

**MAIDSTONE ALLOTMENTS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF AGM MEETING – THURSDAY 27 JULY 2023
GROVE GREEN COMMUNITY CENTRE**

Present:

The Committee: Olivia Hawkins **OH**, Ben Kirby **BK**, Chris Di Marco **CDM**, Lisa Moore **LM**, Dave Williams **DW**, Andy Symonds **AS**, Steve Sharkey **SS**, Paul Ramsey **PR**, Joanne Aylett **JA**.

Pllotholders: 37 Pllotholders from 8 different sites.

Item	Heading	Action
1	Welcome	OH welcomed all and introduced herself as new Chair of the Committee.
2	Apologies	Valerie Cullen Beaumont Road Manager.
3	Chairs Report	Introduced Committee members including three new members. OH thanked Cheryl Wermuth for all of her hard work as temporary Site Manager at Bower Mount Road. We are always looking for site reps, if anyone is interested, please speak to your site manager or contact Jo.
	New Office Address	We are in the process of giving up the office to save money, as Jo now works from home. We have a new PO Box number, details can be found on the website.
	New database	We are going to be getting a new database, as the current system is very outdated and has been causing issues of late. Eventually we hope to go paperless to save on costs and be environmentally friendly. We are conscious of GDPR issues and we have a contact who can liaise with us during this time, to ensure the data of our pllotholders is protected.
	Thank you to Brian Prentice our former Treasurer	Brian Prentice has helped us over the last few months to prepare our final accounts so that we can hold the AGM. He still wishes to retire so we are currently looking to fill his position if anyone is interested, who is good with numbers. Please speak to Jo or your site manager.
	Constitution	We now have a new constitution again thanks to Cheryl Wermuth. This will be published on the website very soon. Any questions, please let us know.
4	Ben Kirby – Website & Newsletters	We now have full control of the website, and we are in the process of going through all content and upgrading with a new look. If any pllotholders have hints, tips, photos, or suggestions please share with us and they can be uploaded. The newsletter has also been redesigned and the first edition will be sent next week. Any suggestions you would like added please let ben know.
	Social media	We would like to start up our Facebook page again to share stories, hints and tips. Most people were keen to see this happen. Ben to reopen and monitor.

5	Andy Symonds – Waiting list & Plot vacancies	<p>We have 10 allotment sites, 700 plus allotment plots, 160 people on the waiting list, and 22 plots vacant. We have lots of overgrown plots. Please let us know if you are unable to work on your plot due to ill health or family circumstances and we can help you. It's not fair for neighboring ploholders to be next to an overgrown plot, covered in weeds. Inspections will be consistent across all sites, to get every plot being used.</p>
6	<p>Lisa Moore –</p> <p>Gates, padlocks and key issues</p> <p>Water</p> <p>Tenancy Agreement</p> <p>Bonfires</p> <p>Shops</p>	<p>Firstly, thank you to Liv for stepping up as Chair.</p> <p>As site managers, a lot of time is spent running back and forth trying to help people with the gates. We are thinking very seriously about how to solve this issue.</p> <p>We recently took delivery of three padlocks and 10 keys from our supplier. The cost of this was £730, which is an enormous amount of money. Part of the problem is the mixture of old padlocks with new keys. Back in 2019 we looked seriously into getting new keys and padlocks. Some were identified and James Street was the first allotment site to try the padlock and it is working very well. We still have some of these padlocks and intend to try them out at Glebe Lane. This will be an ongoing process. This will free up 3 padlocks, and there will be no need to purchase anymore for now.</p> <p>With the exception of Square Hill, we all have water supplied by South East Water. We are very aware of how expensive and valuable water is. Our expenditure in 2022/2023 was £11,477. We keep struggling to tell people please don't use your hosepipes for more than 15 minutes maximum a day. Now we have the ban they can't at the moment. Please fill up a tank and use the watering can once the ban is over. The plants get the water, rather than the weeds getting the water. It is possible to get blue barrels to use as water butts, connected to your shed/greenhouse guttering. Please try to cut back on the amount of water we use, particularly when the hosepipe ban is over.</p> <p>A couple of new items this year. To include the feeding of foxes. On a couple of our sites people are putting out food for the foxes. We all love wildlife but feeding foxes attracts rats and other vermin.</p> <p>We are allowed to have bonfires from October until the end of March but please be aware of your surroundings and neighboring houses, and where the smoke is going. If possible, try to have a communal site bonfire. Choose a day when the wind is in the right direction. Some sites have different rules so please make sure you are aware of these.</p> <p>We have shops at 5 of our sites. The main shop is in Sandling Road. Nick is in charge of all of the shops and he is in charge of Sandling Road. There are also shops at Loose Road, Glebe Lane, Upper Fant and Rocky Hill. If you need something you can go to other site shops. If you would like more information, please ask your site manager or contact Jo. They</p>

