

# Minutes (DRAFT) Gertie Gales Allotments Committee Meeting Tues April 2023 v0.1

Committee Officers Attending: Stuart Armstrong (Chair), Les Curwood (Lettings, site inspections and website), Evelyn Grounsell (Secretary), Heather Milton (Comms/Media)

Committee Members Absent:

Stood Down: Steve Lobley (Site Manager)

1. Stuart Armstrong, Chairman thanked the 20 plot holders for attending this first meeting since the COVID hiatus. He advised that he hoped to step down as chairman before the next meeting.
2. He apologised for the delay sending out the minutes of an initial committee get together in Nov 2022: issued this week. The Oct 2022 of AGM draft minutes had just been issued.

## Committee Meetings

3. Going forward we will have 3 meetings a year plus and AGM. Plot holders have the right to attend and contribute, and to vote at these meetings under our constitution. The proposal is a meeting each January, April and July, with an AGM in July.

[Post meeting note, this aligns with our constitution, although changes will be needed to timing detail and alignment of differing documents, with changes to agreements to follow consultation with Portishead Town Council (PTC).]

ACTION

## Communications

4. Stuart advised that Email is the agreed primary method of communicating information to plot holders. And plot holders are encouraged to use our Gertie Gales website communication form to notify issues to the committee.
5. Thanks to Heather Milton, Les Curwood and Steve Lobley this year we now have a web-based forum and a Facebook page in operation, as well as a quality notice board by the shed. Notices had already been sent to plot holders. Plot holders are encouraged to sign up and use these initiatives to communicate with other plot holders and ask general questions: about growing for example.
6. The hope is that plot holders find the new initiatives a useful way of communicating with each other and find a sense of community support. The number of emails may reduce too.

ACTION COMPLETE

## Finance

7. Stuart gave a description of the financial position in lieu of the Treasurer.
8. Our bank balance is positive due to £810 voluntary contributions by plot holders this year towards the new shed (almost 100% response); and £1100 new shed grant by Portishead Town Council (PTC). Accordingly we can meet the large expenses ie PTC rent and the new shed.
9. Rent receipt this year to date is £4850, with 2 plots outstanding.
10. Bank balance that evening was £450. With current bills due for PTC rent, new shed balance £663, Water £60, grass £240, estimated mower repairs £30 and estimated general repairs £100..
11. The Secretary later queried to items arising from the previous 2022 meeting: additional bank signatories, and changing bank accounts given the introduction of charges by our current bank and potential closure. Stuart undertook to take the actions forward with the Treasurer. He though charges so far were around £80 which he thought reasonable.

## Committee Format

12. Stuart advised that the Site Manager committee post had been vacant since the start of the year, with no volunteer coming forward following his email. He thought that that post might be subsumed by the Chair and that plot holders should take more responsibility for the site. A brief discussion highlighted the long list of tasks that would need to fall to the Chair or others that may have safety concerns.

ACTION ONGOING

[Post meeting note. Changes to the officers and other issues within the ambit of our agreements with PTC may only be changed in the month of April and following consultation with PTC.]

## New Top Shed

13. Stuart had ordered this in January after receiving the grant from PTC. Delivery is forecast currently for 1<sup>st</sup> week in May. The delay is reportedly due to the shortage of affordable decent timber.

14. At the Oct 2022 AGM a proposal was made and agreed to aim for a smaller, more affordable quality shed and the new one will be ¾ size. Life is expected to be 20 years. Existing hardware will be re-used and the committee will treat the shed (extending life) - again to improve affordability.

## Manure & Chippings

15. Stuart advised that for a further year a delivery of farm manure had been arranged and used up by subscribing plot holders.

16. Chippings deliveries are free and ad hoc by local gardening professionals. Plotholdeers are encouraged to use up extant supplies to assist access for hedge cutting by PTC contractors.

## Boundary Trees and Hedges, Grass

17. Stuart advised that PTC contractors should complete work on their trees and hedges shortly. For the future PTC will cut established hedges every second year.

18. Whips - Gertie Gales has been awarded a further batch of free small saplings by the Woodland Trust. Delivered in March these will be used where gaps have appeared in the older hedgerows, and where previous whips may have failed. Stuart thought this may complete the planting.

