

Minutes of the Gertie Gales Meeting

14th May 2019

Present

Committee Members:

Stuart Armstrong (Chair)

Anastasia Mazina-Scott (Vice Chair)

Zoltan Kekesi (Secretary)

Jillian Kirkman (Treasurer)

Les Curwood (Lettings Officer)

Alan Harrison (Site Manager)

Bryan Jackson (Media Officer)

Bob Shepherd & Roger Howard

Tenants:

Annette Peace, Gilli Shorey, Carol Paget, Kathleen Saunders, Clifford Smith, Evelyn Grounell

Apologies

Sally and John Dutton, Andrew and Judith Arnold, Jenny Murray

Chair welcomes attendees and opens the meeting.

1. Administration

Apologies:

Apologies read out by Secretary.

Minutes of last meeting:

No comments or amendments made to minutes of last meeting

Chair quickly introduce the re-elected and new committee members to all present.

Chair confirms he has now stepped back from Treasurer post as all last year's transactions were done; new Treasurer has now taken on the role.

2. Matters Arising

1. Update on new tenancy agreements

There has been a lot of effort put into updating the tenancy agreements and site rules over the last few months. This is an ongoing job and should be finished by the end of summer to be shared with all the tenants for discussion. The new agreements and rules need to be signed off by Portishead Town Council before being implemented and can only be the new rules / agreement with the tenants from 1 April 2020.

There have been some issues/questions raised several times of late:

75 % Cultivation rule of the plot, heights of trees and bushes, poly tunnels on site, ponds, weed control (the use of chemicals), hazard of items crossing or overhanging to paths, width of paths etc.

All these points are being dealt with in the new agreements / site rules.

Other Portishead allotments have some very strict rules about cultivation and maintenance of the plots by the tenants which are enforced vigorously by their committees.

2. Plot lettings report

Since November 2018 there have been a lot of changes:

There were 5 termination of tenancies for non-cultivation

10 tenants gave up their plot when the rent renewal notices were sent out

4 tenants down-sized from a full plot to a half plot

Which has resulted in a total of 19 lettings to new tenants.

There are currently 108 plots - 49 full plots and 59 half plots.

There is 1 person on the waiting list and 3 existing tenants wanting to expand from a half-plot to a full-plot.

Site Inspection:

Les carried out a site inspection on Tuesday 7th May checking on the cultivation of plots.

76 – ok (at least reasonable condition)

22 – could be better (half done or being cleared)

8 – not started / not done

2 – vacant (half plots)

Les has not contacted the 8 worst plot holders so far as the plan was to discuss what to do at the committee meeting about poorly cultivated plots.

After a lot of discussion, it was agreed that Les would write to the 8 tenants advising them that their plots need cultivating and asking if there were any particular issues, did they need help with their plot (eg strimming), did they want to give up their tenancy or if they had a full plot did they want to give up half the plot.

Whilst over the last 6 months the whole site cultivation rate has improved, we must ensure that we talk to the plot holders that are struggling to cultivate their plots and come to a solution to improve their plots. Quite a few tenants are beginning to complain that weeds and seeds are drifting over from the uncultivated plots to their plots and these neighbours plots are becoming a nuisance.

It was also agreed that if a neighbours plot needed strimming then the committee would contact the tenant and offer to strim the plot for them. The committee would not just go onto a plot and strim it for the tenant without warning them first.

It is still important that the committee are tolerant and deal with those tenants with due care who are in breach of the plot cultivation rules because of specific issues (temporary health or family problem).

3. Update on hedges & trees around the allotment

Hedges & Trees - both North Somerset Council and Portishead Town Council have been asked to improve the hedges around the site. The trees now will not be cut back until the nesting season ends at the earliest (if the planned work is agreed). The committee will continue to talk to both councils to reach a conclusion.

Portishead Council will debate at a council meeting if they can provide a small rebate to the allotments due to the delays in sorting out the trees and the adverse effect they are having on neighbouring plots.

The whips at the bottom of the site look good & growing well. Bark has been put down this time to control the weeds and the weeds in between the whips are being cut down by hand. These whips were planted with a little space amongst them so it seems there is no need for an additional row in front of the ones planted.

4. Site maintenance report

The site is in a lot better state than in previous years. More plots are cultivated or worked on properly this year. The grass in general is cut more often. The hedges being maintained, there is less rubbish around the site. Having said all of this there is still more improvements to be made at the allotment with some plots still in the need of significant cultivation. These plots are being sorted by Les in his inspections.

The trees are still shading the plots on the cemetery side, but the situation is being dealt with as much possible.

The wheel barrows are used as per the rules set up last year (only the wheelbarrows with green tape to be used by everyone. Red tape wheelbarrows are not to be used under any circumstances), no complaints about the use of the wheelbarrows anymore.

2 wheelbarrows were left outside the shed - both had punctures in them and it seems the wheels can't be removed/replaced, so may need to be disposed of.

The white table disappeared from the shed recently and has not been seen. Also there was a recent episode of fly tipping of furniture by the shed but this was a one-off. All tenants need to be vigilant of unusual activity around the site.

