

S.H.A.G.S Committee Meeting – 8th November 2023 held in Ted Allen Room

Minutes

In Attendance: Mike Cobby (MC) Chair; Carole Pamphlett (CP) Treasurer; Jane Keech (JK) Secretary; Alex Davies (AD); Rod Cooley (RC); Stephan Barnard (SB); Rachel Andrew (RA); Rich Waight (RW); Mike Lawford (ML); Steve Case (SC); Peter Loveland (PL); Helen Loveland (HL)

Apologies: Hazel Upton; Fraser Gordon; Marcia Dorey; Harriet Dorey; Linda Gahagan; Rosemary Poyser; Geoff Bateman; Syd Marvell

Review of minutes from the last meeting – minutes were approved. (HU did send apologies for the last meeting)

Most actions have been undertaken. **Outstanding action - Wording to be agreed clarifying using paid help on plots. Once agreed, plot holders will be notified.**

A plaque will be bought for Roger Glanville who recently passed away.

The following wording was agreed – Roger Glanville – 1949-2023

Society Secretary and Loyal Friend

Finance:

Report circulated prior to the meeting.

A discussion took place about possible banking options.

Action – MC will go to Barclays Bank in St Albans to pay in a cheque and to get paperwork for online banking.

Water meter readings have been submitted – except for PH. Water needed to be on until after the bonfire.

Action - MC will give meter reading to CP.

There is currently a machinery sale on so this could be a good time to buy new machines.

Action – RW will liaise with Tim

Site Matters

Reports were circulated prior to the meeting.

RC asked if there was an update on the stone bank at OR.

Action – MC will discuss with Tim.

RC has emailed RW about a strimmer that is not working.

Action – RW will pop to site at OR to look at strimmer

There are currently more vacant plots at OR than other sites.

At the last site reps meeting, it was agreed that an inspection would take place in December. If work isn't carried out on neglected plots, plot holders may not be invited to renew next year.

This would allow plots to be re-let at the start of season.

Action – MC to put details in the December Newsletter.

Action- JK to send 'Neglected Plot' letter template to site reps.

Action - MC asked all site reps to look at standpipes and to notify him if any of the wooden posts are rotten.

Lettings

Letting summary circulated prior to meeting.

October is usually a quiet month. There are a few vacant plots across the sites.

Machinery

Good reports about the battery mowers.

Mulching plate must be on unless grass box is being used.

Mulching plate should be checked before machine is started.

It is very important that the back of the mower is not left open and should never be tied open with string.

Petrol strimmers are gradually being removed from each site.

A battery strimmer may be purchased for each site and possibly a small battery mower for OR.

It was agreed that we still need more batteries and chargers.

The estimated cost to charge a battery is 7p- 10p (based on calculations provided by ML and SB) – far more cost effective than purchasing solar panels.

Action – RW to get quote for additional batteries.

Action – CP will work out budget for next year to see how much can be spent on machinery.

Communications

Report circulated prior to meeting.

Facebook

RA reported that all everything is going well. Shop price list and bonfire pictures have been added.

Shop

It has been a quiet month. SC has ordered 'over wintering broad beans' at a very good price.

SC asked about electricity etc. for shop. The society pays for electricity and water. The shop does not need to be registered for VAT as it is not a business.

The shop pays a donation to society.

A discussion took place about how much the shop donates to society and what the donation is for. MC clarified that the aim of the shop is to sell things at a reasonable price.

There will be a stock take in December. This should be much easier now as SC has rearranged the stock and has new lists.

The shop will be open on Sunday 3rd December and will then close until Sunday 21st January.

A.O.B.

Tree pruning – RA has had emails from 9 people, but she is not sure which sites they are from.

RA suggested that site reps email plot holders to see who is interested.

It was suggested that a plot at PH could be used as it has a variety of trees on it.

When the details have been confirmed, **MC will put information in the newsletter.**

Paid help on plots.

A further discussion took place about using paid help on plots.

ML and PL had suggestions for wording.

MC will put something together and when everything has been agreed, the information will be circulated to members.

Date of next meeting Wednesday 13th December

**Summary of SHAGS Committee Reports for
November 2023**

Chairman's Report

(Mike Cobley)

We were all saddened to hear that Roger Glanville had died so quickly and thankfully his last days were in a hospice. I hope we can get a good few committee members together for the funeral on 15th. I will arrange for a brass plaque to be engraved to add to the memorial bench when I have been able to find out how old he was.

On 22nd November we are due to have our meeting with the new members of HTC Allotments Working Party when we will hear the results of the annual inspection back in July. There could be some information on our 2024 grant. The information on large trees has been forwarded and we await a decision whether HTC will reconsider carrying out major reduction work on healthy tree specimens. We also need to look to what works maintenance works will be required in 2024, so please check on gates, fences and security, water supply standpipes and taps.

Bonfire complaints came in on the very first day of bonfire season. It was a very nice day and perhaps we need to consider a little more guidance, rather than outright rule changes. Certainly later in the day if the weather is nice, but our current rules state that no fires should be left burning and should be extinguished and not left unattended. With some of our big bonfires for 5th November in previous years they have been hot enough to revive for several days afterwards. There are now many local FB pages so try letting neighbours know if a big bonfire is expected, so windows can be closed if necessary.

