

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

**Chairman's Report**

**(Mike Cobley)**

Despite the weather we have had a couple of meetings with Tim Austin-Lomas from HTC looking at site maintenance projects required for 2023/2024

Working on our budget of just over £4000 this year from April we have had several bids for work to be done and one or two outstanding from 2022.

At Aldwickbury the entrance to the main gates is very restricted and the concrete posts and chain link fencing are in poor order. There has been an ongoing argument as to whose responsibility the woodland path through to Green Lane comes under, HTC or HCC. HTC have now agreed to undertake work on many trees in Harpenden and including this pathway. The initial request from AB site reps was to replace the fencing either sides of the gates but the quotes for the work were in excess of £2000. The proposal for discussion now is that the HTC Rangers as part of their woodland works in the summer would be to open up the entrance, widen the pathway and make the area more open. AB have approval for a manure compound, subject to a plan for siting and preparation work, The pond approved in 2022 has been dug out, but now awaits the butyl liner, then added costs for paving for the edges and suitable fencing. One outstanding job at OR from last year was to reduce the stone embankment along the Grove Rd boundary fence but it was unclear whether HCC would give permission for a grab lorry to run up on the grass verge for access over the fence. With last summer's dry weather the ground would have been so hard the truck would have left few marks. We hope that the work will be done this year, without antagonising HCC Highways approval/disapproval systems and just do it. We await an estimate from a local contractor, working out of Cross Farm. At PH funding has been approved for new safety handrails for the ramp and steps to the Ted Allen room. Last year the TAR and the shop had all new LED lighting installed and new outside lights replacing life expired fluorescent fittings. TW will get a new shed. CF will have a review of their shed requirements and may now have an additional shed to supplement the now too small metal shed. The close boarded fence along the rear of Co-Op carpark is in poor order and will require replacement, but prices received are in excess of £2,500 with current timber shortages and high prices, making it impractical out of this year's budget. SHAGS has money in the bank, but we should not be spending our money on HTC's boundaries.

At long last we have agreed a date for the Site Reps meeting as it is now 5 years since we last had one. In 2019 the meeting was cancelled in favour of the lecture on earthworms, then in 2020 and 2021 we were in lockdown and last year the meeting was cancelled as so few SRs were able to attend/ This year's meeting is booked for SATURDAY 18<sup>th</sup> MARCH and the maintenance programme will be up for further discussion then.

We now face another problem with our ageing committee, recent illnesses and accidents, so we must make an effort to recruit some of our younger members to join in with a view to taking over some of the principal roles within SHAGS.

We were saddened to hear of the death of Pauline Payne earlier in January. She had been unwell for most of the pandemic and had gone into a nursing home before Christmas. Our condolences to Joe, her husband and their son and daughter. The funeral was held on 8<sup>th</sup> February and a SHAGS team attended to support the family. R I P .

Best wishes also to Roger Glanville who is starting his course of treatment this week and Irene Boogerman who is having a rough time at present.

Finally, our thanks to Geoff Bateman for the latest 'Plot So Far~ and there have been many compliments, especially with added pictures this time

### **Treasurer's Report**

**(Carole Pamphlett)**

Not much happening this month, I've paid a few bills but only received £30.00 from two new plot holders. The current bank balance stands at £20,756.27 but we started the year with £21,314.38. We do not expect any major income until rent renewals.

As always, I monitor the Shop bank account, the current balance stands at £17,794.36, but Mike has placed a large seed order for over a thousand pounds, so I will have to pay that soon, then there will be the seed potatoes order to pay for later in the month.

I have notified Mike Lawford from TSW he was successful in his bid for a new shed, but the work will not start until the weather is better. I have also informed Hazel she has the go-ahead for a manure pen at AB, but I have had nothing back from her. Unfortunately I had to tell Keith from CF he was unsuccessful in his bid for a new shed at CF, we felt his costing was a bit unrealistic and he questioned when he needs such a big shed i.e. 20ft container. We agreed that Mike C, could start work on the new hand rail leading up to the TAR as this is more a H&S issue.

I'm sorry to say I'm a bit behind with the Year Accounts, as some of you may know I had a fall in the shop and ended up in Luton Hospital with stitches in the top of my head and had to wait two weeks for them to be removed. I think I will still have the bruises for Wednesday's meeting.

