

S.H.A.G.S Committee Meeting – April 10th 2024 - held in Ted Allen Room

Minutes

In Attendance: Mike Cobley (MC) Chair; Jane Keech (JK) Secretary; Roger white (RW); Alex Davies (AD); Rod Cooley (RC); Rosemary Poyser (RP); Stephan Barnard (SB); Rachel Andrew (RA); Mike Lawford (ML); Steve Case (SC); Roger White (RW); Linda Gahagan (LG); Vincent Poupard (VP); Peter Loveland (PL); Helen Loveland (HL)

Apologies: Fraser Gordon; Harriet Dorey; Keith Davison; Richard Mottram; Hazel Upton; Rich Waight; Goff Bateman; Syd Marvel

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

Actions – Actions have been undertaken.

Summary of recent meeting with HTC

Most of the maintenance grant has been spent (£92.45 was not spent)

Budget for the coming year has been approved (£3,390) plus the maintenance budget (3,000)

The shop at East Herts has closed. Their members have been offered the chance to use our shop and we may possibly purchase their remaining stock.

There was a complaint regarding a bonfire at PH.

HTC will continue to try to get barrier on Cross Lane moved to enable easier access to the Cross Lane site.

Finance:

Update of paymaster account distributed prior to meeting – see summary of reports.

VP now has access to the HSBC account and SC has been in touch with Barclays regarding shop account. Relevant forms have been completed.

Any expenses can be sent to AD for payment.

Site Matters

Reports were circulated prior to meeting.

JK will forward any water meter readings to AD.

AD still having issues with Castle Water. AD will notify them of which sites need prior notification to enable access.

Fire Extinguisher needs servicing.

OR site gradually being cleared. RC thanked SB for his help. Plots number 3 and 11 are currently vacant.

RA will take photos of vacant plots for The Harpenden Network Group.

CL polytunnel was approved.

SB would like to use an 'Honesty Box' at CL for manure payments.

SB will purchase new taps for CL.

Site reps can think about possible projects for the coming year. SB may consider having a project to have a pond at CL.

ML will send form to JK for distribution.

A discussion took place about the repairs that are needed for the container at PH. MC is making enquiries.

Lettings

Report circulated prior to meeting.

16 plots given up. No reply from the ploholders with neglected plots so plots will be re-let.

Lots of interest in vacant plots.

Vineyard plot is available (2 plots).

Machinery

RW has had a quote for CL mower (£599). Mower can be delivered to SB if it is easier.

Battery for small mower appears to have gone missing.

Two volunteers at SA now charge batteries ready for the weekends.

TW has not yet had mower been serviced.

Hayter mower at PH waiting to be serviced.

A discussion took place about the need to check the mulching plate on mowers prior to use.

It was suggested that mowers have a sign attached to remind people.

Reminder that pathways should be a minimum of 2 meters wide.

Communications

Report circulated prior to meeting.

RC has updated website with shop news and has updated 'Absent Friends'.

There appear to have been some emails looking like they were from MC.

Emails like this can be reported to 'Report Phishing.'

The Facebook page seems to be going well. Lots of interest in the recent post about plant supports.

RA would like it to be more interactive as currently, only the 4 people with permission can post. Unfortunately, it is not easy to change this.

Shop

The shop is doing well. Takings are approximately £250 - £600 per week.

Recent delivery of topsoil.

New Sumup machine has been purchased. New machine does not rely on use of a mobile phone for internet.

We currently have 25 associate members. Membership forms are in the shop.

RC will put something on the website asking people to stay away from shop if they have COVID symptoms or generally feel unwell.

A.O.B.

PL has passed on some information about the trustee role.

He also has a couple of suggestions for rule changes.

JK will forward suggestions to AD who will draft something – this can be discussed at the next committee meeting.

PL suggested we do a final email about seed potatoes. RC will action.

There will be a cup awarded for the prettiest plot - in memory of Carole Phamplatt. LG will arrange for cup to be engraved.

Everyone present was happy with the revised 'Neglectd Plot' form.

RW suggested that plots can be checked soon to enable site reps to contact people who have yet to make a start for this season.

Next Meeting

Wednesday 8th May

7.30 in the TAR

**Summary of SHAGS Committee Reports for
April 2024**

Chairman's Report

(Mike Cobley)

It has been a hard month with the sad news that Marcia Dorey had passed away. She had been a hard working site rep along with her husband Roger, looking after Harpenden Rise ploholders, organising manure deliveries and coping with truculent neighbours, who complained about car parking spaces. Our condolences to Roger, Harriet and her sister and her family. Harriet is unsure whether they can carry on as site reps, whilst Roger is still unwell. Carole's private cremation was held on Thursday 28th March, with just her sons Matthew and Andrew in attendance. The brass plaque is now in place on the memorial bench opposite the TAR. An end of an era ...

