

St Thomas Allotment Association



MINUTES v2.1

COMMITTEE MEETING 2 2021/22 : 11.00am, Sat. Jan 15th 2022

Exeter Community Centre

by invitation (covid rules apply/formal sign-in & out, face-masks in common areas, hand gel)

1. PRELIMINARIES

- 1.1 Endorsement of appointment of John B. as the new Chair: Agreed (1) Paul C. to be appointed as Chair for items 1-4; after which, and for future meetings, John B. appointed Chair.
- 1.2 Present/apologies & confirmation of quorum.
● Present [quorum present] : Executive Officers: David Solman (Sec.) | Paul Collier (Treasurer) | Charles Knill (Trading Manger & pro-tem lead at G&H) | Jim Clark (Web&Data Manager) | Local Allotment Officers: Richard Brownbridge (Clapperbrook) | John Butler (Cowick La.) & Chair Apparent / Chair | Rob Shields (Rackfields) | Claire Richards (Pinces) Alan Mounce for Bill Turner (Ashwood Rd.) . ● Apologies: Bill Turner. ● Absent: Tim Snell (Local Allotment Officer, Newman Rd.), Rob Harding (Local Allotment Officer, Ide La.)
- 1.3 Welcome to new members & introductions to the group. Paul Collier and Alan Mounce were welcomed and the group introduced themselves.
- 1.4 Approval/signature of the previous minutes. Agreed (2) the minutes were agreed as on paper and signed by John B. after his appointment as Chair.
- 1.5 Agreement to the draft agenda as pre-circulated. Agreed (3) the draft agenda was agreed with no changes.

2. COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

- 2.1-3 Notice was given of signed acceptance of appointment from Jim Clark (Web&Data Manager) & issuing of Association membership card to 31/03/23. Notice was given of signed acceptance of appointment from Paul Collier (Treasurer) and issuing of Association membership card to 31.03/23. Notice was given that 'thank-you' gifts were sent to leavers as agreed by the committee.
- 2.4 Notice was given of current Committee vacancies:
 - (i) Local Allotment Officer/Rep 1 at G&H - vacant since Heidi left in May 2021
 - (ii) Local Allotment Officer/Rep 2 at G&H - vacant since Alison W. left in Sept 2021
 - (iii) Chair - vacant since Alison W. left in Sept 2021 (on agenda at 1.1 above)
 - (iv) Vice-Chair - vacant since Angela R. left in Sept 2021
 - (v) Publicity and Events Co-ordinator - longstanding vacancy
 - (vi) Local Allotment Officer/Rep at Regent's St. **Noted (1): Claire R. advised that, until further notice, the former rep for Regent's St. had agreed she can represent their site.**
- 2.5 The Cttee. discussed how best to try to fill the vacancies:
Agreed (4a): Richard B. will raise the vacancy for Publicity/Events Officer with a plot-holder at Clapperbrook who may be willing to do this work.

Agreed (4b): the Sec. will draft a new advert for that vacancy and circulate it to Cttee. members for approval; site officers/ reps will put up that advert, when agreed, on noticeboards and Jim C. will advertise that vacancy on the web/Facebook.

Agreed (4c) that the use of trading shed vouchers will be reviewed at the next meeting (with a view to making more use of these as an incentive for people to volunteer).

3. SITE MANAGEMENT ISSUES

3.1 The Cttee. discussed progress in resolving management issues at G&H. Although G&H is the largest site no-one has come forward so far, since Heidi and Alison left. (in May and Sept 2021 respectively). For the veg box, the Sec. is still waiting to hear back from the solar repair engineer. Charles K volunteered to continue to cover the site vacancies, insofar as his time permits.

3.2 The Secretary reminded to all site reps to ensure volunteers are offered registration for insurance cover.
Agreed (5) That the Secretary bring the current list of registered volunteers to the next Cttee mtg. to help identify any gaps.

Agreed (6): That Claire R will bring suggestions to the next meeting to make the sign-up form as simple as possible.

3.3 There was a round-up of any other news/issues at allotment sites, but nothing further was raised for these minutes.

4-5. MANAGEMENT OF EXISTING WORK STREAMS

a) MEMBERSHIP SCHEME WORK-STREAM

4.1 The Current List of Enrolled Members

- Notice was given of current names on the Association's enrolled membership list; a spreadsheet had been pre-circulated by the Secretary. The formally enrolled membership of the Association was currently less than twenty people; these being free service memberships associated with present or former committee members who had registered as members.
- The Secretary reported that several people had inquired about membership of the Association and were currently being told that the enrolment procedure for formal membership was under discussion. This hiatus was because the decision to approve a wider formal membership scheme (following the productive consultation last Spring) had not been taken at the July 2021 meeting when it was tabled for decision (and subsequently the Cttee's priority had been to once again trying to establish an automatic membership/enrolment scheme, for which the Council's co-operation was needed - see 4.2 below).
- Richard B. noticed that list of formally enrolled members used different numbering from the issued membership cards (the Secretary explained that this list simply used sequential numbering; he would see if the card issue numbers could be added as a further column in future printouts).

