate our transition to a Co-operative, HSAS has rejoined the National Allotment Society, at a cost, currently, of £3 per plot per year, paid for as part of the annual subscription. Society members may opt out of NAS membership, but are otherwise required to agree to have their email address passed to the NAS on the understanding that confidentiality will be maintained. The named NAS member receives free individual liability insurance and can obtain 40% discounts with Kings Seeds on request to Bob Heyman ([bob.heyman48@gmail.com](mailto:bob.heyman48@gmail.com) ). To date, 16 members have done so.  **Highbury South Allotment Show and Barbecue**  We are always in the hands of the weather for our annual barbecue and show. This year looked ominous on account of the endless wet weather. Fortunately, we managed to hit a dryish day, marked by only a few showers which did little to dampen enjoyment of the event. However, the Show tent showed its age, resulting in some of the exhibits and prize certificates receiving a soaking. We will definitely patch it up for next year.  Thanks to David, Jane and Joe Callan who provided their usual stunning feast. It included an excellent carnivorous and veggie barbecue, alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, and many other foods, supplemented by contributions from our members. It’s difficult to predict or gauge attendance, but there seemed to be more present than ever. The Callans had to twice go to the shops for extra supplies!  Our members submitted a splendid array of fruit, vegetables, flowers, jams and preserves which we found difficult to fit into the Show tent. Given the number of exhibits we receive, we will look at putting up a second pagoda for the allotment-related artwork next year. We offered for the first time a prize for the best collation of produce which produced some attractive displays. Thanks to those who helped with the judging. Edmund and Bob judged the veggies, fruit and flowers; Trish Smith the jams and preserves; and Alan Dordoy the artwork and blogs. Ruth Heyman recorded the results on a spreadsheet. Getting the judging carried out and recorded within the time available is quite challenging, and we need to try and give ourselves more time next year. Thanks to Meryl and Stephen for conducting the raffle which made £222, offsetting the cost of prizes. Thanks to Tim Cook for organising a display of art from primary school children at West Jesmond School which he has laminated, and which can be viewed in the recreation area.  Congratulations to this year’s prize winners. First prize winners are shown below, and a full list can be found on our website.  Show 1st prize Sasha Pervin  Best display                    Meryl Wakeman  Adult art 1st prize                Meryl Wakeman  Under 17 art 1st prize        Sophy and Holly  Adult blog 1st prize          Garda Saeed  Best under 17 blog          Robyn  Thanks to everyone who contributed to this year’s Barbecue and Show, including those mentioned above, attendees whose job was to enjoy the event, the many volunteers who helped with putting up and clearing away, and members who managed to contribute Show exhibits despite the inclement weather, slugs and snails which have beset gardeners this year!  **Your Committee**  We have, as I noted last year, a particularly effective group of officers, some fairly new and some longstanding, as Committee membership gradually turns round. I would like, on behalf of the Association, to offer thanks for their hard work over the year to: Stephen Tyrer, our Secretary, Roger Blight, Treasurer; Pam Brown, Membership Secretary; Jo McSwaine and Tim Parsons, Website Managers; Chris Sutcliffe, Equipment; David Callan, Catering; Meryl Wakeman, Paths and Green Spaces; Olga McFall, Bulk Supplies; Tim Cook, West Jesmond School and Community Gardens Liaison. Officers normally serve five-year maximum terms, and we will welcome ‘new blood’. If you think you might be interested in joining the Committee, please discuss the matter informally with a member of the Committee.  **West Jesmond School and Community Garden and Other Volunteers**  Thanks are also due to Jenny Wigston, Joan and Gavin Aarvold and all the volunteers who keep the community garden in good shape for the benefit of children at West Jesmond School and others. They also look after the recreation area for the benefit of all. Finally, thanks are due to all of the many volunteers who attended working parties or helped individually to keep our site in good shape. Without members' active support, the Association could not manage its estate.  **Bob Heyman**  A member asked about the water situation and BH explained it is piped in from Northumbria Water. Chris Sutcliffe is now responsible for switching the water on. We continue with our current arrangement for water otherwise the water would have to be metered.  **Secretary's Report**  The last year has been an eventful year for our Society. In addition to becoming a registered Co-operative Society we are now on the verge of finalising a new lease with the Freemen of Newcastle. This has taken a long time. We were first informed in October 2021 that the new landlords of our site would be the Freemen of Newcastle after Urban Green relinquished control. We have been negotiating with the Freemen since then to finalise our lease. The delay was not of our making and considerable thanks are due to Guy Herzmark, Chairman of West Jesmond Allotment Association, who has been negotiating this the new lease on behalf of all the wartime allotments. The lease is not yet finalised but the hope is that it will be agreed within the next month or two. The main concern that we had was that the original suggested lease that the Freemen put forward stated that if the Freemen wished to take over the site we would be responsible for removing all the structures on the site at our own cost. The cost of doing this would be prohibitive and would fall on all allotment members. It was mainly for this reason that we decided to become an incorporated company and we have also changed our name to Highbury South Allotment Society. As a result of this change we are only liable for our assets if we are forced to move. We have not been able to change this clause in the lease, but it has been agreed that we would not be liable to move until the end of our lease. The new lease will last for seven years when it is signed.  Because of the delay in signing the lease, the grant that we obtained from the National Allotment Garden Trust for planting shrubs around the perimeter of the allotment has not been received until the lease is signed. The plan is for these shrubs to be planted in the autumn of this year if we get the grant in time.  As Bob has indicated we had a very wet autumn and because of this we had to postpone the November working party because the ground was sodden. Dependent upon both the weather and the need for action we may have three full working parties next year, but a decision will be made about this after the Spring working party. In connection with Working Parties all members are encouraged to attend at least one working party every two years. Those who cannot attend a Working Party can always approach us to find out a task to do separately.  Last year there was concern about rabbits, but no sightings have been reported to me over the last few months. There have been reports of rats. David Callan is our rodent specialist, and if plot-holders do have a problem, they are asked to contact him for advice; bait is available. There were reports of wasps on the site in the summer and we now have a wasp protection suit and a volunteer who is prepared to assist in the future.    Surplus produce in the summer months was taken to a Food Bank in Fenham; this was greatly appreciated. We also have regular supplies of coffee grounds that we collect for members.  **Stephen Tyrer**  **Treasurer's Report**  The Bank Balance at 31st January 2024 is £13,107 (compared the prior year £8,594)  However, the current balance excludes site rental payments of approx. £3,276 – owing to our new Landlord the “Freemen” (from 1st October 2022) and also £1,150 in legal fees associated with the new Lease. So the actual Cash “Free” balance is £8,682 – as shown on the Accounts.  How much do we get in ?   * Annual Income- £9,975 (prior year £8,793) including subscriptions of £8,143 with an additional £1,550 coming from Joining fees (currently £50 per plot) Greenhouse income and income from raffles £282.   Where does the money go ?   * Rents and Insurances £2,632 * Provision for Legal costs associated with new Lease £1,150 * Catering at Annual show and three working parties £1,138 (last year £1,480) * Purchase of New shed plus electric Strimmers and batteries £1,292 * Skip Hires (3 x£300) £900 * Annual National Allotment Society Fees (£3x 161) plus FCA fees £539 * Manure, Soil conditioners and woodchip £360 * Repairs to Equipment £294 * Prizes for Annual Show £292   New Legal Status  Effective from 21st October 2023 we became Highbury South Allotment Society Limited – registered under the FCA (Financial Conduct Authority). We operate under the legal status of a Cooperative & Communities Benefit Societies Act of 2014.This legal status was recommended by the NAS and provides all members with Limited Liability status.  New Bank account  As a result of the change in legal status, we have also had to change our Bank account with Lloyds limited – to that of a Limited Liability business. All balances have been transferred to the new account which has a new Account number and sort code.  Annual Report and Accounts  Under the Rules of the new legal constitution, an Annual report (in a prescribed format) and a set of Accounts (including Profit and loss and Balance Sheet) must be submitted to the FCA within 7 months of the year end (31st January 24). These will be prepared and submitted as required by the Committee.  Roger explained the report and accounts must be audited in one of three ways. The members voted unanimously for Roger to arrange our own internal auditing.  **Roger Blight**  **Membership Secretary’s report**  **Allotments**  There are currently 15 names on the waiting list awaiting a plot. As reported at the last AGM, there was a huge increase in interest throughout 2020 and 2021, rising from 12 people in January 2020 (just pre-Covid lockdown) to 74 by the summer of 2022.  