The bright Spring weather interspersed showers throughout March has brought most of the sites back into action. At the recent meeting with Harpenden Town Council, the first item for discussion was straight away into complaints about bonfires, especially one at PH. Please try to persuade your ploholders to look which way the smoke blows, take appropriate action and light them at the end of the day. Our grant has been approved for 2024 and we will have about 40 hours of Rangers time again this year.

A reminder for water meter readings please. If you have not passed on the info to Jane with the reading when the water was turned back on, please do so quickly as Castle Water are estimating our bills and seem unable to understand that our water is cut off November to March each year.

If you have any site improvement projects requiring funds, please bring details to April's meeting.

The paperwork to rationalise our Bank accounting is now in the process of being changed. Barclays (Shop) a/c will have Steve Case as signatory. Our new Trustees will be added to the mandate for our HSBC a/c and Harpenden Building Society. I have tried to shortcut the death certificate problems by just making it a change of signatures. It had been difficult for Carole's sons to get a certificate issued.

Treasurer's Report

Paymaster Update from Alex

The bank account looks healthy following the renewal payments. As of 2nd April, the balance of the account is £30,862.

Just a reminder that any member, or committee member, who has expenses that they want to be reimbursed for, please can they send me a copy of their receipts (and bank details if they haven't been paid before). I will then arrange payment by bank transfer.

On a similar vein, I seem to have got access to the Castle Water portal. I can now submit meter readings whenever we like. If you do have a reading, please email me and I will submit on our behalf. Castle Water bill us monthly, whatever we do, so meter readings just bring the bills closer in line with reality. I have little faith in the accuracy of anything to do with Castle Water; it will take me time to get used to their 'working practices'.

This month has mainly been payments into the society bank account. The only payments out have been for expenses to a few members and the usual Castle Water and Eon monthly payments.

I have had no requests for the RHS affiliation membership cards. Please let me know if you want to take advantage of the 50% entry fee for 2 at any RHS garden.

Sites:

Aldwickbury (AB)

(Roger White /Hazel Upton/Richard Mottram)

Two new taps have been fitted, and the site water was turned back on on the 1st April.

Water Meter Reading **1041**

One vehicle was stuck in the mud on the lower south side track but fortunately this did manage to get out with the help of other ploholders.

There has been some activity on the site but we do have quite a few plots where the ploholder has yet to emerge from 'hibernation', these plots will need monitoring and hopefully some dryer conditions will encourage more people out soon.

Plot 10 has not been renewed due to ill health. Unfortunately this plot is very overgrown so spraying is probably the only option to recover it.

Churchfield (CH)

(Keith Davison)

Cross Lane (CL)

(Stephan Barnard / Rosie Poyser)

Theft of two trees from plot 48. Plot 48 was taken over by new tenants in autumn when they mowed the grass and then left it for the winter. They returned to find two of their three trees had been dug up. Machinery Cross lane has put Stephan down as machine rep for the site. One of the first changes that we would like to agree is machine inductions. I would like to ensure that all users of machines have had an induction. We have removed all two stroke from the machine shed as our users are not capable of treating them correctly. I have tested all the machines and thanks to Roger they all were in good order. (With the exception of the mower that is put aside and marked as not working.) Visiting Piggott's Hill machine container showed us a better way to organise the container. We have re-arranged our container such that it is now similar. This layout makes moving machinery in/out much easier. Composting toilet Plot holders have mentioned the lack of loo roll for the composting toilet. I am not sure what the arrangement is for this. For now, I just donated one from our house. Plots Plot 51 has a lot of junk left by the tenant. The ex-tenant has declined to remove the junk on the basis there was a load of junk when he took on the plot. Thanks to Alex for offer of help to remove the junk. Together we will sort the plot out. Learning from this it's important that when a plot is handed over its junk free and the new tenant is clear that they have taken on a junk free plot. Plot 28 was made vacant and is now re-let. Thanks again to Alex for all his work on turning this one around quickly, and to Rosemary for finding the new tenant. We have a plot 33 which is now in good condition and so it would be good to re-let this before it becomes a jungle. A number of plots are being neglected. As site reps we will chat with the tenant to see what the plans are. Ultimately if no action is taken, we will need to engage with the eviction process. Ploy tunnel request We have a poly-tunnel request. It's a pretty much within the rules and I see this as a positive addition to the site. Water has been turned back on and meter reading have been sent. The water stopcock issue has been sorted and did not require Affinity water. It turned out to be the way I turned the stop-cock off. Thanks to Steve for helping with removing the tap assembly such that I could take it home and repair it. Public involvement The wild flower meadow is in bloom with lots of cow slips. Several members of the public have commented of how they love to see these wild flowers when they walk up cross lane. Access Vehicular access to the allotment is becoming difficult. One of our plot holders is moving and took their car to collect items from their plot. They reported "Abuse from horse riders and dog walkers on the way up". Budget request We would like a budget for the following items Water taps, Hozelock connectors, and end stops from Amazon. I would like to make all our taps work without dripping and become standard. Honesty box to bolt to the side of our metal container. This is for Manure. We would like to discuss