5. Financial report (advised by Stuart Armstrong as he has finished off the last financial year)

The Association has collected the rent for the 2019-2020 season. The finances look good with approx £1,150 in the association savings account to support future investments or

unexpected expenses (there is approx. £2,750 in the current bank account for this years bills).

The water bill was much bigger than expected in the last year, which is partly because of there is a leakage in the system as well as because of the dry season last year.

The water loan will be completely paid off in May 2020. It was discussed and agreed to let this loan repayment continue as is and not to pay off the loan early especially as it is an interest free loan.

It has been discovered that all the other Portishead allotment sites pay much less rent to the council the Gertie Gale's. This matter has been brought up with Portishead Council and a request has been made to the council to lower our annual rent due to the council. This years rent amount of £1,500 has been paid as normal as we had received an invoice for it (we can always get a rebate from the council).

6. Communications

There was a lengthy discussion re - how to communicate with other tenants – Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Blog. It was concluded Facebook would not work but to a certain degree blogs or WhatsApp would work. Bryan will investigate further and come up with some ideas. Whatever method we use it must be monitored so that no abuse occurs of other tenants.

For information to be shared amongst plot holders the simple suggestion was to use the cork board on the shed. It was thought that most people would read the board rather than other forms of communication. Again Bryan will investigate and report back.

7. Portishead in Bloom

There have been no volunteers for PiB. If the Association were to enter this competition properly extensive work needs to be done around the allotment to improve it for the competition in future years. An email will be sent round to tenants for thoughts and volunteers.

However, this year it was agreed for will do what we have done previously – tidy the site (communal areas and the plots) cut all the grass and clear debris for the judging day.

This year's judging is Monday 8th July. All tenants are expected to do their bit and tidy the site for the judges – including the communal areas.

8. Victorian Evening

This event has generated some additional expenditure over the past few years. We did not take part in the evening last year due to the lack of volunteers. Not only is the night a chance for additional money for the allotment but it is an opportunity to introduce Gertie

Gale's Allotment lifestyle to the residents of Portishead and so hopefully generating a waiting list.

We can only do it this year, if people support this activity and there are volunteers to organize, set up and run the stall at the Victorian Evening. The estimation is that we need 5 people to share the preparation works and run the stall in the evening.

If anyone wish to help or run the night, then please let the committee know. Again an email will be sent around for thoughts and volunteers.

9. Water Leak

Unfortunately, we have established there is a small water leak somewhere in the water system (suspected to be one of the joints has come loose underground). The estimated loss of water costs about £25 a month and we may have to make a decision to close down the water supply for a while whilst the leak is identified if it gets worse.

Roger has been in contact with the water company who have put him in contact with a company that can identify the leakage by carrying out an inspection. Once the leakage is identified the pipes/ joints need replacing, which will be a lot of work digging down to the pipe. Again we need volunteers to help with this task. We will keep all informed.

10. Reduce water usage

We all need to be conscious of the amount of water we are all using around the site. Whilst the committee do not want to discourage the use of water we could all be more effective with our water usage generally eg could tenants collect rain water more on their plots? That would be more environment friendly and could save on the water bill in the same time.

11. Mowers

One of the mowers recently broke and was not repaired so we currently have 2 mowers at the allotment that seem to be working very well and are used by plot holders regularly. (the red Honda one has recently broken since the meeting but will be repaired quickly). The strimmer is not the best condition and it is very difficult to operate – but if people want to use it please do however be careful with it as it is difficult to use. The committee will look into getting a new strimmer for communal use.

12. Grass cutting

As mentioned in the site report, the grass around people's plots this year is cut more regularly than previously. There are some plot holders now who help out each other and also the grass cutting is done in the communal areas by some unknown volunteers – thank you for that. However, grass around some plots are being left untouched and these tenants need to cut the grass around their plots. Also if tenants could help out by cutting the communal areas as well that would help.

It is very much appreciated that people are leaving notes on the mowers then they break and emailing the committee – this means we can organise repairs of the mowers quickly and not hinder people cutting the grass.

13. Review of compost bins

All compost bins have been used, in fact they are all full now. Unfortunately, besides the normal compost materials a lot of weeds (couch grass), large and thick woody elements, bushes, clumps of soil were disposed into them which will not rot down. Some of the bins are also over packed.

After a lengthy discussion it was decided that the bins have not worked as planned and not used correctly. So it has been decided to remove the contents of them, dispose the contents and dismantle the compost bins. The trial of them has not worked. People should use their own compost bins on their own sites or take the rubbish to the tip in the future.

14. Banners and posters

The Chair has the banners and posters left over from the previous Victorian Evening which could be used again once decision is made about running the event this year.

15. Date of next meeting

Next meeting is to be held at the Albion. It was decided to make the next meeting on a Thursday as not all tenants can make a Tuesday meeting. The day of the meetings will alternate each time.

Thursday 12 September at 7.30 is the proposed date of the next meeting when more people are around. This date is to be confirmed.

3. Any Other Business

No other issues were brought up on the evening or afterwards.