

Minutes of Leominster Allotment Association Annual General Meeting

Wednesday July 7th 2021, 7.00pm in the Town Council Offices, Corn Square, Leominster.

Committee members present: Kay West, Glenys Millard, Graham Millard

Others present: Jane Lacey, Sue Morris, Vivienne Pearson, Cathy Fewlass, Hilary Tuite, Ray Wall, Janet Gallimore, Julie Debbage, Stuart Sidebotham,

Apologies -Samantha Cox, Steve Gallimore.

Minutes: Kay West

Minutes Approval

The minutes from the previous A.G.M. meeting, September 7th 2020, were approved as a true record of last year's meeting,

Opening matters

Kay welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Stuart who has just been appointed as the new Environmental Services Supervisor. Kay thanked Jane Lacey for supporting John Braithwaite with Kings seed orders, Viv Pearson for contributions and giving up her time for the Plant Fayres in September 2020 and May 2021 and Ray for his continued assistance in allotment site maintenance and helping other plot holders.

Report from the Secretary, Samantha Shakespeare

A total of 2 general meetings and one AGM have been held in the Leominster Allotment Association year, 1st May 2020 to the current date of July 7th 2021.

Due to Government restrictions, imposed because of Covid 19, there has obviously been an impact on the opportunity for and organisation of meetings. Consequently, the meeting in July 2020 took place outside in the Community Garden with everyone bringing their own chairs and observing social distancing. The restrictions also delayed the A.G.M. However, newsletters and any relevant information has been available through Face Book, the Allotment website and hard copies on the Allotment Notice Board. Newsletters were issued in November 2020, January 2021, February 2021 and March 2021. Several other notifications e.g., Plant Fayre information and requests and cancellation of Harvest Supper, wishing members a Happy Christmas, have been put on FB, the Allotment web site and posters on the Allotment Notice board.

Committee Members of Leominster Allotment Association have been in contact with each other throughout and pass on any relevant information to plot holders and the Town Council through the forementioned systems and emails.

Report from the Chair, Kay West

Since the AGM of September 2020 there have been several site visits with Mark Culbert, the last one being on September 23rd 2020 as Mark resigned from his position. There were no more site visits until I was able to meet Julie Debbage in May 2021 and June 2021. The person to replace Mark Culbert did not take up the vacant position until July 2021.

During site visits it is noted if plots are looking neglected and the Town Council contact the plot holder to see to see what the situation is? Unfortunately, some plot holders do not inform the Council of their intentions to relinquish a plot and do not update their contact details, making it more difficult to allocate plots to those on the waiting list and causing the state of the plot to become even more overgrown. (There may be times when personal circumstances make it difficult for plot holders to maintain a plot but there are many other plot holders who are willing to offer support and help out if asked.)

Many of the neglected and vacant plots have been allocated to newcomers and they have achieved a tremendous transformation in a short space of time. It is a pleasure to walk around the site to see such a variety of designs, styles and planting.

Activities during the year – some activities were able to take place as they did not contravene the Covid restrictions of that time.

- September 2020– Leominster Allotment Association had a stall at the Plant Fayre that was held at The Grange. Plot holders donated plants that were sold to raise funds for the Association. It was a beautiful sunny day and many people, including visitors to the area, were enjoying the latest lifting of Covid restrictions and getting out to chat to people.
- CANCELLED-October 2020 –Sadly, the annual Harvest Supper and Awards Evening was not able to take place because of Covid restrictions
- May 2021 - Leominster Allotment Association had a stall at the Plant Fayre that took place in Corn Square. Once again, plot holders donated plants that were sold to raise funds for the Association. Although there were a couple of showers it was a mainly sunny day, which encouraged a good number of people to attend this event. Left over plants were taken to the Allotment swaps table and were soon claimed by different plot holders. Some were also planted in spaces in the Community Garden.
- The Allotment Association is involved with the 2021 Leominster in Bloom event. Kay mentioned how supportive Romy Worthington was in offering help and advice, resulting in an Assessor for Leominster in Bloom visiting the Allotment site on July 3rd 2021. The Allotment site is assessed under the “It’s Your Neighbourhood” category.

Kay thanked all the committee members for their work during the past ten months. and wanted it recorded that she also wished to thank the members of the Town Council Julie Debbage, the Town Clerk, who has continued to be supportive and proactive in ensuring that the allotment site is well managed and maintained, especially in the absence of an Environmental Services Supervisor.

Other Matters

Antisocial behaviour and theft at Allotment site. Complaints were received about some plot holders playing their music too loudly or being very noisy. Perhaps a reminder of the tenancy agreement about respecting other plot holders and what is considered to be anti-social behaviour?

An incident of antisocial behaviour by a plot holder was reported to Julie. Ray was able to give further information regarding this. Unfortunately, the person concerned has been reported again and as they are in breach of the tenancy agreement, they are being contacted by the Town Council to discuss the matter

Thefts. Of more concern is a spate of thefts. Julie has contacted the police and they will be organising a security marking session. Last time this was arranged no one turned up but all necessary security markers were left for plot holders to use. However, as there are many new plot holders there might be a better attendance. Julie stressed that thefts should always be reported to the police as although they might seem relatively insignificant, they might be part of a bigger issue. Julie is currently having weekly meetings with the police.

