

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

Minutes

In Attendance: Mike Cobby (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); Peter Loveland (PL); Helen Loveland (HL); Rosemary Poyser (RP); Hazel Upton (HU); Keith Davison (KD); Mike Lawford (ML)

Apologies: Fraser Gordon; Marcia Dorey; Harriet Dorey; Roger White ; Rich Waight ; Steve Case

Review of minutes from the last meeting – minutes were approved. No actions from previous meeting.

Finance:

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

£1000.00 has now been transferred from shop to S.H.A.G.S (discussed and agreed at previous meeting)

We may be able to get a better rate of interest from Harpenden Building Society – MC will go with CP to look at possible options.

Site Matters

Prior to the meeting, reports were circulated.

HU still has some concerns about gate way to site. This can be looked at during the HTC inspection which is taking place on Monday 17th July.

Discussion about Oakley Road site. Agreed it is not big enough for a pond or to rewild a plot. RC will arrange to put a bird bath on the site to provide water for birds and other wildlife.

This will be on a trial basis in case it attracts too many pigeons.

Churchfield – waiting for date for tree/ hedge work to be undertaken. This can be discussed at the HTC inspection.

Cross Lane – Plots 1 and 2 have been turned into a communal orchard. Someone hopes to attend a course on tree pruning. Details to be made available to see if it could be beneficial to other people.

Lettings

Letting summary circulated prior to meeting.

Machinery

Report provided.

PL – would like to rehome an unwanted cultivator. MC informed PL that he will try to collect the cultivator and it can be kept at PH site.

Communications

Report circulated prior to meeting. The website is up to date.

Facebook

RA will send link to RC to put on website.

The Sunday morning walkabout is becoming very popular. RA visits other sites and takes photos to put on Facebook. Plot holders also send photos.

Shop

Current potato supplier (Horticultural Supplies) has closed down.

PL has been looking at other suppliers and provided a list of what he proposed we order. Some varieties were unavailable so we have alternatives.

List to be handed to SC so that he can place the order.

A.O.B.

Judging has now taken place. Some plots do not have a number which made judging a bit more difficult. A discussion took place about having a plot number competition next year – prior to judging.

It was agreed that we won't order any manure at the moment but will arrange deliveries in the autumn.

Awards evening will take place on 29th October 2023.

AGM will take place on 9th August 2023.

No date yet for IB's funeral/remembrance service.

JK will prepare paperwork for AGM and sent to RC to distribute.

Date of next meeting:

AGM - Wednesday 9th August 2023

7.30pm in the Ted Allen room

Summary of SHAGS Committee Reports for July 2023

Chairman's Report

(Mike Cobley)

Hopefully we can conclude the debate on ploholders paying for help with work required on their plots. Thanks to Alex for his help in forming the strategy.

If ploholders wish to use paid help they must take full responsibility and should enter into some form of a contract.

Any person 'employed' is not covered by SHAGS insurance, so should have their own Public Liability policy, with a min. £2m cover. Details of the insurance to be lodged with SHAGS Secretary.

Plotholder is responsible for all supervision of the works and should accompany the 'contractor' on and off site.

No keys or codes for locks to be handed over.

No SHAGS tools, machines or equipment to be used.

SHAGS sites rules must be followed at all times, with regard to water use, removal of waste and rubbish, no bonfires etc.

Our draft has gone to HTC for their opinion.

Our HTC annual inspection is due on 17th July starting at PH from 10:00 and from previous years the tour usually goes on to AB, SA, OR, CL and CF then after lunch to TW and finally HR to finish by 3 pm. It is the chance for site reps to show off their sites at their best and discuss future plans and maintenance requirements.

Maintenance budget. HTC have obtained a price for the removal of the stone embankment at OR amounting to £700 and an order will be placed shortly.

Hedge cutting contract works will start late August. Please check that headland pathways are unobstructed.

Tree work at CF is planned and we await a date.

There are large fruit trees on several sites, many very old trees are far too large and overshadow adjacent plots, Please make a list of large trees and we may have to ask for professional help for reduction work. HTC currently are not happy about carrying out work on healthy trees.

Best wishes for a speedy recovery to the Doreys at HR, Marcia, Roger and Harriet are all under doctor's orders. Plotholders have taken over the grass cutting.

Annual General Meeting is next month - 9th August.

PIGGOTTSHILL REPORT:

Two plotholders are now under the neglected plots procedure PH4 and PH77 where no work has been carried out all season.

A volunteer work party is required to give the shop building a new coat of wood preservative before the Autumn. There are a few painting jobs to complete on the TAR door frame, the old garage door has recently had a new door frame fitted, but the door needs repainting.

