

Little Moor Allotment Association

AGM 2024 Chair's report

Introduction

This year's Chair's Report is provided to you with the agenda to the AGM and the treasurer's report- as promised at last year's AGM and in addition to our scheduled AGM to be held on Tuesday 13th February at the South North Cricket Club. The Association's accounts accompany this document, and we thank Dorothy Robson for their completion. Connected Voice have audited them.

None of the allotment associations now with the Freemen have signed a lease. The discussions between the associations and within our own committee have taken up some considerable time. We have been admirably represented by our Secretary and Membership secretary. We can expect to pay this year's and back dated rents this year. The new lease has had financial implications beyond the basic rent, such as additional legal and surveyor fees (£1150) imposed on us during the bidding process as well as the responsibility to maintain and invest in the infrastructure of the site. With evidently no support at all coming from the Freemen- we are very much on our own.

Site

This year we have continued to manage our own hedge cutting – it seems unlikely that this can be sustained very much longer and we must look at contingencies where our voluntary supply falls short of our duty to keep the site safe secure and tidy. Thanks to the many who helped with the hedge cutting and tidy up. On volunteer days we have maintained borders and tidied plots that have been left by tenants in poor condition- this has also incurred the expense of skips to take away non-organic matter. A change to our tenancy letter reflects the need to leave plots clear when ploholders resign and imposes an increased key deposit of £50 as an encouragement to leave a rubbish free plot for new tenants (existing ploholders who paid £10 deposit there is no change).

Unwanted visitors to the site remain a problem to us throughout the year. Please do notify the police of thefts, so that they are aware of the scale and frequency of the problem.

Committee

In the last 12 months the committee has changed. We give thanks to Mark Fuller (Buildings & Structures), a long serving member of the committee, who has resigned having overseen many applications to the committee for new structures- he continues to work his plot and will still be seen volunteering at the trading hut on Sundays. We are in the process of finding someone to take over from Mark who is of course on hand to pass on his valuable knowledge and experience. Sara Goodman has also joined the committee; Sara is a fairly new ploholder and amongst other duties is now producing the allotment newsletter.

I'd like to thank my committee colleagues for their efforts- it's a pleasure to meet and discuss allotment business with such friendly people. Thanks also to the regular volunteers at the allotment shop and in particular Rob Hodgson for all that he does at the shop and around the site. Many thanks also to John Bell and Ian who carry out essential maintenance of equipment and site infrastructure.

Membership

We have had 14 new members join this year and currently have 26 on the waiting list. This is lower than in previous years and possibly reflects the reduction in demand that once flourished during COVID 19. Plot standards are causing concern possibly for the same reasons and we have had some quick turnover in newly leased plots. There have also been ongoing issues with some members that have taken up a disproportionate amount of committee time- these are now resolved. The issues facing members have made the committee consider its policies regarding plot standards, and other procedures affecting membership conduct. Users of trading hut equipment will have noticed health and safety requirements in place.

We have had some success in the Urban Green Annual Allotments Competition:

Best 1/2 plot - Helen Giblin-Jowett (Plot 33) 1st place

Finance

What follows is an overview of the financial year to the end of October 2023, the presented accounts are in the separate document attached to the same email this document is attached to.

During the year the association changed legal status to company limited by guarantee - this means we "trade as" Little Moor Allotments Ltd. One of the many consequences of the change in legal status is that we have had to change bank accounts. So please make sure when paying rents to the association by BACS that you use the new sort code and account number detailed below. We are charged for non BACS payments- so please if you haven't tried BACS payment for your rent before, please give it a try this year.

Highlights

- Cash in Bank at year end £33,877.60 (excluding cash held in key account). We await backdated rent invoice from the Freemen £5,000 approximately. We have moved more reserves into a deposit account that at the end of financial year had accumulated £183.60 in interest
- Successful collection of rents via BACS payment facility for ploholders
- Sales from shop down compared to last year by £1171.49 but polytunnel sales up from last year by £1376.10

Year's Overview

Significant Income streams in the year included:

- Trading Hut and Polytunnel sales income up £204.61 from last year
- Rents received - £8730 (£8685.94 previous year) last year there was no rent increase
- Lawn mower rentals - £744.00 previously ££564

Expenditure levels were £10,013 increase from last year (£9593.04) however that excludes the usual rent that would normally have been paid to the council. The major expenses in the year continue to be ground rent and water rates. The cost of fuel impacts grass cutting and our investment in lawnmowers is responsible for the higher equipment costs, the surplus on the trading account has contributed to this investment.

