

Minutes of the AGM of the EWAA 24.09.2023

In attendance: Antoine Flett (211A), Christine Flett (211A), Jane Millar (147), Meryl Wilford (4B & 67), Jane Nimmo-Smith (138A), Sarah Pollard (198A & 199A), Colin Gammon (141), Jon Willis (20), Josie Proctor (6,8A), Simon Bazley (11A), Maurice Leen (83L, 84 & 93), Bridget Wheatley (144), George Murray (12), Martin Rieu (1C), Michael McNaboe (91A), Elaine Townson (120), Pat Mansfield (114 & 150), Ed Pope (26B & 27B), Payam Moghagegh (66), [Nicola Jones (N/A)], Tristram Hill (201B), Shamsia Hoque (133A), Paul de Villiers (143A), Chris Clifford (14, 15, 16), Janita Good (14, 15 & 16), Louise Lobo (143B), Stuart Young (77), Katrin Stelter (24B), Nenad Vranjes (73), Juliet Addenbrooke (120), Zoe Adamson (65A & 2A), François Ortolan (200A), Kate Coldwell (210/211 back), Chris Rumble (129). = 32 voters

Apologies: Mike Yeadon.

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These were put forward for approval. A quick overview was given of key points then discussed:

- the role of a trustee, the committee, and the AGM
- this had given rise to the drafting of a new constitution with the intention of clarifying the role of these bodies in the running of the Association.

There followed some discussion about a mentoring scheme for new cultivators that had been mooted at the AGM in 2022. The question was asked about what was happening with the scheme. The Chair confirmed that the scheme had not been taken forward as volunteers were needed to run it.

The minutes were then voted on and approved.

Chair's Report:

1. Meryl gave thanks to everyone, both committee members and others, who had helped with the day to day running of the site over the last year.
2. There followed an overview of key events and issues from 2022-23 –
 - A. Shop – this reopened in September and is overseen by Jane Millar.
 - B. Willow tree – this was finally sorted out with the landlord of the Howard Street property who eventually agreed to pay for the removal of the tree. This was in February 2023 (the original issue occurred in August '22). It took a lot of time and effort to locate the landlord and time for ODS in the first instance to decide who would pay. This is pertinent to the lease.
 - C. Fire – in the early morning of 20th January, there was an arson attack on a shed which also destroyed sheds and a greenhouse on adjacent plots. An emergency committee meeting had to be called to discuss the issues arising. The cost for clearance was £1,200. There is a major consideration of what the effects would have been in the summer months. There is the issue of whether fires for burning dead weeds should even be allowed.
 - D. Waiting list – there were 60-70 names; the issue of lack of cultivation of some plots has come into focus. There is a need for clear guidelines of how to deal with such situations clearly and fairly.
 - E. New lease – the negotiations with the Council have been on-going for some years. The current lease expired in September 2020 and will be held over until the new one has been agreed. There was a meeting on September 19th at the Town Hall to discuss and clarify whether the role of the ODFAA (Oxford & District Federation of Allotment Associations) in negotiating a new template lease for all affiliated Associations across the City should remain as it is or whether the individual Associations would do so themselves. The vote confirmed

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that ODFAA should continue to negotiate on behalf of its members. There is a particular issue over boundaries and fences as the Council proposes to pass responsibility for their upkeep to the Associations under the terms of the new leases.

Membership Report: George Murray took over in May after Mike Yeadon resigned.

Update:

- 164 current members
- 99% of land is let; with 3 plots vacant
- Waiting list now 42 (with peak of 70)
- 20+ plus plots allocated to new members, who are local, experienced and have expressed interest in being involved with the committee.
- 3 plot inspections over the year carried out to check cultivation according to the guidelines. There were follow-ups to ascertain reasons for lack of cultivation, with decisions made on an individual basis.
- New plot-holders advised that there will be active oversight to check that they are making progress with cultivation and have made the right choice in committing themselves to renting a plot. The aim is to be fair to existing plot-holders and to those on the waiting list.

Treasurer's Report: copies of the accounts were circulated.

- Income is from rent (£4,134 increased last year from £3,172) and the shop (with sales of £4,658 and a profit of £715)
- Best sellers – blended compost, butterfly netting, peat-free compost.
- Main sources of expenditure were rent to Council (£777), water (£818 - this had increased by 30% in cost), site maintenance (£1,770 on mowers, plumbing, clearance for fire damage)
- Surplus of £205 now added to existing contingency fund
- There is now £7,175 in cash in the bank, and £2,319 in stock, which now includes spare keys, these being treated as an asset.

General discussion followed with a question about whether keys are returned to the shop when people leave the allotment as it raised the issue of security. It was agreed that there should be further discussion within the committee about the non-return of keys.

A further question from the floor related to bank interest rates and whether the money lodged in the bank could be earning a higher rate. The response from the officers was that the account held by the Association was a business account which did not offer higher rates.

The question was then raised by Colin Gammon about voting on the accounts. Chris Clifford pointed out that this was a point as there was no existing mechanism in the constitution.

- Rent increase – the proposed increase was to £40 per 10 pole plot per annum, up from £30. Other rents would be pro rata. The increase would make the rent still good value when compared with rents both nationally and locally.
- Reasons for the increase: likely rent increase of 25% in the new lease; increased utility bills; upkeep of boundaries if this is a requirement of the new lease; potential issues with the water pipes around the site.
- Proposal to scrap the term 'concession' and use 'discretionary' instead; 50% reduction can be requested by those experiencing financial hardship.

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Questions from the floor related to the question of concessions, to whom and for how much. The Chair clarified that any discretionary discount would be on an individual basis.

