

**MINUTES OF SUNNYSIDE ALLOTMENT SOCIETY'S  
11<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
held on  
SATURDAY 24<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER, 2007  
at  
SUNNYSIDE RURAL TRUST**

**Present:**

Angela Wheeldon (Chairman)  
Jenny Sippings (Secretary)  
John Powell (Treasurer)  
Jean Barnett  
Brenda Baynes  
Peter Block  
Bill Brinklow  
Jane Dickenson  
Anna Dolan  
Fiona Duck  
Ted Dyer  
Freda Earl  
John Eaton  
Betty Fowell  
Peter Fowell  
Cynthia Fulks  
Rebecca Gee  
John Goffey  
Hazel Grimwood  
Graham Hall  
Fred Jackson  
Joan Jackson  
Ray Phipps  
Hannah Rennie  
Bert Roberts  
Prue Scofield  
Rachael Scott  
Clive Smith  
Jo Tattam  
Clive Weakley  
Mary Weakley

**Apologies for Absence:**

Philip Biss  
Milly Burt  
Chris Davidson  
Barbara Driver  
John Driver  
Joan Earle  
Jim Ellisdon  
Geoffrey Giles  
Olga Lassman  
Chris O'Callaghan  
Patrick Stileman  
Angela Walsh

Angela Wheeldon welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked the Sunnyside Rural Trust for the use of their building.

## **1/07 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received (see above).

## **2/07 Approve the Minutes of the last AGM**

The minutes of the last meeting were accepted as a true record by all those attending.

## **3/07 Chairmans Report**

Angela Wheeldon reported:

It has been a really strange year, full of challenges. Seedlings shrivelled in the April drought; the cold and wet of May prevented seeds germinating, and then when they did they were eaten by slugs, snails and rabbits. Crops had to be sown 2 or 3 times before achieving a full row. The mild damp summer weather brought blight to the potatoes and then to the tomato crop, followed by white rot on the onions. Quite a list of disasters. Many experienced gardeners said that they don't remember a growing season like it. Fruit though, both soft fruit and top fruit, did produce a bumper harvest, even if the sweetness was slightly impaired by the lack of sun. In spite of all this though, gardeners are by nature an optimistic lot and I'm sure most of us, whether we have already ordered seeds through the seed scheme or not, will be eagerly looking through the seed catalogues over Christmas and planning what we are going to try next year.

Interaction between the SAS and BTC is an important element in the smooth running of the allotments. The previous Chairman helped put in place an allotment strategy to take the allotments forward in a proactive way. The Council changed its complexion in May from largely LibDem to largely Conservative, and we welcomed Malcolm Allen as the new chairman of the AMT. The implementation of the strategy has begun with priority being given to a survey of the site boundaries and the allotment infrastructure.

A survey is being undertaken into the location, condition and ownership of the site boundaries. This was prompted by the Council's concern that, while not wanting to stop local residents from enjoying the sites, control over its land could be compromised if the green roadways were allowed to become public footpaths by default, through continuous usage. There is also an ongoing issue with access gates onto allotment land.

The condition of the water supply pipes esp on SS Old was giving concern and in January the SAS offered to provide the organisation and manpower to replace the pipework. BTC contributed £3,500.00 for the materials and the plumbing. (more about this later)

Another aim of the strategy was to provide tenants with helpful and practical information. The Allotment Information pack is now available to all tenants. You just need to ask for it in the Council Offices in the Civic Centre. The SAS is still insisting that the Council continue to press Network Rail for a satisfactory solution to problem of rabbits coming onto the allotment sites from the railway embankment.

As Bruce predicted in his report last year, our waiting list has grown. We sent letters to people with uncultivated gardens in the summer and regained some plots from this, and a few more people also reduced their holdings last month. We have let plots so far this year. We now have the equivalent of 16 plots to let.

We all appreciate the lovely surroundings in which we do our gardening, but I feel that the part the allotments play in the community is also important, together with how the allotments are perceived by our neighbours. Our annual Open Day is an ideal opportunity to share our sites with the wider community; local people really appreciate being able to wander round, buy produce, meet the producers and each other, and have a cup of tea and piece of homemade cake. We had mixed weather this year, but we still had quite a few visitors. Sunday certainly seems to be a more popular day than Saturday. Our first Photographic competition was a success and the judge, Colin Sturges (a local professional photographer) commented on the quality and variety of the entries. Our thanks to him for officiating. The winning photos and several of the other entries have been included in the 2008 calendar.

