

Court Place Farm Allotments Community Interest Company
Annual General Meeting held on Tuesday 26th March 2024 at 6pm
Parish Rooms, St Nicholas Church

All plot holders are members of the company and entitled to attend and vote and 13 members attended¹.

The following documents were available to the meeting: minutes from the 2023 Annual General Meeting, Treasurers report and 2023 Annual Accounts, Chair's report, Secretary's report.

1. Welcome and Apologies

Jane Wilson (Chair) introduced herself and the other current directors of the company: Ian Ross, Steve Bagnall, Anuj Bhatt, and James Lawrie. The secretary made and kept a list of those present.

2. Minutes of 2023 AGM

Agreed

3. Matters Arising: (not covered by main agenda)

3.1 Kate Robinson explained that sadly the chickens had been lost in recent months, and the team were evaluating the best future use of the space including whether to get more chickens, or to do something else.

3.2 ODFAA the umbrella represented body for all the allotments in Oxford city has continued to negotiate the lease. This has been frustrating process going on since 2018, but it is expected that a final version will be available shortly after Easter. The main difficulties have been the balance of responsibilities for items like boundary fences and trees. The council wishes to give most of the responsibility to allotments and this could result in some costly bills. In addition, the rent will have automatic inflation increases and again this could be expensive in the longer term. There are also issues about the rules for plot holders and the sanctions if rules are not kept. For example, recently, on another site, someone doing commercial trading with their plots, had to be evicted and this was very complex.

¹ Para 34.2 says "Two persons entitled to vote on the business to be transacted (each being a member, a proxy for a member or a duly Authorised Representative of a member); or 10% of the total membership (represented in person or by proxy), whichever is greater, shall be a quorum" so 13 attendees was deemed represent 10% of the current membership.

3.3 This year, with some informal consultation, we have revised and reissued our rules for plot holders and put them on the website. These include, to the best of our current knowledge, the requirements of our lease. They will continue to evolve.

5. Secretary's Report and Chair's Report

These reports were accepted, and the meeting discussed the following issues in the light of them:

5.1 Paths and Signage

The reason we have public footpaths across the site is historic. The vast majority of allotments do not have this.

It was agreed that the routes of the public footpaths should be more clearly signed. The context of this was the Council's approach of putting minimal signage up for public footpaths so that it is not obtrusive. This is understandable in a beautiful rural area, but, in our context, we need the paths to be clear. For areas without public access, it was agreed to trial ways of marking that more clearly. We do want people to find parts of the site such as the community garden and forest garden. The meeting was reminded that each plot holder should mark their site with its number. It was suggested that in the long term we could grow some form of hedging to mark the paths.

5.2 Theft and Vandalism

This has been a problem though, fortunately, on a relatively small scale. The meeting considered what could be done. Individuals were encouraged to report matters to the local community police. It was thought helpful if we could use some anti-climb paint around the shed, as there have been instances of people climbing on the roof.

5.3 Driving vehicles on the site

This can be very difficult if the ground is soft and muddy and should not be attempted. A post by the bridge has been repaired and this area is marked by cones because vehicles have been getting far too close to the ditch causing it to subside.

5.4 Communication

There was a request for more frequent newsletters, even if they were short, and it was felt that we could make more use of the website. Jane explained that the WhatsApp group idea suggested at the last AGM had been followed up. It presented several practical challenges when it was considered in more detail, so we have not progressed that. There was also encouragement to make continued use of the noticeboard on site. It was suggested that we consider modifying the newsletter so that it reads more easily on mobile phones.

5.5 Asbestos

The council has inspected the site for asbestos related to the buildings, given that the city council owns most of the buildings. We need to be vigilant about asbestos on the rest of the site. The main advice is to leave it well alone if it is intact, and to alert us if there is broken asbestos anywhere on site. It needs to be properly wrapped and removed to the Redbridge waste disposal site. This must be booked in advance.

Jane Wilson, explained that the type of asbestos found on the site is of relatively low risk, compared to some forms of more dangerous asbestos.

5.6 Water

Ian Ross explained some of the work that has been done here, and Rick Bauer volunteered to assist with this in future. There are three current targets: more water harvesting, isolating valves on every tank, and functioning water supply systems that eliminate the possibility of a tap being left running. To attend to this risk percussion taps have been installed in some places, and it was suggested that some people found these difficult operate. Ian explained that he was open to other options.

It was noted that we supply water annually to the Showman's Field when it is in use for the Saint Giles Fair. Usually, we have been able to collect a contribution of £50 for connecting the water supply.

The possibility of drilling wells for water supply was suggested, and it was explained that some trial bore holes drilled in earlier years established that there is difficulty doing this on our site. Some allotments do successfully have wells, but the geology of our site makes this difficult.