4.2 Report-back and Discussion from the Sub-Committee tasked with meeting Amanda Ziff at ECC to progress the Association's automatic membership proposal:

- The Sub-cttee had met Amanda Ziff and proposed ECC amend the wording of the current ECC Letting Form to read: *"The rent will be paid in advance of 30th September each year; this will include membership of St. Thomas Allotment Association (STAA)"* or similar.
- The 'Crediton model', on which the change was modelled (and which demonstrated how STAA's proposition could work) was cited and left for Amanda Z. to review.
- Other related changes proposed by STAA were: *"STAA will provide public liability insurance associated with operating an allotment garden"* & *"The tenants must notify ECC and STAA of any change of address"*
- During the meeting the Sub-cttee explained the benefits of STAA's proposal to ECC along the following lines: *improved communication, efficiency and collaboration with STAA rather than ten independent sites; improved co-operation and efficiency, faster letting of plots; improve the possibility of moving to a higher level of Let and Check (maintenance of communal areas and cutting hedges can only be achieved if STAA can contact most of their members/plot-holders); Public Liability Insurance paid by STAA could extend to all tenants and not just STAA L&C personnel and the committee; a possible*

addition of £1 to £3 on the annual rent paid to ECC, to cover the cost associated with ECC having to amend invoices etc. and extract membership data for STAA.

- The Sub-cttee thought the meeting had been very positive and constructive: Amanda Z. who is new to the post, was keen to improve the connection/collaboration and reduce overall costs.
- The cost of ECC making the changes to the letting wording will be a consideration, and ECC needs time to explore this.
- The outcomes of the meeting were that Amanda would meet with her line-manager and the finance department to discuss if this proposal could be implemented and the Sub-cttee agreed to have a further meeting with her in Jan or thereabouts, to follow this up.

4.3-4 The full Cttee. then considered what Proposals should arise from the sub-committee's report.
Agreed (7): that John B and Rob. S. would contact the council to arrange the follow-up meeting in Jan/Feb as envisaged; and bring news arising to the next Cttee. Mtg.

Agreed (8): That whilst the automatic enrolment method under discussion with the Council was the Committee's preferred way forward, it should continue to develop its own membership enrolment scheme in the meantime. To that end: (i) the deferred July 21 meeting item (T's and C's of the Association's membership enrolment scheme) will be brought back to the agenda for discussion, and if possible conclusion, at the next Committee Mtg.; and (ii) a trial will be commenced, offering automatic enrolment to all signatories for trading shed goods; this trial to be conducted at Rackfields, with a report-back on the findings to the committee later in 2022.

b) INCORPORATION WORK-STREAM

5.1 In discussion, the Secretary suggested the Cttee begin by reviewing the original, full, papers for the incorporation models - and make sure these state which specific model they describe. Other members thought it best to begin largely from last Summer's 'draft comparative table' as well as any associated background work. Rob S. explained that he had drafted some comparison notes for the former vice-Chair which the Cttee. might find it useful to see. John B. confirmed that the CiC model he had set out, was specific to the 'small-membership' CiC model; the Secretary suggested this be added for clarity. Claire R. thought the comments on an unincorporated structure set out in last August's 'draft comparison table' alongside the incorporated models had been based on the Associations current 'constitution', but the Secretary raised concerns that the *draft* did not say which model it referred to and from his reading it comprised more than one unincorporated model, being partly based on the standard 'unincorporated mutual model' of an Allotment Association which we do not (yet) use.

Agreed (9) That the Cttee. will review the work to date around potential incorporation at the next Cttee. Mtg; Claire R. will seek to obtain various background papers held by the former Vice-Chair.

6. PUBLICITY AND EVENTS

a) WEBSITE and FACEBOOK UPDATES

6.1 Jim C (new Web & Data Manager) led comments, updates, and ideas/discussion about these media: 174 people had logged into the Association's Facebook site in the last 28 days and there had been 92 visits to the website (all from the U.K.). the Trading Sheds were shut at the moment, and he had little news to put out; Charles K. agreed to send Trading Shed news to him for publishing in the near future.

b) ANNUAL STAKEHOLDER & MEMBER MEETING UPDATES

6.2 The Cttee. noted that the annual accounts have been sent to the accountants and their independent report is awaited. Paul C. noted this is more than is technically required by the constitution; John B. explained the Cttee. had considered it preferable to go this extra mile, so as to ensure a higher standard of financial reporting the AGM's.

6.3 The Cttee discussed AGM preparations/options. A date had not been found last year due to some plot-holders not wishing to attend a face-to-face meeting and others being against an online solution since it required joining the Association's email group.

Agreed (10): that, as a practical way forwards, the next Cttee. Mtg. adjourn and re-convene as the outstanding 2019-20 AGM with all formally enrolled members invited.

