

**MINUTES OF SUNNYSIDE ALLOTMENT SOCIETY'S
14TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
held on
SATURDAY 27TH NOVEMBER, 2010
at
SUNNYSIDE RURAL TRUST**

Present:

Freda Earl(Chair)
John Eaton (Vice-Chair)
Jenny Sippings (Secretary)
John Powell (Treasurer)
Peter Block
Wendy Calder
Jane Dickenson
John Driver
Ted Dyer
Debbi Figueiredo
Cynthia Fulks
Marc Gimour
John Goffey
Hazel Grimwood
Phillipa Jones
Tony Lightfoot
Chris Locke
Mike Locke
Annick Mulcahy
Lin Phillips
Grace Phipps
Ray Phipps
Meg Robinson
John Savage
Adrian Scarborough
Clive Smith
Simon Weightman
Tracey Wells
Angela Wheeldon

Apologies for Absence:

Phil Biss
Fiona Duck
Simon Heywood
Fred & Joan Jackson
Olga Lassman
Chris O'Callaghan
Prue Scofield
Rachel Scott
Nannette Street
Jeanne Woodcraft

1/10 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received (see above)

2/10 Approve the Minutes of the last AGM

The Minutes of the AGM held on 28th November 2009 were confirmed and signed.
Matters arising: Dogs are still a problem on the sites. Freda is preparing a notice to go up.

3/10 Chairman's Report

Freda Earl reported:-

Good morning and welcome. People from Old and New and some new faces.

The most significant figure I have heard this year is a series of Tesco adverts for fruit and salad. "We get it from the field to your table in 48 hours." That just about sums up why we are all growing our own. We have a different set of priorities from the shops. What is that salad doing during that 48 hours? It is picked and sorted, anything the wrong size and shape is thrown away, and it then goes by road to a central depot – Birmingham perhaps, even if it was grown just outside Hemel, it is sorted again, packed in plastic bags which our local council here can't recycle, given a puff of fungicide, loaded back onto the lorry and delivered to the shops. It may of course be sent, not to Birmingham, but to somewhere in Belgium where it is washed and chopped, mixed with other sorts of greenery and sent back here to be displayed on the shelves of ready prepared fresh salad.

The shops need to choose varieties which will still look green when they are on sale, won't go limp or brown at the cut ends They aren't interested in flavour at the expense of yield and they want them all the same size. After all they don't want customers rummaging around the shelves trying to get the freshest looking or the biggest lettuce for their money. This is all perfectly legitimate. There are questions to ask though. Have you noticed that if you buy a packet of prepared salad, even though its sell by date is the following day and the remaining packs in the shop look fine, as soon as you cut open the packet it starts to go stale? Often this is because the package has carbon dioxide instead of air inside to slow down staling. The trouble is that it does not slow the loss of vitamin C. The customers are short of time and want cheap food and this is the only way to provide it

We don't see it that way- We want flavour and vitamins, we want to know what we have put on our food. We don't care if the best tasting raspberries turn to mush after two days because we are going to eat them today. We don't care if the tastiest cucumbers are a funny shape. We want the sense of achievement we get from knowing that the food on our plates is the best we can grow. Sometimes we find that we have grown something amazing. I have eaten Charlotte potatoes and they are fine but this year I grew a few, dug and cooked them within the hour and found that I was tasting new potatoes like they used to be when I was young. As you get older and your taste buds start to get wrinkles you don't say "That tastes just like it used to when I was young" very often and when you do it is a treat.

With vegetables like peas and tomatoes, carrots and potatoes, as soon as the plant is cropped, the sugars start to convert to starch and if you don't eat it very quickly all that wonderful flavour is gone for ever. It is sad that one of our major suppliers thinks that plot to plate in 48 hours is something to boast about. The correct time is more like 48 MINUTES and we are privileged to be able to have the chance to do that.

What have we been doing this year? Quite a lot of watering in the early part of the summer. Our water supply is metered and John reads the meters monthly to report back to the Council. Heavy unexpected use is often a warning of a leak. We can often deal the minor problems

ourselves, which saves delay and the cost of the wasted water or a plumber, which gets taken into account when the rents are fixed. I ask you to keep an eye on any water tanks you pass to make sure they are not overflowing and the tap's turned off properly. After all, we shall be paying for it next year. There are two insoluble problems in Berkhamsted. One is parking and one is how to make the payment for allotment water fair to all tenants. The Council is looking at this.

All the work and effort done by the SAS to put rabbit fencing along the railway has paid off. There are still rabbits on site, Tilley and Stripey are still binging rabbits home but we no longer have them at plague proportions. Wish we could say the same for rats which are everywhere and have done a lot of damage to sweet corn and squashes in particular. The idea comes up from time to time that we should get the Borough rat-catcher in but we are advised, by the borough rat catcher that we should need to spend a lot of money repeated every two to three months in order to cover the site with rat poison. As soon as our resident rats were killed others from surrounding areas would move in to take their place. We can do a limited amount to help. Do not put on your compost heap anything the rats could not find growing on the site. In other words potato peelings – yes Tuna sandwiches no. If you decide to put traps on you allotment make sure that any bait cannot be reached by children, our resident ratters or any desirable wild life. Make sure that you kill any caught rats humanely and if you cannot do this make sure you have arranged IN ADVANCE for someone less squeamish to finish them off for you. If you trap a rat in the open on a very frosty night they tend to have died of hypothermia by morning – any ideas?

