

Burnside and Vinery Road Allotment Society

Annual General Meeting 2024

St Martin's Church Hall
29 February 2024

Present: - Liv Bull (Burnside Site Chair/Vinery Site Chair), Hamish Symington (Secretary/Treasurer), Peter Fenton, Andy Kurdynowski, John McGill, Aggie Gada, Patrick Joyce, plus 18 members of the Society (15 ploholders, three Associate); a few other Society members arrived after the meeting started.

The meeting started at 19:32.

Welcome and apologies

- LB welcomed everyone to the meeting, and noted that Emma Lacy, Peter Harrison and Sam Bloxam (Committee members) were not able to attend. Apologies were received from assorted Society members.

Approving minutes from last meeting

- A Society member queried whether re-gravelling the car park was planned. We aimed to have done it this year but have not been able to. We will keep it on our radar for the future.
- The minutes from the 2023 AGM were approved.

Chair's report

- LB summarised the Society's activities. Her report is attached below.
- At the end of her report LB noted AK's contribution to the Society over many years, and how grateful we are to him. As he steps down from his post as Site Manager, we want to formally minute this. We were pleased to present him with a commendation from NSALG Eastern Region.
- A member queried that scrap metal may be being left on site by people who are not members of the Society. LB will keep an eye out for this.

Vinery site report

PJ summarised Vinery activities over the last year.

- Finished remediation of the part of the site which was dilapidated sheds: these are now plots for letting and have been re-let.
- 16-18 plots relet this year so lots of new tenants (welcome!).
- Three volunteer sessions focussing on coppicing, tidying and scrap metal.
- At least three skips – popular! Lots of rubbish shifted.
- Felled some nuisance trees.
- Three major water leaks.

Burnside site report

AK summarised Burnside activities over the last year.

- The weather has meant that we've not been able to do as much site maintenance as we'd hope.
- Several volunteering days: fencing, herb garden, demolished sheds, skips, scrap metal shifting, a few burn bins but the wind direction has been wrong (and they have been popular when they happened, including meals), and the new tearoom has helped with these.
- Tea club membership is over 20 now.
- Toilet is being looked after well by the toilet team, and modifications have resolved lots of the problems we've had with the toilet.
- Burnside store is doing well, and making a little profit.
- There was an underground water leak, fixed on the day it was found.
- Compost orders were well received.
- Summer party at Burnside: we bought in catering and asked for donations; it was received well.
- Currently 129 tenants on the Burnside site, and people do have helpers – so that's a couple of hundred people!
- During the year we let 26 half plots out and there are 49 on the waiting list.
- LB commented that the waiting list is about 1.5 years at present.

Treasurer's report

HS presented a report on finances. The report is reproduced below.

- AK commented that we rely on tenants to point out water leaks to us – so please do point them out to the Committee if you see boggy patches, and don't cover potential leaks with wood chip!

Auditing of accounts

The members present voted unanimously to opt out of having our accounts audited, and the accounts were approved.

Election of Officers; Burnside Chair, Vinery Chair, Secretary & Treasurer

- LB noted that JM is stepping down from the Committee, though he is going to be helping run the Burnside store in the future. LB thanked John for his contribution over around ten years on the Committee.
- LB unanimously elected as Burnside Chair and Vinery Chair.
- HS unanimously elected as Secretary.
- Luce Moelans has volunteered to stand as Treasurer. She was unanimously elected.

Election of Committee

- Peter Fenton, Andy Kurdynowski, Aggie Gada, Patrick Joyce, Sam Bloxam, Peter Harrison, Emma Lacy were unanimously elected to the Committee.

The meeting was paused at 2011 for a comfort break. The meeting resumed at 2016.

Setting of rent for 24/25

HS introduced the rationale behind increasing rents (report below).

- A tenant queried the average rent in Cambridge; previous conversations with John Parrott (at the Council) suggest it's around £35 for half a plot.
- There was a query as to whether we should raise the rent even further, given this is lower than many other sites – we feel that raising it to this level is fair and there is no need to over-raise it. It was unanimously agreed that rents will raise to £40 full plot/£20 half plot/£13 quarter plot for the 2024-5 year.

Change in tenancy agreement

LB introduced the proposed new tenancy agreement.

