

S.H.A.G.S Committee Meeting – 13th September 2023 held in Ted Allen Room

Minutes

In Attendance: Mike Cobley (MC) Chair; Carole Pamphlett (CP) Treasurer; Jane Keech (JK) Secretary; Rod Cooley (RC); Linda Gahagan (LG); Stephan Barnard (SB); Rachel Andrew (RA); Rosemary Poyser (RP); Keith Davison (KD); Rich Waight (RW); Mike Lawford (ML); Geoff Bateman (GB); Steve Case (SC)

Apologies: Alex Davies, Fraser Gordon; Marcia Dorey; Harriet Dorey; Roger White

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

Finance:

Report circulated prior to the meeting.

CP has also been busy sorting out a water leak at Oakley Road.

Site Matters

Reports were circulated prior to the meeting. MC has been in discussion with Tim from HTC following incidents with people from a house close to the site. Previously, they chopped down an Elder Tree that was on the allotment site. More recently, they allowed a cherry picker on to the allotment site in order to do roof repairs to their house. A large area of blackberry bushes has also been hacked down to ground level.

There have also been reports of someone burning a shed causing a lot of smoke and upsetting neighbours.

Cross Lane has been cut back but as yet, the flower meadow at CL site has not been cut.

Action - MC will liaise with HTC.

There are ongoing issues with a plot holder who, despite several requests, has made no attempt to clear the bushes and compost area blocking the headland path.

Action – JK will resent email with ‘Read Receipt’. JK will cc Keith Davison and Mike Cobley.

Brief discussion about recent pond applications that have been approved.

Plot PH 22 has a small pond, but it appears the original application was approved for PH24

Action – JK will notify plot holders / Alex.

Lettings

Letting summary circulated prior to meeting.

Machinery

No report this time.

Communications

Report circulated prior to meeting.

It was agreed that Geoff etc. will continue with The Plot so Far. Possibly to be produced twice per year.

A discussion took place about the possibility of printing some copies to give to new plot holders and to be available in the shop (as we have done previously)

CP had some costings. 100 copies - £218.14.

Action – Geoff will also get some costings.

Action – Rod to liaise with Mike and Alex regarding paid help on plots. Rod to send email to all plot holders and put information on website.

Rod has uploaded all entries for the photo competition.

Winning photos will be printed (A4 size) and will be on display at the awards evening. The remaining photos will be used to make a collage. Photos will be uploaded to website.

Facebook

Action – Rachel to investigate having Facebook link to The Plot so Far

Shop

It has been a slow month. Kings delivered bulbs to Carole's house but in future, they will be delivered to Steve. There were some items missing but we have had credit for these items.

Awards evening.

Everything is in hand for the awards evening which will take place on Friday 29th September 2023.

Action - Linda will order sandwiches / drinks etc.

Action - Rod will print / mount photos.

Winners will receive certificate and voucher for shop (first to third place)

There has been a request to bring children to the awards evening – there were no objections to this request.

A.O.B.

Rachel is arranging for someone to demonstrate how to prune fruit trees. Details to be confirmed but likely to have demonstrations at PH, CL, SA, HR. Probably November?

The cost will be £30 per hour. This is likely to be paid for between the attendees but could possibly be subsidised by the society.

Action – Rachel to confirm details and liaise with Rod who will email all plot holders. Plot holders can liaise with site reps if they would like to attend.

There have been reports of a 'flasher' in the area close to Grove School/Aldwickbury site. Police are aware. There have been requests to put up a new fence by gate to Alwickbury site.

Action – Further discussions to take place.

Shop painting working party to take place on Sunday 24th September – 10.00 – 12.00 followed by BBQ with burgers and beer.

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

Chairman's Report

(Mike Cobley)

I took up the question of running a Disability Discrimination Assessment with HTC and in their opinion it would not be necessary and it is not one of their requirements so hopefully no further action will be required. To have fulfilled the requirements we would have had to canvass all our existing membership and ask personal questions of age, gender, religion, and any current disability in order to match the profile of the population of Harpenden.

Currently the only information that we require is name, address, contact phone number and if the applicant is female, her preferred title Miss, Ms or Mrs.

