

**MINUTES OF THE NORTHERN REGION ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION**  
**11<sup>th</sup> July 2015 2014, 2pm held at Belmont Working Men's Club**

**Present:** Peter Lawson (Barmoor), Evelyn Leck (Burn Valley, Hartlepool), Karen Minter (Durham County Council), Alan Dixon, Jacky Storey (Foundry Fields), Derek Lindsay (Hummersknott Allots/Small Holdings Ass.), T. Taylor (Langley Park), Colin Campbell (Marden Farm, Cullercoats), C. Fennelly (Northfield Allot. Ass., South Shields), C.Meikle (Red House Farm Allot. Ass. Whitley Bay), N. Storey (Rossmere Allotments, Hartlepool), J. Monkhouse (Smithfield Rd Darlington), Alan Bell, J. Putt (South Moor Garden Association), Vince Scott (South View, Birtley), Jeff Ridley, F. Heatherington, (Wheatbottom, Crook), Aubrey Smith (Wylam Allots. Ass.), Colin Smith (individual member).  
Elizabeth Allnutt (St Aidans, Carlisle and Allotment Development Initiative (ADI) mentor), John Doherty (NRAA Secretary).

**Agenda**

1. Welcome
2. Apologies for absence
3. Minutes of last meeting and Matters arising
4. Secretary's Report
5. Regional Rep's Report
6. Break and raffles
7. ADI mentor report
8. Members Forum
9. AOB
10. Date of next meeting

1. Everyone was welcomed. There were no newcomers.

2. Apologies were received from Tommy Wood and Joan Russell.

3. Colin Campbell queried item 6 from the Minutes of the meeting of 25<sup>th</sup> April. Regulations which covered the resale of bulk buys of weed killer did not apply to fertilizers such as Growmore. While it is illegal to sell on weedkillers in packaging other than that supplied by the manufacturers this does not apply to fertilizers.  
The Minutes were otherwise approved – Proposed by Neil Story, Seconded by John Hayes.

4. Secretary's report – John Doherty

**Trip to Harrogate Autumn Flower Show.** Following on from the trip to the Spring Flower Show, JD was happy to organise a trip if there was demand. Costs would be higher (approximately £20 for members, £25 for non members), it would take place on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> Sept. and the finish time would be later so plants could be bought. This was thought to be a good idea and JD will follow this up.

**Scottish Allotments and Gardeners Society (SAGS) AGM.** JD had visited this one day event in Dunblane and stood "in awe and amazement" at what SAGS have achieved for allotments – full consultation with the devolved government re setting rents, security of tenure, minimum plot size and other issues. It was a full day with speakers on relevant issues from James Hilton Institute. A minister from the Scottish government was present. The business meeting took only 30 minutes at the end of the day.

**Summer Newsletter from NAS.** A straw poll round the membership present revealed that not many members had seen this. It was up to them to ensure Corby had their up to date email address. Were their individual association secretaries emailing the newsletter on to them if it came to their generic association email address? Plot holders should be hassling their association officers to send it on to individual plot holders/members if this was not happening.

**"Allotment Gardener" Magazine articles.** The regional section for the North is always a bit thin. If you have had any events, shows etc please send in some photographs or a note to two to cover these, direct to NAS. If you are unsure about where to send them or closing dates than send them to JD, who will forward them on.

There are also pop up banners and information on NAS for shows and similar events where the wider public attend. Apply to JD if you want to borrow/use these.

**Rodent Control Training Course.** NRAA will host this as a one day event with a firm from Yorkshire, who will issue certificates in competence at the end of the day. Probable venue Belmont Club in early October, at a weekend, when leek show season is past. JD will organize this and contact members when details are confirmed.

5. The Regional Representative was not present so there was no report

6. Two bottles of wine were raffled. There was a short break.

7. ADI Mentor's Report – Elizabeth Allnutt

**NAS AGM** in June. Described as a “damp squib”. The accounts were passed. The proposed new Rules could not be passed as procedures had not been followed adequately. These will now be reassessed by a Management Committee sub-committee (David Banks, Northern Reg Rep is a member), rewritten and presented to the AGM in 2016.

Rather dull AGM when compared with SAGS. Dalesfoot Composts and Colony allotment management systems were present and there were leaflets from both for members to take away.

It was thought to be a good idea if Colony could come and talk to the meeting. EA/JD to pursue. KM confirmed that Durham County Council had bought ‘Colony Enterprise’ which would allow Durham parish/town councils and allotment associations to use the system for their own sites under the banner of Durham County Council.