- HS has been in discussions with NSALG legal team to make improvements to our tenancy agreement. Although our current one is simple, it has a number of deficiencies from a legal standpoint. HS has combined our current agreement and site rules with the NSALG model tenancy agreement and the wording has been unanimously approved by the committee, and reviewed by NSALG legal team.
- The agreement won't change activity for most, but it will support us to be able to better manage situations when rules are broken. There are a few adjustments we'd like to note;
 - Vinery gate must be shut and locked at all times – we get multiple complaints throughout the year about this gate being left unlocked overnight and leading to trespassing and we feel this is a reasonable change.
 - Path maintenance between plots to be the responsibility of the tenant – honestly something we thought was already a rule, but bringing this in means we can be clear on the responsibilities for plot holders with the paths between plots and can hold individuals accountable for their management.
 - Trees – new trees may only be fruit trees and on dwarfing rootstock. We get multiple complaints about trees so we plan to implement this new rule to support fewer issues with trees going forward. Existing trees will not be covered by this.
- We have to give a full year's notice outside of a growing season, so the new tenancy agreement won't come into effect until the 25/26 year. All society members will be automatically transferred onto the new tenancy when the society membership is paid in September 2025. You won't physically have to sign the document – it will be included on the online payment process for that year.
- A Society member queried point 6.4: what is an 'immoral purpose'? HS to query with NSALG.
- A Society member queried which paths would need to be maintained? HS noted that it's the half of the path nearest your plot. While this may seem needlessly complicated, it's a standard clause.

- Society members queried if we could buy tools to enable path maintenance. LB explained that our insurance doesn't cover this, but there is no problem with tenants sharing tools.

No vote was taken as none is needed. Tenants will be notified of the new tenancy agreement in September 2024, and it will come into force in 2025.

AOB

- A tenant proposed a vote of thanks to the Committee for their work, which was generally welcomed by all.
- A tenant noted that the water requirements of Cambridge are under pressure, and that tenants should consider rainwater harvesting. LB will discuss this with the tenant and aim to increase activities around this on site.
- A tenant has noted deer activity on plots, and asked if there's anything that can be done about this. Culling is impractical. We have had discussions with St Bede's about fencing around the school.

Meeting closed 2041.

Chair's report

It has been a very busy year for the society, where many projects have been completed across both sites. We have had a specific focus on clearance over the last year, having arranged multiple skips across both sites, hiring contractors to support, and further plans to get a scrap metal collector in to remove the growing piles of metal. The condition of both sites has improved, although we are aware there are some vacant derelict plots still due to be cleared. Rest assured there are plans in place to resolve this and get them let to new tenants as soon as possible. All the above does come at a financial cost (which Hamish will go into in his treasurer's report) so I feel it is worth noting that while we may arrange for occasional skips for specific clearance projects, these will not be a regular feature on the sites.

The Madingley Mulch joint order was very popular this year and we will consider repeating this again in future. Unfortunately, at the moment we are unable to get deliveries of PAS100 soil improver to either site as the company who produced it have stopped delivering. We are investigating alternative sources.

We have also been very busy in the background sorting out our processes and making things easier for everyone. Hamish has done some great work rebuilding our plot letting process, tidying up the website, and setting up an online card payment process for the rents, which worked really well this year! On top of this, the committee have agreed a new site inspection procedure which we will be publishing on our website in due course so that we are open and clear on how we manage this in a fair manner. These inspections will still occur twice a year in the spring and summer.

The committee as a whole have been working proactively together to support both sites, we have held multiple joint committee meetings and have attended events at both sites, including a coppicing day at Vinery and the two parties we had in the summer. We have

also agreed to share key tasks across the committee more widely, with each committee member having an area to oversee e.g troughs, tea facilities, plot letting. We have also built stronger relationships with the council and now further understand what they can support with.

We also had great positive feedback in the recent survey, with 70 responses, 69 of which were positive. There were lots of really useful suggestions, and I won't go through them all now as I will be writing up a full report for the committee in the near future. One initial action we are going to take is share round the Welcome Pack we have created for new tenants. There was some feedback about being unsure about how to access the tea facilities on both sites and other key features. If you have any further feedback, please raise this either in the AOB or contact one of the committee members directly or via the form on the website.

Future plans are currently, pending us all being re-elected, completing the tea room extension at burnside and refresh of the vinery pavilion, working with the council to hopefully repair the vinery gate, alongside further clearance of derelict plots. It is also our centenary year so plan to have some events to celebrate this leading up to a party on the August bank holiday Monday later this year.