Specific Performance

1. The Trading Hut continues to make a surplus. This is an excellent result & reflects the hard work put in by Rob Hodgson and the many volunteers throughout the year
2. The Polytunnel generated a surplus, selling seedlings and plants to plot holders early in the season and then later fresh produce. Again, thanks to Frank for growing and the many who are on hand to promote and sell on a Sunday morning.

As pointed out in last year's Chair's Report the issue of rents received not meeting those costs incurred that all ploholders are benefitting from now needs to be addressed in terms of a rent increase.

Summary of Accounts

Looking forward to 2023/24

This year we are seeking an increase to the rents which in proportionate terms is significant, but now probably brings us closer to the rents charged by other associations in the city. The reasons for the proposed increase are as follows:

1. In terms of our regular annual costs we are like every household faced with inflationary pressures on, for example, skip hire and manure deliveries. Our rent although lower annually than with Urban Green are due to have RPI increases and we must also expect that will also affect the coming year's skip hire and manure costs. We have been told that our water usage has increased, with our provider also stating that we may have leaks on site. (There will be a need to spend our reserves on replacing piping.) Our insurance cover will be greater this year – as we will need employer's liability cover because we have "volunteers" on the trading hut, tidy up days and hedge cutting. We have also joined Northern Counties Allotment Society which provides every plot holder with insurance cover, where previously we've had none.
2. There are one off costs of £1150 which we will be charged by the council related to the new lease.
3. There are new significant costs some of which are associated with our need to change legal status- we have used an accountant and will need to continue this for HMRC purposes. There will be maintenance costs associated with our responsibility to ensure gates and fences are repaired. Replacing sections of fencing will need to come from reserves – the costs of which over the following years will need to be budgeted for and reflected in a capital fund contribution each plot holder pays in rent.
4. In previous years the committee have reported that our rental income does not meet our annual outgoings. In the past the trading hut activities have subsidised the low rents. It is not prudent nor fair to continue to do this. Trading hut surpluses should benefit those who use the trading hut in lower prices or better equipment e.g. lawnmowers, maintenance of the containers etc. The low rents also come about in part due to the generous support from volunteers who carry out communal grass and hedge cutting- most other sites have bought this in at significant cost. Our volunteers aren't getting any younger and we may have to make provision for this too in future years.
5. Our cash reserves although healthy cannot be used to subsidise cheaper rents. The costs of replacing the deteriorating fence are considerable, we have also known for a long time that the piping around the site may need an overhaul and that seems likely given the statement from our water provider. We are also under a duty to maintain and or replace the "accessible plot" sheds and greenhouses. All of that capital expenditure will commence this financial year.

Accountancy Note

The annual accounts for the year ending 31 October 2023 have been prepared in line with accountancy rules for Societies and Clubs. They have been prepared by Dorothy Robson, Treasurer of the Little Moor Association April 2022 to 31 October 2023). Connected Voice audited the accounts.

Communal Tasks

As mentioned earlier, we are very much on our own, whereas before we could rely on some support from the council in terms of compliance with legal obligations related to people on site, we now have to be self-sustaining in that respect. As a committee we will not only need support in site maintenance but also in creating a Business Plan that incorporates Policies and Procedures of our own. But we are not on our own – there are 187 plot holders of varying skills and experience. If you feel that you can support this necessary work, even if only temporarily we'd like to hear from you. It is unsustainable for the increased workload in all respects to be shouldered by the same people.

Little Moor Allotment Association - Rents 2024/2025

The annual rent levels are as follows:

Full plot: £90.00

Half plot: £45.00

Third Plot £30.00

Quarter plot £22.50

A reminder there are no reductions for those claiming state pensions or state benefits, and there is no early payment reduction.

How to pay

Rents will be collected up to the deadline of 13 March 2024 and can be paid as follows:

- By BACS transfer.

If you want to pay your rent by BACS transfer our account details are as follows

Account: Little Moor Allotments Ltd

Sort Code: 30 99 50

Account No: 14339563

For your reference please use the first 4 letters of the **plotholder's** surname followed by the plot number (e.g. **John Smith on plot 7 would be SMIT7**)

- By cheque. Cheques should be made payable to Little Moor Allotments Ltd and handed into the Trading Hut between 10.00 and 11.00 any Sunday in February. Please ensure you write the **plotholder's** surname and plot number on the back
- By cash. Any Sunday in February at the Trading Hut. Cash must be put in an envelope marked with the **plotholder's** name and plot number.
- If you are unsure of either the plotholder's name (if its not you) or the plot number contact littlemoormembership@gmail.com

Any queries please by email to - littlemoortreasurer@gmail.com