

MOORSIDE ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION

Committee meeting

5.30pm on Tuesday 2 May 2023
Nunsmoor Centre, Fenham, NE4 5AH

Present

Frank Lightfoot (Chair), Barbara Taylor, Nick Coster, Emily Sweetman, Richard Littlewood, Susan Pownall, Tony Whittle, Nicola Francis, Karen Brown.

1 Apologies for absence

Steven McDonnell, Simon Rutherford, Sarah Farrell.

2 Confidential discussion

Urgent item not on the circulated agenda. (A note of this item has been kept separately.)

3 Treasurer's report

It was AGREED to take the Treasurer's report first and so enable Nicola to leave the meeting early.

(a) Late payment of rent

Nicola reported a flurry of late players and a handful of payments not yet received. It was noted that Plot 83 had indicated their intention to going to give up the tenancy. It was **AGREED** that rent letters for 2023/24 would be sent *after* the AGM when the rent level agreed at the AGM could be confirmed. It would be necessary to clarify the bank account name ('Moorside Allotments Ass') as some banking apps rejected details where the details were not precise.

Action: Emily

It was confirmed that rents were due by 31 March and noted that some payments were more than a month late.

Action: Nicola to send the non-payer list to Emily.

Action: Emily to issue formal letter to non-payers, asking for payment / contact within 2 weeks and otherwise assuming termination of tenancy.

(b) Bank signatories

Nicola asked new committee members to return the form she had previously circulated in order to lodge the new members' details with the bank. Karen and Barbara had not received the email. Emily asked Nicola to confirm the form of words needed by the bank to reference new members and the signatory change.

Action: Nicola to resend.

Action: Nicola to confirm the form of words necessary to assure the bank.

(c) Freeman's lease

Nicola had sent a list of agreed questions to the Freeman and had still received no response. Frank advised that Kevin would raise those questions at a forthcoming meeting later in the week.

(Nicola left at 6:10 pm).

4 Minutes of the previous meeting (4 April) and matters arising

The minutes were AGREED as a true record (proposed by Karen, seconded by Barbara).

Action: Emily to pass to Richard for publication.

5 Chair's Report (Frank)

On the cultivation standards in the Freeman's new lease, Frank had received confirmation from Kevin Batey that a mixture of veg and flowers was acceptable.

Frank had reported bottle diggers passing through the site on several occasions. The Freeman had noted a minimal police response. A number of break-ins in the East and Middle Lanes were apparent, with some discarded items being found on plots.

Researchers from Northumbria University's Urban Pollinator study had met Frank on site in the previous week. The research between May and October would compare pollinators inside and outside of the allotment site which ought to provide useful data demonstrating the contribution of the site to the local environment. Plot holders on 84, 34, 49, 63b, amongst others, had offered their plots for the study.

The Plant Scheme had been informally open for two weeks and turned over £90, covering its costs (compost and seed) so far. Frank recorded his thanks to volunteer growers for the quality of plants they had produced. It was noted that members of the public were eligible to buy from the plant scheme only if they had paid for annual associate membership (£1) and received a membership card. Susan kept the record of associate members and the date of membership renewal in the Trading Hut.

Frank reiterated his intention to find ways to streamline committee meeting agendas in order to create more time for discussion on items of importance.

6 Other updates

Trading hut (Susan)

Susan reported turnover in April was £1,073.30. The hut had almost sold out of compost. Straw had been requested, but this could only be delivered for free alongside manure which was not required at present. Susan reported it was still very difficult to obtain paraffin despite her best efforts.

Richard reported that he had inspected the roof of the Trading Hut and assessed that it was repairable with an initial patch, fibreglass cover and bitumen at an estimated cost of £60. Dry weather in early summer would provide an opportunity for him to do the job.

Action: Richard.

It was noted that a replacement shipping container would cost in the region of £600, not including the cost of delivery and disposal of the old one, which was likely to require a crane.

Inspections update (Frank)

Frank and Susan had inspected earlier that morning. The standard was improving. A number of plots were on a current 'watchlist'. Frank wanted plot holders to be offered support and assistance in the first instance.

Action: Frank to contact plots 10 and 27 which showed no signs of attention so far this season.

Frank reported that the Freeman were likely to inspect within the month and their focus would be cultivation. Nick had produced a spreadsheet which tracked the history of inspections and interventions, demonstrating that the committee is managing standards closely in line with the Freeman's expectations.

Action: Nick to circulate.

Lettings update (Tony)

Tony confirmed that 73b had moved to the former plant scheme plot. 73b and 18 were currently vacant. 79b was let.

Action: Emily to update the membership list and note that 79a and 79b would now be recorded as a single plot, 9.

Tony reported a request for a plot from someone who was the partner of an existing plot holder but not formally a joint tenant. Regrettably this could not be agreed as he was considered a 'helper' rather than a current plot holder.

7 AGM proposal from John Spencer (Frank)

Taking forward John Spencer's proposal at the AGM for a formal commitment to gardening with care for wildlife, the environment and sustainability, Richard, Frank, and Jonathan Wallace had had an initial conversation about forming a wildlife group. Meanwhile, Richard planned to survey the site to establish the shrubs / trees and plants that we have which are valuable to wildlife with a view to improving this in the future. Frank was investigating designs of bat boxes with a view to introducing those. Karen expressed an interest in joining the group when it was established.

8 Moorside competition (Frank)

Frank asked the committee to consider whether Moorside should proceed with its annual competition in the absence of any clarity from Urban Green about their plans for a 2023

citywide competition. Susan's reported that her contact at Urban Green was seeking a decision. It was noted that Moorside's usually proceeds the citywide competition (first week in July). Some changes had been made to the categories in the previous year. It was **AGREED** that Moorside would run its own competition in early to mid June, resurrecting the original categories. Barbara suggested adding more children's categories which was **AGREED**.

Action: Richard to investigate the former categories and bring a proposed list to June's meeting. Inspections would take place soon after.

Action: Emily add to agenda for June.

9 Moorside show (Emily)

Pat Francis had supplied a comprehensive list of the tasks involved in setting up the Moorside Allotment Show in the traditional manner (last held in 2019). The list was circulated with the agenda. It was noted that the show usually required considerable advance planning, particularly in order to run the formal competition. Since the agenda was circulated, Pat had also provided a breakdown of exhibitors in years 2015-2019. This demonstrated that roughly a quarter of the regular exhibitors each year accounted for 57% of all entries. It was noted that the previous year's Open Day had required significantly less planning and had been well attended.

It was **AGREED** to survey the membership to elicit their views and preferences. This would be an opportunity to gather more general views and encourage volunteers to come forward.

Action: All to send suggested questions to **Emily** who would construct an online survey using a free tool.

10 Any other business

Frank referred to the proliferation of rats on the site this year. Ian Carter had provided some information from the HSE regarding rats and diseases. It was **AGREED** to post information on the website (**Action: Richard**) and also on the noticeboards (**Action: Emily**)

Susan referred to the Chair's Newsletter (April) and asked that it be noted that the former plant scheme had run, albeit on a reduced scale, between 2020 and 2022. The team's previous years' efforts had left a surplus of around £600.

Richard and Barbara gave apologies in advance for 6 June. Emily would be away the week before, so Richard agreed to prepare the agenda.

11 Date of next meeting

5.30pm on Tuesday 6 June 2023

The meeting closed at 6:50pm
(ES)