

S.H.A.G.S Committee Meeting – 12th April 2023 held in Ted Allen Room

Minutes

In Attendance: Mike Cobley (MC) Chair; Carole Pamphlett (CP) Treasurer; Jane Keech (JK) Secretary; Rod Cooley (RC); Alex Davies (AD); Linda Gahagan (LG); Stephan Barnard (SB); Rachel Andrew (RA); Steve Case (SC); Peter Loveland (PL); Helen Loveland (HL); Rosemary Poyser (RP); Roger White (RW); Hazel Upton (HU); Helen Loveland (HL); Mike Lawford (ML); Keith Davison(KD); Rich Waight (RW)

Apologies: Fraser Gordon; Geoff Bateman

Review of minutes from the last meeting – minutes were approved.

Action points from last meeting

- JK to draft email about Coronation BBQ to send to RC to circulate – Action complete

Finance:

Prior to the meeting, CP circulated the latest financial report.

£82.50 total of outstanding rent from plot renewals.

FG to provide information from stock take.

Site Matters

Prior to the meeting, reports were circulated.

RC asked if woodchip could be taken away from Oakley Road and thanked MC for helping to clear Buddleia.

John O'Connor are not able to cut hedges after 1st April – to protect nesting birds.

The hedge at Sibley Avenue has not been cut back for some time – possibly because there are old wheelbarrows etc. in the way.

HU asked if it is ok for any plot holders to cut paths and was informed that this is fine as they are already members.

Lettings

Information circulated prior to meeting.

Approximately 10 vacant plots and only a few people on the waiting list – except for Harpenden Rise with 15/16 people on the waiting list.

HU tried to advertise in Godfrey's but notices 'disappeared.'

Machinery

The petrol mower from Piggotshill has been repaired and is ready for collection. Repair was covered under the warranty.

Quote for similar mower – approximately £520 (Mower, charger, and battery).

Agreed that we will purchase 3 new machines – this will give us a total of 9 batteries. The mowers are mulching mowers, but a grass box can be used if required.

Discussion about possibly purchasing a battery-operated strimmer – one that has a battery compatible with the ones for the mowers and discussion about possibility of purchasing a battery operated chain saw for site reps to use.

AD to investigate.

Discussion about width of paths. Some paths have become narrower and narrower, making it difficult to mow. Our mowers are fine for pathways that are the width stated in the rules.

Churchfield – possibility of a second hand shed. MC will obtain photographs and liaise with KD.

AD has visited sites and wheeled machines all seem fine. He was unable to gain access to Churchfield site but will reschedule.

Problems with people trying to cut grass that is too wet / too long. Important that blades are kept high.

Shop

Report circulated prior to meeting.

Communications

Report circulated prior to meeting.

RC has updated shop details and list of committee members.

Going forward, we will have a report from RC and separate Facebook feedback from RA

A.O.B.

Agreed that we will have a photo competition again this year but not a scarecrow competition.

Scarecrow competition - possibly every other year.

Not enough interest in Coronation BBQ so we will not go ahead. Possibly a mid-summer get together.

The following points were agreed / clarified

- Close family and friends may help on a plot with the plot holder
- Anyone else working on a plot on a regular basis must become an associate member (site reps may use their judgement as to 'regular')
- If a couple wish to become associate members, they must each take out a membership
- We will seek advice from HTC about outside contractors working on site

Date of next meeting:

Wednesday 10th May 2023

7.30pm in the Ted Allen room

Summary of reports

Summary of SHAGS Committee Reports for

April 2023

Chairman's Report

(Mike Cobley)

CHAIRMAN:

I have had another meeting with Tim from HTC and we are now in the process of getting new and/or revised prices for some of the bigger maintenance jobs necessary, helping to use our allocated maintenance budget.

OAKLEY ROAD: Levelling off the stone embankment adjoining the Grove Road fence.

ALDWICKBURY: Improvements to the main entrance either side of the driveway, removal of old fencing and levelling up the dip on the driver's side.

CHURCHFIELD: Tree and hedge work, now subject to bird nesting season restrictions, so probably late summer. We are looking into bringing part of the flower meadow back into use for an additional 4 plots.

Out of our SHAGS funds we have committed to pay for the new shed.

On the subject of Topstreet site, there was a small celebration and bonfire to mark the milestone that Michael Beck has achieved his 60th anniversary of starting as a plothead. Mike Lawford organised a small gathering, with a celebratory cake and drinks and presented a model allotment plaque, before getting a good bonfire going, with the smoke heading towards our favourite neighbour ... poetic justice ?

Very little response for the suggestion for a Coronation barbecue next month so decisions to be made.

PIGGOTTSHILL SITE:

After such a wet and miserable March the grass has grown dramatically as soon as the sun shone and temperatures rose above 5C and this week the site reps and Albert have made a start on cutting the headway paths, tidying the entrances and planting more hedging plants along the new fence line, with a further 40/50 saplings promised from HTC.

