

Minutes of TGAA AGM Tuesday 25th March 2025

The minutes record the main features of the written reports circulated to members before the AGM with additional points discussed during the meeting added in italics.

Present:- Tony Hollander (Chairman), Neil MacLennan (Vice Chairman), Bob Crabtree (Treasurer), Rachel Faulkner (Secretary), Jonathan Clark (website, shop, skip), Andrew van Hemel Parsons (machinery), Richard Gordon (Pest Control), Michael Wheale (Bonfires and Compost) and **30** members.

Apologies were received from:- Robin Nicholas, Dorothea Maraki, Liz Cairncross, Sue Ledwith, Richard and Bee Hillier, Chris Goodall, David Kewley, Jan Maulden, Sue Knutzen,

The Chairman welcomed those present. Welcome drinks for the members were kindly provided by Neil and Sally MacLennan.

The Chairman signed the Minutes of the 2024 AGM

1. Chairman's Report.

The committee met three times since the last AGM.

The main topics included:

1. SSE's closure of the car park for cable-laying to the new substation.. Phil & Jim kindly agreed to our using their car park.
2. Access. After legal delays, the bridge path was re-surfaced in good time and is now much safer for cyclists. The leaking gabions remain a potential problem for the access to Port Meadow.
3. Trees. The city council's inability to pollard the willows has been damaging to the perimeter fence and to plots along the western and southern boundaries, and also to the trees themselves. We still await promised maintenance by the tree team.

Working parties have trimmed the accessible intrusive branches and cleared shrubs from our boundary fence.

I also cleared excessive plant growth from the pond boundaries.

4. Employees. Employers of helpers are advised not to allow use of members' shared equipment.

5. Status. We need to become registered as a Co-operative and renew our lease. The administrative and financial adjustments will be explained in the following reports from BC and MW.

A group of about 14 Americans from "Operation Europe" will be visiting us on 21st May at 11 a.m. We will need some guides to show them around our site so please let me know if you would like to help out.

I should like to thank the committee members for their dedicated work over the year. Their reports follow.

The committee met three times since the last AGM.

The Chairman emphasised that the status of TGAA would change. He asked that members inform him of any trees that might need pruning or felling. The Chairman also thanked the working party who had assisted with clearing branches etc from the boundary fence.

More volunteers for the mowing rota would be welcomed.

2. Treasurer's Report.

A summary of the accounts is attached. The net income (income less expenditure) was £2,036.96. The income from fees was slightly higher than in 2023 due mainly to a higher turnover of plots. The shop showed a substantially higher income than in the previous year but this reflected an error in the end year stock valuation in 2022 on how VAT was handled. There were no water project costs in 2024 after the re-instatement of the stolen equipment. Oxford City Council has started to collect rent after a reminder from the committee. The end-year bank balance at January 1st 2025 stood at £17,136.42. This is a very satisfactory financial situation. The reserve is a handy cushion were a replacement mower be required. It can also cover the substantial costs of tree pruning and fencing should these be necessary.

I wish to thank Jim Moore for examining and approving the accounts.

Bob Crabtree

The treasurer indicated that a simpler fee structure would be advantageous as and when the status of the TGAA changes to being a co-operative. He suggested dropping the early payment discount and pensioner rate and instead introducing a flat rate of £24 per member, regardless of the size of the plot. This would produce a similar income and be simpler to administer. The members present indicated they would be in favour of such a change.

3. Secretary's Report

Once again a highlight of the TGAA year for many was the Harvest Supper which took place in November. I was extremely grateful to a willing band of volunteers who helped the Committee with both the preparation and the later tidying up of the SMI Hall. They were Stuart and Gillian Skyte, Moony Budge, Meg Movshon, Jessica Harris and Nick Harberd. The wonderful food was enjoyed by 64 members and guests and there were very few leftovers!

Each year several allotments change hands and we welcome in new members. The Committee is also refreshed with new members from time to time and so it is important that **ALL** plots are numbered clearly. If not a lot of time can be wasted looking for a particular plot.

As I write this final report as Secretary I realise how many TGAA members I now know. I have enjoyed the friendly exchanges and discussions with long standing and new members and I urge all members to consider putting themselves forward for a spell on the Committee.

4. Machinery Report

The extension lopper has broken so will be replaced – otherwise all equipment appears to be functioning correctly, and fuel usage is as we would expect.