The matter of leaving the gate open or shutting it after entry or on exiting the plot was raised. During the Covid pandemic it was felt by many that the gate should only be locked on leaving the site if no one else was there. However, this poses a security issue so there will be a sign requesting allotment users to shut the gate.

Town Council issues

- **tuart Sidebotham was appointed as Environmental Services Supervisor** in July 2021 and will be overseeing the maintenance of the allotment site. It is hoped that others will continue to address allotment issues through the correct channels and respect the fact that when Stuart is working on his own plot it is not appropriate to discuss allotment issues. To try and prevent this from happening the idea of having a locked “post box” placed in the Community area where plot holders could post suggestions, was raised and generally considered to be a good idea. Hopefully, this will prevent the problem of Stuart being too available.

- **Compost** This is now available for use as the rotten steps and handrails have been replaced, the interior has been cleaned and hand sanitizer made available. (Many people carry their own hand sanitizer.) Concerns regarding a lack of handwashing facilities were raised. There is a sink outside the compost loo but no water supply. There used to be a tank of water to this facility but the deterioration of this and the piping resulted in it no longer functioning. It was suggested that perhaps this facility could be reinstated. The alternative is to wash hands under one of the taps that is on site.
- **The area occupied by the dismantled compost bays** will be cleared in the Autumn, after a wildlife check has taken place. Part of it will be hardcore with raised beds to allow access for people with physical disabilities. The rest of it will be a managed wildlife area with paths cut through it and a couple of benches.
- **The matter of the surface water leaking** into some plots was investigated and it is hoped that the work carried out by a drainage contractor, who found a collapsed plastic drainage pipe on the entrance to plot 51, has resolved this problem. It was a wet year with many areas being waterlogged, which makes it more difficult to assess the true situation
- **There is still an intention to replace the rather small noticeboard** by the gate with a much larger and fit for purpose Notice Board by the Community Shed. This will make it easier to display all relevant information, especially for those who don't have ready access to the internet.
- **Compost Toilet/ disabled facilities** Due to the number of plot holders now using the site it was felt that a second toilet should be made available and that it should give access to disabled people. Researching this and finding funding is ongoing.
- **New Software** Council Staff have received training on the implementation of new software that will make it easier for them to collect payment for plots and to be able to contact plot holders more efficiently, when necessary. Kay said she would like to thank Lena Dahnsjo for her efforts in dealing with the difficult task of updating plot holder details. Jackie Whittall, one of the Office staff has also been helpful. Unfortunately, there are issues regarding payments for Allotment Membership but this will be rectified for 2022 payments.
- **Lease** Julie is still looking into the lease of the site as these expire in 2026 and 2029. This was dealt with by an Executor but has now passed on to family members. Julie hopes that negotiations with the family will enable the Town Council to continue to lease the allotment site after the current ones expire.
- **Vacant plots** At the moment there are no vacant plots and 22 people waiting for a plot
- **Numbering plots** Plots have been split, sheds have moved and some plots are not numbered which has made it difficult when trying to identify plot numbers during site inspections. Julie would like to provide each plot with formal numbering in order to rectify this issue.

Report from Website Administrator - Christine Conlon

Kay said she would like to minute her thanks to Chris Conlon for running the Allotment Association webpage and offering to continue to do this if there were no volunteers to take over this role in the forthcoming year,

The number of people using the website has shown a yearly increase since it was started in 2016. In 2019-2020 there were 798 users and 997 sessions. The statistics show that we already have 674 users and 883 sessions and this is in the last ten months. Chris has also said that there have been comments on how useful the site is and not all associations have this facility.

Report on Membership from Glenys Millard

Currently I believe that membership stands at about 50. I am not entirely certain because the Council have not paid all that they received to the end of March. I have however entered the sheets received by email from Lena. We (the committee) will make a concerted effort to encourage more people to join our association this year. We will make a circular to email out and put on the gates of the plots that I don't have a record of. Then next year we should be able to do more of the social events that we have been unable to do since 2019.

There was confusion as to what should happen to membership forms and several of these were handed to Glenys at the meeting. Some people had asked for clarification on exactly what the

membership covers. (There are some fliers in the Community Shed re the National Allotment Association)

Report from the Seed order Co-ordinator, John Braithwaite and Jane Lacey King's seeds report 2021 for Leominster Allotment Association

This year saw a small increase in orders placed by Association members compared with previous years. The King's catalogue contains goods of high quality and offers members value for money as well as giving the Association the benefit of early order discounts. In addition, the staff at Kings are generous in providing gardening tips - even the most obscure - whenever requested by phone or email, a facility well worth pursuing where required.

This year's catalogue will be made available in September together with individual order forms.

Report from Treasurer for April 2019 to March 2020 - Glenys Millard Leominster Allotment Association Treasurers Report for the Year to 31st March 2021

It was a difficult year for most people but weren't we glad to have our allotments to retreat to! I'm not sure what I would have done without it.

