

MINUTES OF THE NORTHERN REGION ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION
31st October 2015, 2pm held at Belmont Social Club

Present: John Hays, Evelyn Leck (Burn Valley), T. Taylor, K. Wilson (Langley Park), Tom Wood (Mulberry), Chris Meikle (Red House Farm), Neil Storey (Rossmere), Elizabeth Allnutt (St Aidans, Carlisle, ADI mentor), G. Bolton (St Margaret's, Durham), V. Scott (South View Birtley), Colin Smith (Dipton), M. Robinson, N. Robinson (Trimdon Community Garden), Frank Heatherington, J. McCabe (Wheatbottom, Crook), Richard Burton, R. Suckling (Woodcroft, Hartlepool). D. C Banks, John Doherty, C. Hemingley and 8 others

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, especially newcomers G Bolton from St Margaret's Allotments in Durham and Kay Wilson from Langley Park.

2. Apologies were received from Colin Campbell and Charlie Fennelly.

3. The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a true and correct record. Proposed Neil Storey, seconded Colin Smith. All were in agreement. There were no matters arising.

A statement, prepared by the NRAA committee was read out detailing the circumstances around David Banks (Northern Region's representative) suspension from the National Allotments Society Management Committee. This is attached in full to these Minutes.

Questions and comments were invited; the membership felt that this was internal politics, that the Northern Regional Representative should not have been suspended and that a letter should be sent to the NAS Management Committee indicating that the membership of the Northern Region were not happy with the situation.

The membership was asked if they were happy for the NRAA committee to continue opposing the suspension in the way they had begun, which was in the best interests of the region its associations and individual members. The meeting was unanimous in its support for the committee to continue by a show of hands.

There was a proposal that David Bank's term of office as Regional Representative for the Northern Region be extended beyond it's original term of one year, as decided by the NRAA AGM in January 2015, for a further two years to make three years in total. This would be in line with the terms attached to the position as stated at the NAS AGM in June 2015. David Banks was in agreement with this. Proposed: Neil Storey Seconded John Hays. The meeting was unanimous in agreement.

4. John Doherty (NRAA Secretary) reported that the two trips to the Harrogate Spring and Autumn Shows had been successful. The numbers on the second trip had increased, indicating that this was probably worth following up in the coming years.

The rodent control course which had taken place a week ago, was a great success – 18 people had taken part, all had passed and had received certificates which would last for their lifetimes. This was excellent value as in future there will be an additional cost for on an online test. It would not be feasible to repeat the course in the near future.

The national magazine "Allotment and Leisure Gardener" was circulated through the member associations. There should be approximately 1 copy per 10 members. Speak to your association officers if you are not getting to see it. It is possible to take out an individual magazine subscription if you would like your own copy. Articles from the Northern Region are always welcome – especially if there is a photograph. News of events, awards, achievements

on your site would be welcome – send them to the address in the magazine or to John Doherty if there is any problem.

Christine Meikle from Red House Farm expressed great thanks and appreciation of the Secretary's work in arranging the Harrogate trips and the rodent course. Neil Storey also expressed his thanks and appreciation.

5. David Banks (Northern Regional Representative) invited questions on the earlier statement and gave a brief resume of his activities.

- He had received twenty three enquiries, March – October 2015. Most of these were simple easily answered by phone or email. Other recurring issues were:

- Continuity for family members, plot support workers on termination of a tenancy or even death of a plot holder. There was a need to deal with this with a suitable clause in the tenancy agreement. Further discussion raised the need for clear arrangements for plot helpers to also be on the waiting list so that there was no "queue-jumping". There was a need to speak to local authority officers if these arrangements were not already in place for directly-managed sites.

There was a need for flexibility; Red House Farm had had an interim plot holder for two years while the plot's tenant had gone to India. The original plot holder had resumed the tenancy on their return

- Forceful committees/bullying. If there are forceful personalities who are taking advantage of their position as officer to run things for their own advantage rather than the good of the site as a whole, then plot holders should take the necessary steps of voting them off at the next AGM and electing a new committee.