The small tiller, strimmer, two walking mowers, and Countax tractor were all serviced over the winter by Meadhams and the Countax has also had its faulty front tyre replaced.

Later this year the large tiller and flail mower will be unavailable for a short time while they are serviced.

There has been some discussion of the acquisition of a battery powered extension chainsaw to help authorised users to maintain the borders and to trim trees within the site. This is a good idea - petrol chainsaws are difficult to handle, and tend to be unreliable. As the council appears to have abandoned any pretence of responsibility for this work, we're better to get on with it ourselves.

I have met a few new members to demo various equipment – please don't hesitate to ask if you need help, or are not sure of what might be best for a particular task. Long term members - please mention our fine range of machinery when you see new neighbouring plot-holders – particularly if they need to clear undergrowth etc.

Just a reminder to everyone to ensure they observe the safe use of both TGAA's and their own machinery onsite – we have ear and eye protection available – stout footwear and gloves should be worn as necessary. Please inspect the work area for wire, plastic, metal, glass etc before starting, and be aware of others around you or passing by whilst you're working. Handle fuel carefully, particularly if refuelling hot machinery – if you have spillages, move fuel cans well away, also move the machine away from the spillage, and don't restart the machine until the spilt fuel has evaporated.

Andrew Parsons reminded ploholders who needed to employ additional help that they should have their own personal insurance and be satisfied that their helper was competent to use the smaller equipment. The use of the large tiller, flail mower and tractor mower should be for members only, once trained. Safety was paramount when using any equipment. He also reminded members who have hoses attached to a water trough to turn off the tap when the hose is not in use.

5. Water System Report for 2024 (extracts from the full report)

Fortunately this year has been much less eventful with no significant challenges or changes to report. We received one bid for the installation of the last trough and this was fitted in the summer. Other than this the system has run without any disturbances and continues to require very little maintenance other than occasional cleaning of the solar panels.

The most major piece of work needed was when a few of the willows close to the solar panels needed to be pollarded/thinned as this had not been done by the Council for some time.

The overall message from this is that the system is working well with all the demands on it. Just a few important reminders when using it:

The water is taken directly from the gravel beds about two metres below ground and is closely linked to the Thames and run-off from farming land. **The water is not drinkable.**

Our system has no batteries and when the sun gets low the extraction stops. After this we only have the 3000 litres in the tank plus about the same again in the troughs to last us until the next morning.

There are some signs that our consumption is increasing so we should begin to think about using water more effectively, such as by directing the water to the base of plants and not all onto their leaves where much of it will rapidly evaporate. An easy way to do this would be to use a soaker hose or a drip watering connection with a simple timer. Soaker hoses are low pressure systems (optimal at around 1 bar) but they seem to work well also on our system, which operates at about 0.5 bar. (I have installed a few for myself and they work very well).

In the summer our pump can lift over 30 tonnes a day in sunny weather provided that the use is spread evenly throughout the day, such as by filling your own water butt. Extraction from groundwater without a licence is limited by Thames water to 20 tonnes per day and we have never exceeded this to date but have come close on one or two

days. By extracting groundwater from the gravel level we are taking water which is too high in ammonia salts and filtering it through the ground on our plots, where the ammonia turns into fertilizer and some of the water goes back to the river. Anything we return to the river goes back in a better state than before, so higher use is (very slightly) beneficial to the environment.

Detailed instructions on how to clean out the individual troughs are posted on the website <https://www.tgaa.org.uk>

6. Composts and Bonfires

The collective bonfire site helps to ensure fires meet OCC guidelines and don't cause a 'nuisance'. I try to hold them only on weekday mornings, avoiding any bank holiday, and with a wind blowing smoke away from the railway and houses. Having a core of dry wood usually enables a fast burn, and except where huge amounts have built up in the wet winters, we can usually reduce it to ash within an hour. The cooled ash is a rich source of potash.

Fires happened on:

21/03/24; 23/04/24; 25/05/24; 23/06/24; 12/07/24; 24/10/24; 04/11/24; 07/02/25; 04/03/25

We have received no complaints from nearby houses about bonfire smoke. We did have a slow burning rogue fire overnight in the summer from someone camping out, which is not permitted under OCC rules. The matter was resolved. Please don't bring plasterboard to the fire pit.

