

## Little Moor Allotments Ltd

### Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 13 February 2024

- 1 **Chair's Opening Remarks:** The Chair welcomed 41 members to the meeting and thanked them for attending. He stated that we are an association of 187 members with plots of different sizes on both the north and south side of the site. Our longest serving member remains John Bell who began in 1976 and new members join us each month. The waiting list is smaller than last year, but still shows a demand for allotments. In acknowledging the length of time some members have been allotment holders, he commented that all were agreed that the Allotment was currently the wettest anyone had ever seen it!
- 2 **Apologies for absence:** 13 members had sent their apologies.
- 3 **Minutes of the previous meeting:** Previously circulated by email and available on the website, no comments were raised, and the minutes were therefore agreed. Proposer Maureen Foster, seconded by Martin Stead.
- 4 **Matters Arising:** None
- 5 **Chair's report:** The Chair introduced the Committee, thanking Mark Fuller who was retiring as Structures Secretary (a vacancy now exists, and members are encouraged to express interest!). Ken Fawcett – Chair, Chris Hodgson - the Secretary, Lesley Greenwood – Membership Secretary, Dorothy Robson – Treasurer, Tony Robson – Site Manager, Liz Bennett – Website. Also, Sara Goodman has been co-opted onto the Committee to produce the Newsletter. He thanked all for their efforts and acknowledged the hard work and commitment shown by those members who ran the Trading Hut and carried out maintenance to site. If it were not for them, and the time they put in, the Allotment costs would be significantly higher.

A copy of the Chair's report and the audited Annual Accounts had previously been sent by email and were also available on the website. In the expectation that members would have read them, he planned to highlight / summarise rather than read out the full report.

#### Issues arising from that Report –

- **Lease issues** - The Lease with the Council, managed by the Freemen, had still not been signed. A lot of Committee time had been spent on this, meeting with both the Council & Freemen and 7 other Allotment Associations. Issues with the original proposed Lease had been identified and discussed, several revisions made, and a revised Lease created by the 7 Associations was now with the Council for their response. Hopefully it will be approved and concluded soon. This drawn-out process explains why the Accounts show that we have not yet paid rent to the Council for the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2022 or during 2023. This, of course, will be done when the

Lease is agreed, and we are invoiced. Members will be updated as soon as we have news.

With change of “ownership”, we were obliged to change our legal status and an emergency AGM was held in September 2023 to approve us becoming a “Limited by Guarantee” Company. This does not affect us as an Association but avoids the risk of members being individually sued for damages and means that we are now officially called Little Moor Allotments Ltd and have a new Bank Account. Members need to remember this when paying 2024 rents (bank details are given later in the Minutes).

- **Site issues** - The Chair explained that some plots on site are not in a good condition, and this is incurring both volunteer time in clearing them and extra costs of skip hire.

Also, the Committee have noticed a trend in an increasing number of people who have taken on an Allotment and then given it up quite quickly. This may mean that we have to introduce a more rigorous allocation procedure.

Many thanks go to those members who helped at the Volunteer Day on the 11 February. A lot of jobs got done. Of course, there are many more to do and we hope that even more members will attend in the future.

Members may have noticed that a lot of our fences are in disrepair and need replacing. This is now our responsibility, not the Council’s, and will be very expensive. However, it is imperative that we do this as Site Security has been an issue for several years. It means that some gates and fences will need to be replaced to minimise the number of unwanted guests and improve the safety & security of all members. The Chair reminded members not to approach people directly and to report any break-ins to the Police.

Finally, the challenges to the Site caused by the wet weather and flooding were mentioned. These need to be monitored but, of course, nothing can be done about the weather.

*A vote was then held to approve the Chair’s Report.*

*Vote for - 40 / Against 0 / Abstentions 1*

- 6 **Finance:** The Chair outlined one correction to the Accounts - “Expenditure levels” rephrased “Non trading hut costs/expenses” at end of trading were £5202.58. The previous year they had been £6313.52 but, if we were to add the half year rent that is shown in 2022 accounts, expenses have increased by £1315.99.

Our accounts are in good condition. Since moving some of our funds to a savings account we are now enjoying interest. The Trading Hut continues to be successful

for those who use it, but of course this is not a guaranteed income or surplus that we can rely on.

In both 2022 and 2023 expenses (if including a full year's rent) are greater than rental income by £54.51 in 2022 and by £1326.44 in 2023.

*A vote was then held to approve the Finance Report.*

*Vote for -39 / Against 0 / Abstentions 2*

- **Little Moor Allotments RENT 2024**

The annual rent levels proposed are:

Full plot	£90
Half plot	£45
Third Plot	£30
Quarter Plot	£22.50

The Chair acknowledged that this was a significant increase but said that he thought it was fair and proportionate. The rent has to more than cover our expenses. Several points apply -

- 1 Whilst the time that volunteers spend offsets our costs currently, we should not always rely on that and must make some provision.
- 2 Everyone is facing increasing costs in our daily lives.
- 3 In the past, the Trading Hut profit has been used to subsidise rents but, going forward, the Committee believe that this should be used to help fund planned investment. The Committee will write a 5-year Business Plan and future rents and some of our Reserves will fund that.
- 4 There has been a one off cost in 2023 of £1150 because of the new Lease (cost of a Surveyor).