There is a feed back form on the NAS website for comments on the AGM – this is for all members to make suggestions, comments etc.

The AGM took place in Volunteer's week – recognition given to all reps and mentors but more importantly to all the association officers who also work voluntarily and give of their time and commitment readily. DB has a certificate from NAS recognizing voluntary work in the Northern region which hopefully will be available at the next general meeting.

**Mentors meeting in Birmingham** at end of April to talk about the future of the ADI mentors. This will probably be re-launched as NAMS - the National Allotment Mentoring Scheme and will focus more on supporting the professional management of allotments rather than trouble shooting problems as in the past. Demand for plots is falling off and work is now proactive rather than reactive.

This is particularly relevant in the NE where we need a **new mentor** who will be on the spot in the region and can effectively deliver a proactive service. The present mentor will be resigning. There will be a request for a new local NE ADI volunteer mentor in the next edition of the Allotment Gardener magazine. Please consider doing this. EA is happy to talk about it to anyone who wants more information. EA will continue to work in Cumbria but not with the mentor title.

**Allotment Officers Forum** 21<sup>st</sup> May, hosted by Spennymoor Town Council. About 20 officers from around the region attended, slightly better than before. There was a talk from Transition Durham on their allotment and community gardening mapping project. The NRAA committee thought it would be a good idea to give them some money towards further staff funding for their work and decided to send £200. They are finding and mapping a lot of sites – private as well as local authority - which will be of interest to NRAA and we should be working with them and collaborating.

Next meeting 19<sup>th</sup> November in Middlesbrough; ask if your local authority officer is going and if not, why not?

**Gamblesby** is a remote village on the Pennine edge of the Eden Valley with an allotment site. Contact has now been made with the plot holders.

**Local Planning** – Check out what stage your local authority is with their Local Plan and see what they say about allotments. In Carlisle the final stage submissions have been sent to the planning inspector before the Examination in Public. The comments re allotments are included in this.

8. Members Forum

A member from South Tyneside asked if foxes were vermin and if so, would the Council deal with them? It was agreed that foxes probably were vermin, in which case the land owner should deal with them. It was thought best to ask the Council to confirm the status of foxes as vermin and ask what could be done. In the case of S Tyneside, where plot holders pay a large, unsubsidized rent, which should cover the cost of the allotments service, some action

against vermin on the part of the Council was felt to be justified. S Tyneside Council dealt with seagulls as vermin. However, there might not be the resources to deal with foxes in other local authorities.

It was felt that using firearms was probably not a sensible option when there would most likely be plot holders, local residents and pets in close proximity at all times.

New planning regulations re development of brownfield sites without the need for planning permission. What were the implications for this for allotments? Allotments are not classed as brownfield sites and therefore are not in immediate danger. However, it was felt that a precedent was being set, which might affect allotment land in the future.

The question of how to establish allotment site status (ie statutory/temporary) was revisited from previous member's forum. This was as before:

Ask the local authority. They may not know definitively but may find out for you.

Plot holders need to look at this for themselves using the Archives service and the Land Registry. The Land Registry is located in central Durham City (opposite the hospital) and is free to use.

Hartlepool members had a problem with excessive rents – approximately £120 a year - and broken promises with rent freezes and how the rises had been implemented.

The legal case of Reigate and Banstead was raised where the rents were set at a "reasonable" level – reasonable being in line with charges set for other leisure activities which the Council provided. This was a useful precedent which Hartlepool members should be using. They need to ask the Council to compare the allotment rents and service with costs and service of other local facilities they provide. They also need to be comparing the Hartlepool rents with other allotment rents in adjacent local authorities. This will set up what is "reasonable".

It was also suggested that there was communication and cooperation amongst all plot holders in Hartlepool; they should be organizing and presenting a united front.

If an allotment focus group/consultative committee existed then plot holders should be working with it or asking whether it was effective and if not, how it could be made so.

Self-management was also an effective way to prevent Councils charging rents which were economic and therefore much higher than the subsidized rents which plot holders are used to. Sites should investigate self-management.

How was self-management achieved? Plot holders can approach the Council with a request for this. There is a checklist on the NAS website which covers all aspects of self-management and is useful for sites considering it. There is a need for capacity and commitment amongst plot holders if self-management is to be successful.

There were general comments to the effect that all plot holders want to do is garden – they do not want to be bothered with running their sites.

9. There was no other business.

10. The next meeting was set for 31<sup>st</sup> October 2015, 2pm at Belmont Working Men's Club.

The meeting closed at approximately 4:03pm.