Take any asbestos to Redbridge Recycling centre!

Metals should be put in a Skip. Wet green weeds should be composted (if they burn at all, they create heavy smoke.) Please don't dump broken or unwanted items - save them for the skip.

Collective large Composters:

These work well and are especially helpful to those with small plots. A JCB comes periodically to turn them over which mixes material and finally loosens up the finished compost which ploholders can then take away.

Potato tubers harbour blight spores so should not be put in the compost. The top growth can be composted.

A good 'on-plot' compost bin made from wiring together 4 pallets saves barrowing good material to the collective site but these need turning 2 or 3 times over the year and a good mixing of greenery interspersed with twig and stem bits. 7 pallets will give you two bins. Empty them of the rotted material in Spring- please don't keep them as just an unsightly dump. Even rough compost quickly gets broken down in the topsoil and adds a wide range of nutrients.

Volunteers on fire days are welcome-its hard work sometimes.

The Chairman reminded members that Michael's skilful reading of weather conditions resulted in no complaints from neighbouring houses when bonfires were lit.

7. Tree Discussion

Members had previously been circulated with two papers on the rules regarding the growing of fruit trees on the allotments. A general discussion was held as it was thought it was time to review and possibly update the rules. With more members cultivating smaller plots several people thought the number of trees should be limited. It was generally agreed that the maxim of consideration of neighbouring plots and the careful positioning of trees should continue. Fruit trees of dwarf stock should only be planted and pruning undertaken when necessary. Permission should be obtained from the Chairman/Committee before the planting of a tree, as is currently the practice of positioning a shed.

8. Pest Control

RATS: I recently collected in all the rat bait boxes, cleaned and renumbered them, as any recent sightings had all been dealt with. When told of new sightings now that ploholders are more in evidence given the arrival of spring, I have put our boxes where necessary. I will shortly put out half a dozen boxes in a given area, moving them on every two or three weeks to cover the whole of the allotments over the course of 2025, as I did last year. A big thank you to all those whose plots now have a clearly visible number.

I do not enjoy poisoning other creatures, so please do what you can to make your plot unattractive to them. A tidy compost, regularly turned and emptied helps. Please do **not** bring kitchen waste down to the allotments, as this risks simply enticing rats along for the feast. Also I have noticed that rats are more likely to be found on plots where apples are not picked, resulting in a tempting carpet of windfalls. I have got in touch with Abundance, a volunteer group, who will come, pick the unwanted fruit, and take the crop to local food banks. If you would like to take advantage of this, please let me know your plot number and likely ripening time, and I will organise the picking with them.

RABBITS: I have had rabbit traps out since the beginning of November and have regularly pre-baited them with carrots to familiarise the rabbits with taking the bait. The carrots have been sporadically taken and although I have set the traps on a number of occasions, I have had no success, unlike last summer. I have though been told of two sightings of a stoat, whose presence might well make traps unnecessary! There do seem to be fewer rabbits around than last year.

Some remedial repairs, where there is a persistent rabbit burrow underneath the north fence, are necessary to prevent easy access from Burgess Field once the ditchwater has drained away. I have blocked and re-blocked this particular hole on a number of occasions, yet the hole simply reappears in much the same place within a day or two. The repairs will require a well-attended work party.

RG asked members to inform him if they had been affected by rats on their plot.

9. Lettings Report

There are currently 18 people/couples on the waiting list.

I took over as Lettings secretary from Martin Fleminger on the 13th of January 2025, since then I have let 5 plots. 5 people declined plots when offered to them and their names have also come off the waiting list. 5 have not responded to a call or email and their names have also been removed.

There has been no review of all plots since I took over.

I wrote to all those whose plots were judged to show lack of satisfactory cultivation during the previous growing
There are 7 plots available.

It was suggested that DM could emphasise the new rulings on the planting of trees when allocating vacant plots.

10. TGAA status

As no new decisions had been made there was nothing to report.

11. Shop Report

The shop is open between March and October on Saturday 11:00am-12:00 pm and Sunday 3:00pm-4pm. It sells such things as manure (bagged), ground cover for weed suppression, horticultural fleece for plant protection, various nettings to protect from birds and insects, canes for plant support and other items we believe will be useful for gardening. There is a price list at <https://www.trapgroundallotments.org.uk/trap-trading> . The shop is card only, we don't use cash.