### **Sites:**

#### **Aldwickbury (AB)**

**(Roger White /Hazel Upton/Richard Mottram)**

#### **Churchfield (CH)**

**(Keith Davison)**

- Some plot holders are tending their plots, collecting produce and preparing plots ready for a start this coming spring.
- **Is there any news of the Society replacing our petrol-powered strimmer which is out of order, so that our plot holders are able to use a strimmer in the next couple of months.**
- The combination padlock to our entrance gate has become very unreliable, despite my efforts to keep it serviceable. Our plot holders have not been able to lock the gate at times, as the tumblers at times will neither engage or retract the levers inside. This padlock has been in constant use for about 3 years and is basically worn out and we require a replacement.

#### **Cross Lane (CL)**

**(Stephan Barnard / Rosie Poyser)**

**Harpenden Rise (HR)****(Marcia & Roger Dorey)**

We have now finished receiving loads of manure from our farmer friend and plot holders have collected it all. The gate area has been tidied up accordingly. Our mower was kindly collected for repair and so we have retained the mulching mower until it is returned. We have one new plot holder who starts with the new season and another new plot holder from the end of last year has been very active already, putting in raised beds and adding fresh manure to them. This month we have enlisted help from all plot holders in our annual cutting back and disposal of branches from the alley hedge. The alley passes through our HR site. This action takes one day and ends in a traditional barbecue to which all helpers are invited.

**Oakley Rd (OR)****(Rod Cooley)**

- Two plot holders have said that they will not be renewing their plot rental for 2023. These are plots 10 and half plot 3A.
- Alex is trying to find out if the Tenant of plot 3B would like to plot 3A as well. However, the Tenant of plot 3B is also the tenant of plot 4.
- Plot 6 is still vacant. This will mean that two and a half plots will be vacant at Oakley Road.

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

HTC Rangers helped by clearing an enormous overhanging Russian Vine from a neighbouring property and a tree overhanging the headland pathway towards the Jewson's fence. On 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb the site reps cleared the cuttings and other various piles of vegetation with our first 2023 bonfire. With no vacant sites we had to use the plot used for our 5<sup>th</sup> November bonfire, before the recent plot holder has made a start on digging and planting. The ongoing saga of the damaged gatepost has yet to be resolved, due to inaction by the Transport Co and then their Insurers taking nearly 4 months to process the claim, to advise us on the day before Christmas Eve that they would not indemnify the policyholder as they had infringed their terms. We are now back in touch with the Transport Co direct but as yet still await a reply. With increased costs the original estimate has risen from £612 to £1020 and increases every 14 days ... it's one post !!

**Sibley Ave (SA) (Peter & Helen Loveland)**

At

Sibley Avenue, we have new tenants for plot SA9, and all plot holders have been informed. Most plots are looking quite tidy after what has been a fairly hard Winter. Our unstartable strimmer is languishing at the back of the shed and will hopefully soon be replaced by a battery powered one. We, like everyone else, await the Spring. Peter and Helen Loveland, SA10, site reps

**Topstreet Way (TW)****(Mike Lawford)**

A finessing of plot ownership and better aligning plot size with some individuals' capacity, has meant that all plots now have allocated owners. There are a few plots where I've been

working with the owners to ensure sufficient maintenance / preparatory work is seen to give me confidence of an appropriate level of cultivation in the upcoming year – before they are invited to renew again when March’s annual fee payment becomes due.

I have managed to divert a substantial amount of soil dug out by landscapers of a nearby garden to help fill the ruts in the entrance path - so on the rare occasions when vehicles are given permission to access the site, they can do so more steadily and avoid further damage to that track.

We are nearing a permanent screening solution to the outstanding neighbour harassment issues. Sufficient recycled fence panels and fence posts have been sourced from St Albans Wood Recycling centre and are now on site ready to screen the current open end of her garden. Work to erect the screen will be done by the council rangers rather than do it ourselves this time, given her previous behaviour towards plot holders. Hoping it will be completed around Easter time, before growth restarts on the hedge on the boundary.

We had the good news that our bid for a new communal metal shed has been approved. It is to be located next to the existing smaller shed, but before progressing I have met with the neighbours with direct line of sight and ensured that they have no objections, even though technically their approval is not required. Work on preparing the site will commence in February and a fully erected shed should hopefully be in place before summer.

