

MINUTES OF THE NORTHERN REGION ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION
22nd April 2017, 2pm held at Belmont Working Men's Club

Present: Evelyn Leck (chair), John Monkhouse (treasurer), Vince Scott, Neil Storey, Tommy Wood, David Banks (Allotments' Advisor), John Doherty, Edwin Wheeldon, Derek Lindsay, Paul Wattam, Janette Croker, Charlie Fennelly, Doreen Wright, Martin Ellison, Elizabeth Ellison, John Hayes, Emma Beattie and Stuart Flude, Colin Smith.

1. Welcome from the Chair

A welcome was extended to all present especially to the newcomers:
Emma and Stuart from Sherburn Hill

2. Apologies

3. Minutes The minutes of the 28th January meeting were circulated and were accepted.
Moved that the minutes be accepted; John Doherty: Seconded Neil Storey, – passed.

4. Matters Arising The dispute with the NAS was raised and will be dealt with first.

5. Report from the Chair At the end of January, the Treasurer reported that we had only £300 left in the account so Evelyn took the decision in conjunction with John Monkhouse (treasurer) to freeze outgoings on the account. Our members' rebates had not been received. At the request of the national management committee Evelyn attended the March meeting in Corby. After confirming her membership status, she was cordially treated and helped with travel and accommodation. Evelyn began by clarifying some misconceptions; firstly, she is not the Regional Representative and secondly we commonly have around 25 to 50 members attending our quarterly meetings. She also made it clear that her only purpose in visiting the National Management Committee (MC) was to obtain our members' rebates without which our regional association would come to an end. MC said that they did not accept David Banks as the Regional Representative of the National Allotment Society and the MC were unanimous that they would not give us money that they presumed was solely going to him as he incurs expenses advising local allotment societies. Evelyn pointed out that we had run two Rodent Control Courses and 4 trips to the Harrogate Flower Show in the past two years. Without our rebates those events, the present trip and any events in the future, which would benefit NAS members, would not happen. After some discussion, the MC agreed to give half the rebate due to our members (£1316.50) on condition that none of the money goes to David Banks as expenses or in any other form. David stated that he had been incurring expenses and charging them to an interest free credit card. David stated that he would cover the expense himself if no funds are available from the society.

(Last year David received £1742 in expenses and to remunerate for the web site, computer and other administrative items.

6 Discussion

Charlie Fennelly asked what attendance at our meetings had to do with it. On average, we have 25 present. Also, he asked about the current state of David Banks and his position. *David was appointed Regional Rep. for 1 year at the NRAA AGM in January 2015 and this was extended to a further 2 years at the AGM in 2016. His term will finish next January.*

Evelyn explained that Liz Bunting at Head Office had looked at our website and got the impression that David was presented as Regional Rep. for the NAS. The MC did not like this at all.

Paul Wattam asked what the objection to David was. Evelyn replied that she is not taking sides in the dispute and that she saw her job as getting us our members' rebates so they could receive benefits for their membership of NAS. She is determined to be honest and made it quite clear that if we have only part of the rebate received under strict conditions then we cannot pay David's expenses from it. Evelyn said that her preference was that we should draw a line under this whole dispute and simply agree to differ.

John Hays asked if David Banks should stand aside until this is resolved but received no definitive answer.

Charlie Fennelly asked what the alternatives were to affiliating to the NAS and should we consider breaking away from them?

John Doherty gave a bit of background information and advised against hastily forming our own supportive organisation mainly because we have not got a sufficiently strong and well-qualified committee to run one. Evelyn also agreed that at present we are not strong enough to go it alone.

David Banks suggested obtaining grant funding as a community group to support our activities. Other suggestions included using the telephone and email more before making site visits and possibly Skype. Could we get the sites requiring assistance to pay for David's travelling expenses or to visit him?

Hummersknott allotments in Darlington have already withdrawn from the NAS and NAS membership in the Northern Region is declining. John D stated that the NAS is the only national organisation solely dedicated to

allotments. Evelyn reiterated that we have got to move on. The NAS does offer some benefits to members principally legal advice from Liz Bunting but this has often required perseverance to obtain. We do need our rebates to organise benefits for sites and to attend shows etc. She is quite prepared to go back to the MC for the rest of the rebate money.

Paul Wattam asked whether we would be able to get by money wise if sites paid the NRAA instead of NAS? David reckons we could if sites paid us £1 per member and individuals paid £10 but it would take around a year to get sufficient income assured.

Charlie Fennelly suggested asking our members to make a "one-off" donation to NRAA.

These monies would; go into a separate bank account and could be used for expenditure that is not on the NAS list of authorised expenditure.

Janette Croker asked that we consider taking any reference to the Regional Representative off our web site and state plainly that the position of Regional Representative for the NAS is vacant. This would be followed by; "Your local Allotment Advisor is"

This must placate the MC and help to recover the rebate whilst in the meantime we develop ideas to obtain funding from our regional members.

In Conclusion

Proposal Evelyn proposed from the chair that; "The term "Allotment Advisor" be used to describe David's position and that we do not use any rebate money to reimburse David." Seconded Edwin Wheeldon. Passed 16 in favour, 1 against, 1 abstain.

David Banks stated that the NAS has broken and is still breaking its own rules. What clause in their own guidelines do we not adhere to? We can't make any decision until we know their exact reason for denying us our members' rebates.

Proposal Neil Storey proposed the following, "That we send a letter to the MC requiring them to give us reasons why according to their own rules they are not paying us the rebates due to our members".

This was seconded by Charlie Fennelly. Passed.

7 Members' Forum

Derek Lyndsey; "Hummersknott allotments (Nunnery Lane, Darlington) are 100 years old this year and we are holding an open day in celebration. All are invited on Saturday 29th July. There will be a Silver Band and other festivities."

Neil Storey reported that Hartlepool Council has rescinded its extortionate rent demand to a more acceptable 6%.

John Doherty said there are 17 seats still available on the trip to the Harrogate Flower Show tomorrow. Last minute bookings taken.

Suggestions for talks at future meetings; -

How to do an allotment shop – to be confirmed

Health and Safety on Site – Charlie Fennelly

Bee keeping on allotments – Derek Lyndsey

8 Date of Next Meeting Saturday 22nd July 2pm Belmont Social Club