However, this year, I have contacted 51 people by email who have declined a viewing for one reason or another. Some genuine reasons of ‘plots elsewhere or simply ‘no reply’ but many, I suspect, have simply realised that the allotment waiting list was a lifeline at the time and is no longer required.  Nevertheless, in 2023, we welcomed 25 new families to our site.  **Inspections**  All three 2023 planned inspections went ahead with the addition of three interim inspections. These were return inspections a month after the main ones to ensure improvement.  **Nursery beds**  The original initiative arose so that local asylum seekers could have the opportunity to grow their own food and enjoy the site and the outdoor space. Unfortunately, the council housed many of the folk in hotel rooms without cooking facilities, doubled with the fact that these people are constantly relocated to other cities.  Consequently, all 8 of the beds are now offered to folk on the waiting list, giving them a chance to grow their own produce and to see if they enjoy gardening and tending a plot of their own. Three of these beds are currently vacant.  **Email correspondence**  I take this opportunity to report that occasionally, and at *random* times, certain emails bounce back with a note saying, ‘message blocked’. In every instance, the email addresses end with doctor.org.uk so I would encourage all allotment-holders to use their own personal email addresses where possible and to let me know so I can update the database.  **Pam Brown**  **Bulk Supplies report**  In 2023 we had 4 loads manure delivery. 3 full load and 1 half of load. Also, we had 3 woodchip deliveries.  We also had a mushroom mycelium delivery and on a regular basis committee members collected coffee grounds waste from the coffee shop. More woodchips will be ordered soon and Olga asks if the bulk supply area can be re-organised.  **Olga McFall – apologies, report only.**  **Catering Report**  All of the working parties were well attended which resulted in little wastage.  The Annual Show was very well attended. It is estimated that about 120 people attended. We had to send out for more food, which is always a good sign.  Despite food price inflation at about 18%, we have managed to keep the costs down.  The cost of the catering for the show, including wine, was just over £8 per head.  The efforts of those supplying homemade desserts are appreciated.  There is a vacancy for an Assistant Catering Officer if anyone is interested.  **David Callan**  **Rodent Officer Report**  The rat problem does not seem to be as serious as it was. It is impossible to rid an open natural place like an allotment completely of rats or other pests.  The specialist poison we obtain under licence is expensive. If members need some, they should contact me, and bring an average size Tupperware like container with a lid on. It should be adapted by making a hole the size of a 50 pence piece at each side. I am usually on the allotment on Saturday mornings.  The type of poison which is available without licence can be bought widely in hardware shops, or on Amazon.  If there are pools of liquid near to a place where you suspect rat infestation, be very careful. Use rubber gloves. Weil’s disease is very nasty and can be caused by rats’ urine entering any cuts or bruises you may have.  I can see the attraction of bird feeders, but they do not help in preventing rat infestation.  **David Callan**  **Web Management**  Tim reported a slight increase in the web-site visits and the eight blogs in 2023. Tim encouraged the membership to send the web team any articles in a word document with pictures / photos in a separate document. Also, let the team know if you want anything in particular adding to the website and if you have any great photos of the allotment, please forward to Tim.  **Tim Parsons (and Jo McSwaine, apologies).**  **Machinery and site infrastructure report. AGM 15th February 2024**  We have two petrol lawn mowers, two petrol strimmers, an electric battery strimmer and the trusty ride on mower stored in the lock up container near the Jesmond Road gate. These are available for all members to use although we have restricted the number of keys to the lock up to enable easier monitoring and maintenance of the equipment. If you do not have a key and would like to use any of the equipment, please contact either the membership secretary by email or Chris Sutcliffe by text on 07976794712. The two petrol containers are kept topped up and there is also a container for 2 stroke petrol/oil mix for use in the 2 petrol strimmers.  If you do use the machinery, please give it a brush down/clean after use and fill in the logbook in the lock up where you can report any faults or issues.  I would like to give Phil Leonard a special mention for keeping the ride on mower serviceable against all the odds and for ensuring that the main paths are always well maintained.  