

Minutes - Southern Allotments Society Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 13th November 2024, 7.30pm

The Metropolitan, Lapwing Lane, Didsbury M20 2WS

23 attendees including 6 committee members)

Agenda:

1. Welcome

Apologies: Martin, Lydia & Mike

2. Chair's report

Acting Chair (Craig Wilkinson) introduced Committee members *present & absent* and their main responsibilities:

Martin Oldham – Chairman (not present)

Craig Wilkinson – Secretary & membership systems

Frances Farrow – Treasurer & plot inspections

Ray O'Neil – Inspections & plot lettings

Michelle – Inspections & plot lettings

Alvin Pinder – Society structure/legal

Peter Field – Communities

Hamid – A.M.A.S representative (not present)

Southern Allotments now a member of AMAS (Association of Manchester Allotment Societies) – Hamid (Committee) is our representative.

New Council contact for allotment sites (Richard Dudley)

New version of Green book (Link now available via Society website/useful links)

Achievements/projects completed this year:

Plot lettings - Michelle & Ray are now managing and contacting list provided by Manchester council.

Annual show – successful event although entries a little less due to challenging growing year – more new attendees.

Cabin now open at weekends (Spring/Summer) between 2-4pm where possible
Small branch electric shredder available for use outside of the cabin during cabin opening times.

Purchase of communal manure (Peter Field has kindly funded this). Manure has been used by plot holders and society will continue to provide this for plot holders. Manure is located in the right-hand concrete silo next to the mulch.

Main road tree cutback completed by private contractors. This will enable access for those deliveries who were until recently, unwilling to drive past the trees which were obscuring the road and preventing full access.

New mobile plot inspection system & Database set up. Plot inspectors now have the ability to grade individual plots and take pictures to record state and progress.

Ideas for next year:

In response to the 2024 plot holder survey, we are planning to set up the first Learning session for plot holders. This is anticipated to run (online likely) in February/March 2025 and will focus on Biodiversity & Pollinators, delivered by Debbie (Southway) who manages the grounds/nature area immediately outside the Wintermans Road entrance.

To combat the problem of plot holders dumping of organic waste over fence by the nature reserve and the soil then coming back on to the main road and excessive plant growth then occurring, the committee will trial the opening of the nature reserve at weekends (summer) for a couple of hours to coincide with the cabin(2-4pm). This will enable only those who are **unable** to dispose of **organic only** waste by normal composting methods to place organic waste into a specified area within the nature reserve. As this will be made available via a committee member, the gate to the nature reserve may not be open every weekend. The society requests that if the gate is closed, plot holders DO NOT dump any organic waste over the fence of the nature reserve. Anyone discovered doing this will be reported to the council and may have their plot tenancy cancelled without notice for breach of the site rules. Please be aware that this initiative is a trial and continuation depend on how plot holders participate.

The committee is encouraging a more efficient and less administrative heavy method of collecting Society fee membership payments. We are encouraging plot holders to set up a yearly standing order to be paid on 1st November each year rather than paying cash to committee members. Plot holders can also pay by bank transfer/set up standing orders using the following details:

Account name: Southern Allotment Society

Bank: Santander

Account number: 3906 3485

Sort code: 09-01-54

Please be aware that it is anticipated that cash payments will no longer be accepted due to security reasons, but the society will advise when this payment method is no longer available.

Chair also advised attendees of the reasons for the Society membership fee, the most important being that the Society membership fees provides individual plot holder liability insurance and protects the plot holder (Leasee) from financial and legal liability costs if anyone other than the plot holder has an accident or injures themselves while being present on the plot holder's plot. Chair also advised that the Plot inspection team do walk onto plots to inspect them so it is extremely important to pay the Society fee each year. Chair also advised that an allotment plot holder (thankfully not at Southern) had recently been sued for damages owing to an accident taking place on their plot. The plot holder was not insured and was financially responsible for all costs incurred. The Society would like to remind plot holders that they have a legal responsibility (as defined by their lease) to ensure that their plots remain in an accessible, safe and tidy condition at all times. Chair also advised that a consolidation exercise was underway to identify and contact those plot holders who had not yet paid their 23/24 or 24/25 Society fees and would be contacted by email in the next few months.

Chair advised that the Society has been approached by a bicycle courier and asked if we could manage the collection and distribution of excess plot holder produce for distribution at Emeline's pantry, a local women-only food distribution charity. Owing to issues around arranging access and storage of excess produce (Rats/other wildlife being the challenge) the committee has suggested that plot holders might donate directly to the charity instead. Details of the charity (and other charities we support) will be listed on the new Society website over the next couple of months.

Chair advised that a gentle reminder of the site rules will be included in an end of year summary that is planned to be sent out to all plot holders (likely a link to the new website).

Work days – these are publicised days where plot holders work together on a communal task to help maintain the safety, accessibility and condition of the whole site. There have been 4 work days this year: 2 x main drive path clearance days where excessive plot growth has been removed from the main drive path, 1 x rubbish sorting session to separate historically dumped rubbish from outside the toilet area, placing clean wooden waste into the nature reserve to encourage biodiversity and insect populations. There has also been a skip day where the remaining rubbish was loaded into a hired skip.

Chair advised that work days were publicised on the cabin noticeboard and the entrance gates and would be soon referenced in future email communications. To encourage participation from more plot holders, those who contribute regularly will be able to make use of the cordless power tools used on work days.