Our thanks to Rachel Lyons who left the committee this year.

Woodchip and leaves....please use. The idea of the leaves is to make your own leaf mould on your plots. It takes two years to rot down but once you get going you have a continuous supply. Leaf mould is what peat is a substitute for. Like peat it is not enormously high in nutrients but is a splendid soil conditioner. Our leaves come from the grounds of various school in the town which would otherwise be carted all the way to Aldenham—leaf mould miles. They should be pretty clean.

Working parties There will be working parties in Jan, Feb March. The Jan one is likely to be Birtchnells copse under the control of the new warden Andrew Calderwood, February and March may be stocktaking of the valuable timber resource on SSO but this depends on the availability who knows what there is and where to find it. If this is not possible, we need a volunteer to organise some alternatives

A reminder that Christmas drinks are on December 19th.

Fame – Ted and Angela were in the Gazette and Angela and I went to Chalfont to give a talk on our allotments whose fame seems to have spread far and wide. I have written a couple of articles in Berkhamsted Living. This sort of publicity is always good and emphasises the contribution we make to the community. The Baptist Church Pre School again made their visits to the site this year. If you like the idea of showing the little ones round the allotment and would like to volunteer it is great fun.

The Allotments Handbook is available from the town council and is also on our website.

If you are growing food without pesticides it is devastating to find that your manure is contaminated with residues of amino-pyrolid in sufficient quantities to distort the leaves of susceptible plants like potatoes and tomatoes. There has been trouble on Dellfield and a couple of suspected incidents on Sunnyside. Wheat and possibly hay, is treated with herbicide. The wheat straw is bought in good faith by livestock farmers to bed their stock. The manure contains residues which can be enough to damage crops growing on manured land. What you choose to do about it is up to you. We are told that most of the problem is contained by the farmers buying straw from large arable companies and then selling the manure back to them in a like for like exchange. It seems to me that the land involved must be gradually building up more residues. I personally would want to know more about what happens to the wheat or livestock produce grown in this closed system but that is not strictly an allotment matter. If you buy manure you would be wise to check where your supplier gets his straw and what it has been treated with. We know that there are many sources of manure used on Sunnyside. Please keep the committee informed about any reliable information you come across.

Calendar. We have this year's calendar ready for you at the bargain price of £5.50. This year's theme is fruit. This is a good fund raiser for the SAS

Discussion of the Chair's report:-

There were no comments or questions raised

4/10 Consider and approve the Society's accounts

John Powell the treasurer presented the annual accounts. He asked those attending for ideas for future expenditure. One suggestion was made that we should hire skips again. Discussion took place outlining the problems with the previous skips.

There was a suggestion from Simon and Debbi to make a social, barbecue area on New (Spiros' old plot). It was asked whether this area could be cleared as part of a working party in February or March. It was suggested that this should be discussed at the next committee meeting on 12th January 2011.

A suggestion was made that the SAS barbecue in Cynthia & Jamie's shed could be sold.

The accounts were approved by the meeting. Proposed by John Driver and seconded by Angela Wheeldon.

5/10 To Receive any Nominations for Officers/Committee Members.

The following were nominated as officers:

Chair: Freda Earl
Vice-Chair: John Eaton
Treasurer: John Powell
Secretary: Jenny Sippings

Nominations for the committee:

John Driver (associate member), Nick Hood, Chris Locke, Annick Mulcahy, Prue Scofield, Andy Walker, Simon Weightman (Debbi Figueiredo & Marc Gilmour in reserve) and Angela Wheeldon

6/10 Election of Officers and Committee

Those nominated were all elected to the committee

7/10 Election of Allotments' representative on Town Council's Allotment Management Team

Freda Earl was elected as the Site representative, with John Eaton as Deputy.

8/10 Future Developments

Community picnic area on New was discussed further. John Powell suggested that Marc, Debbie and Simon should draw up a plan of their vision.

Further discussion on skip hire took place. John Driver suggested that this should be left for the committee to decide.

9/10 Any Other Business

Rats John Savage suggested that we use a rat catcher. Ray Phipps suggested that tenants should use traps, but these should be checked regularly. Philippa Jones asked whether the problem was the same all over the allotments. John Eaton enquired about the use of poison. Freda Earl and the meeting in general were opposed to the use of poison. John Driver suggested contacting the NSALG for advice.

Training/mentoring Ray Phipps thought it would be a good idea to draw up a list of people willing to help mentor new tenants. Ray would be willing to draw up such a list and thought it could improve the success rate with new lettings. Ray was asked to put a proposal together which could be discussed at a committee meeting.

Waiting list Freda reported that there were 6 people on the list since May plus a few more that she had not been notified about by the council. There were very few plots available for letting.

Roofing felt Meg Robinson enquired whether it would be possible to buy a roll of higher quality roofing felt to sell to members. Simon Weightman said he would be willing to organise this and Debbie Figueiredo agreed to get a price for some agrimesh.

The meeting closed at 11.45 p.m.