

Burnside and Vinery AGM 2022 minutes

26 April 2022

St Thomas' Church Hall, Cambridge

The meeting started at 1930 with Liv Bull and Barry South in the chair.

Present: 24 plotholding members plus one Associate Member.

Before the start of formal business, the committee introduced themselves.

1. Apologies for absence.

HS noted that there were apologies from Melinda Rigby, Vanessa Nichols, Fran and Terry East, Ingrid Jackson, Lynn Turner, Joan Bullock-Anderson and Jane Betts.

2. Approval of the minutes from last November.

Approved unanimously.

3. Site reports.

Matthew (Burnside) reported that he has just started letting plots again. Nominally we have three half plots vacant. Emails have gone out to various people, and he aims to get them let out by the end of next week. He and Andy will do a site survey in May which will likely result in some more vacant plots (usually 10-15), so in June he shall let out some more.

The waiting list for both sites is currently 100 – 43 for Vinery, 38 for Burnside, and 19 don't mind which. Currently the waiting time for a plot is at least a year.

Barry (Vinery) summarised his report as 'What he said'. Vinery is very nearly full except five half plots; he hopes to get them let out soon. He hopes to reopen the toilet soon – it needs some love but it will be done. He is looking into having a shredding session for woody waste.

Andy (Burnside) reported on general Burnside site activity. We now have volunteers to 'own' and keep clean all the water troughs (thanks due to them), which means nice clean troughs (plotholders were encouraged to keep them like that!). Burn Bin version 3 is running well and we've cooked some things in the oven. The toilet is being refurbished (the front side had warped), and that is almost done and ready for reopening. The store is fully stocked, and reopens on Saturday (30 April) with lots of bargains. As always Vinery people are very welcome to come and use it. Throughout May the store will be open every Sat and Sun morning. Coming up: there will be more burn bins (weather dependent). The next social will be Sunday 5 June: Jubilee afternoon tea, all welcome.

4. Behaviour and grievance policies

Liv introduced the reason why we're bringing these in. These policies were prepared a couple of years ago by Alex Considine Tong and Suzy Ashworth, to whom we owe thanks; the policies haven't yet been formally adopted by the Society. The aim is to give a framework under which both tenants and the Committee operate. They don't change much (if anything) about how we operate, or what we would hope is acceptable behaviour; it

simply means that we have in writing what the Society expects of its tenants and the procedures for sorting things out if there are any problems. We really hope that we will never have to use them – it's only for the worst-case scenarios, but it gives plotters a framework in which to make a complaint if needed.

There were no comments on the policies and they were unanimously approved.

5. Adoption of new Society Rules

HS introduced the new Rules which the Committee were asking the Society to adopt. Because we are regulated by the FCA, we have to notify them of changes to our Constitution; while doing so, we have found that the FCA require a number of specific clauses which we don't have at the moment.

The aim of this is not to increase bureaucracy or introduce any new restrictions on people; instead it's simply to make sure that we're complying with the law. The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (of which the Society is a member) have a set of Model Rules which have been agreed with the FCA, so we've drawn up a new set of Society Rules based on these.

The Model Rules are almost right for us, but not quite, so we've made a few minor amendments to them. We've tried to keep them as close as possible to our existing Constitution, but there are a few which (having taken legal advice) are a bit different. These are:

- In our existing setup, the AGM has elected the Committee members, and then when the Committee meets it has then chosen the Site Chairs, Secretary and Treasurer from among those on the Committee. The advice is that the AGM should formally elect the Site Chairs, Secretary and Treasurer - ie the membership should make these choices, rather than the Committee. (In practice, this probably won't make any difference to who's elected, given not many people stand!)
- In our existing setup, the Site Chairs, Secretary and Treasurer are elected for a term of two years, before being able to stand for election. (This was intended to provide continuity of postholders.) However, the advice is that because our membership runs on an annual basis, these officers should be elected every year. (Again, in practice, this probably won't make any difference to who's elected.)
- In our existing setup, Associate Members (who have an interest in the site or allotment gardening, but who don't want a plot) can join the Society, but they don't have a vote at the AGM. The advice is that Associate Members should have a vote at General Meetings, except on matters which only affect plotters.

The new rules were unanimously approved.

6. Election of Officers and Committee

All committee members and Officers stood down. All were happy to stand again, including all Officers, and no other members wished to stand for any positions. Re-election was approved unanimously in all cases. The Committee remains:

Burnside Chair: Liv Bull

Vinery Chair: Barry South

Secretary: Hamish Symington

Treasurer: Andy Kurdynowski

Committee Members: Matthew Whitelegg, John McGill, Emma Lacy (all Burnside); Peter Harrison, Patrick Joyce (both Vinery).