We still await the electrician to get an outside socket fitted for the new pump for the pond.

Treasurer's Report

(Carole Pamphlett)

Our current surplus for this year stands at £4,058.51, which includes the £1,000.00 donation from the shop for 2023. I do not expect any more major income this year, but we will have to pay for this year's Awards Night in September and any other bills. The total bank balance stands at ££25,370.89, which includes £21,314.38 from last year.

The shop continues to do well, so our thanks go to Steve who has taken over the roll as shop manager, he is now more familiar with placing the stock orders.

I'm making slow progression our 2022 Year end accounts mainly due to my mobility issues (plus old age), but I will have them done by our AGM and will send our committee members a copy beforehand.

Sites:

Aldwickbury (AB)

(Roger White /Hazel Upton/Richard Mottram)

Aldwickbury site report

Good news! The access road to the main entrance to the site has been cleared of overhanging bushes and ivy and the broken fencing has been removed. This has widened the entrance road which will make it easier for plotholders to park up when stopping to open the gates.

Generally, the site is looking in good condition ready for the HTC inspection although plot 4 which was given up in the Spring and plot 14 which was given up last week will both need work to clear away tall weeds and grass, hopefully some of this will be done before next Monday.

A 'dead hedge' is being built around the pond planned on plot 49 and when complete the liner will be laid so hopefully a wildlife habitat will be created ready for the autumn.

The H&S survey has been completed and submitted, most actions can hopefully be completed by Sept/Oct. There are two points arising from the survey that the committee may need to consider:

1. Several trees are becoming too large and are blocking access paths and shading adjacent plots.

Proposal: should the Society have a policy to ensure trees on plots are kept to a manageable height so that fruit can be picked safely, and neighbouring plots are not shaded? Perhaps a three-year plan to request plotholders to prune trees to a height where in future tree pruning can be carried out from ground level using extendable pruning tools?

2. Grey squirrels are again causing problems (noted under vermin on the H&S survey). These have been taking strawberries from under netting and have been damaging courgettes by biting into the fruit. Some early sweetcorn has also been taken. Is a reduction in squirrel numbers using humane methods such as <https://goodnaturetraps.co.uk/humane-squirrel-traps/> an option we should consider?

Churchfield (CH)

(Keith Davison)

- Many of the plot holders have got their plots and produce into fine condition, achieving a very good selection of vegetables and fruit. This looks promising for when the plots are judged.
- We have now received the battery strimmer complete with all accessories; I have given it a trial run which was very satisfactory. It has been used before by others and a problem has been left when trying to feed out more strimmer chord. The strimmer head would not react to the normal method of doing this, which is to hit on the ground, with the power full on. I started to strip the head down and found that the chord had not been installed correctly. As the instruction book did not properly explain the process, I am contacting our Machinery Manager to show me how this has to be done.
- To date the plotholders of Plot CF31B have not replied to a termination letter (i.e., termination on 9th July) from our Lettings Secretary as they have not renewed their rental and have not tended their plot at all this year. There is interest from people on the waiting list, to take on this plot. Our Lettings Secretary is at present dealing with this.

- I have had to deal with a leak on one of the water points pipework. This was successful, but in the process of repairing it, a noticeable crack on one of the fittings was found, which may eventually mean replacement of the stand pipe.
- One of our plotholders has begun carrying out remedial works in the headlands of Plots CF8 & CF9, originating from complaints by an adjoining resident contacting HTC. The plotholder has been instructed by myself, to clear the non-conformances as soon as possible.
- None of the outstanding trimming to perimeter hedging, bushes and trees, have been carried out by HTC's contractors since last August. Some of these hedges and perimeter vegetation are now in need of severe cutting back, in some areas preventing access to the rear of some plots.

Cross Lane (CL)

(Stephan Barnard / Rosie Poyser)

New plot holders Plot CL48 and CL49 have both started well making full use of the petrol strimmer.

The Allotment awards visit has taken place. Cross lane plot numbering is somewhat confusing and we do not have all plots with numbers.

Cross lane, could do with an electric strimmer to compliment the electric mower.

The new electric mulching mower has been well received and is being made good use of. We have got into a routine of charging the battery.

A second battery would mean the mower is not without a battery whilst it's being recharged.

Neglected plots. We have a small number of neglected plots and have started the process of contacting the plot holders.

The community orchard is being well maintained by the Cross Lane plot holders and one of the plot holders is considering attending a tree pruning class such that we can do the job properly.

Free potatoes, these came at just the right time for one of our long standing plot holders. They had a complete crop failure and replanted using the free potatoes. These have now shot up and look very healthy.

We have not used up all the free potatoes but those that were taken were much appreciated.