5.7 Community Benefits

On behalf of plot holders Kate Robinson thanked the directors and all those involved in running the site and Supplies Shed. She reminded us of the community benefits of allotments and gave some examples of the difference it has made to individuals she knows. She also mentioned good work done young people working for Duke of Edinburgh awards. In response, it was reiterated by the directors that we very much want to encourage community participation and involvement and this links with our community interest company objectives. There are lots of ways people can volunteer to help and you do not have to be a company director to do this.

One aspect of community benefit is sharing surplus food. The meeting wanted to discourage any sense that this could mean people could help themselves to produce on allotments, and examples of this happening were given. So, it is hoped that we can make food that is available for sharing more prominent with a new sharing table by the Shed. Tim Wilson volunteered to help with signage for this, as the meeting felt a clear message was important.

5.8 Watercress

This grows in one of the streams, and Edward Pope asked for permission to cultivate this systematically by removing weeds and encouraging growth. The meeting agreed that this was a good initiative.

5.9 Supplies Shed

Anuj Bhatt thanked the team of Supplies Shed volunteers and encouraged more people to come and help with this from 9 to 10:30 am on a Sunday morning. He said that with several people on rota an individual need only volunteer three or four times a year.

He explained plans to decorate and refurbish the shed. It had been important to resolve the electrical problems first, and that has now been done. He also welcomed suggestions of things we should have available in the shed. Our prices are usually much cheaper than elsewhere. We are not looking to sell produce in the supplies shed but it is anticipated we shall repeat the successful initiative of selling some seedlings. It was suggested that we put the list of supplies available at the shop on the website.

The Supplies Shed is open to members and affiliate members.

6. Treasurer's Report & Annual Accounts

The headlines of the report were:

In addition to the numbers which I presented at last year's AGM, we discovered during the year that a CIC has to file both unaudited financial statements with Companies House and a tax return with HMRC. These were filed within the requisite timelines and I am pleased to report that no tax was payable. However, they do represent an additional burden on your management team, which did not exist when we were simply an allotment association.

Turning to this year's results, the shop and allotments accounted combined saw a deficit of £3,151.34 or £3,951.34 if we had not received grants amounting to £800. As a result, our combined cash position fell by £3,151.34 to a still healthy £12,569.51. Most of the Thames Valley Police grant has now been spent, but £5,812.67 of the water grant remains to be allocated. Cash reserves for general purposes stand at £6,208.76, marginally up on 2022. Income from Rents increased by 19% to £4,896.66 and total income was £5,737.81.

Total expenditure was £8,748.44, of which Council rent and water remained the two most significant operating items, though I am pleased to see that water costs have fallen by a couple of hundred pounds. Other expenditure includes £1,148.96 spent on getting the electrics in the shed into safe and reliable order and £3,376.99 of expenditure related to the Thames Valley

grant. Adding that grant funded expenditure back sees the deficit turn into a small surplus of £366.36.

We transferred £10,000 to our deposit account at the end of the year to benefit from higher deposit rates.

As we have learned, the key financial elements of running the allotments are to ensure that rental income from allotment holders more than covers the rent to the City Council, water and electricity. Any extraordinary expenses such as wiring, skips or tree works will, by and large, have to be paid from reserves.

The Treasurer's report was accepted. In going through his report, James Lawrie's concerns were the possibility of rising future costs as a result of the new lease, and the need to continue to develop water harvesting. Water is our largest bill after rent. He added that he is comfortable with not putting the rent up this year because we have been able to cover our core costs with rent income. It was also noted that the current health of our finances is the result of successful and efficient, plot letting. Work by the probation service teams to ensure plots are suitable for renting and not overgrown, as had been the case in the past, has been important here. Successful grant applications have also been part of the success story. In 2023 we received grants from Thames Valley Police, and the Parish Council. There is currently a pending 2024 application to the Parish Council and another one to National Garden Scheme Community Garden Grants for funds to improve the sharing table. The meeting requested that our appreciation of Parish Council support be made known to them.

7. Resolutions

This year (rents due March 24) there will be no change to the annual rent for plots. The meeting agreed it was not necessary to make this a formal resolution. It was agreed, at Rick Bauer's suggestion, that we shall need future discussion about plot rents if the size of bills and needs increases.

8. Any Other Business

8.1 Marston Open Gardens is on Sunday, the 9th of June and it is hoped that the community garden of Forest Garden can participate.

Steve Bagnall, Company Secretary

Notes:

The process for general meetings is set out in the company articles of association available on our website:

<https://cpfallotments.files.wordpress.com/2022/02/model-articles-of-association-limited-by-guarantee-large-membership-cpfa-cic-final.pdf>