

S.H.A.G.S Committee Meeting – 14th October 2022 held in Ted Allen Room

Minutes

In Attendance: Mike Cobby (MC) Chair; Carole Pamphlett (CP) Treasurer; Jane Keech (JK) Secretary; Gill Hicks (GH); Jim Machin (JM); Linda Gahagan (LG); Rod Cooley (RC); Stephan Barnard (SB); Rachel Andrew (RA); Mike Lawford (ML); Peter Loveland (PL); Helen Loveland (HL)

Apologies: Alex Davis; Roger White; Keith Davidson; Rosemary Poyser; Marcia Dorey; Frazer Gordon; Geoff Bateman; Syd Marvell; Steve Case

Review of minutes from the last meeting 2022

- **Action points**

MC has spoken to RW to see if he can get asset list up to date and number new machines. Some old machines will be scrapped.

Shop – MC and FG are still covering the shop. This is becoming a strain. MC has suggested the shop shuts for December. MC may give another ultimatum.

Shop is usually closed for a couple of weeks after Christmas for stock take.

RC has looked at COVID policy. We will continue to follow NAS guidelines and leave policy as it is.

- **Approve minutes**

The minutes were approved.

Finance

We currently have a healthy bank balance and the shop is doing very well. CP circulated report prior to meeting. The most expensive purchases have been the new doors and the new shed for Harpenden Rise. Half of money for doors will come back from the shop.

A meeting with the council has taken place and CP has submitted budget for the year for a grant.

The water bill is likely to be high. Water should be turned off by the end of November and meter readings should be given to CP. MC will order some new taps in case any need replacing.

A meeting with the council has taken place and CP has submitted budget for the year for a grant.

No vacant plots for bonfire at PH but we may be able to have it where it was last year or there may potentially be another possibility.

Site Matters

The visit from Harpenden Town Council has taken place. MC visited all sites.

A discussion took place about the planned development on Cross Lane and where boundaries are. There are ongoing discussions with David Heritage about the possibility of moving the barrier on the Cross Lane bridge to allow easier access to the allotments. We have been informed that residents would need to be campaigned and this would involve a huge cost. It has also been reported that there could be load bearing issues with the bridge.

Parking issues in Wensley Close do does not seem to be from plot holders but from a resident selling secondhand cars.

Hedge cutting has taken place but has not been done very well. The cost from the previous contractor was £1600.00

Lettings

AD has reported that we are pretty well full. He may need some help as he is sometimes away. Suggestion is that we go back to how things were done previously – lettings enquiries would go to AD and he would pass on to the relevant site rep. There are benefits of site reps being involved and this would enable AD to do his part remotely if necessary.

JM would like to cease his involvement with lettings by the end of next year.

MC mentioned he would also like to give up some of his responsibilities in a year or so.

Machinery

Some of the strimmers have been difficult to start. We still need to keep a check on the fuel – E5 will finish sooner than expected. Cans have been clearly labelled.

JM was impressed with the electric mower – they seem to be efficient but not so robust

Shop

As mentioned above, the shop will close for December and a stock take will take place in January.

PL thanked RC for putting information about potatoes on the website and reported that International kidney potatoes are currently unavailable

Communications

RC has been busy getting things ready for awards evening – printing photos from competition and scarecrow photos. This year, we will not be able to get into the venue for the awards evening until 7.15. RC will take display boards home and mount / display the photos ready to take on the night.

LG has ordered food from M&S. She will also get wine and a gift for the Mayor. RC will take photos of winners receiving their awards

A discussion took place about our Facebook page. RA does not currently have admin rights. MC will liaise with Lisa Lyons Montgomery and will put something in newsletter

ACTION – MC to liaise with LLM to discuss Facebook admin rights

ACTION – MC to produce Autumn Newsletter

A.O.B.

RC asked if we had anything to catch rain water. Some people have water butts with upturned lids. This enables water to be collected and covers water butt to prevent any accidents.

Discussion about squirrels causing problems on sites. Suggestion that we could put traps out but there was some opposition to this, and SB explained how it was a much larger issue and not something that we as an allotment society could solve.

Date of next meeting:

Wednesday 14th December 2022

7.30 in the Ted Allen room

Summary of SHAGS Committee Reports for October 2022

Chairman's Report

(Mike Cobley)

Our belated site inspection eventually took place on Friday 30th Sept. Overall, our sites are in excellent order, so great work by our site reps, thanks all round. HTC were pleased with our sites and the meeting went well.