From the Site Rep meeting in April, we did agree to bring forward the neglected plot inspections to December so that a plot holder can be asked to carry out remedial work. or agree a plan, otherwise they

could risk not getting asked to renew in March and any vacated plot can be re-let early in the season instead of lingering on until late summer. A reminder will go out to all plotheolders in the next few weeks.

We need to finalise the guidance notes for plotheolders paying for work to be done on their plots. It is vital that there is no involvement of our site reps in supervision work.

PIGGOTTSHILL REPORT:

A successful 5th November bonfire was held on Sunday with 30+ attending. To pre-empt neighbours' complaints Rachel messaged the local FB group advising the bonfire would be held and extended an invitation to come along, but no-one came and so far no complaints Thanks to Geoff, Rich & Alex for their help gathering materials and bonfire building over the weekend.

The neighbour who destroyed the elder tree on our site, then had a builder working from a cherry picker on our side of the fence and cleared most of the blackberry bushes has had a letter from HTC advising them that the work could be classed as criminal damage. An apology would have been nice. There has been some further work carried out at the house and the rubbish and concrete waste was dumped over our fence.

Amongst jobs for 2024 are some fencing repairs along the boundary with these Dark Lane houses. There are several taps to replace this winter and several of our standpipe supports are in poor order.

Currently there are 4 or 5 plots which are under supervision where little or no work has been carried out throughout this year and from comments from the HTC inspection we do need to be more proactive to keep plots up to our required standard. 50% cultivation is our best request to get plotheolders' action.

Treasurer's Report

(Carole Pamphlett)

Our current bank balance stands at £24,118.03, but we started the year with £21,314.38 which means we have a surplus of £2,803.65 until the end of the year. But I have no major bills to pay, so our expenditure should be covered by our income.

I'm putting together our grant application for next year which I have to present to HTC at the allotment working party meeting later in November.

As always I continue to monitor the shop account and the current balance stands at £17,139.46 but again, we started the year with £19,800.77 but we have paid 2 years donation to SHAGS amount to £1,000.00. But we will not know if the shop has made a profit this year until we do the stock take in January when the shop is closed for Christmas

Sites:

Aldwickbury (AB)

(Roger White /Hazel Upton/Richard Mottram)

The site pond has finally been constructed. This will hopefully encourage wildlife and the site environment.

I found out just yesterday that Patrick Fisher (Plot 39) is leaving the Harpenden area in the next two weeks and therefore is giving up his plot. Patrick has I think been a plot holder on Aldwickbury since the 1960's and he wishes to thank the Society for everything they have done to manage the sites and support the plotheolders over many years.

The site water has been turned off, **meter reading is 1041**. This is a 40% reduction compared to 2022.

Churchfield (CH)

(Keith Davison)

- The poor weather over the last few weeks has meant that little work has been carried out by plotheholders. The majority of these works have been tidying up and preparing their plots for next year's cultivation.
- The plotheholders of CF21 have decided to vacate their plot, primarily due to age, fitness and for family reasons. They have held this plot for about 15 years and we were sad to see them leave us. One of the ladies has sent a letter to the Society, in which she offered her thanks to the Society and said that their plot had given her a lot of enjoyment and happiness over those years. Our Lettings Secretary is in the process of giving this vacant plot to another person that is on our waiting list. It's pleasing that despite several people vacating their plots this year, the Churchfield site still continues to be 100% occupied.
- One of our plotheholders who had been instructed to carry out remedial works to the headland of Plot CF9. The plotheholder had now completed these works and has cleared the non-conformances. I have advised our Chairman and he has contacted HTC, who will be checking this work. Subsequently they will advise the adjacent householder who had made a complaint.
- On the 1st November: I isolated the Cold Water main supplying the allotment site and then took a water meter reading. I have passed on the details to our Treasurer for her records.

Cross Lane (CL)

(Stephan Barnard / Rosie Poyser)

Plot 21: This plot was abandoned and has now changed hands and I expect will be back under control very shortly. The change of hands has been by agreement and was not part of the eviction process. We have one other plot that needs to be actively engaged to ensure that the plot follows the site rules.

Rubber tyres: I have noticed a number of Rubber tyres on our site, and will start to ensure that these are removed from the allotment.

Wild flower meadow: This has not been cut by the council this year. We found that we could do this ourselves but that would add wear and tear on the push strimmer. With the absence of the council cutting and not wishing to cut the entire area we have cut a set of interconnecting paths that is somewhere between a maze and a very confusing walkway. I thought having some of it cut would be good and families with young children can explore the random paths. Next year if the council want us to cut it I would be happy to do this but maintenance of the strimmer should be considered. If we were to maintain it, I would like to do the first cut a maze and then in early spring give it its final cut.

Harpenden Rise (HR)

(Marcia & Roger Dorey)

The site goes along well with everything going to sleep. Helpers have kindly kept the grass under control and we hope to be well enough to see to everything again soon. I have informed plotheholders that we mean to change the gate code in the spring and asked everyone to get into the habit of scrambling the

open padlock after entering now. We are about to receive our loads of manure from a farmer friend of mine. Deliveries will commence as soon as the farmer is available to do it.