The cleaned pond has loads of mini tadpoles and once the electrics have been connected we will have a new fountain for the summer.

There is already a short list of neglected plots, with no obvious activity since the end of last season, although all plotheads have renewed.

Treasurer's Report

(Carole Pamphlett)

Our bank balance stands at £28,568.47, but remember we started the year with £21,314.38 which leaves £7,254.09 for this year. Of which £10,890.60 is rent income and £119.00 in Associate members fee. The difference is monies paid out. This includes the payment for the new hand rail to the committee room which cost £1,311.30, we also paid for the new gate post at PH at a cost of £816.00, but we will eventually

get this back from the insurance company, Mike is handling this. All other expenditure are our normal running costs. I'm very pleased to say we are now down to only £169.50 outstanding renewals which represents 8 plot holders. My thanks go to Alex, between us we managed to sort out any problems. I should now be able to go back to our Year End account, which have been on hold while we did the renewals.

As always I continue to monitor the shop finances and now confirm to shop taking to Steve.

Lastly, if anyone has not sent their water meter reading, please do so ASAP

Sites:

Aldwickbury (AB)

(Roger White /Hazel Upton/Richard Mottram)

Churchfield (CH)

(Keith Davison)

- Only a few plot holders are preparing their plots ready for a start this spring. The lack of people also starting, is probably due to inclement weather over the last few weeks.
- The old mower we have on site has developed faults: 1). It starts, but then immediately shuts down. 2). The engine has developed a knocking noise. It has been returned to the Piggotshill Engineering Shed for inspection by the Machinery Manager. Our old strimmer refused to run all last year and so has also been returned to the Piggotshill Engineering Shed. I have requested a battery powered strimmer as a replacement.
- The mains CW supply has been restored to the site, but only after much trouble with the water points. I have modified the pipework to one point and have replaced 4 out of the 5 old stopcocks, with a new non-return type. Thus, preventing the possibility of contaminated water syphoning back into the CW main.
- I have sent details of the meter reading to our Treasurer. There was no water loss (leakage), over the winter.
- I have replaced the faulty combination padlock to our entrance gate, with a new one.

Cross Lane (CL)

(Stephan Barnard / Rosie Poyser)

Harpenden Rise (HR)

(Marcia & Roger Dorey)

We have three new plot holders this year. One of our existing plot holders asked to erect a poly tunnel but in the end decided against this and instead has bought a number of large long plastic cloches which will cover a good part of their plot. Most days now see a number of people busy on

their plots although we are still all wary of the frosts to come. The water has been turned back on and the meter reading sent in. A number of washers etc needed changing and these were done by a helpful plot holder.

Oakley Rd (OR)

(Rod Cooley)

- Mike Cobley and Alex Davis did a great job cutting down an overgrown Buddleia and removing two small walnut trees on Plot 10 Oakley Road. This plot has now been taken on.
- I have taken more car loads of wood and cuttings from plot 10 to the St Albans recycling centre. More will be taken.
- Hopefully Harpenden Town Council can help to chip the wood from the Buddleia.
- I turned the site water on and sent the meter reading to Carole after replacing a tap which could not be turned off. The new tap was provided by Mike Cobley.
- One plot is being looked after by someone on behalf of a plot holder on OR. I have requested their contact details so that I can contact them about any site news, any town council inspections, or if there is a problem on that plot.

Piggottshill (PH)

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

Sibley Ave (SA)

(Peter & Helen Loveland)

1. The water has been turned on and the meter showed no leakage over the winter.
2. There are signs of cultivation on almost all the plots and mowing of the long winter grass has made the site look very tidy.
3. A survey of plot holders showed that:
 - A. Nobody wishes to retain either the rotovator, the petrol-driven strimmer, the push mower, or the old mower.
 - B. A battery-powered strimmer is high on our wish list. Two plot holders have indicated a willingness to be responsible for battery charging.
 - C. Some plot holders would like a battery-powered mower. The mulching mower, although very effective, is very heavy and difficult to manoeuvre around plots. It has proven to be best kept for the main paths.
 - D. There is a general desire to keep the community orchard - at least until late summer when the health of the trees and the quality of the fruit can be more easily assessed. The 'orchard' is also seen by some as having wildlife value.
4. The hedge at the bottom of the plot is proving very difficult to manage. Could the HDC contractors help ?

Topstreet Way (TW)

(Mike Lawford)

Michael Beck's 60th anniversary of working on his allotment was celebrated in style with a group of 30 of us gathered for his presentation plot-side. He was presented with a certificate of achievement and a model of him presiding over his allotment, with his late wife and daughter represented busily working away under

his watchful eye! Drinks were raised and a massive cake was completely devoured, and it had to take a sudden heavy hailstorm to eventually break up the subsequent socialising.