If there had to be provision of a disabled accessible plot the only practical site currently would be at PH with level access to all parts and good car parking. However we would then have to consider providing a disabled toilet, accessible for a wheelchair user would mean a turning circle of 1.5m radius within the unit, non slip flooring, suitable wc pan, handrails, alarm system, hot water system, hand dryer, hygienic waste disposal equipment usually by a hygiene cleaning company. It would be too expensive for SHAGS to finance a project of this magnitude, so we would have to seek funding from HTC and under current financial pressure this is unlikely to be considered in the immediate future.

No update yet on dates for the hedge cutting contract by J O Connor but this has brought up again the loss of headland pathways around our sites, with several incursions right up to the boundaries by some plottolders. There is a complaint at CF from a neighbour via HTC. In a previous newsletter there was a reminder to plottolders, which appears to have been ignored, so SRs should check all headland paths and take appropriate action to get the obstacles removed.

The list of large trees on site that would benefit from professional pruning will be forwarded to HTC later this month.

There has been a serious trespass incident at PH with a contractor on site working on an adjoining house. HTC are following up with the contractor and house owner, but it has highlighted site security, where gates were left unlocked at the time. (See PH site report)

PH SITE REPORT

To date one plottolder (PH77) has received notice under the neglected plot procedure, No work has been attempted since this time last year. There are 5 plots also needing urgent attention with little or no work obvious at present. The HTC inspection highlighted our procedure so we have to be more proactive, especially on the 50% cultivation requirement.

There have been two serious trespass incidents recently, with a neighbour cutting down an elder tree overhanging the footpath between our site and their property. Some years previously the householder's grandson was caught on site hacking the tree and sent on his way and it has taken 4/5 years to get the tree into shape and for the first time it was laden with elderberries for a bumper crop. HTC have been informed and were following up the incident, but then on 18th August a contractor was on site with a hydraulic platform, having cleared the fruit laden blackberry bushes along the fence line. HTC were informed and Tim was on site within 30 minutes of our call. The contractor was very apologetic but had been told by the neighbour that access had been arranged - NOT ! On my return from holiday there was yet another complaint from St Albans DC about a reported bonfire on site. On investigation no plottolders had been identified as the culprits, but the adjoining neighbour had taken down a shed and burnt it in their garden. HTC have informed SADC but no apology or reply received.

We hope to have a work party on SUNDAY 24th SEPTEMBER to repaint the exterior woodwork on the shop, with some prep work on Saturday with the front of the shop treated and the sun blind taken down. If the weather is kind we hope to have a bbq for the volunteers after the shop has closed.

Machinery update. All mowers are working but await a service and some blades require sharpening. Our DR strimmer has had the rotor head replaced as it had worn through, but when tested the drive control cable snapped so had to be replaced. It was due to be collected on Friday 8th. Broken spring on our Stiga cultivator awaiting spares and we have inherited a similar machine from SA where it was no longer required, but this has no drive, so requires investigation.

Treasurer's Report

(Carole Pamphlett)

A quiet time of the year on the finance side. Our current bank balance stands at £25,026.05 which include the balance at the start of the year which was £21,314.38, this means we have £3,711.67 in hand to the end of the year. I have paid out all our bills so far but nothing major. We have had a few new lettings but most of these have just been just the £15.00 joining fee.

The shop is also quite at the moment, I think with a lot of people on holiday and too hot to do much on their plot, so not going into the shop.

There was a lot of talk this month about Disability Discrimination Assessment, but just a reminder all plot holders agree to our GDPR privacy statement which says we only hold contact details given at the time of joining and are not passed on to any other agency. This is on our website.

Sites:

Aldwickbury (AB)

(Roger White /Hazel Upton/Richard Mottram)

Churchfield (CH)

(Keith Davison)

- Many of the plot holders are getting the benefit of all their hard work on their plots, who continue to achieve a large selection of good quality vegetables and fruit.
- The new battery strimmer is now on site, thanks to our Machinery Manager reinstalling the strimmer cord that had been incorrectly fitted. The machine works very well and is a great benefit to our site.
- The ploholders of Plot CF31B had not responded to a termination letter from our Lettings Secretary, so the plot was offered to a person on the waiting list and we now have a new plot holder on CF31B.
- The ploholder of CF12 has had to vacate his plot, primarily due to his age and fitness. He had held this plot for about 20 years and we were sad to see him leave us. He offered his thanks to the Society and said that his plot had given him a lot of enjoyment and happiness over those years. I advised our Lettings Secretary of the vacant plot and he offered the CF12 to another person on our waiting list, who is now the new ploholder. It's pleasing that the Churchfield site continues to be 100% occupied.
- One of our ploholders carried out remedial works, as instructed, to the headland of Plot CF8. The ploholder had also been instructed to carry out remedial works to the headland on Plot CF9, to clear non-conformances as soon as possible, which he has not carried out. Last week the Society sent a letter to him to carry out the works required within 10 days.

