

**MINUTES OF THE NORTHERN REGION ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION GENERAL MEETING  
30<sup>th</sup> January 2016, 2pm held at Belmont Working Men's Club**

**Present** David Banks (Regional Rep), Vince Scott (Chair), John Doherty (Secretary), John Monkhouse (Treasurer), T F Shaw (Clyde Terrace), Bob Russell (Margery Flatts, Lanchester), Doreen Slater and Doreen Wright (Tommy's Field, Morpeth), F Ramshaw (Thorntree Gill, Peterlee), A Sutton (Gilesgate, Durham), Evelyn Leck (Burn Valley), Neil Storey (Rossmere, Hartlepool), Tom Wood (Mulberry, Felling), Colin Smith (High Handenhold), Dave Jarman (No Place), Bob Chapman (Brancepeth), Alan Clark and Martin Ellison (Barmoor), Colin Campbell (Marsden), Terry Taylor and Ken Lowerson (Langley Park), Mark Farren and Karen Minter (Durham C-C), Charlie Fennelly (Northfield Allot. Ass, South Shields), Aubrey Smith (Wylam), Colin Hemingway (Roddymoor, Crook), Alan Myers and Frank Heatherington (Wheatbottom, Crook), Derek Lindsay (Hummersknott, Darlington),

**Apologies** No apologies had been received.

**Welcome and Introductions:** The Chair welcomed everyone, and especially newcomers, Anita Sutton, Bob Chapman and Alan Myers

**The Minutes** of the previous meeting held on 31st October 2015 had been circulated earlier and were accepted as a true record. Proposed Neil Storey, Seconded Tom Wood. Unanimously accepted. There were no matters arising

**Statement to NRAA Members January 30<sup>th</sup> 2016  
Subject: Exclusion of Regional Rep from National Allotment Society**

This is further to our statement of November 2015

Recap:- David Banks was duly elected to be our Regional Representative at our AGM in January 2015. In July he was unlawfully suspended from the National Management Committee for two reasons: Firstly because his site had not joined the National Allotment Society (NAS) as agreed at a committee meeting, hence David was not a member of NAS when he became our Regional Representative. When this came to light he promptly joined as an individual member. The second reason was that there had been a private dispute between a non-member association and the incorporated company running the site of which David was a director.

We believe that the National Management Committee did not like David's no-nonsense approach and had no respect for him bringing his experience in business to their meetings. This went against their sloppy procedures that had become acceptable over many years.

In August David was expelled, unlawfully, from the Management Committee. We have twice informed all members of the National Management committee of the unlawful way they have handled this matter. At every stage they have been **in complete breach of their own rules**. No reply has been received on either occasion.

Since September all details of our Regional Representative have been deleted from the magazine and the website leaving members in our region with no information on whom to contact.

In mid-December we were contacted by Head Office with a proposal that David, our Chair and our Secretary should meet with the Management Committee to come to an agreement to end the matter. A date in January was agreed but, ten days before, we were informed that Head Office had changed their mind and were now proposing to create an independent review panel consisting of Ron Jones (chair of NSALG Standing Orders Committee) and two others from the RHS and Garden Organic. (Talk about airing your dirty laundry in public!)

We received a letter on 13<sup>th</sup> January informing us that the review was to be held on 29<sup>th</sup> January; we were to submit documents by the 19<sup>th</sup>.

We found this most unsatisfactory for the following reasons:-

- Less than a week to prepare documents
- No statement of terms of reference of the review: what or who is it to be about?
- No opportunity to see what Head Office or other parties have submitted and respond

- Who will see the finished report?

We responded before 19<sup>th</sup> January drawing attention to the vagueness, secrecy and lack of professionalism of this process. We did not think it appropriate to cooperate further in this improper process.

Also, in November we requested nomination forms for Regional Rep with the intention of re-nominating David Banks. They were sent but were incorrect. (Four signatures required but only space for three!)

We also submitted many comments and positive suggestions for the important changes to the NAS rules to be discussed at the November Management Committee Meeting; these were not discussed due to lack of time.

To sum up the governance and administration of our National Society leaves a whole lot to be desired. The Society purports to be the expert on allotment law, constitutions, tenants and members' rights, governance of associations and societies yet it's management committee break the rules as 'custom and practice'.

In this whole affair The Management Committee have shown arrogance and complete contempt for our region but importantly a complete disrespect for the rest of the law-abiding membership.

This statement raised several comments:-

- This is rather concerning to everyone
- What are they trying to do? Are they trying to side-line David Banks and put their own person in?
- David has been twice voted in, we want our man in office. He has a lifetime of experience in committees and has never come across a committee as corrupt as this one (our National Management Committee).
- Other Comments:-
  1. Walk away from the NAS
  2. Create an independent organisation
  3. Putting our 29 Motions before the National AGM in June
  4. An EGM requires the signatures of 100 shareholding members
  5. We should continue to contest this.

There was a unanimous vote in favour of getting members and proxy votes to the National AGM in June.

