

St Thomas Allotment Association



approved MINUTES

COMMITTEE MEETING 5 2020/21 : Fri. Feb. 26th 2021

(zoom online meeting by invitation)

7:10pm online

- 1. Attendance:** **AI Present** [quorum pres.] : **Executive/Officers:** Alison Walker (Chair & pro-tem lead for G&H Trading Shed & Site Mngr/Rep vacancies) - attended for first half of meeting only | **David Solman** (Sec. & pro-tem lead for the Treasurer vacancy) | **Angela R.** (Vice-chair & Local Allotment Manager, Regent St.) | **Local Allotment Managers:** **Richard Brownbridge** (Clapperbrook) | **John Butler** (Local Allotment Manager, Cowick La.) | **Rob Shields** (Local Allotment Manager, Rackfields) | **Bill Turner** (Local Allotment Manager, Ashwood Rd.) | **Sue Therrian** (Local Allotment Manager, Pinces) **BI Apologies:** *Heidi Miller (Local Allotment Manager, Guys&Hylton) | Ruth O'Neale (Web & Data Manager) | Rob Harding (Local Allotment Manager, Ide Lane) | Charles Knill (Trading Manger).* **CI Absent:** *Tim Snell (Local Allotment Manager, Newman Rd.).*
- 2. Minutes of previous mtg.** These were approved with no amendments, this to be given effect to by being signed and dated by Alison as Chair, then put on the website for members to read. The meeting asked the Vice-chair to Chair, and she accepted.
- 3. MAIN ITEM : Membership**

Discussion: Angela R. proposed the Secretary outline current membership issues to open the discussion:

- The Secretary explained he wore two hats in a process like developing a membership scheme; one as an individual committee member ('trustee') and another as secretary to all the other committee members; he invited members to ask if they were unsure which hat he was wearing, when.
- He thanked the committee for having done a lot of work in this area already to meet it duty to make *bona fide* memberships available. There had been a growing awareness that the association had a duty to make such memberships available where necessary or required, and to make these available as widely as possible to plot-holders who wanted them.
- For a number of years, the Association has operated without written documentation, or published information being made available about any membership scheme; it had issued no membership cards; and kept no membership records. The knock-on effect was that the tax position of the Association had been somewhat unclear, trustee indemnity insurance had been of doubtful validity, and insurance could not provided for the generality of plot-holders.
- The Association had therefore developed a scheme of membership which it hoped to roll-out more widely so people could choose a definite *bona fide* membership if they wished to, which would help solve these problems. This work had followed-on from the adoption of a signed, dated constitution and a Data Protection Policy so that any membership scheme would be underpinned by these. It had also been designed to be compliant with the requirements of an unincorporated body, and to give the Association potential eligibility to apply for insurance for the generality of plot-holders.
- It has become evident that the Association wishes to do more work on developing a membership scheme - to try to bring everyone on board. This is a complex area and due to uncertainties in the past, plot-holders appeared to be starting from different pages: some thought they were 'implicitly' or 'automatically' members; whilst others thought they were not members and did not wish to join until they understood the benefits of doing so.
- This latter type of comment opens-up the wider question of what services the Association can or should offer to members or to everyone with an allotment plot; and how best to advertise and communicate these. In looking at such a big question, there is a need to understand how the Association can take proposals forward, consistent not only with its constitution but also with its current structure as an unincorporated body. The rules for decision-making that flow from this individualistic structure are, unfortunately, not written down by the Association (e.g. as a footnote to the constitution), so the importance of personal signatures, how to bind-in all committee members to decisions, novate agreements or responsibilities to others when committee members leave, can be all too easily missed until we address that.

- Other alternative structures are available, such as becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), or a Community Interest Company (CIC). Work to compare their pro's and con's for delivering the work of the Association and look at how they might give us more scope to improve on the current 'offer' to members and plot-holders, could be useful as part of the committee's work in developing a *bona fide* approach to membership, attracting members by providing the right services, and supporting everyone with an allotment plot.

The subject was then opened out to everyone, and a thorough discussion took place whilst the Secretary took notes. Amongst the contributions from Angela, Rob, Bill, Alison, Sue, John, and Richard were the following:

MEMBERSHIP: *we have to put our members at the heart of what we do and make the most of what we can offer; *people don't know what benefit we bring them; * how do we get them involved; the reps work their socks off but pulling a team together to help them can be hard work; *we need to say we strongly support equal opportunities of all members and plot-holders; *some people know the Trading Sheds depend on the Association to operate; *other people don't make use of the trading sheds and don't see what benefit the association brings; *the Trading Sheds should be re-thought to make goods available by delivery; *I thought I was a member as long as I had a plot; *we need to make the duration of membership clear - how long should a membership be for; we do need to know; * more time was needed to work with the range of views plot-holders have; *the AGM is seen by some as being for sites with a Trading Shed, and they simply won't go as they don't think its relevant.

COMMUNICATIONS: *we need to tell those people we can reach through email opt-in, what the association offers; *how are we going to be able to reach people to consult if we can't contact them due to data protection? we can't reach everybody; *we have to use what we can - website, facebook, the new opt-in email list, noticeboards; *but that will never be complete; *we must improve our communications.

INSURANCE: *we should offer insurance cover for all plot-holders; *the key is the Association needs to know who the members are or we can't get them insured; *ECC's reply about providing insurance for plot-holders when they work on common areas, says they do some work but don't do it often - we should be insuring the plot-holders; *we may have the very best of intentions, but unless we can get a membership list together we can't get valid insurance and offer this to plot-holders as a benefit; *we need to ensure we try our best to reach all plot-holders, including those who don't have internet access or opt-out of email, by continuing to make full use of site reps, noticeboards etc, and exploring new opportunities that could improve on this offer.