We had a small delegation from Tring Allotments in the spring. They are starting down the road to providing a toilet on the Duckmore Lane site. And in June we were again visited by painters from some of the local art classes who come to experience the variety and colour of the allotments in high summer. Berkhamsted Art Society had to cancel their evening visit as the weather was so poor. In the spring and autumn we had visits by groups of 3/4 year olds from the Baptist Church Toddlers Group. These visits have become a regular event. They get to see familiar vegetables growing in the earth and it is a joy to see them taking it all in with wide-eyed amazement. Perhaps some of them will be allotment gardeners of the future.

Promoting allotments and allotment gardening in the town as a 'good thing' has always been seen as part of the SAS remit. Initially this was to let more plots, but it is now seen as part of the debate about producing more food locally, less food miles etc. In September we again had a stall at the Ashridge Plot to Plate event at the Monument with a raffle tickets of allotment produce.

One of the impressive things about Sunnyside Allotments is the amount of 'self help' work we get done, compared with other allotment sites. We had our usual Working Parties last winter and while not overly well attended, we did nevertheless get a lot of jobs done. We did some clearing in Birtchnells Copse, under Patrick Stileman's direction, and put up more bird boxes. We did the first coppicing of the hazels in the Jubilee Coppice. We repaired the fence by Grantham Mews gate – a legacy of the railway fencing job and we created a new car park at the end of B road. We cut down and removed dead trees and we painted the summerhouse. There are always general jobs to be done to maintain the communal parts of the site. It's hard work but good exercise and we enjoy a sociable lunch together! You will be glad to know that next year's dates are on the calendar.

I mentioned bird boxes. We are very grateful to John Powell for making these for us. It is important to encourage beneficial wildlife to the site and there was quite a good occupancy rate this year. But sadly many of the fledglings perished in the cold and wet of May. We are grateful too to Stuart Downhill, a local licensed bird ringer, for regularly patrolling our boxes with John Driver, and demonstrating his expertise. We have some more boxes waiting to go up.

Someone else I would like to thank is Andrew Calderwood who has kept the grass cut in the Millennium Coppice. It's really hard work as the ground is so rough. Other people did offer to trim.

Rabbits have been a real problem this year. But quite a few with myxomatosis have been seen and despatched. A local ferreter has started work on SSNew. He netted 8 on his first visit. Rabbits have been cleared from under the SRT building on SSNew and netting has been put down to prevent them congregating there in future. The feral cat project on SSOld is underway. We will notify the Cats Protection League when the des res is ready. The cats will need feeding every morning and we will be looking for some more cat-loving volunteers! They should noticeably reduce the rodent population and while they will probably only catch a small number of young rabbits, the idea is that they will disturb them and keep them on the move.

Water project. This really was a challenging project for the SAS to undertake. We laid about 700m of new pipe. We dug about 16 holes for the plumbers at water tanks, not to mention the extra holes we dug trying to find a non-existent pipe on SSN. We backfilled it all. We started when we said we would; we finished on time. We were almost on budget apart from the extra water pipe on SSN where we had to connect to a pipe higher up the hill. We toned our muscles; we consumed gallons of tea and quantities of cake. As a result we now have a more robust water supply with built in flexibility due to the extra stop cocks installed. The weeks of planning and preparation paid off and of course the weather helped. I can't end this report without paying tribute to the Two Main Men: John Driver who undertook the arduous and time-consuming job of Project Manager, and actually directed work on the ground, and Fred Jackson whose digger-driving expertise and good humour encouraged us all. We all owe them a very great debt of gratitude. But we must also express our thanks to all those of you who responded to the call for volunteers to get stuck in and help. Whether you were able to come for just a couple of hours or everyday, it was all appreciated and helped us to finish the job on time.

A society can only operate successfully with the enthusiastic help and support of its members. But the smooth running of the SAS is down to the Committee. I'm not going to pick out individuals; everyone has played a vital part contributing their own particular skills and I would not have been able to fulfil the role of Chairman during this year without their help and encouragement. I would like us to express our appreciation and thanks

I've enjoyed my year as Chairman – it has been hard work. I thank you all for your support and I wish my successor well in the year ahead.