Our final communal bonfires of the season were lit at the same time, just as if we were lighting beacons for a royal occasion, albeit this time it was allotment "royalty"!



After a lot of ferrying of raw material across the site (discovering ever little bit of uphill incline in the paths to push the wheelbarrows!) and then slab laying that would grace anyone's patio, work has completed on the base for our new communal shed. We now await delivery of the flat pack shed ready for its construction in the next few weeks.



After the renewal process we had one plot become vacant. Also, after some serious lopper / pickaxe work another plot has been reclaimed from the undergrowth, making it presentable for offering to new tenants.



Before



After

Letting's Secretary Report

(Alex Davis)

Renewals

The renewal emails were sent out on the 23rd February and the postal ones delivered in the following days. I sent a reminder to those that hadn't paid in mid-March and generally we have collected most of the rents. There is less than £200 still to collect

We are coming to the end of the process with the final few stragglers to sort out.

Carole has been busy reconciling bank payments. Most people are paying by bank transfer.

There have been some resignations through the renewals process.

Lettings

With the warmer weather we have started to get some new enquiries. Currently we have the equivalent of 10 full size plots available for rent across the 8 sites.

The only substantial waiting list is Harpenden Rise.

In the past week we have had 3 new plot holders sign up.

Actions

Insurance documents. Carried forward.

I haven't progressed due to focus on renewals but will get round to following up with our insurer.

Machinery Manager's report

(Roger White)

Battery powered machines

The PH small battery mower has been repaired under warranty and is ready for collection. I've asked for a report on what was the fault.

New small battery mowers of a similar model are currently priced at £520 (including charger and one battery).

Petrol machines

The HR Hayter mower has been repaired and returned to the site.

This week all wheeled machines have been checked on SA, OR and CL. All seemed to be running correctly. PH and CF wheeled machines will be checked in the next few days.

TW and AB machines will be checked later in the month.

Mowing advice

Please remind users of mowers and ploholders of the following:

1. Set the mower height to cut no more than 1/3rd off the top of the grass, never remove more than 1/3 of the grass blade length at any one time.
2. Do not mow when the grass is wet.
3. If the mower is not cutting well and is difficult to push or drive it is probably set to cut too low.
4. Paths between plots should be at least 60cm wide, all sites have mowers that can be used to cut grass on paths of this width.

Shop (Steve Case)

Takings from the shop were as follows:-

5th £315 (24% cash 76% card)

12th £284 (11% cash 89% card)

19th £212 (16% cash, 84% card)

26th £300 (20% cash, 80% card)

Big Tom growbags have sold very well as has John Innes and bagged manure and pelleted chicken manure. More Big Tom bags are on order should be delivered after Bank Holiday Monday as should codling moth traps and refills (I didn't realise we stocked these until someone asked where they were). I tried some new stock items such as cane flexi connectors and plastic devices to make creating cane wigwams easier and these both almost sold out the first week they were on display

Also, after Easter I plan to list the second hand electric scarifier which has been for sale for some time on Facebook marketplace (advantage no fees) and if not sold there eBay the same for the pond chemicals which have been on clearance price in the shop for a considerable time.

I'm also working on a price list which we can publish on the SHAGS website and Facebook I got the idea from East Harpenden's website noting that as their shop is now closed we may see an uptick in customers to the South Harpenden shop

Communications and Webmaster Report

(Rod Cooley)

- Various emails including Shop News and a proposed Coronation barbeque have been sent to all members.
- The website has been updated with the latest shop information
- The table of committee contact details has been updated and put on the website after being reviewed by committee members.
- Jane Keech and I will start the 2024 photo competition if everyone agrees to hold one.

Oakley Road report 7th April 2023 (Rod Cooley)

- Mike Cobby and Alex Davis did a great job cutting down an overgrown Buddleia and removing two small walnut trees on Plot 10 Oakley Road. This plot has now been taken on.
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- I turned the site water on and sent the meter reading to Carole after replacing a tap which could not be turned off. The new tap was provided by Mike Cobby.
- One plot is being looked after by someone on behalf of a plot holder on OR. I have requested their contact details so that I can contact them about any site news, any town council inspections, or if there is a problem on that plot.

Social media – Facebook.

Facebook postings are now more frequent, at present at least daily. The content is varied: linked to growing fruit and veg, wildlife, foraging, recipes, and creative things to do such as staining eggs for Easter using peelings and skins.

We have had 2 new followers over the last 14 days – one being our chairman.

There has been a good response and feedback, both via Facebook and in person regarding the posts. Please encourage plot holders to join and take part.

It would seem people not only like informative posts, but also photos of sites. The posts with the greatest engagements are those relating to our sites and plots.

Can site reps take photos of seasonal activity and share via email to me, or via messenger so I can share online. Or if possible, encourage holders to take photos and send via Facebook messenger, with any text they want to include so I can upload.