

**Minutes of the Gertie Gale's
General/ Committee Meeting**

(copy agenda at the bottom of this document)

12th September 2019

Present

Committee Members:

Stuart Armstrong (Chair)

Les Curwood (Lettings Officer)

Alan Harrison (Site Manager)

Bryan Jackson (Media Officer)

Zoltan Kekesi (Secretary)

Tenants:

Jenny Murray, Robert Baylis, Ian Cameron, Ced Protheroe, Paul Albone (representing Stefanie Blundell)

Apologies

Anastasia Mazina-Scott (Vice Chair), Jillian Kirkman (Treasurer), Bob Sheppard (Committee), Roger Howard (Committee), Sally and John Dutton, Michael Perry, June Gregory, Liz Newton, Evelyn Grounsell, Guy Britton, Aili Purdy

Chair welcomes attendees and opens the meeting.

1. Administration

Apologies: Apologies read out by the Secretary.

Minutes of last meeting: No comments or amendments made to minutes of last meeting, minutes signed by Chair

There was a quick voluntary introduction of attendees as not everyone knew who each other was around the table.

Chair explained that Ana Mazina-Scott (Vice Chair) and Jillian Kirkman (Treasurer) presently do not have a plot at the allotment and therefore technically cannot be committee members as per the rules. However as they are both intending to take up new plots shortly they have not stood down from the committee but they do not currently participate in their roles. So for the time being the Chair is undertaking the role of Treasurer and is being monitored by the other committee members to ensure there is not a conflict of interest.

2. Matters Arising

1. Update on new tenancy agreements

New agreements are still being finalised. Once they have been finally drafted they will be reviewed by all the committee first, then by the tenants and finally sent to Portishead Town Council to discuss and approve. The agreements will be discussed in full at our AGM. The intention is to introduce the new agreements from 1st April 2020.

The agreements are being changed as the ones we currently use are too brief and missing rules. This is causing the committee issues with new tenants when they are carrying out certain actions and the new tenants are stating that there is nothing in the rules saying they cannot do this or that. The agreements have been compiled after reviewing various other agreements locally and on the internet. Portishead Town Council is getting involved and wishes to standardise agreements with Gertie Gale and North Weston Allotments.

The aim is to have one agreement with clear rules that is to be signed by each plot holder. The main issues currently are: trees on plots, greenhouses, tyres on plots, plot sizes/borders, cultivation issues of plots, ponds, maintenance of paths around plots.

After a discussion with a couple of the plot holders it was clarified that determining plot borders can be difficult without guidelines. Those present agreed that plots should be measured out when a plot is given up, with the aim of getting the plot back to the original size if possible, (appr. 50 m² for a half plot and 100 m² for a full plot). There was also a discussion about paths being a min of 1.5m wide and it was agreed to review this rule as many paths are now less than 1.5m wide.

2. Financial report (advised by Stuart Armstrong)

The finances are in a healthy state with £920 in the main account and £1,153 in the reserve savings account. We will be on budget by the end of the financial year.

The majority of the bills have now been paid with just one large bill (the water bill) to be paid which will be received in October. Expected cost of the water bill to be £400. There will be two grass cuts to pay for as well before the end of the year.

The water loan will be paid off May 2020.

3. Plot lettings report

Site occupancy since the last report in May

6 tenants have given up their plots

This resulted in 8 new lettings (2 full plots were split into half plots).

There are 110 plots on the site now that is 47 full plots and 61 half plots.

There are 3 people on the waiting list and 3 existing tenants wanting to expand from a half-plot to a full-plot.

Site inspection

A site inspection was carried out on 6th September 2019 by Les Curwood and Stuart Armstrong.

79 – ok (at least reasonable condition)

21 – could be better (half done or being cleared) out of:

2 – half done (dug and or part cultivated, the rest weeds)

19 – could be better (dug and cultivated but lot of weeds)

9 – have not been touched since the last inspection

1 – vacant (full plot)

That is a very slight improvement from the May inspection

Gertie Gales Website

Nothing much to report.

Still getting an average of 6 visitors per day visiting the site.

4. Site maintenance report

The site is again in a better state than in previous years, more plots are cultivated or worked on than previously.

The grass in general is cut more often than previously and the some of the plot holders help out each other or do additional cutting for the communal paths. However some plot holders do struggle to move the heavy mowers around the allotment. Do we need to get more lighter mowers?

With more tenants cutting the grass themselves this has resulted in less money being spent by the committee getting the grass cut. Zoltan currently cuts the grass (max 4 times a year) but it was agreed to investigate other companies cutting the grass more regularly and the cost implications.

More unsuitable items such as carpets and plastic sheets have been removed from tenants plots which is better for the soil and environment.

It has been noticed that there are more tyres on tenants plots than in previous years. After research on the internet it is advised that tyres should definitely not be dug into the ground as they release harmful chemicals into the soil. At best tyres should be laid on top of the soil and replaced every 3 years to stop harmful chemicals entering the soil. If tenants want to get rid of tyres then the committee will take them to the tip and pay the charge at the tip to recycle them, as has happened recently. A note will be sent around to all tenants.