STRUCTURE: *moving to form a CIC could help and I have experience of these; though we could become charity (but that would give us a wider social purpose than just the allotments, though there's nothing wrong with that).

The committee then considered three proposed resolutions that had been pre-circulated on paper and discussed possible amendments until they were satisfied with the wording.

- 3.1 RESOLVED (i) : That the following resolution be agreed: **"The Association's work to ensure a proper and valid Membership Scheme will be further consulted on and, therefore, will not be implemented until further resolved.* During this time the Committee of the Association will :**

- (i) explore the feasibility of implementing an Opt-out scheme as well as an Opt-in scheme, and identify any changes to the constitution and practice that would best give effect to these;
- (ii) explore how best to establish the status of any pre-existing approach;
- (iii) apply to the ICO for registration.

*** other than in cases where a genuine and verifiable membership is requested or needed"**

- 3.2 RESOLVED (ii) : That the following resolution be agreed: **"In furtherance of the Association's duty to ensure it has a *bona fide* and propitious membership scheme the Committee will consult on the following as necessary characteristics:**

- The Association needs to attract members by providing the right services, and give the best support it can to everyone with an allotment plot

- All new plot-holders should be given the chance, when being signed-up through Let&Check, to learn what the Association does and how to join - or how to opt-out

- The membership scheme has to be made available in writing to plot-holders

- Any conditions of membership have to be clear
- The duration and cost of membership have to be knowable
- The Association must know who is on its membership list
- Any membership scheme must be approved by the Committee of the Association and be in accordance with the signed constitution at the time
- Any membership scheme must be compliant with the laws of the land including the Data Protection Act, and must therefore offer Opt-in/Opt-out."

3.3 RESOLVED (iii) : That the draft letter (v3.1) of reply to two allotment holders who have contacted all the members of the committee with various comments on membership and other matters, be agreed - subject to asking the Secretary to include several specific modifications (to be itemised in detail to all committee members, including any absent tonight, by circulated email), with the aim of issuing the final version for posting out on Monday March 8th.

4. FINANCE

Let and check income had now been paid to the Association by ECC; this had been tabulated and pre-circulated to all committee members. The Secretary had invited proposals for its expenditure.

4.1 RESOLVED (iv) : That the Committee of the Association approve the supplementary expenditure proposal for the new mini-tool/supplies shed at Rackfields as submitted & circulated in advance on the 'Form for prior approval of any Events, Projects or Purchase Proposals' by the representative for Rackfields. These supplementary funds of £200 to be costed against Let&Check income earned by the site.

4.2 RESOLVED (v): That the Committee of the Association approves a one-off honorarium (T.Shed voucher) for Heidi Miller as a thank-you for struggling with the administration of our largest allotment site. Also a gift towards her administrative expenses recently incurred (details itemised by circulated email). For the future, the committee will seek a better understanding of the cost of providing Let&Check services, and explore how it can equitably meet these costs so they aren't paid for by individuals. As a first step, Angela R. will explore prices for photocopying and printing Let&Check forms/papers in bulk at a local printer or online, rather than these administrative costs being incurred by, and not always reimbursed to, individual Let&Check officers.

5. AGM

Gardeners at the Association's community poly-tunnel are, technically, disenfranchised by the current constitution. It seems the constitution had not been updated to accommodate their arrival when the poly-tunnel was first established about five years ago.

5.1 RESOLVED (vi) : That the Committee will recommend to the AGM that it approve a modification to the constitution's line which currently reads: "3 Members: Association Members must be tenants of allotments rented from Exeter City Council and which are located in the Association area." These words to be amended to read "3 Members: Association Members must be tenants or poly-tunnel community gardeners of allotments rented from Exeter City Council and which are located in the Association

area." If approved, the Chair and Secretary, such as are elected for the period thereafter, to bring effect to this by signing and dating a revised Constitution for members).

6. AoB

Records and Inventory: The Secretary reported progress on archiving. All pre-existing Committee Minutes on file (*together with some misc. papers*) have been scanned in apparent date order as a pdf file. Committee Members could now review these (just ask the Secretary for a copy). At present, the file cannot be passed-on beyond the Committee or published; before doing that previously unpublished items (*such as draft minutes where no signed/dated copy is on file*) need to be read through and checked to see if there is any personal information that would need to be redacted prior to publication, to meet data protection laws. At this early stage, the set of records includes some copies that are not A grade (e.g. not signed/dated, or incomplete in other ways). Committee Members could help spot any such gaps, so we could then ask plot-holders to come forward with any records they have retained. Paraphernalia for the Annual Show also needs to be collected-up and stored safely, and an inventory kept.

- 6.1 RESOLVED (vii) That the Filing Cabinet for old papers, now at the Veg Box, be further filled-up by advertising a request that anyone with a knowledge of any papers belonging to the Association please contribute. This, or a similar, request to be promoted through the usual means (Facebook, website, e-mail contacts, T.Sheds, notice-boards).
- 6.2 RESOLVED (viii). Angela R to ask Alison W. and others for knowledge of the whereabouts of any paraphernalia for the Annual Shows that is currently being stored at people's own addresses; and arrange for these to be stored at the Veg Box; and for an inventory to be made.

Next Mtg.

The next Committee meeting will be by zoom on March 12th 7pm; Angela to send out invitations and host. The topic will be: Outstanding Items from the Circulated Decisions Monitor v2 dated 6th Feb 2021, and from subsequent committee minutes.

David Solman, Secretary @ staacommittee@yahoo.com

Cttee. signed: 

Dated: 