3. Treasurer's report

Frances Farrow talked through the Society financial statements (see attached) and advised that the society had purchased new cordless power tools to help support work days (1 x cordless strimmer, 2 x cordless branch saws). Frances advised that these were only available on supervised work days owing to health and safety concerns and that previously lent tools had been returned broken. A number of rat bating units have also been purchased this year.

Outstanding payments from this year's statement include:

Cabin ceiling & floor replacement/repair, new kitchen and lighting fitting
(Estimated £3000)

Electricity charges (estimated to be £240)

4. Secretary's report

Craig Wilkinson advised that the Society now had a new secure membership database in place and with this, a more efficient method of managing plot inspections. Access to the database is limited to a small number of named committee members to help keep data secure. Craig also advised that the society was in discussion with Manchester City council about possible participation in their new allotments management system ('Colony' replacement) and will know more in early 2025 if this is possible.

Craig advised that the society now had full control over its website and email systems and a tentative email communications effort had started to show results with more plot holders receiving emails. This should improve once the society domain name (southernallotments.org) has been transferred fully to the new website hosting provider (Hostinger). Craig advised that the new society contact email is societyadmin@southernallotments.org and which is accessed by committee members on an ad hoc basis.

MIND charity who have a large plot on the site have approached the committee and asked to use the cabin during the winter months so that they can continue to

support their clients in the colder weather. The society has agreed to provide the cabin for use, subject to review.

The gate padlocks codes will change in the new year and only those plot holders who have paid their 23/24 & 24/25 Society fees will be provided with the new codes. If asked, please do not share gate codes with anyone – we are trying to encourage everyone to pay their society fees and ensure that they are insured so if you are asked, please refer the person to the society email address or if present, one of the committee members who can advise further.

5. Committee nominations & elections

Craig Wilkinson is now elected as Secretary with no objections recorded. No further new nominations have been received.

6. General discussion, Q & A, suggestions

Emails received in advance of the AGM:

MDC

Can you confirm how many skips were delivered to site for use of plot holders to remove waste from site in 2024 & how many are planned for 2025?

Also - when a skip is planned, can the committee inform the plot holders by email of dates? The last one appeared and was full before some plot holders had a chance.

As plots become vacant and new allotmenters take over there is usually an amount of metal / wood / plastic that needs to be recycled and surely a regular skip would be advantageous?

Chair response:

1 skip was ordered this year at a cost of £480. The purpose of this skip was to remove the rubbish dumped outside the toilet area and which had to be manually sorted through. Skip hire is only arranged for site rubbish removal tasks, after which if there is still space in the skip, plot holders are invited to dispose of (specified by type) rubbish from their plot. Please note that skips **must** be supervised and managed by one of the committee members and this is done on a voluntary basis – If unspecified rubbish is placed into a skip, the skip hire company will not remove it and will charge the society even more money for further hire.

The society encourages all plot holders to compost (organic) waste on their own plot and if unable to do this, use the (trialled) option of placing it in the nature reserve in its

designated place. Any other waste should be removed by the plot holder and taken to one of the two local recycling centres (Stretford and Wythenshawe).

Questions / suggestions presented at the AGM:

The standard of (some) plots was raised in comparison to other sites.

Response:

The society inspects plots every month during the summer and grades the plot. These grades are published and if two grade 5s are recorded, the plot is then reported to the council who have the power to terminate the lease. On occasion, the council has been known to overrule the referral of the inspection team and which is currently being resolved by dialogue with the council.

A probationary period was suggested for new plot holders

Response:

While a good idea in principle, there is currently no method of doing this with the current council leases. Committee member **Peter Field** will ask the council if this is possible and if so, the committee will consider this as a new initiative.

To assist new plot holders (and encourage effort) how could plot holders be identified as people to approach for advice?

Response:

This was discussed at a previous committee meeting and where those willing to assist and give advice, could display a notice of some form ('Plot buddy') to indicate that if present on site, they would be able to offer advice. This can be raised at the next committee meeting to outline a way to make this work.

Is there a toilet on site?

Response:

Yes, it is situated just after the car park area (past the two mulch & manure silos) on the right. It is a composting toilet for seated and standing users. Chair asks that this can be cleaned by anyone – dust pan/brush, cleaner, hot water and bin bags available in the cabin at weekends between 2-4pm. New signage will be put on the toilet door to help identify it.

Could we have some communal manure?

Response:

Yes, Committee member **Peter Field** has kindly funded an initial load of manure and which was placed in the right hand manure silo (next to the BBQ). Peter will order more manure and which the society will now fund moving forward.

Is the provided mulch organic?

Response

Unfortunately, there is no way of clarifying this as the mulch is delivered from multiple sources. The mulch mostly consists of chipped trees and unlikely to be sprayed with chemicals but we cannot guarantee this. If any plot holder can offer to test this, please let the committee know.

Communications between the committee and plot holders still a problem

Response:

Craig advised of the considerable efforts that have been made to secure and manage membership data through research and adoption of a new website/email hosting/database system. While every conceivable effort has been made to encourage plot holders to join the (private) Facebook group, not everyone wishes to participate and this cannot be a mandatory request. Craig also advised that the recent membership database had been cleaned up but that not everyone had (or would) provide contact information and that made communications challenging. With the transfer of website and email to a new hosting provider, it is anticipated that even more emails will be received by plot holders and that this method of communication will be the priority moving forward. Frances also advised that signs and notices have been placed around the site and that these have generated further engagement.

(Post AGM) Craig will investigate how the new website can assist in managing the flow of information to full paid-up society members. This may also improve the current society fee payment collection challenges. Craig will update at the next committee meeting.

Meeting closed at 8.50pm