

MOORSIDE ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION

Committee meeting

5.30pm on Tuesday 7 November 2023
Nunsmoor Centre, Fenham, NE4 5AH

MINUTES

Present

Frank Lightfoot (Chair), Steven McDonnell, Barbara Taylor, Susan Pownall, Nicola Francis, Nick Coster, Emily Sweetman

1 Apologies for Absence

Karen Brown, Sarah Farrell, Simon Rutherford.

2 Minutes of previous meeting (3 October) and matters arising.

ES noted that the minutes would need to be amended so that the numbered items corresponded with the agenda, and then passed to Richard for publication.

Action: Susan

For the benefit of Committee members absent at the previous meeting, the issue of access to the site from private houses on Moorside North was revisited. It was confirmed that residents whose properties backed onto the site had the right to apply for a key and a permit (via Newcastle city Council) allowing them access across the site for the purpose of reaching the Moor.

With regards to the lease provisions discussed previously, Frank reiterated that the Freeman had made clear that their primary concern was that plots should be 'at least 75% cultivated' rather than prescribing any balance of fruit, vegetables and flowers.

3 Chair's Update

(i) Site improvements

Frank reported that Northumbrian Water (NW) had investigated the valve located on the Moor outside the perimeter of the site, with the Freemans' permission. NW were hopeful that an improvement to the valve would increase water pressure to the top of the site. If this did not have the required effect, the next step would be to consider an additional replacement valve within the perimeter of the site at a cost of c.£800. The new valve kit on the Moor would include a feature to indicate whether there were any leaks in the system.

Whilst they were on site, Frank took the opportunity to ask Northumbrian water to extend power to the toilets for lighting, which they said may be possible, pending discussions within NW.

NW engineers advised that it was unlikely that there would be severe enough ground frost to cause burst pipes on site, based on recent winters, and that it would be possible to cheaply and easily lag the pipe above ground.

It was **AGREED** that Frank would purchase and undertake the lagging.

(ii) Lease

Frank confirmed that no word had been received either from Newcastle City Council (NCC) or the Freeman since NCC's last email stating their intention to issue the lease by 16 October. No lease had since been forthcoming, nor had the Association been invoiced for rent from the Freeman. MAA's questions and suggestions about the lease have remained unanswered (as with other sites). Without the appropriate reference / purchase order, it was not possible to pay the rent due, although the Association was willing to do so whilst noting its objections to certain of the lease terms. Frank had made several calls to the Freeman, seeking an update, but had not been able to speak to them to date.

(iii) The Way Forward: information

It was noted that Susan had produced information summaries regarding the Trading Hut and toilet block which could usefully be added to the website and / or revised handbook. Frank clarified that he had asked for a written account of the Trading Hut procedures for reasons of risk management / succession. Susan assured the Committee that all the necessary information was written down and in her possession, and that operations could therefore be picked up by any of the Hut volunteers if necessary.

Frank advised that he had produced more advice sheets (on growing carrots and hedgehogs) for circulation and inclusion on the website.

Action: Frank to circulate and Richard to post.

Susan advised she would contact those who had previously submitted recipes to see if they were happy for them to be included on the website.

Action: Susan

(iv) Waiting list review

Frank undertook a review of the existing waiting list by contacting people to determine whether their application was still live. He made a minimum of three calls, left messages and emailed. A revised list was produced (circulated) containing only those applications that had been confirmed. Frank **proposed** that:

- A revised application process would gather information about applicants' experience and any special needs they may have (to inform appropriate offers).
- The waiting list be kept to a maximum of 15 (which would mean a maximum five year wait based on current turnover).
- If and when the list was reopened, new applications would be invited from anyone who had been on the old list in the last five years.

This was AGREED subject to Nicola's suggested caveat that anyone responding late to Frank's attempt to contact them would be included on the revised list. It was further AGREED that applicants would receive no more than three offers before being removed from the list. Those offers would be made with due regard to any specific needs (e.g. accessibility) that had been declared.

It was noted that there was only one current application from an existing plot holder wishing to upgrade from a half to a full plot.

4 Election of lettings officer

Frank confirmed that the new Lettings Officer should work in tandem with the Chair, as had been established and proved effective in recent months. Nominations were invited. Barbara Taylor was proposed by Steven McDonnell. Susan Pownell was proposed by Nick Coster. Barbara was duly elected by 3 votes to 1.

It was agreed that issuing and receiving keys and returning deposits would be the responsibility of the Lettings Officer. Susan was still in possession of some of Tony Whittle's files which included a log of deposits paid (rates had varied over the years) which she would pass to Barbara.

Nicola proposed the Committee review the existing tenancy agreement.

Action: Susan and Barbara to liaise and handover any relevant materials.

5 Other updates

(i) Treasurer

MAA's financial Year End was approaching (November): all transfers would be completed and accounts would be produced in advance of the AGM.

(ii) Trading Hut

Takings in October were £351.79. No new stock would be purchased until after the next stock take. Rats were currently enjoying the ericaceous compost and it was necessary to empty the hut in order to find the point of entry.

Susan asked that next year's Plant Scheme purchase and store its own pallet of compost to be kept separate from the Hut's accounts and stock.

(iii) Inspections

It had been agreed not to formally inspect in November because the recent deluge prevented most people from working in flooded allotments. Emily provided an update (circulated) of letters sent to plot holders (Advisory, Health & Safety letters) and responses. Nick had informally reviewed the site and counted 12 plots currently kept under scrutiny.

(iv) Lettings

There were no current vacancies.

(v) Health and safety

Steve reported the removal of branches overhanging on the main paths.

A pond which had been dug on plot 33 was now made safe with a lockable gate.

Nick noted that some of the hedges at the back of Moorside had reached heights of 10 feet and were proving difficult to keep in check.

Action: Nicola seek property law guidance on rules around boundaries and responsibilities.

6 Application for greenhouse - Plot 33 (circulated)

Plot 33's plan had been submitted in October, but arrived too late for the meeting on 3 October. (The committee had previously agreed that it was not constituted to make such decisions outside of meetings by email until a change was made to the constitution. Therefore the proposal was only circulated with the agenda for November's meeting.)

The plan met the necessary criteria: location (being 1m from any fencing, and avoiding a tree trunk at the back of the plot); size (within prescribed limits); materials (new timber and safety glass). An inappropriate door had been fitted but advice had been given and an amendment made. Unfortunately, the plot holders had proceeded to build before they received written permission, which caused some confusion.

The application was **AGREED**.

Nicola noted that if the Committee was of the view that more detailed specifications were necessary, it should review the existing rules.

Action: Emily to remind plot holders they should await written permission before commencing any construction in next email update.

The committee noted an email from Sue Brophy querying the construction's adherence to the rules.

Action: Frank to respond to Sue Brophy with assurances as above.

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It was AGREED to defer the item to the next meeting.

8 Any other business

Steven asked when a decision was to be taken about a rescheduled community bonfire. A considerable amount of material had been deposited at the Community Plot and this was preventing the relocation of the old Plant Scheme Greenhouse. The weather was the key determinant but it was AGREED to make a decision by the end of November.

9 Date of next meeting

5.30pm on Tuesday 5 December 2023

(ES)