There are still boundary problems to resolve as part of our maintenance budget over the next 12 months. Old chain link fencing at PH requires some attention, where old concrete posts have cracked and broken. The damaged gate post has not yet been replaced as the Transport Co insurers have asked for CCTV or dash camera evidence of the incident, driver's details, vehicle registration etc. At AB the chain link fence outside the main gates has collapsed. Not our responsibility, so we do not expect this to come out of our maintenance budget. The access at CL is still a major bone of contention, with HCC stating that to open the access over the bridge would require canvassing the residents of the 10 houses on Cross Lane - with an estimated cost of £16,500! There is a planning application pending to build houses on the field opposite which the residents will not be happy about. To be fair, on Friday the access up and down Cross Lane was unhindered. The residents on Cross Farm estate have complained about nuisance parking by allotment holders, but there is now an investigation into a resident selling cars in the street, by St Albans DC. Similar problems are now being experienced at HR where nearby residents have dropped kerbs for the full frontage of their properties, reducing further any on street parking.

Reported crop damage - especially sweetcorn - has been blamed on muntjac, but it would appear to be squirrels, ripping through netting, digging under if necessary to get to the cobs! HTC would not contemplate shooting on our plots. There is a very efficient squirrel trap available, working off Sparklet CO2 cartridges, where the squirrel is attracted to the bait via a short vertical tube and as the head triggers a bolt, the dead squirrel drops out; dead squirrel on the menu for the red kites! We may have to canvass our membership about such drastic action or stop growing sweetcorn.

The work on the new doors for the shop and the TAR have made access easier. Detail work to be completed in the next few days. We have asked for a quote to replace the handrails on the ramp to the TAR. The shop woodwork will need a new coat of wood stain in the Spring.

The hedge cutting contractors have made a start, but some work is not completed, and areas have been missed, so HTC are having a meeting with JOC this month to review the performance and the specification of the works required. We now look forward to the Awards evening on Friday, the highlight of SHAGS social calendar. Thanks to Linda and Alan for all their hard work with the judging, the prizes, and the catering for the evening.

Treasurer's Report

(Carole Pamphlett)

We started this year with £24,792.77 in the SHAGS bank account and our current balance at stands at £22,649.75. But for the first time we have spent more than we received, so we have a deficit so far this year of -£2,143.02. This is mainly due to paying for the new doors to the TAR and the shop this month, the total cost including the paint was £2,266.72, but the shop will pay half together with this year's and last year's donation to SHAGS (we call it a donation but really, it's rent). There will obviously be more bills to pay before the end of the year including the water bills. So, we will have a deficit this year, but we are still in a healthy position.

As always, I keep an eye on the shop bank account which currently stands at £18,391.17, which again is healthy, we started the year with £24657.77 but Mike has lots of new stock to sell before the end of the year.

I will be attending our meeting with HTC at the end of the month at which time I will submit our yearly grant application for next year. Last year we received £3180.00 I normally increase it by a small percentage.

Sites:

Aldwickbury (AB)

(Roger White /Hazel Upton/Richard Mottram)

No report received.

Churchfield (CH)

(Keith Davison)

Most of our plot holders are still working their plots and there are good quality vegetables and fruit still being produced. With the weather now mostly cool and rainy, very little mains water is being used.

The half plot that was vacant has just been taken on by another plot holder and so the Churchfield site is now fully occupied again.

In mid-September HTC's contractor cut some of the hedges on site, but did not finish all the work, leaving areas of uncut or partially uncut hedges, perimeter bushes and trees. I have provided a marked-up site plan, indicating the areas where additional work is required, which will be handed to HTC at their next inspection.

The new Stiga mulching mower that we received a few weeks ago is proving to be a very useful piece of machinery. We have a problem with our hand strimmer which starts but refuses to run as soon as the throttle is increased. We need this to be serviced/repared a.s.a.p., as it is a very useful machine.

Fox incursions on site continue. On my plot, they have continually dug up and destroyed my potatoes and damaged my onions too and this is happening to other plot holders. The foxes constantly bring in bags, food containers, etc, onto site, then tearing it up leaving it scattered around the allotments, which I and others then have to clear up. Foxes are also damaging and destroying plot holders' equipment and sheeting etc. Their defecation around the site continues to be a problem and is a health risk to all our plot holders.

Cross Lane (CL)

(Stephan Barnard / Rosie Poyser)

As new site reps, we appreciate the good support we get from the plot holders.

We are organising the manure delivery for Cross Lane.

Plot holders have appreciated the wood chip delivery we had a while ago. As site reps we cannot take credit for this as it is an activity that seems to just happens when it happens (if it happens).

Harpenden Rise (HR)

(Marcia & Roger Dorey)

After the drought of the summer HR has mainly recovered well. The grass has grown again and has been cut several times.

The Council Inspection went well we thought, and they seemed pleased with our site.

We have found that most produce adapted well to the changed climate with the main sufferers those that needed early season water such as onions. We will know if another similar year comes how to protect such plants.