John outlined a history of management problems in the NAS in recent years.

Gilesgate who have recently joined are disappointed to hear all of this.

Tommy's Field and North Tyneside have benefitted from their membership of the NAS in recent years. We should not forget this.

### **The 2016 A.G.M.**

**Present** All those already listed.

**Minutes** The minutes of the 2015 AGM have been circulated. Proposed that they be accepted:  
John Hays, seconded Evelyn Leck

**Chairman's Report** We have had an active year with trips to both the Harrogate Flower Shows and the Rodent Control Course. Our four open meetings have always been well supported. Our Regional Rep has actively supported allotment sites around the region. The year has been eventful in that we have become embroiled in this dispute with the NAS.

**Secretary's Report** John Doherty reported that after 22 years and 3 months as secretary of the Northern Region he has to stand down for personal reasons. He stated that it has been a privilege and a pleasure to serve the allotments movement in the region for so long and he will continue to support the region as much as he can.

There was a vote of thanks to John Doherty proposed by Neil Storey which received the support of the membership.

**Treasurer's Report** The Treasurer presented the accounts for the year ending 30<sup>th</sup> November 2015. The trips to the Harrogate flower shows have been a successful experiment and we will hopefully continue with them.

He took questions on the accounts.

The meeting agreed to appoint Norman Webber as the Independent Examiner.

Proposed that the accounts be accepted, Colin Smith, seconded Neil Storey. Passed unanimously

### **Election of Officers**

	<b>Nominee</b>	<b>Proposed</b>	<b>Seconded</b>
Chair	Vincent Scott	John Doherty	John Hays
Secretary	Colin Smith	Neil Storey	Evelyn Leck
Treasurer	John Monkhouse	Evelyn Leck	Neil Storey

All were elected unanimously

The following were elected unopposed to the committee:-

Neil Storey, Evelyn Leck, Tom Wood

**Date of the next AGM** 28<sup>th</sup> January 2017

### **End of Annual General Meeting**

There followed a break and raffle

### **Secretary's Report**

The Secretary reported that he had been very busy dealing with the correspondence to do with the dispute with NAS. This is regrettable.

He hopes that this year we will have a greater presence at local shows including a show stand, a guest speaker, trips to the Harrogate Flower Shows and more positive publicity for the allotments

### **Report from Mark Farren** Durham C.C.

We were pleased to welcome Mark to our meeting. In his turn he welcomed the opportunity to speak to us in the light of the intentions of the council with regard to all allotments owned by them in the county.

Firstly, he emphasised the importance of having a qualification in rodent control. Without this it will be impossible to obtain supplies of rodenticide sufficient to treat an allotment site.

The situation in Co. Durham has been allowed to 'drift' over a number of years and we have the situation in many places where allotment land owned by the county has been adopted unofficially

for other purposes like keeping animals, storage of motor cars or caravans and many other uses not normally associated with the accepted use of allotments.

Letters have been sent out to all Associations running DCC sites setting out 3 legal options:-

1. Self Management where the association runs the site on behalf of DCC but DCC remains the landlord. On these sites the tenants will be tenants of DCC and will have to comply with DCC rules; however, the Association will be responsible for repairs and maintenance so it determines how much rent is needed.
2. A Formal Leasing Agreement of 20 to 25 years where the site has complete autonomy from DCC. The Association will need to draw up its own tenancy agreement and deal with waiting lists, terminations, disputes, rent collection etc.
3. The site could be managed directly by DCC and comply with its rules and also pay its rent, etc.

At present there are a lot of different tenancy agreements that were inherited from District Councils that are now no longer in existence. Some sites are also not recognisable as allotments. As a result, DCC is proposing to de-classify some of its sites and to bring in a single, harmonised tenancy agreement for those sites that remain as allotments. These proposals have been developed with the help of the National Society and are currently going through a number of DCC approval processes to allow public consultation to take place. When this happens, all DCC tenants and associations will be contacted to give them a chance to have their say on the proposals.

The final list of sites that are to be de-classified will be handled by a separate working group with a number of possible outcomes ranging from continued leasing but under agreements relevant to the sites use to sale. If a shortage of allotments resulted, this would be addressed, subject to demand, in association with town and parish councils. Section 8 procedures would be followed where the site is Statutory.

DCC is also looking at water supply and costs need to be examined as do future rents, which may rise a little. A figure of £42 to £52 was mentioned depending on plot size.

Mark took questions and comments on a number of issues including water supply, animals, boundaries and Sect 8 disposals. He does envisage a sympathetic transition time to enable owners of animals on allotment sites to make alternative arrangements.

All of this will be subject to consultation.

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### **Members' Forum**

The main issue was that of the possibility of moving this meeting around the region.

As before when this issue arose, the convenience of Carrville and Belmont Club was mentioned as significant plus they don't charge room rental. Also, we need to remember that we include Northumberland, Tees Valley and Cumbria.

The Committee will consider this issue.

**Date of Next Meeting** Saturday April 16<sup>th</sup> 2016 .