7. Auditing of accounts

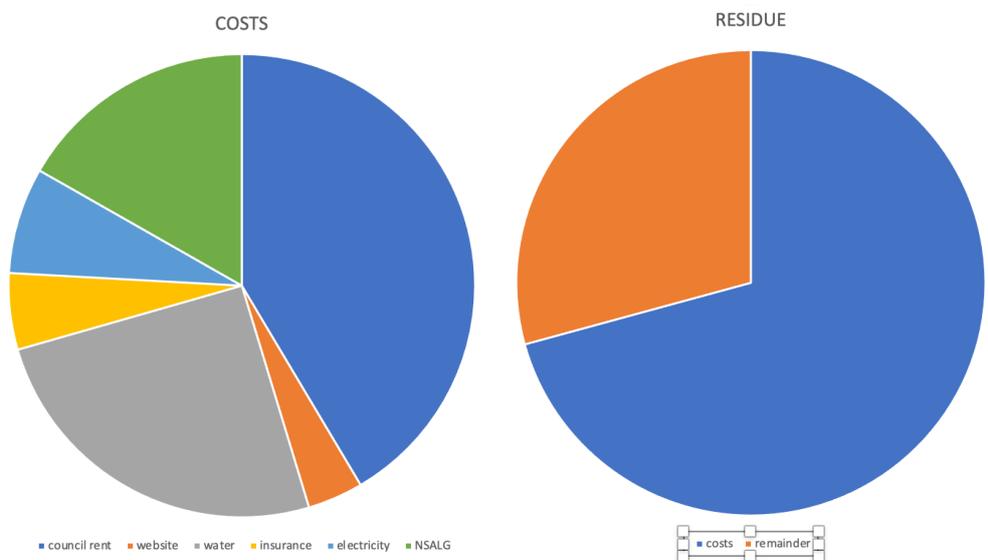
The FCA allows for us to opt out of formally auditing our accounts. We believe that it was voted for at the AGM in November 2021 but it was not formally minuted, so we need to take that vote again. A vote was held to approve opting out of auditing; this was approved with one opposing.

There then followed some discussion on the accounts; it was pointed out that the lack of audit means the burden of responsibility rests on the Treasurer, and having someone to audit the accounts in future might be useful. It was agreed that if there is someone on the society with accountancy experience who would be willing to look things over, then that would be good. Andy to email round at some point later this year to ask if anyone's willing to do that. It was queried if there is the need to go through the bank statement; Andy says probably not, but we do keep careful records on a spreadsheet. It was noted that the Committee approves large spends.

8. AOB.

Andy introduced the subject of the Society's finances. He showed a breakdown of our costs; our biggest outlay is rent, then NSALG affiliation fees, then water. Our *fixed* costs are about 2/3 our income, but because over the last few years we've been very careful how we spend money, the surplus has added up.

There are a few other non-fixed outlays: stock for the store (though the store is self funding); King's Seeds give us a cut from the order; potatoes the same; onions the same. There was income from the Council because of the closure of a historical scheme, too. There are a few other non-fixed costs – the hall for the AGM; repairs; keys; toilet costs etc.



(Left: Blue: council rent; orange: website; grey: water; yellow: insurance; pale blue: electricity; green: NSALG. Right: Blue: costs; orange: surplus.)

Liv and Barry then introduced that the Committee would like to spend some of our surplus. The Committee would welcome ideas for site improvements, or kit that's useful or nice to have, for either site.

There was debate as to whether we should have a rent reduction so we don't continue building a surplus. It was felt that the rent was very cheap already (£20/half plot), though noted that even £20 may be out of some people's budgets, particularly as the idea behind allotments is to give space to grow food to reduce the need for buying it. It was suggested that if this is the case perhaps we could have a policy where we reduce rent for people who can't afford to pay, though this did not receive widespread approval.

Given energy and consumables costs are rising; the buying power of the surplus we have will likely be reduced in coming years. It was also noted that having a small surplus is a good thing, so we can improve the site; the problem here is not that we have a small surplus each year but that we shouldn't have built it up in the first place! One of the main reasons that we have it is that we have been fortunate that Andy has had the time and skills to do construction or repair jobs himself rather than paying a contractor; he won't be around for ever; we may need the money.

Returning to ideas for spending the money:

- A refurb of the Vinery gate would be excellent.
- It was suggested that sometimes new tenants find it really hard to make a start; perhaps new plots could be cleared for people to make a decent start. (Perhaps *some* new plots, not all?) There is the possibility of having a communal rotavator, though lending heavy machinery is not the simplest of things. We could certainly do more to help new people with tricky plots; perhaps this could be part of volunteer days.
- It would be nice to do more to help people reuse rainwater. AK noted that on store opening day there'll be a note about free guttering; there are some large water butts available. The committee is always happy to help if people need help with water collection.
- Liv has prepared some suggestion cards for further suggestions after today; these will also be left at the store when it opens.
- Having dumps of soil improver is good; perhaps we could have a bunker for it? Nuffield Road has a concreted area for soil improver – perhaps we could do that. Vinery would be interested in having one as well.
- It was noted that there had been some talk about a polytunnel, but this had disappeared. Andy says it was a very big project, and the polytunnel that we got (9m wide and 25m long) was too big, and the cost of skinning it was going to be very expensive. We didn't get enough people interested in using it to make it worthwhile spending the money on. We've now given it away to CoFarm – it's even possible that they're not going to use it because it's so big! Polytunnels need managing really carefully for temperature and badgers – it's actually not the easiest of things to keep working. We probably shouldn't have taken it in the first place. Also it would take up space on a site where we do have a massive waiting list!

- The benefit of being affiliated to NSALG was queried. It costs us £3 a person to be members. It gives us access to King's Seeds (=cheap seeds), plus a kickback on cost price for seed ordering, which works out at approximately the same amount that we give to them. There is also access to legal advice and various discounts. The Committee feel that it is worthwhile continuing membership.

Penny proposed a vote of thanks to the committee.

There was no other business, so the meeting closed at 2034.