Our site is very proud to receive the Cup again and we would like to thank all the inspection teams and volunteers who make such things possible.

Oakley Rd (OR)

(Rod Cooley)

Mike Hughes and Guy Graham kindly cut the OR site grass paths many times before the 30th September 2022 Harpenden Town Council site inspection as I was not allowed to cut it after my operation. They did an excellent job as the paths looked nicely trimmed.

All the path edges were strimmed prior to the inspection.

Plot holders responded well to the request to tidy up their plots for the inspection with the result that the OR site looked very good. Well done to all the OR plot holders!

The OR site inspection on 30th September 2022 went very well and compliments were made about how well the site looked. These compliments have been fed back to all the Oakley Road plot holders.

Piggottshill (PH)

(Fraser Gordon/Mike Cobley/Geoff Bateman/
Syd Marvell/Rich Waight/Rachel Andrew/Steve Case)

Still one or two plots with little or no activity evident. We will need a vacant plot if we hold a 5th November bonfire this year. The neglected plots all have nearby polytunnels so not practical to use them.

The hedge along the Dark Lane footpath new fencing has started to get re-established, but some of the new planting has struggled to survive the hot dry weather.

As the manure heaps diminish repairs to both damaged posts can be put in hand before the next delivery.

For Piggotshill (lower area) the sides of the hedge opposite the recycling area have been cut. Albeit not very straight. But the tops have yet to be cut and would need doing so before they can claim they would be too tall to do it. Also, the same hedge has been done on the other side away from the wall which is great to see.

Sibley Ave (SA)

(Peter & Helen Loveland)

The new mower has been checked by Roger White and seems to be OK. Autumn clearing, tidying up, and planting are well under way so the site is looking good. Hopefully, the last cut of the grass will be done soon whilst the grass is still dryish. The HTC inspection did not, apparently, raise any issues on their part. Water will be turned off later this month and advance notice will be sent to all plot holders a week or two beforehand.

Topstreet Way (TW)

(Mike Lawford)

Generally, been a quiet time this last month. Plots winding down for the Autumn. Thoughts turning towards having a clear up bonfire and general tidy up soon.

Letting's Secretary Report (Alex Davis & Jim Machin)

Lettings

September was a relatively quiet month with some turnover in plots. We are still getting new enquiries and there were several new agreements. We currently have 4 plots available across our sites. There are currently single plots available at each of Cross Lane, Oakley Road, Piggottshill and Top Street Way.

Waiting lists are much reduced from last year, except for Harpenden Rise. This month we have had enquiries with people waiting for a plot at both Churchfield and Sibley Avenue, which is a turnaround from a couple of months ago when we had spare plots at both sites.

AOB

1. Carpenter's Nursery Friends and Family scheme. All the original requested cards have now been collected or delivered.
Any plot holders who want to join the scheme can now collect a card directly from Carpenter's. They need to show their letting agreement, or an email from me confirming that they are a SHAGS member (Associate or plot holder)

Machinery Manager's report

(Roger White)

No report received

Shop

(Mike Cobley)

The fox cubs have wreaked havoc amongst the bags of composts and topsoil in the compound, despite covering them over. We may have to fabricate some form of caging to prevent any further damage.

Shop sales continue to be brisk on most Sundays. The early Spring bulbs have sold very well this season. The last few late flowers packs have been donated to HR for their planned QE2 memorial garden bed next to the new shed, and some other will be planted around Lin's bench at PH.

We are considering closing through December this year, to alter some of the shelving at the back of the shop and improve the lighting, so look out for the November end of season sale, for bags of fox chewed manure and composts!

Is there a shop manager out there? We have discussed splitting the job into separate areas of responsibility but for the 2 hours that we are open on a Sunday it is likely to be too time consuming.

Communications and Webmaster's Report

(Rod Cooley)

Jane Keech and I have worked as a team on the 2022 Photo Competition.

The photo competition was closed on 12th September 2022 as planned. However, one submitter had accidentally uploaded a folder instead of a photograph. This was sorted out after help from Alex, Jim, Jane and Carole, but delayed the judging of the photographs by a week.

Jane Keech and fellow judge Jacqui Ansell have now judged all the photographs and awarded first, second and third place.

Jane and I would like to thank everyone who submitted a photograph. Many of them were very high quality.

The winning photographs and those photographs that unfortunately did not win have been put on the society website under the heading "PHOTO COMPETITION 2022", and all plot holders have been sent an email with the details.

The winning photographs, plus a collage of the remaining photographs, have been printed and will be displayed at the awards evening.

Photographs of scarecrows taken by Linda Gahagan have been printed ready for judging for the 2022 scarecrow competition. These will be added to the society website once judging has taken place.

The table of officers and site reps was updated by Gill Hicks and has been put on the society website.

The society website wording has been updated to match events taking place.