· I have produced a plan of the Churchfield site, marked up to show where hedges, trees and perimeter vegetation are in need of severe cutting back. This has been passed on to our Chairman for his meeting on site with HTC, later this week.

Cross Lane (CL)

(Stephan Barnard / Rosie Poyser)

Harpenden Rise (HR)

(Marcia & Roger Dorey)

In a previous report I mentioned, 2 ploholders are awaiting for direction from me for their autumn gardening & tidying procedures. One of those plot holders has made an effort but said she had been unwell. Most ploholders I believe, know that we have both been unwell this summer, thus unable to attend to grass cutting, hedgerows, and indeed our own plot in the usual way. We have had other plot holders grass cutting etc at their own discretion and we are extremely grateful for this.

Sadly it's possible that I seem to have had a few crops removed from my plot over the whole season and need to deal with this somehow. At present we have noticed that our large bed of sweetcorn has been a little depleted, there are knife marks in some places. This is not squirrel damage. I know no plot holder would do this & need to find out whether anyone else has noticed this problem, & I will warn the other ploholders via email about this situation. I am still thinking about how to deal with this and certainly am not sure I am right. If we decide to change the gate code we will let the Society know of the new number but we are still considering the matter as it may be kids climbing the fence rather than kids who have made a note of the code from a left open padlock, or popping in when they find the gate left open.

Oakley Road (OR)

(Rod Cooley)

- A water leak has been found from the water supply to the allotment site. The leak is located outside of the allotment site perimeter in the Oakley Road grass verge. Water is still leaking and flowing into the allotment, even with the water shut off at the site water meter.
- Castle Water have been informed and a document and compressed videos of the leak, plus its location, have been emailed to them. This will be followed through with a phone call to Castle Water.
- The site water meter reading has been submitted.
- The site water supply was turned back on, on 3rd September 2023 to allow plot holders to water their plants.
- 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.
- Requests were made to several plot holders to tidy their plots in order to prevent them becoming overwhelmed by weeds.

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)

Top Street Way (TW)

(Mike Lawford)

July / August Report (Bumper double month summer issue!)

Despite the changing extremes of sun, rain and then sun again I've seen lots of harvesting going on over the last two months – together with some monster sunflowers!

Unbelievably in the current heatwave my mind is turning to having a bonfire in a few weeks' time when we are again allowed to do so at the beginning of October – given there is a lot of material that has built up around the site from all the good work on plots through the summer months. This includes some impressive clearance work on two previously overgrown plots (Rotimi - Plot 34 & Nick - Plot 36) by their new owners.

e.g. Before (Plot 36)



After (Plot 36)



After (Plot 34)



In the spirit of other site's work on a communal orchard, Stephen Moss (Plot 27) has planted an apple tree on the edge of the unused bit of land beyond his plot in the far corner of the site (dwarf rooting stock of course!). For the time being he will be responsible for its maintenance and upkeep, but we may expand on this small start on some communal basis in the future.

It was very timely that for the council inspection back in July that our general shelter facility had been upgraded so they could make use of the recycled chairs and table (Karen - Plot 40b). I think though we've now raised their expectations for next year to the extent they'll be looking for accompanying refreshments to match! Anything to keep them happy with us as their tenants – which to be fair they seemed to be anyway which was very pleasing.



I've been trying to minimise the time there is no charged battery in the electric mower so it is ready for use, but I really feel we need a second battery so that I can charge the other without a) stopping it being used and b) me having to commute to the site more often.

Very excitingly we are looking forward to the awards evening at the end of September when for the first time in twenty years we pick up the best site cup (after the judging back in July). Rumours that we have

booked an open top bus to parade the trophy round the adjoining loop roads that back on to us is totally exaggerated. More likely we'll just put it in a wheelbarrow!