Manure payments / ordering at the next meeting.

Replacement water butt.

Harpenden Rise (HR)

(TBC)

Oakley Road (OR)

(Rod Cooley)

- A huge thank you to Stephan Barnard for helping to clear plot 3 at Oakley Road by removing the green and black council bins left on it. One of the bins was full of old used black landscaping sheeting and the other bin was full of water.
- Plot 3 is now almost cleared of rubbish.
- Plot 11 has been almost cleared of rubbish and will soon be in shape for covering with the black plastic sheeting procured to cover it. Pegs to secure the black plastic sheeting have to be procured. I will check what is required.
- All OR plot rentals have been renewed and there are now only two plots at OR without a tenant: Plot 3 and plot 11.
- The site water was turned on, on 27th March 2024, and all plot holder were informed.

- Castle Water requested a meter reading was sent to them. After discussing their request with Alex Davis I submitted our meter reading of 2277, which was the same as when I turned it off in November 2023.
- Thank you to Roger White for giving the OR site a second strimmer battery.

Piggottshill (PH)

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

A couple of bright and dry days gave a chance to clear up some of our neglected plots and burn off brambles and some of the site rubbish. On 24th there was one small bonfire on site during the afternoon, yet one of the neighbours complained about smoke affecting their washing. Somewhere in history there used to be a bye law about putting out your washing on a Sunday! Time to bring that back? ... The tool shed at the bottom of the site was inaccessible when the combination lock failed, but that has been removed and replaced with a standard padlock that has the same key as the gates. The green half container has a wonky door making it hard to close sometimes, so we are now looking to replace the doors - around £850 plus fitting.

Along the fence in Dark Lane where the brambles were cleared, we propose to plant a few trees as a screen, Rowan, Crab apple and perhaps two small cherry trees to replace the big tree recently cut down. HCC are offering trees to households, so perhaps we can get included in the deal?

Sibley Ave (SA)

(Peter & Helen Loveland)

Despite the seemingly endless rain and sodden soil, the site is showing signs of cultivation - potatoes, broad beans etc. Plot 3A has been taken over by existing plot holders who have a good track record in cultivating their current plot. There has been some success in mowing the main tracks and several plot holders have been using their own battery powered strimmers. The search for the missing battery for our Stiga mower continues. In the meantime, we have the loan of a spare battery from Piggottshill site. The arrangements for charging the battery have changed; one of the plot holders has agreed to charge it every Friday. The plot holders have been informed. The water has been turned on. There was no leakage over the winter.

Top Street Way (TW)

(Mike Lawford)

We had our bi-annual site bonfire on Sunday 24th March. A very thorough burn-through - and I'm not aware of any complaints from our neighbours. We were helped by a more favourable wind direction this time, in addition to putting out advanced warnings on the surrounding roads' WhatsApp groups.



Castle Water advised of a failed attempt to read our meter with the generic reason “unreasonable additional steps being necessary to clear obstructions”. Alex was able to contact a representative who, despite not knowing the exact reason, stated that if there is a locked gate to get through, they won’t try to access it. So, I can only presume they didn’t want to leap over the low metal entrance gate to reach the manhole cover two feet in! I can’t believe that previously the gate has always fortuitously been unlocked, but Alex has advised them to contact us in advance next time so that we can ensure access and avoid a stated £70 fine!

Our battery mower’s grass diverter has had a small chunk lopped off it, presumably with it dropping out of position at some point and the blade hitting it. I’ve circulated advice to all users to check both before and after use that the diverter is properly in place – and will monitor accordingly. Has this happened to other sites’ mowers at all? Thanks to Roger for servicing the other mowers.

