

## Burnside and Vinery AGM

5 April 2023

7.30pm, St Thomas' Church Hall

In attendance: 31 members of the Society, including committee members Liv Bull (LB), Hamish Symington (HS), Andy Kurdynowski (AK), Patrick Joyce (PJ), Emma Lacy (EL), John McGill (JM) and Aggie Gada (AG).

### Introduction

LB introduced the AGM and presented apologies from committee members Matthew Whitelegg and Peter Harrison. The current Committee introduced themselves.

### Approving minutes of the previous meeting (April 2022)

The minutes were approved by acclamation.

### Burnside Site Report

AK presented the Burnside report.

- People commenting that the site is looking good and tidy.
- The tearoom is being used well.
- All plots are let.
- The toilet has been less good: the building needed refurbishment, which has cost some time and work. Unfortunately the toilet hasn't been used properly by some people, which has caused real problems. Thanks to the toilet team (particularly Ingrid). We've modified it a bit and hopefully this year we won't get so much of a problem. We'll see how it goes.
- Water to the site will come back on next week.
- The amount of general rubbish on the site is an ongoing issue. In the last three years we've had three lorryloads of scrap metal off the site. We've had numerous 8yd skips; we've also had three 13yd skips which have helped.
- It would be great to see more people at the volunteering days – we have regulars, but having new people come along would be great.
- Coming up next: we're going to be covering the outside space of the tearoom.
- Also coming up: a communal herb garden on the newly grassed area next to the orchard.
- Looking at improving space for wildlife on the site, for more insects – long grass, wild flowers, insect hotel etc.
- Aiming to re-gravel the car park soon as well.
- Store re-opens on 15 April – special offers, plus equipment!

A tenant noted that the free wood chip and compost deliveries are useful.

A question was asked about cutting down tall trees on the Burnside end of the site. We should have done this last year and it is now the wrong time of year to do this. **LB** will keep an eye on this and aim to schedule it in next autumn/winter.

A question was asked about why there are some 'derelict' plots when there's a big waiting list. LB explained that we do two site inspections a year; we have been being somewhat lenient over the last few years, as COVID made it difficult for many people to work their plots. We do evict a number of people each year, though. We are also trying to use volunteering days to help new tenants clear their plots; we've also been proactively helping tenants get rid of rubbish with our skips, aiming to help them get plots back into cultivation.

There was a question about getting some raised-bed plots, either for people with accessibility needs or as a small part-plot for people on the waiting list. LB explains we have it as a project for the future, we'd need grant money to pay for it, and we don't have a suitable plot – it needs to be very near the gate so it's actually accessible!

### Vinery Site Report

- Patrick Joyce (PJ) introduced the Vinery update.
- They had a delivery of a skip-full of soil improver which was well used.
- The skip was then used to take away (some of some) derelict sheds which have started to be demolished on volunteering days (thanks to the volunteers). These have been there for ~40 years.
- We've also got rid of half a tonne of asbestos. The sites are now clear of asbestos, as far as we can see.
- The pile of detritus ('communal compost pile') has also been removed, the plot cleared of brambles, and the plot let.
- Thanks to EL the hazel plantation has been coppiced, producing lots of useful poles.
- Upcoming: a final clear-up of the derelict site, using a contractor to take away wood, tin, and clear the large trees too, then some new projects.
- All vacant plots have been re-let (ten new tenants since PJ took it on).

A comment from the floor is that PJ has injected a lot of new energy, and that it is appreciated.

HS and LB noted that there are around 90 people on the waiting list, roughly split across both sites. That's going to take about three years to get to the top. We periodically prune the list. Existing tenants who want a plot are welcome to join the list, wait to get to the top, then sit on it while they wait for a particular plot to become available.

One Vinery tenant asks if the fence along the alley could be repaired. **PJ** to investigate – we're not sure whose fence it is!

A Vinery tenant says there are a number of plots which are looking derelict (though another says there are several which *are* being used!). They've not been surveyed since PJ took over the site management; they will be inspected in April.

### Treasurer's Report

AK presented the accounts (noting that this is the situation to the end of the last financial year, end September). He explained that Cordelia, a tenant on Burnside, provided a lay audit of the accounts and was happy with them.

At the end of the year we still ended up with more money than we started with, even though we were trying to spend money on larger projects (shared bags of compost, new picnic benches, new mower on Burnside). Vinery is spending a lot more than before (thanks PJ!) so we will hopefully start to reduce our surplus in coming years.