There followed several questions from Members and much discussion. In summary

- A question re the Surveyor fee and why we had to pay what was, in effect, a cost for the Council. The member felt that the Committee had not negotiated strongly enough. The Chair explained that we had queried this but, along with the other 7 Associations, felt there was nothing we could do. Also, if we did not accept the Council's Surveyor, we would need our own and this would, of course still incur an expense. However, he agreed to look at it again.
- A question re whether we could ask members to pay an additional amount over and above the stated rents to subsidise those who may be in hardship. It was felt by other Members that, whilst this was a good idea, it would be difficult to administer and seeking "proof of hardship" would breach Data Protection. The Chair explained that any hardship cases would be considered and looked at as sympathetically as possible if people raised this as an issue

for them. He also said that the Committee would continue to think about this. As a proposal it could not be voted on at this meeting (as it had not been raised prior to the meeting) but maybe we could come back to it at the next AGM.

- A question/suggestion that, in view of the proposed rent increases, Members should receive a 10 – 15% discount at the Trading Hut. It was explained that Members do already get things cheaper than the Public because the Public have to pay a £1 in order to buy. The Trading Hut has to pay for itself and., whilst we have had to register with the HMRC, it is very unlikely that the Trading Hut will ever raise enough to qualify for Corporation Tax.
- A question re whether we could guarantee that future rent increase would not be as high as this one. The Chair replied that there could be no guarantees, but he felt that it was unlikely to be in the same %. The reality was that LMAA had been the lowest rents for a long time and had been 2 years since we had any increase at all.
- A question re planned maintenance of the fences and how much offset was provided by our volunteers. Re the former, the quotes had been for £250 per 10 metres (materials only). Given that the perimeter of the site is 750 metres (North) x 540 (South), that is a very significant cost. Re the costs of “replacing” volunteers with contractors, it is £1500 pa for tree felling and £4,500 pa for hedge cutting/grass cutting.
- A question was raised re the unsightly appearance of a metal fence. Extra security was needed but did it have to be metal? The Chair reiterated that we have a duty of care towards Members but that we would consider the appearance and location of replacement fencing when making a decision.
- A question re could we buy a sit on Lawn Mower to help ease the strain on Volunteers. This was positively received, though it would incur a cost of a new lock up as well as the mower itself. However, the Committee will investigate it.

*A vote was then held to approve the Rent Increase.*

*Vote for -36 / Against 4 / Abstentions 1*

NOTE – THE PREFERRED METHOD OF PAYMENT IS BACS.

WE HAVE A NEW BANK ACCOUNT AND THIS MUST BE USED FOR PAYMENTS.

THE DEADLINE FOR PAYMENTS IS 13 MARCH 2024

Bank Details are -

- Account: Little Moor Allotments Ltd
- Sort Code: 30 99 50
- Account No: 14339563

- For your reference use the first 4 letters of the plot holder's surname followed by the plot number (eg John Smith on plot 7 would be SMIT7)

Payment can also be made by

- Cheque payable to "Little Moor Allotments Ltd" and handed into the Trading Hut any Sunday in February between 10.00 and 11.00. Please write the Plot holder's surname and plot number on the back.
- Cash – must be in an envelope, marked with the plot holder's name and plot number and handed into the Trading Hut any Sunday in February between 10.00 and 11.00.

**7 Election of Committee:** The current Committee are willing to continue within their roles – though there is now a vacancy for a Structures Secretary as Mark Fuller has stepped down. Thanks again To Mark.

Acceptance of this was proposed by Irene McDonough and seconded by Liz Clarkin. Carried unanimously.

**8 Appointment of Auditor:** Motion to accept Connected Voice as our Auditor. Proposer Helen Giblin-Jowett, Seconder Richard Young. Carried unanimously.

**9 Trophies/ Awards:** The Chair thanked the Secretary and Membership Secretary for reviewing individual Allotment Plots and was delighted to announce the following recipients –

- Peter Horrocks Trophy for Best newcomer – D Garcia, Plot number 115B (not present)
- LMAA Challenge Cup for Best Allotment – Helen Giblin-Jowett, Plot number E
- LMAA Trophy for Most improved Allotment – Philip Kyle, Plot number 74A

**10 AOB:** No items had been received.

#### **Final Comments -**

- A member proposed a vote of thanks for the Committee, which was agreed by others (and gratefully accepted by the Committee!)
- The Membership Secretary thanked Jen Stephenson for volunteering to manage the Trading Hut rota.
- The Chair thanked everyone for attending and for their contribution.
- The meeting closed at 9pm.