We are very grateful for the current machinery servicing being undertaken for us by Roger White and his helpers – even though their presence did trigger an alert to me from some vigilant neighbours concerned that they were actually stealing them! From an accompanying photo sent to me by the eagle-eyed observers I was able to verify them as “good guys” and immediately put the neighbours’ minds at rest!

Last, but not least, we have arranged for a short presentation to be made on site on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> March at 12pm to celebrate Michael Beck’s 60 years allotmenting at Topstreet Way. All are welcome to join us as we take a few moments to come together as a community to celebrate this amazing achievement – suitable refreshment will be available!

### **Letting’s Secretary Report**

**(Alex Davis)**

#### **Lettings**

Quite a lot of activity this month. The email to all plot holders regarding renewals reminded some to notify that they are giving up a plot this year. We have had 10 resignations in January. A number of these plots are in the process of being re-let (viewing, awaiting payment etc).

At the end of January, the number of vacant plots across all sites stood at 10 (including several half plots).

I would expect more resignations in the next month or so, but by trying to get them now, it gives new tenants the chance to get a full growing season, rather than taking on a plot in late Spring.

Waiting lists are relatively low, apart from the Harpenden Rise list which stands at 13.

## **Machinery Manager's report**

**(Roger White)**

Lawnmower and cultivator servicing has started on some sites and we hope to get to the remaining sites in the next 4 weeks. Details of each site as follows:

TSW

All machines serviced except for the small graveyard mower which would not start (possibly because it was too cold so servicing will be carried out later) and the Hayter mower which caught fire in the air filter! This machine had started a few weeks ago but we suspect a fuel leak perhaps due to damage to seals in the fuel injection system. The spark plug has been removed from this machine until a decision is made on repair or replacement.

HR

Hayter mower collected from the site and the drive is now working, final servicing will be carried out asap.

CL

All machines started and ran but are still to be serviced. The very old Mountfield mower which had been but to one side as it has lost engine bolts is probably uneconomic to repair.

CF

All machines except one started and ran, final servicing still to be carried out. Old mower 802 would not start.

AB

All machines have had a basic clean and will be serviced later in the spring. The Hayter 41 mower requires more major repairs and will be assessed further to see if these are cost effective.

SA

Mowers and cultivator all started and ran correctly.

PH and OR

Mowers and other cultivators not yet checked.

**Overall, almost all machines seem to be working with the exception of a small number of the oldest smaller mowers. As the trial of a small battery machine at PH last year seems to have been successful is now the time to purchase more of these mowers along with battery chargers for use on other sites? The costs for repairing the old machines may be better spent on continuing to replace these with small battery mowers which are easier for plot holders to use.**

## **Shop (Mike Cobley)**

Steve Case (PH88) has stepped up to take on the shop manager role from January, timely as we were undertaking the, delayed, annual stocktaking.

On the first day of business, we had just one customer, but the morning was upset when Carole had a bad fall inside the shop and ended up in Luton & Dunstable A&E with a nasty cut on her head. We have told her she is banned from the shop, but she has made a good

recovery. The second Sunday of opening resulted in one sale - £2.50 so that barely covered the electricity for heating, lighting and boiling the kettle. Last week was over £85 so it's on the up !

The seed order was due to be delivered by 3<sup>rd</sup> February, but at the time of writing it had not arrived. The seed potatoes are due to be delivered on 16<sup>th</sup> February and we have located a supply of garlic, at last. There still remain onion sets available, but the shallots sold very quickly this winter.

The new lighting inside the shop is a vast improvement. We suffered one burst pipe in the frosty weather, quickly repaired, but we now have a problem with the stopcock, which is leaking again and a leak on the over sink water heater. Volunteer plumber required.

This Spring we need volunteers to give the shop woodwork a new coat of wood stain, possibly darker grey or black to complement the new doors.

The old shop blind is in need of TLC and could do with replacement. A task for our new manager ?

### **Communications and Webmaster Report**

**(Rod Cooley)**

- The S.H.A.G.S. new year letter was sent to all plot holders and put on the website.
- Geoff Bateman's Spring 2023 Plot So Far was put onto the website.
- The website has been updated with the latest status and information.
- Alex Davis's letter about renewals for 2023 was sent to all plot holders
- The minutes of the January 2023 committee meeting have been put on the society website.