The communal compost bins are not being used as they should and are now overflowing and full of material that will not rot down. Can tenants please stop using these bins. Over the winter the bins will be dismantled and the waste spread along the hedges. These communal compost bins will not be replaced. In the future all green waste must be composted down by each plot holders on their plots or taken away to the rubbish tip. No green waste is to be put down by the hedges by tenants under any circumstances.

There is still an issue with greenhouses and poly tunnels at the allotment. These are being blown around the allotment because they are not being secured properly to the ground. Can tenants please ensure they are secured properly as they are causing damage to neighbouring plots.

It was also discussed that some of the trees on tenants plots are now getting to high. The trees should be a max of 1.2m high because the allotment is on a green belt. The committee are looking to relax this height to 1.6m in the future. A note will be sent around to all asking them to reduce the height of the trees on the plots.

5. Victorian Evening and Portishead in Bloom

The Victorian Evening has generated some additional money over the past few years but this cannot be done without the help of numerous volunteers. We will not take part in the Victorian Evening again this year due to the lack of volunteers.

The Portishead in Bloom visit went well again this year. If the allotment want to enter the competition seriously in future years then serious work around the allotment needs to be started well before the judging.

The committee have asked several times for volunteers to take both these projects on and run them. However there is very little interest from the tenants. Therefore it was agreed not to participate in the Victorian evening in the future and not to enter the full competition of Portishead in Bloom, we will just ensure the site is tidy for judging day. If in the future there are volunteers we will take part in these two events.

6. August Portishead Town Council visit

The new councillors for Portishead Town Council that have responsibility for the allotments (Cllrs Aldridge, Temple and Cartwright) visited the allotment in August to discuss various current issues (water leak, the trees and hedge on the boundary, front gate and rent reviews) and to have a look around the allotment to view its current state.

The visit went very well, with the council being extremely proactive. The councillors all commented that they thought the plots generally were in a good state.

7. Portishead Town Council future involvement in the allotment

The councillors would like to be more involved in the allotment going forward but not actually run the allotment, this can continue by the committee / association. The

councillors will attend future meetings, if they can, to share ideas. The council wish to align Gertie Gale's and North Weston allotments in the future and for both associations to help and learn from each other.

8. Update on hedges & trees around the allotment

Portishead Town Council have advised that they will cut back the trees down the farmer side, sort out the trees in Mead playground at the bottom and to cut back the trees on the cemetery side that are growing on the allotment ground. The trees that are growing in the cemetery and causing a nuisance to tenants will be sorted out by either North Somerset Council or the company that runs the cemetery (Dignity). The cutting back of these trees in the cemetery is being facilitated by Portishead Town Council on behalf of the committee, which we are very appreciative of.

Quotes are being obtained to cut back all the trees (the cost is significant to cut the trees back but this has not been done for years and needs to be carried out) and the intention is to sort out the trees by next Spring.

The hedges on the farmer's side will be cut back by the farmer himself and the hedge at the front will be cut back by the usual Portishead Town Council contractor.

National Wood Trust visited the site to audit the planting of the whips they supplied to ourselves. They were very satisfied with the condition of the plants and advised to remove the plastic covers around the whips (which has been done). It was also suggested to trim back the whips each year to encourage them to develop more branches etc. The Trust recommended that we ordered more whips to strengthen the hedge.

9. Update on water supply and leakage

Portishead Town Council paid for the investigation work and repair of the water leak, which again we are appreciative of. Luckily the water leak was located and fixed quickly. The system no longer leaks and is back to normal (saving the allotment money, appr. cost of water leaking was £100 per year). Thank you to Roger Howard for his ongoing contribution to deal with this issue.

The water as usual will be shut down at the end of October and put back on in March to stop winter damage to the pipes etc.

10. Update on gate fixing

The post to the vehicular gate had rotted away and resulted in the gate being dangerous. However the post was replaced very quickly by Portishead Town Council and the repair cost was settled by Portishead Town Council.

There was an incident recently where intruders lifted the gate off its hinges but could not gain access to the a car park due to the padlock being on and operational. However the loose gate did fall on a plot holder but luckily did not cause serious injury. To stop the gate being lifted off the hinges, devises have been put onto the hinges to prevent the gate being lifted off the hinges. This again has raised the issue of insurance for the association.

11. Insurance

The cost of the insurance for the allotment is around £200 a year. The insurance will provide liability cover for each tenant and the association. It was decided that this would be reviewed in more detail next year and if purchased it would be from the next financial year.

Portishead Town Council have insurance for the allotment but this only insures the council themselves against any negligence and damage caused by the council. The Town Council insurances does not provide cover for the tenants themselves or any actions the tenant does.