Agreed (11) That the 2020-21 'AGM (or AGM + Open Mtg. for stakeholders) would be scheduled for Sept-Oct 2022; the Cttee. felt it was important to put date in place now.

c) NEWSLETTER & OTHER PUBLISHED MATERIAL UPDATES

- 6.4 The Cttee. discussed its capacity to issue a newsletter and other published material. The publicity/Events Officer post was currently vacant, and no-one had come forward to fill it (see 2.5.) It was noted that leaflets were needed or new plot-holders; these should become possible once the Cttee. agrees its membership scheme (see 4.3). Similarly, there is currently no leaflet explaining the Association at the trading sheds etc. - this should become possible once the incorporation workstream completes and the Assn. has the necessary clarity around constitution/operational model. John B. proposed that the Cttee. circulate all email contacts with a Spring news update (by when more known about ECC's support for automatic membership of plot-holders). Richard B. suggested that at the next Cttee. mtg. it delegates a member to book a slot for a Summer Show in 2022.

7. FINANCIAL ITEMS

a) Procedural

- 7.1 Paul C. (new treasurer) gave comments, updates and led ideas/discussion. His initial thoughts were that the Association needs to hold about £7k in the bank to cover the ups-and-downs of stock ordering and for repairs, contingencies etc.; also, that depreciation of the poly-tunnel and other items should be linked to ensuring the Association accumulates sufficient funds for eventual replacement; and that inventories and valuation of items such as prize cups should be made on the basis of average replacement cost.
- 7.2 The Secretary will send Paul C. a copy, or further copy, of the Association's draft 'Treasurer- Outline Role Description' for him to review.
- 7.3 **Agreed (12): To appoint Paul C. as the registered contact (trustee) for the Association's banking (currently Fiona K.); the Secretary and Paul C. to liaise over the mechanism for so doing.**

a) Inventories & Asset Register

- 7.4 The Secretary will send Paul C. a copy, or further copy, of the draft Inventories and Asset Register for him to review and complete.

b) Format of Annual Accounts:

- 7.5 The Cttee. invited Paul C. to advise further in due course. John B. mentioned that the format would also depend upon the organisational structure the Association opts for.

c) Expenditure Approvals:

- 7.6 **Agreed (13): The Committee agreed the pre-circulated expenditure proposal for tree works at Pines Allotments as proposed by Claire R., the cost to be shared with hoped-for income from a proposed local area grant (STAA's contribution being £676).**

Agreed (14): That the Committee will usually require three quotes before deciding proposals for use of contractors or purchases unless the value is low. Paul C. to check this is written into the Association's current 'Financial Rules, Sept 2020' procedures paper, or amend accordingly.

The Cttee. discussed the wider implications of paying for tree works to fruit trees at Pines Allotments; it noted that tree works last took place only 3 yrs. ago, and that to be financially prudent, members of the committee need to be clearer as to which trees are plot-holders, DCC or ECC responsibility to maintain at their cost.

Agreed (15): John B. and Rob. S. to raise tree care (which trees is it down to plot-holders, DCC or ECC to maintain at their cost?) with Amanda Z. at their next meeting and report back.

- 7.7 The committee then considered any further expenditure proposals that were in the offing. John B. mentioned that he intends to bring an expenditure item of approx. £70 to the Cttee. for purchase of additional local insurance at Cowick Lane, under the Somerset scheme.

d) Collection of Poly-tunnel Rents

7.8 A revised draft for the "Explainer and Code of Practice for poly-tunnel gardeners, 2022" had been pre-circulated. It differed from the previous year's document in that the fee would be reduced from £30 to £20 but only cover the year to Sept 30th - and thereafter the fee would revert to £30pa. for the next 12-month period. This would bring the fees into line with the Association's financial year.

Agreed (16) Charles K. will ask Paul Tregoning if he will continue to take this on as the Association's named 'Approved Volunteer'; he will also remind Paul T. of the bank details for poly-tunnel gardeners to pay into and to display a copy of the 2022 Explainer and Code of Practice" in the poly-tunnel or ask everyone to sign one. The Secretary to send Charles K. the finalised copy, as approved today by the Cttee.

7.9 The Secretary, Charles K., and Paul C. are asked about the state of payments from poly-tunnel gardeners for 2022; none were aware of any being received to date; Paul C. will look for them in the bank account and liaise with Charles K. to ensure all payments are received this Spring.

8. **A o B** - covered above.

9. **PLANNED MEETINGS/EVENTS**

Agreed (17): The Secretary to book the Community Centre for the next Committee meeting on a Sunday afternoon in early March, if it is available at that time.

Sept-Oct 2022 to be diarised: for the 2021-2 AGM (or AGM + Open Mtg. for plot-holder stakeholders)

David Solman, Secretary @ staacommittee@yahoo.com

Cttee. signed: 

Dated:  13th March 2022