- Need for good rules and constitutions in all situations to give consistency and clarity.

- General need to talk to both sides to get a clear picture and to encourage both sides to talk to each other.

6. Break and raffle

7. Elizabeth Allnutt (ADI mentor) attended the two day training course run by NAS for ADI Mentors and regional /reps, 8th/9th October. Useful discussions and contacts made.

Wigton Town Council, Cumbria - a visit was made to discuss how to proceed with long-running misuse of allotment site for small "farm"/Donald's Ranch. There is a long waiting list, and the tenant is not using allotment land for an allotment. Town Council had to go to court to evict. The "ranch" was a popular local enterprise. Parish poll was invoked – like a referendum where local voters can vote for/against a question. Town/parish Council do not have to act on the decision but it is a useful way of assessing public opinion and feeling. In Wigton there was overwhelming support for evicted tenant – 306 for replacement of Ranch, 88 against it. In this case the Poll was used against the allotments but it could well be a useful tool for gauging support for an allotment site in cases of closure.

Local Planning. The Carlisle Local Plan has reached the final Examination in Public stage – Allotments have not been raised in the matters and issues for discussion. Not surprising but worth pursuing allotments as part of the consultation process. If a site is under threat in the future then having made the case for allotments in the Local Plan consultation process will be to your advantage.

Next AOFoum meeting 19th November, Middlesbrough. Middlesbrough officers will be talking about transfer of local authority management to Environment City – local Transition Town movement. Should be interesting encourage your allotment officer to attend.

National Allotments Week 8th-14th August 2016, theme will be Growing Together and will cover the ethnic diversity and wide age range found on allotments. Please think about organizing an event on your site – there is help in the form of a show kit from NAS.

8. Members Forum

Tommy Wood advised that next year's allotment rents for Gateshead could be found in the Cabinet's papers on the Council's website. [All charges for Council services are reviewed annually as part of setting the Council's budgets and will be found in various financial committee reports before their acceptance by full Council. This process is part of financial planning and usually begins in the late summer. A simple telephone call to the allotments officer is an easier way of finding out what the rent will be.]

Trimdon Community Garden won an RHS award for Community Effort. An article/photographs about this for the magazine were promised

Langley Park has now completed its Community Garden with £9k grant from the Lottery for a toilet, raised beds etc. Articles/photographs about this for the magazine were also promised.

John Monkhouse for Darlington advised that John Doherty had been to inspect /judge their plots. An independent appraisal was respected more than one made by the resident committee. The appraisal was done on a points system and all the results were displayed on the Notice Board. This acted as a pat on the back but also a name and shame exercise. The points also assisted future committee decisions re dirty plots. Points were awarded for eg range and variety of plants, environmentally friendly activities (composting, bee/bird attractants), levels of weeds

St Margaret's Durham had opened the site as part of the National Gardens Scheme. There had been a scarecrow competition which had generated lots of interest, especially with children. Again photographs/article were promised for the magazine. The site had also won a Gold award for Northumbria in Bloom. – photos again please!

Bonfires on allotments can be a problem for local residents. Bonfires are not illegal but smoke can be an environmental hazard especially in urban areas and it is advised that bonfires should burn quickly and cleanly. Petrol is not advised as it can flash back and be dangerous. Paraffin is preferable if an accelerant is needed.

Hartlepool Council allow bonfires between November and March and will issue a permit which will last one week only and allows bonfires between 10am and 4pm, which must be attended at all times.

Durham's new regulations permit fires only in metal incinerators.

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9. There was no other business.

10. The next meeting will be 30th January 2016, 2pm at Belmont Working men's Club. This will be the NRAA AGM, but it is anticipated that the formal business will be concluded swiftly.

The meeting closed at 3:50pm