Finally, one of the big things to happen this year is that Andy has stood down as Site Manager at Burnside and society Treasurer. Andy has been on the committee for over 20 years and in that time has improved the sites greatly! I am extremely proud to present him with this commendation from NSALG east region for his long and dedicated service.

Treasurer's report

This last year we have focussed on clearing Vinery, at a cost of nearly £4k. Over and above our usual spend, we have also spent money on the tearoom, herb garden, and a couple of larger events. We have also introduced credit card payments online, which vastly reduces admin, but does introduce a small fee.

The store has made a small profit, as has seed commission from King's and a little surplus from compost sales. Most of our income comes from rents.

At the end of the 2022 financial year we had approximately £17k in the bank account. At the end of the 2023 financial year we had approximately £14.5k in the bank account. However, this does not reflect amounts due to be paid of approximately £3.5k for compost, £1.5k for water, and £700 for skip hire, so at the time of writing our bank account stands at approximately £9.8k.

Two catastrophic water leaks at Vinery have cost us dear: approximately £2.5k more than usual. We are pursuing a leak allowance payment from our water supplier, but have no info as to whether we will get that or not. We have now implemented a monthly monitoring of water meter readings to ensure that long leaks like this can't ever happen again; we've had two small leaks at Burnside since then which we have fixed quickly.

At the end of the year our bank account was around £9.5k. Since then we've also spent about £1k on store stock, and a few expected outlays on things like insurance, water, admin and so on, so we're on track for spend this year. We do still have a bit of surplus left, and some projects we'd like to spend it on:

- Finishing the Burnside tearoom extension: £600
- Refreshing the Vinery Pavilion refresh: £150
- Tree surgery to one tree in the Burnside/Tiverton Way corner by the Burnside park: approx £200
- The Vinery gate: £2000 (approx.)
- The centenary celebration: £400 (approx.)
- Vinery party in June: £150
- Herb garden: £100

All this will cost us £3600.

So, that's the situation to date, and with this spend we'll end up with a reserve of about £5k which is what we aimed to get to when we discussed this a couple of years ago, so I'm very pleased that we've been able to do this work.

Now I want to look to the future.

Standard forecast

This is for the 'normal' running of the site, and excludes store income or expenditure.

Income

Approximate current annual income from plot and tea club membership: £5040
(estimated from rent 2023)

Expenditure

Meetings: £200

Insurance: £210

NSALG: £620

Rent: £1480

Electricity: £220

Water: £600

Card processing: £150

Keys: £50

Tearoom supplies: £100

Toilet supplies: £300

Volunteering days: £300

Postage, laminating etc.: £100

Website: £50

Take-home message: with rents at the current rates, this gives an annual surplus of £660.

I have omitted the store from this; I'm considering it self-funding, making a profit of a few hundred pounds a year which is a useful extra surplus.

Rents report

As I said before, we have been actively spending the reserve in our bank account, so we're now down to a reserve of £5k. We feel that we should retain a £5k reserve for unexpected urgent expenditure.

I've already told you that our current surplus is going to be about £660 per year – and that needs to cover site maintenance as well as a few other costs, including things like our events. This has been nearly enough in previous years, because our site maintenance costs have been much lower, and because we had a big surplus in our bank account. We need more now because of increases in material cost, and because we're actually doing stuff now, particularly on Vinery.

So, if we're going to spend a sensible amount on site maintenance, we need about £2600 surplus per year, and it's therefore time to make a small increase in rents. The last time our rents were reviewed was in 2017, when they were raised from £20/£10/£5 (full/half/quarter) to £30/£15/£10. Since then, the rent we pay the Council has increased by 16% (and is currently increasing a further 3% year on year), and the cost of services (particularly utilities) has also increased a lot. We are proposing raising rents to £40/£20/£13 (full/half/quarter) for the 2024-5 allotment year. Raising rents is fairer than raising membership fees, as people who have larger plots will pay more. These increased rents are in line with or cheaper than other societies in Cambridge.

Rents need to be set by the AGM, so that's what we're asking for now: a formal discussion and vote on raising the rent from £30/15/10 to £40/20/13. It's worth also noting that we feel we should discuss this at the AGM at least every other year, rather than waiting for several years then raising them by a relatively large amount.