	Community Payback Scheme	<p>sell compost, manure, fertilizers including Grow More, Blood Fish & Bone, Pelleted Chicken Manure and at good prices compared with Wilko's etc. Seasonal seed potatoes and onion sets come in around Christmas/January time and also an annual seed catalogue from Kings Seeds that Chris deals with at Upper Fant. Huge savings, about 40% if over £10. (Discount only for seeds).</p> <p>We were contacted to see if we would like help with anything at our sites in aid of the allotment community. We accepted and they went to Loose Road for 4 weeks. They come along with a team leader. At Loose Road they took down an old shed, strimmed, cut back hedges. They are currently at Sandling Road most Saturdays and can then move on to another site. This has been a fantastic scheme, similar to community service. The feedback from plotholders and from the scheme itself has been very positive. The Community Payback office have expressed an interest in having their own plot.</p>
7	Elections to the committee	<p>Chairs position – No other nominations apart from Liv. Liv voted on. Vice Chair position – Currently Ben Kirby previously nominated. Bob Wermuth nominates Andy Symonds Glebe Lane Manager. All voted – Ben Kirby took the overall vote. New Site Managers voted on to the committee. These include Andy Symonds of Glebe Lane, Paul Ramsey of Buckland Hill, Steve Sharkey of Rocky Hill and Valerie Cullen of Beaumont Road. All voted on.</p>

Questions and Open Floor	
<p><i>Graham Farey & Co worker Steve LR68a –</i> Can we look in to the possibility of having a toilet on our plot.</p> <p><i>Steve –</i> I don't think we would need to worry about all of that, what we were thinking of was a proper toilet plumbed in. Someone mentioned the possibility of getting a grant.</p>	<p>The main issue is who would take responsibility for disposing of the waste. Possibly in the future there could be some eco friendly ways to get around this but we would need to look in to this and the expense of raising the money.</p> <p>The committee to look into this.</p>
<p><i>Alan Barrett GL61b/62 –</i> Are you going to do each site individually with regards to gate keys, so that other sites can't get access to other plots?</p>	<p>Not at the moment. We have the padlocks that were ordered a few years ago and the keys. James Street are already using them but they only have the one gate and six plots, and obviously Glebe Lane have said they will move over to the new style. What we are hoping is with the return of your keys and padlocks – this will keep all of the other sites going without the expense of buying new padlocks.</p>

<p><i>Billie Winwood GL65 –</i> The issue with the foxes, there is someone on our site who lives behind their allotment and they feed the foxes. If this goes in the Tenancy Agreement this wont necessarily stop the people from feeding on their own property. This person has been fairly aggressive to anyone who has challenges them about it.</p>	<p>We have two people feeding foxes at GL but I couldn't do anything about it because it wasn't in the Tenancy Agreement. Now it will be we can deal with them.</p>
<p><i>Richard Coleman GL69/71 –</i> I have a couple of questions about the accounts. Are they going to be gone through as in previous years this evening?</p> <p>How do the shops feature in the accounts?</p> <p>The new database being built and having a GDPR advisor – Are their services being paid for?</p> <p>Further to that, were these services asked across the plotholder members to see if there was anyone with the expertise within our community that could provide this specialism?</p> <p>So there is potentially a conflict of interest in terms of cost.</p> <p>If you are providing a service for an association you are part of, then there is a conflict of interest because you are potentially only charging the group that you are working with.</p> <p>Also just to protect the Maidstone Allotments Management Committee has the work all been agreed in writing? Not only for the payments being made but for the services they are going to provide?</p>	<p>No unfortunately Brian was unable to be with us this evening.</p> <p>The shops have nothing to do with the management committee, they are run by MAGA a separate entity.</p> <p>Yes they are.</p> <p>Yes it is a plotholder from our community who is providing this service.</p> <p>In what way?</p> <p>Having looked into it, if we had gone with a company it would have cost thousands. BK confirmed the quote we received was for nearly £3,000 just for the initial set up. Our plotholder has very kindly offered to do the whole thing for £600. We know we are getting a good deal with full support.</p> <p>Yes it will be, this is very early stages as Liv only took over 6 weeks ago. We have had an awful lot to do, including new managers. You are going to have to bear with us. Everything is relatively new and we are working on it. JA confirmed when we send out invoices every year the postage cost alone totals £600. If we get a new database, in the future we are hoping to send the majority of invoices electronically. That's not taking in to account ink, envelopes and paper cost.</p> <p>The current database was created by a previous plotholder Colin, made with his software. BK took this over when Colin left. It has been a mind field to work out</p>