We try to price things to make a modest profit and generally we are able to do that while keeping prices lower than you would find at local garden centres- I believe. Let me know if you find that we are more expensive than local suppliers for any item, and I will see if we can afford to match it.

If you think of something we ought to be selling, please let me know. We don't sell seeds or plants because of wastage. We also hold membership cards which give discount at Yarnton Garden Centre and other places- see the website for details <https://tgaa.org.uk/discounts> -and Dobies end catalogues in support of the discount(50% on seeds) which we get from Dobies.

The shop only functions due to the volunteers who each do about seven sessions each during the season. Special thanks to them:- Howard Cox, Isabella Underhill, Jan Maulden, Judy Shakespeare, Katalin Pinter, Liz, Cairncross, Meg Movshon, Rachel Faulkner, Vibeke Mannion, Virginia Wallis.

12. Cutteslowe Larder

Cotteslowe Larder

Cotteslowe Larder is a food and community event that meets every week at the Cotteslowe Community Centre. It is run by volunteers. In order to access the service potential members sign up and agree to pay a monthly nominal sum by direct debit. They are then able to use the larder and also obtain discounts from a number of local retailers.

Before the involvement of TGAA, the food had mainly been store-cupboard items, with some fresh food coming from supermarkets but fresh, locally grown and largely organic produce is highly valued.

As growers know only too well, there are times when we produce more than we can cope with or give to family and friends. For several years TGAA has participated in the Cotteslowe Larder scheme, donating excess produce. During the summer months, a steady stream of fruit and veg has been left in the cupboards at the bottom of the ramp, to be collected Wednesday morning. Naturally as autumn comes the donations lessen and finally dwindle to nothing until growth starts the following year.

This produce has been well received by the Larder and even the occasional glut has been most welcome, with members using monster marrows for curries or soup. The produce has also encouraged experimentation with use and recipe exchange, creating a good community spirit among the Larder members.

I have been helped by Vibeke, as adviser (she is a long term volunteer at the Larder) and a team of collectors and deliverers, Julia and Peter, Debby, Chris and Gillian, to mention but a few. Thanks to all of you. Thank you too, to those of you who have donated your surplus produce.

I have finally given up my plots, but am happy to organise the Larder collections. As soon as the growing season gets under way, weekly collections will resume. Any queries: mary.gurr1@btinternet.com or via the allotment WhatsApp group.

Mary Gurr has asked if there are any more members who would like to collect and deliver produce during the coming growing season. They can contact her using the email address above or via the WhatsApp group.

13. Website

JC recommends all members to use the website where they can find information, advice , photographs and much more.

14. Election of Committee

TH spoke to the members

“Martin Fleminger has withdrawn from being Lettings Secretary and we are very grateful to Dorothea Maraki for agreeing to take on this work. Martin managed to reduce the waiting list from nearly 100 to around 30 and succeeded in persuading members with neglected plots to give them up for productive use. Our thanks to him for a very useful year’s work on our behalf.

Rachel Faulkner has been our secretary since March 2021. She agreed to take on the work for five years and has fulfilled her promise with unfailing competence. Our thanks for her initiatives with agendas, speed, accuracy and reliability with minutes which eased the work of the committee. Also for organising the success of the Harvest Suppers with her careful planning and recruitment of volunteers to run the event.

Johnathan Clark joined the committee as web master in 2008 and since then has taken on a number of jobs from maintaining machinery to organising the shop and helping out over the level crossing, the lease, the new cooperative status and many others. He has agreed to continue to offer help on an ad-hoc basis. Many thanks Jonathan.

As Julie Brannan, Dorothea Maraki and Karen Walker had already agreed to stand for the posts of Secretary, Lettings Secretary and Shop Manager respectively and with no other nominees proposed, the Committee was then re-elected for the coming year. This was proposed by Roger Mumby-Croft and seconded by Carol Jarvis.

Ian Salisbury then proposed a vote of thanks to the Committee which was warmly applauded.

AOB

William Kirkland had asked for site security to be raised.

TH said it was a difficult issue as he knew several members had experienced loss of fruit and vegetables in the past. He urged members not to disclose the key code to people who were not members of TGAA. It was also important to ensure the gates were properly closed when entering or leaving the site.

The meeting closed at 9.30pm.