Stuart Young recommended an alternative of keeping automatic concessions, not increasing the rent and encouraging optional donations since many are on low-incomes but there are others who can afford to give more. Discussion followed both about this idea, concerns over keeping enough money in reserve to cover emergency costs, that relying on voluntary donations was risky and whether people could pay in instalments. It was pointed out that the latter would be difficult to administer. Stuart Young's proposal was seconded by Ed Pope.

Votes: 2 for; 21 against; 8 abstentions. Motion not carried.

Chris Clifford made a 2nd proposal that 1) the rent be raised as recommended by the treasurer 2) the increase in rent and any voluntary donations be kept in a separate sinking fund (interest bearing) for a specific purpose, ring-fenced for long-term good not emergencies. The proposal was seconded by Sarah Pollard.

Votes: 7 for; 19 against; 5 abstentions. Motion not carried.

Final vote on the rent increase as proposed by the treasurer and seconded by Jane Millar.

Votes: 24 for; 3 against; 3 abstentions. The motion was carried.

Rent days – the rent demands would go out in the next week or so for people to pay online. People would also have the opportunity to pay in the shop. The cut-off point by which rents must be paid was set at November 1st.

New Constitution:

- Under the new lease, the Council is likely to compel the Association to incorporate, though this may be some time away.
- Meanwhile the existing constitution is minimalist and does not provide guidance for all procedures.
- George Murray has drawn up a draft which has been made available on the website to provide the opportunity for feedback and suggested amendments. It is a work in progress until finalised.
- The Chair outlined the existing system of trustees (minimum 2, maximum 3, 1 being a signatory for the bank accounts. The trustees are the tenants for the site under the existing lease); the committee – composition & roles; and the AGM.
- George explained how he had researched local allotment associations and taken ideas from those.
- The idea of a new constitution is that if the Council insists on all allotment associations becoming a constituted body, having a robust constitution to work from would facilitate the process.
- Chris Clifford had sent in a list of drafting issues, asserting that the proposed new constitution would not work legally, and that an additional layer of responsibility was being added in clause 2, which is the trustees section.
- It was pointed out that although these comments had been sent, no specific proposal had been made within the date set for submissions.
- Janita Good suggested redrafting the constitution from a legal point of view.
- There was some discussion about the need for more clarity in the wording. The decision was made to continue this discussion at a later meeting, an EGM for which the date was set at November 19th, with the agenda and fresh draft to be circulated by November 12th.

Revised Rules & Cultivation Requirements:

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The discussion moved on to the proposed amendments to the document circulated:

1. to replace all occurrences of the word 'tenant' with the word 'member', and the word 'tenancy' with the word 'membership'
2. regarding the use of weed suppressant materials under B. Cultivation Requirements point 1, to adjust point to allow 'no more than 25% of the plot after the first two years of membership'.

These two amendments were both passed by vote.

The *Revised Rules & Cultivation Requirements* were passed by vote.

Election of Trustees:

- Meryl Wilford will continue in role. Proposed by Jane Millar, seconded by Jon Willis. Vote taken and carried unanimously.
- Bridget Henderson is standing. Meryl Wilford proposed and George Murray seconded. Vote taken and carried unanimously.
- Pat Mansfield resigned as trustee; this was accepted. Many thanks were expressed to Pat Mansfield for acting as trustee for some years. She had been incomparable and amazing in terms of time invested and commitment.
- Clare Ferguson is standing. Simon Bazley proposed; Jane Millar seconded. Vote taken and carried unanimously.

Election of Officers:

- There were no nominations for Chair. Meryl Wilford is standing down. Many thanks were expressed for all her hard work and commitment. The committee would actively seek a new chair, with the hope of confirming someone in the role at the EGM in November.
- There were no nominations for Deputy Chair. The position has been vacant for a number of years.
- Treasurer: Jon Willis is standing down. Many thanks were expressed for his hard work and commitment. Simon Bazley has offered to stand. This was proposed by Jon Willis and seconded by George Murray. The vote was taken and passed in favour.
- Membership Secretary – George Murray has offered to stay in the role which he has been performing since May. This was proposed by Jane Millar and seconded by Jon Willis. The vote was taken and passed in favour.
- Shop Officer – Jane Millar has offered to stay in role. This was proposed by Simon Bazley and seconded by Jon Willis. The vote was taken and passed in favour.
- Communications Officer – no nominations and position is vacant.
- Machinery – not an officer position but a committee member. Tony Flett has offered to continue in this role. This was proposed by Meryl Wilford and seconded by Jane Millar. The vote was taken and passed in favour.

Appointment of committee members:

- Meetings are held 6 times a year: January, March, May, July, September, November
- Committee members: Dan Thorpe, Chris Clifford, Mike McNaboe, Sarah Pollard, Jon Willis, Meryl Wilford, Tony Flett, Mike Yeadon.
- This was proposed by Simon Bazley and seconded by George Murray. The vote was taken and passed in favour.

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Survey:

- Jane Millar gave a quick overview of the results which will be placed made available in the shop, and summarised on the website.
- In general people were happy with the shop; there were some concerns about thefts from within the site but people felt the site was more secure from external issues; concerns about the deer.
- More people needed to be engaged and be prepared to volunteer time.
- The association might have to consider paying for work to be completed.
- 7 people had offered to help.
- There was a long list of jobs that need to be completed.

AOB:

- Keys – George Murray proposed that this item be added to the agenda for the EGM.
- Message from the Oxford Urban Wildlife group that people from the allotment site are also welcome to become members.
- Deer – looking at the combined Nature Reserve-Allotments land, a survey of invasive species is going to be carried out by some students from Oxford Brookes.

The meeting concluded with George Murray offering a vote of thanks to Meryl Wilford for everything she had done as Chair.

Date of next AGM

Sunday 22nd September 2024