Oakley Road (OR)

(Rod Cooley)

- Affinity water was contacted about the water leak into the Oakley Road allotment site and the leak has now been fixed. It is not clear whether contacting Affinity water fixed it or whether Carole's contact with Castle Water fixed it but it is an excellent result.
- The site water meter reading has not been turned off yet. When should it be turned off, please?
- The Oakley Road plot holders have been consulted on which trees and any hedges need pruning on site and a document showing these has been created and submitted.
- A request has been sent to a plot holder to tidy their plot in order to prevent it becoming overwhelmed by weeds. The other plot holders have been asked to tidy their plots.
- **Can I please ask when the stone bank will be removed from the rear of plot 11?** There are no objections to this being removed, provided adjacent plots are not disturbed.
- The heap of wood from the pruned buddleia on plot 11 is being gradually removed to avoid the need to burn it. It was very large and will burn for hours. However, it is also very wet.
- **Some help is required on the OR site battery strimmer as the strim line does not feed out correctly.**
- Thanks go to Guy Graham for cutting the site grass.
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Piggottshill (PH)

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

See report from Mike Cobley – part of chairman's report

Sibley Ave (SA)

(Peter & Helen Loveland)

Most plot holders are harvesting their final crops and readying things for the Winter but the current very wet weather is slowing things down a bit. The grass continues to grow but is too wet to mow so some strimming is being attempted. We have had a delivery of (free) chippings for use as a mulch and/or surfacing for paths. The water will be turned off in the next week or two.

Top Street Way (TW)

(Mike Lawford)

The highlight of the last two months was of course receiving the best site cup for the first time in twenty years at the awards evening.

On the Sunday after that we held a little celebration on site, finally getting around to formally opening the new shed and then sharing the cup around and partaking of some refreshments.



We then had our autumn site bonfire which successfully burnt up a lot of pruning of branches, bushes and plants accumulated through the summer.

However, as has already been circulated separately to all committee members, there were some complaints received at the time from a few of our neighbours both in person, on social media and I understand directly to the Chairman. I believe I covered the circumstances and our proposed actions in my separate update so won't repeat that here.

Our annual manure delivery was completed just before the latest deluge, so the tractor didn't churn up the entrance drive too much at all. Steady progress is now being made by plot holders to transfer it to their various plots.



It was good to see the hedges along the entrance way had been given their yearly trim by the council contractors – very much appreciated.

Letting's Secretary Report

(Alex Davis)

Lettings

Very little letting activity in the past month. A few plots being given up as the growing season comes to an end. A trickle of interest from new plot holders, there are also some existing plot holders who want to take on an additional plot.

Overall, we have 5.5 plots available across the 8 sites. 4.5 of these have been available for a while, these are quite overgrown. (Oakley Road 2.5 plots available; 1 at Piggottshill, 1 at Cross Lane).

A plot is in the process of being given up at Churchfield. It is likely that we will find a new tenant for this plot in the next few months.

There are some let plots that are looking a bit overgrown.

Actions

1. We have agreed that neglected plots will not be invited to renew next year. Please can Site Reps let me know if they have any plots in this category by the 28 January 2024.
2. We still need to agree the precise wording of the guidance to plot holders around the use of contractors, so that this can be posted on the web site. Hopefully we can finalise this on Wednesday.

Machinery Manager's report

(Roger White)

Machinery Report – Nov 2023

Preliminary pre-winter checks have been made to almost all sites in the last 2 weeks to determine which machines will need to be sent away to Herts Garden Machinery for repair.

Currently five have been identified, two at CL, the DR wheeled strimmer and the AL-KO mower and three at PH, the DR wheeled strimmer, the Hayter mower from the lower shed and the small hedge trimmer. The AL-KO mower at Churchfield may also need to be sent away.

Servicing of the other machines will hopefully start next week with the intention of trying to complete this before Christmas. If any site rep is aware of other problems with their site machines please let me know.

Stiga machines are currently reduced in price in their winter sale, if we are planning to purchase any new battery machines for 2024 now may be the best time to place an order.

Shop

(Steve Case)

Communications and Webmaster

(Rod Cooley)

- The website has been updated to reflect current status.
- Emails have been sent to plot holders on different sites.
- Steve Case's excellent shop information has been out on the society website.
- All of the member photographs from the awards evening have been put onto the society website.
- All of the photo competition winner photographs and the non-winning photographs have been added to the society website.
- Peter Loveland's updated potato information for 2024 has been put on the society website and corresponding words put on the website opening page. This is a very comprehensive document.
- Suggested wording for the paid contractor policy has been submitted for feedback. It would be good for the role of the site rep in this policy to be discussed and any modifications fed back to be included in the paid contractor policy, so that it can be sent to all plot holders.
- I am scheduled to have an operation on 15th November 2023 so I may be incapacitated for a while afterwards.

Social media – Facebook

(Rachel Andrews)

Next meeting – Wednesday 13th December 2023