With regard to the finances, we were always going to make a loss in the year with some plot holders shielding and not able to look after their allotments. On the whole we didn't fair too badly with just a small deficit of £93.53.

Income - During the year we had the Seed Swap which made £93. John Braithwaite handled the seed catalogue orders which made a profit of £67.72. We received £270 in fees from the Town Council and another £30 was paid after the year end, so £300 in all, there was also a donation of £5.

Expenses - The Stall for the Seed Swap cost £25. The cost of the website was £65, Grange Court £40. Kay bought turf, a wheelbarrow wheel for the communal area. The Insurance was paid at the same rate as previous years £154.74 but I will be able to reduce that a little next time unless we get more members. Last August when the NASLG Fees became due I had no idea how many members we had so I again left it at the same number as we had previously paid less Mike and his partner who we knew had given their plots up.

General - The bank balance remains fairly healthy at £1,247.10.

Election of Officers

No one expressed an interest in joining the committee or taking on roles so Jane Lacey nominated all current Committee Members to retain their positions and this was seconded by Vivienne Pearson

- **Kay West** - Chair
- **Samantha Shakespeare** - Secretary
- **Glenys Millard** - Treasurer and Membership Secretary
- **John Braithwaite** - Seed Order Co-ordinator with support from Jane Lacey
- **Graham Millard** - on the committee.
- **Christine Conlon** - Website Administrator representing **Chris Preece**.

These appointments were proposed, seconded and passed unanimously by those attending the meeting.

Glenys made it known that personal circumstances will mean she is not be able to fulfil this role for the whole year and it is hoped that someone else will come forward to take this on.

Any other business

- **Kings seed orders** - It was mentioned that some of the seeds purchased by plot holders were out of date. It was suggested that if this happens then the person receiving the seeds should contact Kings as they like to provide their customers with a good service and products.
- **Leominster in Bloom, It's your Neighbourhood assessment**
Kay, Samantha and Glenys met the Assessors, David and Lesley Pritchard, at the allotments on Saturday July 3rd. Lots of questions were asked, suggestions and information exchanged and there was a tour of the site. Thank you to Sam for providing refreshments afterwards. This was much appreciated by all. We felt that it was a positive experience and are looking forward to receiving the Assessors report as we are sure it will contain suggestions on how we can improve the allotment site. There was discussion about the proposed wildlife area and we hope there are ideas in the report that can be discussed at our next Committee meeting and helpful to make the allotment site more environmentally friendly. Having bug hotels and all plot holders to have water butts was mentioned and this is something that needs further discussion at the next Committee meeting.
- **Retiring plot holders** - Vivienne Pearson raised the matter of people who had maintained and enjoyed having a plot for many years coming to a point where they could no longer manage their plot, even though there are always plenty of other plot holders offering to help out. It was suggested that perhaps these people could still be given a key so that they had access to the plot as it was an important place for their well-being as they had social contact. They enjoy just visiting the site, catching up with the people they know and passing on gardening advice gained through years of experience. Julie suggested creating more mini plots with a £5 annual fee as one solution to this.
- **Rotavators** - Julie has had two rotavators and strimmers donated for use by plot holders. There were some who thought that a nominal charge for using these could go to L.A.A. so if one required maintenance or repair then there were funds to cover this. There was also the issue of where to store them. Space might be made available in the metal container but at the moment there is no lock for this. There are also issues of making the machinery available if kept in a locked container. Ray has a heavy-duty padlock but there are no spare keys. No resolution was reached but this situation will hopefully be addressed in the near future.
- **Communication with new plot holders** - Because of Covid there has been no opportunity for any social events to take place. Some of the new plot holders are now known but it was felt that there should be an information pack to make the new plot holders fully aware of what facilities are available and an opportunity to meet up informally and provide an opportunity to ask questions and meet other plot holders.
- **Social event to welcome new plot holders and their family** - Graham suggested the dates of either the weekend of August 14th/15th or the weekend of August 21st/22nd. It could be a bring and share event if Covid regulations permit this or coffee, tea, squash, biscuits, cakes could be appropriate. Plot holders could bring own mugs so nothing would need washing up and there would be no need for disposable cups. Individually wrapped biscuits and cake slices would comply with hygiene standards. Kitchen towel and sanitiser could be made available. Although covid restrictions should be lifted by the proposed date we respect the fact that some people may still be wary of social events.
- **Harvest Supper** will take place on Friday October 8th if Covid restrictions allow this event to go ahead.

Next Annual General Meeting: May 4th 2022, 7pm, in the Town Council Offices, Corn Square, Leominster. Please bring your copy of these minutes with you to the next A.G.M. meeting.

The Next LAA meeting is Weds 8th September 2021 at the Town Council Offices at 7pm.

Kay West then thanked everyone for attending and the meeting was closed.

The proposed Committee meeting did not take place as many items on the agenda had already been addressed at the AGM. Also, there were only three Committee members present (and the unforeseen circumstances of England football team being in the European cup semi-final.)