Harpenden Rise (HR)

(Marcia & Roger Dorey)

(No report – site rep unwell)

Oakley Road (OR)

(Rod Cooley)

- I returned from holiday and found a breach of the safety rules. Somebody had removed the mesh cover from the water tank by plot 2 at Oakley Road and dumped it behind the water tank. Grass was growing through it, so it must have been there for days. I have now refitted it onto the water tank.
- In addition, somebody has been filling the water tank by plot 2 from the taps so that the mesh cover is below water level and the water is very close to the top of the tank. I have removed the water and it has been refilled every time I have reduced the water level.
- I have sent an email to all plot holders explaining the site safety requirements of covering water tanks and that it could affect the society insurance if safety requirements are not met. I have also

informed all plot holders that overfilling the water tank could cause the mesh to rust plus makes the tank more dangerous.

- Alex Davis has done a great job in strimming plots at Oakley Road. I have started strimming plot 13 and finished what Alex started.
- Today I cleared the remaining wood, metal, and rubble, plus other rubbish from plot 4 and took it to the recycling centre. It was a full car load. The rubbish included two rusty metal chairs.
- It is a struggle to manage the site as few plot holders are cutting the grass. I have appealed to all plot holders for help. The solution is probably that all plot holders should have their own small lightweight strimmer as some plot holders cannot manage the site strimmer. For the site a small strimmer is not so practical as one battery can only strim one plot. The site strimmer can strim four plots.

Piggottshill (PH)

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

(Report from MC in Chairmans report above)

Sibley Ave (SA)

(Peter & Helen Loveland)

Almost all the plots are receiving considerable attention from their tenants, with lots of growing crops of great variety. The paths and headlands are being mowed regularly so, overall, the site is looking trim. One half plot is looking neglected but this is partly due to the late takeover and the hard setting of the ground. We think that we should err on the side of tolerance. We do need to find a home for our unwanted cultivator. We can no longer get it in the shed and it is being stored outside where it will inevitably deteriorate. The person storing it wants it gone from their garden in the next few weeks as they want the space for a greenhouse.

Top Street Way (TW)

(Mike Lawford)

The site continues to look very good, with a lot of work being put in by plot holders.

The one severely overgrown plot is now back within our control, following completion of the neglected plot / termination process. I've undertaken some initial strimming, but a lot further work will now need to be undertaken to return it anywhere near a reasonable state for cultivation.

Letting's Secretary Report
Lettings

(Alex Davis)

There has been a consistent level of interest. New plot holders have taken up plots at Cross Lane, Aldwickbury and Piggottshill. We have also had a few resignations so that the overall number of available plots across all sites remains at 7 (the same as last month)

There has been no response from the couple who were sent a termination letter for non-payment of renewal for their Churchfield plot. They have until the 9th July to respond, and then the plot can be re-let. The Harpenden Rise Waiting list is now up to 18, and there are small waiting lists at Churchfield and Top Street Way

Actions

Following the last meeting I drafted some wording on Contractors. Following feedback (thank you!) I have added some more and re-circulated. I assume that we will get it validated by HTC and then add it to our guidelines/working practices.

Regards

Machinery Manager's report

(Roger White)

John Jones, a plotholder on TSW has kindly offered to help with machine problems and repairs. Work has started on some of our older failed machines to determine if they are worthwhile repairing.

Some spare mulching plates (£7.46 each plus delivery) have been ordered for the small Stiga battery mowers as this part has been mislaid on a couple of occasions and one of the plates was unfortunately accidentally damaged.

Shop

(Steve Case)

We've had a delivery recently so are well stocked on most things the New Horizon compost continues to sell well. For our suppliers it's coming to the end of the grow bag / tomato bag season so I could only get a limited number of each

This morning I placed the order for onion sets and autumn bulbs with Kings Seeds I'll notify when they arrive

I've ordered 5Kg of garlic from K.G. Loach and they said it will probably despatch early September again watch this space for updates

I had a conversation with Peter about what seed potatoes to order that is to say what varieties and he suggested we survey the members to ask from a list of what we can get which ones they would like. I'll be putting the survey together today / tomorrow then will ask for it to be emailed to everyone and a couple of weeks after that we should have a clearer idea of what should sell

Price list is nearly complete (yes I know I said that last month work got in the way again) so we should be able to get that on the website and Facebook soon

Communications and Webmaster

(Rod Cooley)

- The table of committee officers and site reps has been updated with Rachel Andrew's name and email address added for Facebook.
- The SHAGS Midsummer newsletter has been emailed to all members plus put on the website.
- The website has been updated again to reflect current status.

Social media – Facebook

(Rachel Andrews)

Next meeting

AGM – Wednesday 9th August 2023

7.30 in the TAR