Glad to hear that all our plot holders have now paid their annual rent. The one plot that did become available as a result has already been taken over. There are four plots that I’m monitoring to ensure that signs of cultivation are soon seen. Otherwise, in the current optimum growing conditions they may very quickly become very difficult to recover, even to the minimum 50% cultivation benchmark.

Letting’s Secretary Report

(Alex Davis)

Lettings & Renewals

he renewal process is largely done. We have 15 people on the ‘debtors’ list i.e. still to pay. I expect there will be a small number who give up their plots and the rest will pay up, eventually. We have collected over £10,000 and there is the balance of just under £500 to be paid.

Thank you to all site reps for their help and support in getting the monies in.

I will chase the final 15 in co-operation with the site reps. Local knowledge is important at this stage as I don’t want to be chasing those suffering from ill-health, or who have promised to pay on return from holiday etc.

24 Associates have renewed so far. Associates can renew at any time in the shop. I wondered if this should be rung through the shop till? The main benefit of being an Associate is to be able to use the shop. If the main contact details are captured (so they can be kept up to date with Society news). Some associates remain members as they like to keep in touch, having had to give up their plot for some reason. Just a thought??

There has been quite a bit of activity with plots being given up and others taken up by new (or existing) plot holders. Plots have changed hands at Aldwickbury, Cross Lane and Piggottshill. There are also several plots in the process of being re-let. There is a plot available at Harpenden Rise and I am contacting those at the top of the waiting list. I agreed with Harriet that I would follow up, in the circumstances. Of the neglected plots list 3 plots (all at PH) have had no response from the plot holders. These will go on the list for re-letting in April. I have not included them in the stats for March as we have had no confirmation, either way, from the plot holders. Their rental runs out as of 1st April 2024.

Machinery Manager's report

(Roger White)

Apologies to TSW, the wet weather has defeated me again and I have been unable to find a dry day when I have had time to finish the annual machine checks on the site.

I have quote for a Weibang mower for CL (similar to the mower on PH). The cost for supply and delivery is £599.00. Does the committee approve?

The Stiga battery from SA has 'gone missing' so at present they have a battery on loan from OR.

The serial number of the missing battery is:

s/n **21DC5CAC 312712**

Please will site reps check their sites to see if this battery has been left at a different site by mistake.

(Roger White)

Please will all site reps send me a list and contact details of the main machine users on their sites.

UPDATED NEGLECTED PLOT ACTION LIST FROM ALEX

South Harpenden Allotment and Gardens Society
The Allotment Centre, Dark Lane, Southdown, Harpenden AL5 1QA

Neglected Plot Action List

Ref Plot –

Please carry out the following marked actions by xx Date xx or you risk having your tenancy terminated:

- Remove all prohibited materials from the plot, paths and headlands. These may include rubber-backed carpet, tyres of any kind, barbed/razor Wire; asbestos; corrugated Iron; glass (discuss with Site Rep.); cement or concrete; building rubble; sheet metal (or any other non-compostable rubbish or waste).

- Trim back any bushes on the plot and headlands that may be obstructing communal paths.

- Cultivate at least 50% of the plot. Put measures into place to control weeds so they do not cause a nuisance to other tenants.
- Tidy away all tools and store all tools and equipment safely. Any garden chemicals should be stored out of sight. Remember, no poisonous chemicals may be stored on the site.
- Maintain compost heaps in a tidy, reasonable condition.
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Repair and maintain any structures on the plot. Sheds and polytunnels must be kept well maintained, in good condition, and must be securely anchored and not be an inconvenience to adjacent plot holders.

PROCESS

Site reps or any committee member to check plots on their site in April, July and November and a list of neglected plots to be sent to the committee. Site Reps may speak informally with the plothead in person if they feel able to do so.

Message to be sent to the plot holder from the committee to determine why the plothead is having problems maintaining their plot and asking them to meet with the site rep or a member of the committee.

Action list to be agreed with the plot holder in writing and a date established for remedial action to be completed (usually 6 weeks from the date of the first message).

Shop

(Steve Case)

Communications and Webmaster

(Rod Cooley)

- The shop news has been further updated on the website and information sent to all members.
- Carole Pamphlett was added to the website “absent friends” section
- Various emails have been sent to all members including an email about Marcia Dorey
- The committee and site rep contact table needs to be updated after the passing of poor Marcia, once we know what modifications are required.

Social media – Facebook

(Rachel Andrews)

Date of next meeting

Wednesday 8th May – 7.30 in the TAR