[Post meeting note. For those new to the site, Woodland Trust deliveries began over 5 years ago and a Woodland Trust surveyor has already inspected our work: declaring GG a successful project and positive case study. The variety of species selected reflects the local flora, and should provide food and cover for local insect and bird communities. That losses have been low is down to the many amazing plot holders who contributed to the planting and continuing care of the establishing hedgerows over the years.

19. Stuart advised that a Spring cut of the grass on the site had been completed and paid for. A cut is planned for October. Outside of this site policy is for plot holders to maintain grass by their plots.

## Mowers

20. To assist plot holders maintain grass around their plots GG has been buying petrol mowers second hand. Stuart advised that over the past 2 years £80 has been spent on repairs. A similar mower new might cost £700 and would require servicing for the warranty. There were issues with one or more mowers at present, mainly due to rough handling and loss of screws etc that could be avoided with care.

## Composting Toilet

21. Stuart advised that usage has been higher than expected. The liquid capsule has been emptied 4 times now. The solid capsule was changed last year and the contents are seen to be composting well and in due course can be used for the hedging.

## Coffee Grounds

22. The collection of coffee grounds from a local café was proposed at the AGM. Stuart advised that the galvanised storage bin obtained for this will be chained to the new shed once it is erected and painted.

23. Arrangements with Impero Lounge had fallen through at present. To date the Secretary has been collecting and ad hoc sharing grounds from Oceans Café and others. Stuart thought other plot holders might do the same.

ONGOING

## Website

24. Les had nothing to report. The addition of a portal to a website forum will be covered below.

## Lettings

25. Les advised that GG currently has 38 full and 82 half plots that are occupied by 113 tenants.

26. 2 half plots are as yet unpaid. Action re this is ongoing.

27. Since September 2022 there have been 20 applications for plots, with 16 new lettings following 11 terminations of tenancy and one house move.

28. The current waiting list is 7 households plus 2 tenant half plot-holders requesting a second half plot.

## Plot Inspection

29. Les reported on his Oct 2022 plot inspection. 92 plots were found to be in an acceptable condition; 19 were OK; and one required action.

30. Les had conducted a quick review pre meeting (April) and found 20 plots with no recent work. His first inspection of the growing season would be in May 2023, and he would follow up action as required.

## Secretary report

31. Evelyn advised that she was invite by PTC Town Clerk and the Assistant to a brief introductory meeting. PTC has recognised the enthusiasm of plot holders noted on all visits to the site, and has been pleased with how the site is maintained.

32. As secretary there were no other actions to report because GG secretary committee activity and record keeping had changed over time from those in the GG job descriptions. Evelyn recommended that this issue and some anomalies within the PTC agreements are reviewed to come up with the best fit going forward.

## Portishead In Bloom – “It’s Your Neighbourhood”

33. Evelyn reported that GG had entered for this RHS award for a second year, having been rated as an amazing “Thriving” in 2022 our first year. Judges are expected to visit early July around the same time as judging for the wider Portishead in Bloom. Stuart agreed to the recommendation that a message publicising that visit would be sent to Plot holders.

34. Further information on the RHS award can be found on their website.

ACTION

## Proposed Social Function

35. Heather, who joined the committee recently to look after our new social media, raised the idea of a summer social gathering. She felt that tenants would welcome an on-site get together on site, with possibly food, refreshments, and barbeque; possibly some contribution from GG surplus funds. Plot holders present appeared to agree. Bring a plate was proposed as an option.

36. Stuart, Chairman was not keen to spend much on this and asked Heather to look at the feasibility.

ACTION

## Site Security

37. Recently 2 plot holders had suffered distressing losses. Bricks security ground covering fabric had gone. And over 2 nights 4 filled potato pots had contents been taken.

38. On behalf of the committee Steve Loble has contacted Avon Constabulary and investigated "Allotment Watch". Our local PCSO recommended re-instating the car gate chain and padlock, theft aware signage, and marking of equipment and other items with UV pens. The PCSO will arrange to add a drive by of GG on their round. Steve agreed to produce the agreed signage and noted that Avon Constabulary is content for us to use their logo.

39. For Allotment Watch we do not need to set up as a formal Neighbourhood Watch, But plot holders are asked to be alert and report sightings and incidents.

ACTION

## Next Committee Meeting

40. Stuart thanked everyone for coming and hope that the Poachers was acceptable as a new meeting venue (a little warm given the weather). The next committee meeting will be in the last week of July.