#### **4/07 Consider and Approve the Society's Accounts**

The Treasurer presented the statement of accounts for the previous year. (Copy attached) It was agreed that the subscription to the SAS should be £2.50 for the current year, to cover increased expenses. These included raised subscription to NSALG and raised postal charges. It was noted that welcome income was raised by the Open Day and the sale of the calendars. Thanks were recorded to Barbara Driver for inspecting the accounts.

## **5/07 Future of Open Days**

It was noted that the Open Days created a lot of work for a few people, while providing publicity and raising funds. It was agreed to continue to hold Open Days and the Committee would seek additional helpers to run the event.

## **6/07 Rabbits**

The problems caused by the increasing rabbit population were discussed and the Chairman reported on action that had been taken or attempted so far.

- a) The Town Council is happy for tenants to fence round their plots, either singly or in groups, subject to gates of some type being provided for access to paths between plots.
- b) Negotiations between the Town council and Network Rail about the rabbits living on the railway banks were proceeding slowly and no conclusions had been reached.
- c) Myxomatosis was present in the rabbit population, but was unlikely to spread widely as many of the rabbits are surface dwellers. The use of ferrets was also hindered by this living habit of the rabbit population.
- d) The Town Council had decided against shooting rabbits on Health and Safety grounds.
- e) It was noted that the rat population was also expanding. The Pest Officer had been contacted and advised that 4 visits to lay poison and check to see if it had been eaten would cost £40.00 per visit. So far, the Town council is unwilling to meet this cost.
- f) One tenant expressed strong disagreement with the decision to home 2 feral cats on Sunnyside Old, but the general view was that this should be tried as a means of keeping the pest problem in check.

It was agreed to press the Council to allow rabbit shooting on the sites, to ask the Council to pay for pest control of rats and the pay for the provision of rat and rabbit traps for the use of tenants. It was noted that if these traps were used, they must be checked daily.

## **7/07 Resolution to Change the Constitution**

It was agreed to alter the rules of the Society to state that subscriptions 'should not exceed £5.00' annually.

## **8/07 To Receive any Nominations for Officers/Committee Members**

The Chairman confirmed that she was resigning as she had agreed to hold the Chair for one year only and it was reported that Patrick Stileman and Billy Wall had resigned from the Committee.

The following were nominated for the committee:

- a) Chair. Freda Earl
- b) Vice Chair. John Driver
- c) Treasurer. John Powell
- d) Secretary. Jenny Sippings
- e) Existing committee members: Brenda Baynes, Anna Dolan, Fiona Duck, Ted Dyer, Prue Scofield and Angela Wheeldon. Plus John Eaton.

## **9/06 Election of Officers and Committee**

Freda Earl was elected as Chair. Proposed by Mary Weakley and seconded by Hazel Grimwood.

The other officers and existing committee were elected. Proposed by Ray Phipps and seconded by Peter Block.

John Eaton was also elected onto the committee. Proposed by Freda Earl and seconded by Fiona Duck.

## **10/07 Election of Allotments' Representative on Town Council's Allotments Management Team**

Freda Earl agreed to be the site rep, with Ted Dyer as deputy. This was proposed by Graham Hall and seconded by Prue Scofield.

## **11/07 Any Other Business**

a) The problems caused by untidy gardens was raised. It was noted that the Chairman had inspected the sites during the summer and letters had been sent to tenants of untidy gardens. Some tenants had decided to give up their plots and these had been re-let.

It was noted that if tenants were to be given notice to quit their plots, this would be done by the Town Council

b) The restoration of the paths after the pipeworks would be needed as the soil sank. Tenants would be asked to fill in dips adjacent to their plots and to prepare these areas for seeding in the spring.

c) Newsletter Distribution. Additional distributors were requested to help with these deliveries. Hazel Grimwood agreed to deliver to George Street and Ray Phipps volunteered for the Hall Park area.

d) Angela announced that there would be coffee after the meeting and the opportunity to buy calendars and to pay subs.

e) Ray Phipps thanked the outgoing committee for all their hard work this past year, particularly for the water project.

The meeting closed at 11.45 a.m