	and recently crashed. It is a good 10 years old and cost JA at least 2 days lost work.
The last question is to do with the bank balance. There are some features that were on the accounts last year that aren't there this year. Has this been purposely missed off? Are there any pre paid rent that needs to be considered this year? Also the value of the key deposits.	Brian has been working along side us recently since Liv stepped up as Chair, but he is no longer our Treasurer and he was not in a position to do the full accounts the way we usually would. We asked him to do the best he could so that we could go ahead with the AGM. We are looking for a treasurer and next year we hope to provide the information as normal. The accounts are at the top table if anyone would like to view them. BK will add to website or we can email a copy to you.
<i>John White LR57-</i> It would be nice to have more competitions, especially where the children are concerned. The other question is could we take two plots together and make them into a boxed area so that we could introduce disabled people in chairs. You could introduce 6/8 people to work those two plots.	Absolutely. There used to be competitions for the tallest sunflower etc. Yes absolutely, there is no reason why not. All ideas welcome. Back to the competitions, it used to be across all sites and trying to differentiate between them all took a lot of time. But within sites for example Glebe Lane – they have their own competitions. We also have Maidstone in Bloom. One of the Loose Road plotholders won last year.
<i>Richard Coleman –</i> It would be good to make the sites more inclusive whether that be information on the website etc.	We may need to involve the council, because of the pitfalls including Health and Safety aspect.
<i>Trevor Pearce SR97 –</i> A lot of people don't know the difference between the Management Committee and the Association. Could we send out a letter explaining?	We can put it on the website and in the newsletter. We need to look at the history of it too.
<i>Billie Winwood –</i> Will the newsletter be more regular?	Yes – apologies for the lack of newsletter over the years, that's something we want to address. We want plotholders to be involved in the content and have a say. Please let your manager know if you have any news. Also make sure your email address is up to date!
<i>Stephen Mann SR100a/111 –</i> Would it be possible to add to the tenancy agreement about the use of water. We have ongoing problems at Sandling Road, as Nick and Trevor understand. Each plot should only use the hose for 30 minutes, unless this is enforceable this is pointless doing it. So could this be put in to the tenancy.	This is in the Tenancy Agreement.

<p>But is it enforceable because it doesn't seem to because we had the water restrictions last summer, then we had the caps put on the taps and they haven't been taken off, even before the hosepipe ban so we haven't been able to use the hose. If people are abusing it they should be asked to leave their plot.</p>	<p>There is currently a hosepipe ban and this can't always be enforced.</p> <p>Site managers could issue a warning to begin with. Please give us a chance to talk to them first. It would be nice to educate people to why they shouldn't be using so much water.</p> <p>For a 10 rod plot it is 30 minutes, 5 rod plot 15 minutes, 2 rod plot 10 minutes max.</p> <p>All we can do as manager is tell people if we see them doing it.</p>
<p><i>Richard Coleman –</i> I did ask last year as well, I think we have a really good opportunity to decide whether we are going to change the way we are communicating. I would ask the committee to consider publishing the minutes of their committee meetings, to improve transparency and communication with ploholders on all sites. Site managers are there to represent and carry on the views of their ploholders from their site to the committee. If ploholders aren't attending the committee meetings, publishing the minutes would be one way of communicating to ploholders and also to know whether or not their concerns and ideas are being discussed.</p> <p>With regards to confidential minutes – these would not be recorded as minutes and it would be up to you to decide as chair what is confidential and what isn't. There is a good guide on the government website basically saying how to construct and record minutes for the public domain.</p>	<p>We can not publish the minutes of the committee meetings. Issues discussed here are confidential.</p> <p>If managers are given something to take to the committee, managers will report back on that issue. If it affects all it will be on the notice board. Managers will not report on issues on other sites unless we think they need to know. Publishing everything from a committee meeting isn't sensible. We could do an update per site each month.</p>
<p><i>Steve LR –</i> What happens next with the suggestion made to the committee?</p>	<p>We will be having a committee meeting to discuss costs etc. We have had to concentrate on the constitution because this is needed to apply for the grants. The banking situation all had to be sorted out to allow us to move forward. Liv has met with MBC this week and asked if there is anything they can give us financially we would be very grateful. They have gone away to look into this. We are determined to get as much for our sites as possible. The constitution has been sent to MBC.</p>
<p><i>Billie Winwood –</i> There are some boundary changes being consulted on by MBC. Some of the areas are looking at whether they could become parishes</p>	<p>The only way it would affect our allotments is if you were no longer in a Maidstone Borough Council tax postcode, because you must be a MB council tax payer for an allotment in Maidstone.</p>

and extending the parishes. Obviously there are some allotments in Maidstone that are parish run rather than you guys. Do you know if that affects any of the plots?	
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Thank you to everybody especially the committee and Jo who has worked really hard, it has been a mad few weeks but we are getting there slowly.

Thank you for coming this evening it has been lovely to see you all.