Now that we are under the jurisdiction of the Freeman, we no longer have any financial assistance with running repairs and this is most notable with regard to the perimeter fence. The fence in the southwest corner of the site is now in a precarious state and I propose that we establish a team at the next working party to replace 6 or 8 posts in that corner. If you would like to help with either the fence repair or with any of the other jobs that are proposed please do volunteer your services - the working parties are a great way to meet new members and are very satisfying team-building activities, usually rewarded with some on-site catering.  We have recently replaced one of the communal wooden huts which had deteriorated beyond repair. The replacement hut has been positioned on the vacant concrete plinth on plot 8A so has a good solid foundation and is raised above the ground. Thanks to all who helped assemble, paint and erect the new hut in which we will store barbecues, tables, loppers and other communal bits and bobs.  The site has suffered badly from flooding this year because of the relentless rain and I fear this is something we will have to get used to as a consequence of changing climate patterns. There is drainage on the site but when the water table is so high very little, we can do except wait for the level to drop.  At the opposite extreme, however, I think we could improve on the water supply along the path on the southern flank of the site. This would involve laying a new water pipe with 4 or 5 baths strategically placed along the length of the path. If it is felt that this is a worthwhile use of funds, I am happy to put forward a costing for the committee to consider. Such a project will stretch the present fragile and ageing water connection to the limit but updating the main supply would be prohibitively expensive and would also involve the water utility. We encourage everyone to store as much rainwater as they can by capturing water from their greenhouses and members are reminded that hose pipes are prohibited except for filling up water butts and tanks which should be carried out during the middle of the day when less people are watering their plots.  **Report on the school garden by Jenny Wigston.**  *Jenny had given her apologies but sent in the following report: -*  2023 was a very successful year for the School Garden as we entertained even more children than ever. We now have Y3 and Y4 visiting from West Jesmond Primary School on Wednesdays whenever the weather is clement.  Our trusty band of 12 volunteers are amazing and come whatever the weather and we work hard to make sure the children have an enjoyable experience and get to do all the variety of jobs required throughout the growing year.  Our main remit is to introduce the children to the growing year and all that that entails, to experience all the nature that is around at the school garden, and that it’s always fun!  Our Open Day in June last year was a big success. We had the school choir singing, a refreshment stall, and aisles of plants for sale, but the best thing was the sunshine! We made enough money for ourselves to see us through this year and donate some to the Friends of West Jesmond PS. Our Open Day this year will be on Saturday 8th June, 10.30-2pm, everybody is most welcome.  Gosforth East Middle School visit the school garden 3 times a year. The 3 food technology classes come to learn about where food comes from and see what’s growing. We talk about food miles and climate change.  We like to support the Ilford Rd allotment shop and now buy all our bags of compost from them.  Hoping for another successful year this year but very frustrated about not being able to get on with our winter maintenance jobs due to most of the plot being under water.  **Election of Officers and Committee.**  Bob invited those attending to come forward if they wanted to stand for any of the committee roles.  The following officers were re-elected:  Chairman – Bob Heyman  Secretary – Stephen Tyrer  Treasurer – Roger Blight  Membership secretary – Pam Brown  Machinery and infrastructure – Chris Sutcliffe  Web team – Tim Parsons and Jo McSwaine  David suggested that members of the society could join the committee without holding a specific role. If interested, please contact Stephen or Bob.  **Rents for 2024-2025**  It was unanimously carried to increase the rent as follows:  Half plot – increase from £48 to £50  Quarter plot – increase from £24 to £25  Roger and Pam to update the membership and emphasise the change of the new bank account.  **A.O.B.**  Wendy asked what was happening with the asylum seekers accessing the nursery beds. Pam and Meryl explained that the local hotel has been closed and asylum seekers have been moved elsewhere. The nursery beds will remain for waiting list folk.  Food waste - It was discussed that if food was going to waste, could we ask the member’s permission to pick it on their behalf for the food bank. Stephen and Pam to make a note when doing their inspections.  The Committee recommended to the members that an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM), or an AGM following one which was inquorate, may be held online, or be replaced by email votes. If one or more Society members objects, a face-to-face meeting must be convened.  **Meeting closed 9:00pm.** |