12. Missing crops/Theft

Occasional thefts have been reported in previous years and this year is no different. However lately tenants have reported that significant amount of their produce has been stolen from their plots. Also this year, tenants have noticed more unusual people walking around the allotments and when challenged have just said that they are looking to rent a plot and then walking away.

North Weston allotment are also experience significant thefts that are similar to ours. North Weston have also advised that part of their hedge has been cut away to gain access to their allotment.

It was agreed that we would try to build up our boundaries so access to the allotments especially from the cemetery is restricted.

13. Thoughts on next year's rent

There was a brief discussion that the committee are talking to Portishead Town Council about a rent review between the allotment and the council. Currently we pay Portishead Council £1,500 a year in rent and the committee have asked for this to be reduced significantly to bring Gertie Gales more in line with the other allotments in Portishead. Portishead Town Council have agreed to review our rent and advise the outcome before our AGM.

If we do achieve a rent reduction with the council it was debated, do we pass on this saving to tenants or use the "additional" money for projects around the allotment. It was thought that we keep the rent amount to the tenants the same and have projects around the allotment. This will be discussed more in the AGM when the committee know the result of the rent review with Portishead Town Council.

14. Best form of communication with tenants

It was agreed the most practical way of communicating with the tenants is via email, Gertie Gale's website and the noticeboard at the allotment. There will be issues (mainly moderating) if we use Facebook or Whats App platforms. This will be reviewed on a regular basis as society changes.

15. Mowers

The yellow mower recently broke and the committee were advised this mower is now dangerous to operate. So this mower has been scrapped and taken to the tip.

This leaves two operating mowers in the shed, which is acceptable. The committee will invest in another second hand mower if one is advertised but good second hand mowers are not often advertised.

It was requested that we repair the self-propel mechanism on the Honda mower to make it easier to use. The committee advised that they had taken the lawn mower to be repaired but were advised that it was potentially a waste of money as the self-propelled mechanism would be broken again soon.

The old petrol can was removed from the shed as it was broken and leaked. It was agreed after discussion that the committee would purchase a new petrol can for communal use and place it in the shed out of the way. However the committee will not replace the used fuel, that is the responsibility of the tenants to replace the fuel and return the can to the shed quickly. It was suggested an honesty box to be introduced so that people could drop in money when they used community petrol for mowers. The committee agreed to look into this idea.

A few tenants have advised that the mowers are too heavy and they would be happy to cut the grass but cannot cope with the heavy duty mowers we have. This point has been mentioned several times and the committee agreed to look into a potential solution.

The site had a full grass cut of all areas on the weekend of 14-15 September.

16. Review of communal compost bins

All compost bins have been used, in fact they are overflowing. 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. It was agreed that the communal compost bins would be removed and the material in them spread around the hedges. These communal compost bins will not be replaced.

17. Change of date of AGM

In previous years the AGM has been held after the rent letters have been sent out. It was agreed that the AGM should be held before the rent letters are sent out to discuss the current financial situation and to agree next year's rent amounts from the tenants. An AGM in November or December is likely to be poorly attended due to Christmas being close, so a AGM in January was agreed to be the best time. The rent letters can then be sent out early February.

18. Date of next meeting

Next general/committee meeting is to be held at the Albion at 7.30 on Tuesday 19th November for discussion on the tenancy agreements and thoughts on next year's rent. This meeting is likely to be attended by the councillors.

The AGM will be held also at The Albion 7.30 on Sunday 26th January.

3. Any Other Business

Other issues;

Lawnmowers and replenishment of fuel

Tyres

Greenhouses & poly tunnels

Plot sizes

Lawn mowers – too heavy

Height of trees on plots

advised by plot holders via email were discussed at the most relevant points of the general meeting points.

Gertie Gale Allotment Meeting
12th September 2019
The Albion – 7.30 pm
Agenda

Items for discussion:

1. Administration

- sign minutes of last committee meeting (corrections if needed)
- apologies
- update on latest actions

2. Matters Arising

- Treasurer report
- Plot inspection & lettings report (discuss strategy with uncultivated plots)
- Site maintenance report (include any issues with mowers, grass cutting & whips)
- Briefing on Portishead in Bloom visit
- Briefing on council visit in August
- Council involvement and activity with regards to the allotment
- Update on new tenancy agreements
- Update on hedges & trees around the allotment
- Update on water supply and leakage
- Discussion on insurance
- Thoughts on disappearance on crops (padlock on pedestrian gate?)
- Update on Victorian Evening & future Portishead in Bloom visits
- Initial thoughts on next years rent amount & collection
- Finalisation of best way of communicating with plotheolders
- Discussion on changing AGM date
- Date of next meeting

3. Any Other Business

- Should you have any topics not included above, please send it to the committee by 6th September.

Lawnmowers and replenishment of fuel

Plot sizes

Tyres on plots

Lawnmowers – 3 very heavy out of 3 mowers, elderly and ladies are unable to operate despite they want to cut the grass

Greenhouses

Height of trees