The store has done very well, particularly in selling equipment which has been donated to the Society from tenants who are leaving.

Electricity is a high cost. We have looked at putting in a solar panel, but we have found a new supplier which is one-third of the cost of before (saving ~£400 per year).

Skips are also expensive – Mick George is about £365 for a 12yd skip. The 13yd council skips are £185 – Burnside have had three, and it's great to see rubbish being removed from the site. We do need to think about how we get rid of rubbish from the site (or not bring stuff on to the site!) for the future.

A Vinery tenant asks about how we're communicating with people about not bringing stuff on, suggesting a WhatsApp group. The Society is not keen on setting up an official WhatsApp group, not least because it means we'd be sharing people's personal phone numbers. **LB** will produce a poster for the summer after we've spent time clearing the site, helping to educate people about what can be coming on site. **AK** extolled the virtue of actually talking to people, too; it's a multi-pronged approach of emails, posters, talking etc.

One tenant suggests a deposit system for new tenants to vouchsafe that they will not bring rubbish on. It's a possibility, but it would also need us to provide plots in essentially pristine conditions.

A tenant asks why water rates are cheaper in this last year than last. **AK** suggests that some people simply gave up watering because it was too hot, and wrote off the year's harvest. Otherwise, not sure.

A tenant asks if it's possible to earn interest on our current account. **AK** to investigate.

**HS** introduced the option of an opt-out for auditing our accounts, which is the option recommended by the Committee. There was some discussion as to whether we should have a professional to audit the accounts, but there was general agreement that having a member of the Society audit the receipts is enough. The members present agreed that we can opt out of having our accounts audited, with all in favour except one abstention.

## Elections

- Burnside Chair: **HS** proposed **LB**. **Kate Whitelegg** seconded. No other candidates. Passed unopposed.
- Vinery Chair: **HS** proposed **LB**. **John McGill (JM)** seconded. No other candidates. Passed unopposed.
- Secretary: **LB** proposed **HS**. **Kate Whitelegg** seconded. No other candidates. Passed unopposed.

- Treasurer: LB proposed AK. HS seconded. No other candidates. Passed unopposed.
- Burnside Site Manager: MW has stepped down as joint Site Manager. LB proposed AK. HS seconded. No other candidates. Passed unopposed. (AK notes that having a second site manager for lettings etc. is useful, so we may co-opt someone.)
- Vinery Site Manager: LB proposed PJ. HS seconded. No other candidates. Passed unopposed.
- Committee members: LB proposed EL, JM, Aggie Gada (AG), Peter Harrison; HS seconded. There was consensus that members were happy to elect all in one vote; all elected to the committee unopposed.

LB thanked MW for his very hard work over the last decade or so as Burnside site manager. It is much appreciated.

### Site Rules

HS introduced the proposed changes to the site rules regarding bonfires. A Vinery tenant suggested adding 'no accelerants' to the proposed Rule 14, which the Committee accepted was a sensible idea.

A couple of tenants suggested entirely banning bonfires. A Vinery tenant spoke in favour of bonfires being allowed at least part of the year.

JM queried if barbecues were acceptable: HS explained that these rules don't cover barbecues and they are permitted.

A Vinery tenant asked if it would be possible to have the Burn Bin occasionally. It is unclear if that will be possible, for reasons of space and management. **PJ** to bear it in mind.

Given the suggestion to ban fires entirely, there were then two votes: one on banning bonfires (except the Burn Bin) entirely; one on changing the rules as suggested (but adding in a 'no accelerants' clause).

Vote on banning fires entirely: only two in favour, otherwise all against.

Vote on rules as presented: all in favour with one abstention.

The Site Rules will therefore be updated to ban bonfires between 1 April and 30 September

### Website update

HS presented a note on the rent, potato and King's Seeds orders: we hope to move online for all payments in future (with the exception of those members who wish to continue using paper). The additional cost to members would be 70p per seed order.

### Social prescribing

For time reasons we're parking this item, but **EK** will write it up for **HS** to send round by email.

### Any other business

- A vote of thanks was proposed from the floor.
- A tenant asked what the situation was with paths between plots on Burnside. **LB** to investigate, in collaboration with MW.

LB thanked everyone for attending and for their comments and questions.

Meeting closed 2100.