Finally, we nearly acquired a site mascot one afternoon recently when "Ziggy" the dog appeared wandering up the main site path, and we couldn't readily identify where at all she had come from. However, after a good bit of detective work ringing its dogwalker in Stotfold. we were able to reunite it with her owner who was visiting one the neighbouring houses.

(Emergency use of strimmer wire tied to Ziggy's collar and the shed!)



Letting's Secretary Report **Lettings**

(Alex Davis)

There has been a continuing consistent level of letting interest. A couple of plots have become available as plot holders have decided to resign following health issues. These are in the process of being re-let. Some of the available plots from last month have been let. Aldwickbury has had a busy August with the 3 available plots being taken up. The 2.5 available plots at Oakley Road are the main ones which are still available. The plots available at Piggottshill and Cross Lane are quite overgrown, so will be best for energetic new plot holders.

The Harpenden Rise Waiting list is now up to 19, and there are small waiting lists at Churchfield and Top Street Way.

I'd appreciate if we can agree on a communication to plot holders re the timing of the neglected plots inspection this autumn. Those plots judged to be neglected will not be invited to renew in February/March 2024 I think it best we give people plenty of notice, so that they have a chance to remedy in the autumn, rather than a mad panic dig in a cold and wet January!

Regards Alex

Machinery Manager's report

(Roger White)

Shop

(Steve Case)

Communications and Webmaster

(Rod Cooley)

- The website has been updated to reflect current status.
- Various emails have been sent to all members.
- Reminders for the closing date of the photo competition: Midnight on 10th September 2023 have been sent to all members.

- Photo competition entries are still being received.

Social media – Facebook

(Rachel Andrews)

From Geoff

Plan for *THE PLOT SO FAR*.....

The SHAGS newsletter, *The Plot So Far*, has for many years been issued once or twice a year to inform, and perhaps even entertain, members about allotment matters. A particular target audience currently is the new membership.

Having had almost no unsolicited feedback from the last three online issues, which I edited, I began to wonder if anyone actually looked at it, and whether I was producing it only for my own amusement. Should it therefore be abandoned (as it nearly was before I took it on), or changed in some way?

I asked Committee members for their comments. Only four replied. Those replies included very constructive suggestions, however. Therefore, on the basis of those replies and on discussions with the main regular contributors, I propose the following:

1. Continue with newsletter.
2. Continue without printed copies. Printed copies would be better, but too expensive. My earlier costings for photocopying locally were prohibitive. More recent costs from a printer were about £200 per issue, which I think is not very different from photocopying. However, we might make the occasional photocopy on request for anyone interested who is not on the internet or able to print (e.g. very old members).
3. Increase frequency of issues and modify content. An interesting suggestion was for more issues, but shorter and more topical, with information on current jobs to do, advice on particular crops or jobs such as plot restoration, some news/coming events, etc. “Advice” would be based mainly on local experience rather than “expert” advice. Best we can manage is twice a year, I think, around March and September. (I understand there have been two issues per year in the past.)
4. Incorporate it into/combine with Chairman’s report/newsletter. Chairman’s reports have been more frequent than *PSF*, and circulated directly to members (I think). This plan will depend on what our new Chairman has planned, of course.
5. Continue to inform members by email of availability. I think that Chairman’s reports are currently circulated to all members who have an email address. This would not be possible, I assume, with a bulky *PSF* package that includes photos. Members do receive a message to tell them when *PSF* is available, however. Is it possible to include, in that message, a “click here” button that would give immediate access? (That is how I access *Herts Advertiser*, for example.) Recipients with email addresses might also be asked to inform any non-online members whom they know, who may then request hard copies.
6. Alternate the editors. To keep it fresh (and because I spend part of each year out of the country), I suggest alternating editorship – Stephen Moss (Topstreet Way) may be willing. Does that raise Committee membership issues? (I seem to have two seats on the Committee, for editing and site-repping, neither of which may be necessary).

So, there will be a *PSF* next March, to coincide with rental renewals, and in approximately the same style as the previous three. Then we might try out a twice yearly issue, with more topical content, and see how it goes.

Geoff Bateman.

Date of next meeting - TBA