

**Minutes of the TGAA Committee meeting** held at 11.00 on Tuesday 16th October 2018 at 23 Chalfont Road, Oxford.

**Present:** Tony Hollander (chairman); Neil MacLennan (deputy chairman); Virginia Wallis (secretary and lettings secretary), Bob Crabtree (treasurer); Chris Beckett (shop); Michael Wheale (compost); Jonathan Clark (website and machinery); Pete Jarvis (pest control).

**Apologies:** Roger Mumby-Croft (lettings secretary).

### **Matters arising**

Further to the action points completed since the last committee meeting on 20th February 2018:

VW has yet to update the TGAA rules on the shed policy and fruit-tree planting. In addition to the new rules agreed at the last committee meeting plot holders with neighbouring fruit trees overhanging their plots will be permitted either to pick the fruit from the overhanging branches or prune back those branches to the plot boundary.

### **Pruning of the communal orchard**

Prior to the meeting John Porter had circulated a note (attached) detailing what he sees as the inadequacies in the pruning of the communal orchard. In response to his concerns, TH has arranged for Chris Lanczak, orchard manager and pruning expert at Waterperry Gardens, to look at the fruit trees which he will do at 2.00 pm on Friday 26th October 2018. John Porter has been invited to join this meeting.

**Action:** If required, TH will arrange a further meeting to prune or instruct or both. TH also to ask John Porter to identify the varieties of the trees in the communal orchard so that they can be labelled.

### **Allotment water supply**

Following on from an extensive exchange of emails in the summer concerning the lack of water on site and the various ways of tackling the problem seen at other allotments - ranging from digging more wells, encouraging water-butt use to having bore holes drilled among others - it was agreed that a firm decision on what action should be taken (if any) could not be made without a clear idea of possible cost.

**Action:** NMc and CB to investigate water supply solutions at other allotment sites and report back with recommendations at the next committee meeting on Tuesday 19th February 2019 in preparation for discussion at the AGM on Tuesday 26th March 2019.

### **Treasurer's report**

At the start of the year the bank balance was £13,600 which has risen to £16,000 as a result of fee payments and not spending very much. It was agreed that new members taking a plot on after 1 January would pay only the new £30 joining fee.

### **Manure delivery**

**Action:** VW to send a note to members about manure delivery as detailed in the minutes of the February meeting.

### **Pollarding**

The willows along the southern and part of the western boundaries have been pollarded but the northern boundary is still in need of work. There is a pile of chippings next to the equipment shed.

**Action:** TH to alert park ranger, Julian Cooper, to the need for the sycamore and ash trees to be dealt with.

### **Bee-friendly beds**

**Action:** TH to engage David Haynes to remove the wood from the raised beds, level the soil and also spread the contents of the rubble bags. RC to plant fruit trees.

### **Machinery**

JC intends to get the machinery serviced in November. The machinery has worked well this season but a light-weight battery-operated strimmer would be a popular addition although a source of electricity would be required to charge it. In addition it was suggested that a battery-powered hedge trimmer would be useful for cutting back brambles and small branches coming through the perimeter fence.

**Action:** JC to investigate the cost of solar panels for the equipment shed as well as the cost of lighting.

### **Owl boxes**

A suitable tree has been identified for an owl box (which costs £60) and Richard Gordon has volunteered to put it up and maintain it. He is also installing two owl boxes on Burgess Field. How effective the owl box will be at deterring rats was called into question as owls tend to target mice rather than rats. If an owl does take up residence, however, rat poison should no longer be used on the allotment site.

### **Any other business**

**Communal compost** The compost bins need to be mended with telegraph poles and timbers which MW will organise.

**Hazardous hole** JC to ask Tom Landell Mills to make safe the large hole he has dug for a well on his plot.

**Harvest supper** Volunteers to convene at 6.00 at the St Margaret's Institute on Saturday 17th November 2018 to help set up. JC will set up the slide show for the photo competition - theme 'colour' - for which there are already lots of good entries. RC to buy a case of wine for welcome drinks and bottles of mineral water to be served with supper.

**Footbridge surface** This is being dealt with by the County Council in negotiation with the city council and Network Rail.

**The meeting ended at 12.45**

## Pruning of the communal orchard

For the Committee Meeting to be held on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2018.  
re. Community Orchard

Dear Tony,  
Dear members of the Committee

I feel I should voice some thoughts on the pruning of the orchard apple trees. *Only after this had actually taken place in March* did I look up the committee minutes [of 6<sup>th</sup> November 2017] and found the phrase: “JC to ask John Porter if he would be happy to have the communal apple trees pruned by a tree surgeon (he would be)” I am positive that this clear phrase was not used in conversation with either TH or VW and so a misunderstanding ensued.

I assumed that Simone’s role at some stage was to be an advisory one only. In the event the surprising news to me of imminent pruning (or pruning at all) was only received (by my wife) on the very morning it was to take place, even though the date had been fixed at the February committee meeting. Unfortunately I was elsewhere on that day and did not get the message.

It still puzzles me greatly why it was thought necessary to hard prune trees that were fruiting very successfully - and even more so why it took place at that particular time of year. The sadly predictable results of the imbalance between roots and canopy are still evident: a proliferation of water shoots, both from the pruning cuts but also along the hitherto bare branches. Many shoots are well over a metre long. Rather than a problem being solved one has been created.

As they could inform future work, it may be useful at this point to give the RHS views on the matter. They first expressed surprise that it was felt necessary to hard prune trees that were fruiting well, and continued that “in the orchards at Wisley we no longer aim for a manicured look.” The advice was “to keep secateurs in their holsters” and “reach for the pruning saw to remove whole branches if necessary.” And to under- rather than over-prune. The article on ‘regulated pruning’ is at [www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=856](http://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=856) [regulated pruning is carried out to control the size of apples and pears trained as free-standing bushes that have reached the optimum size for the rootstock they are grafted on. It is an alternative to traditional winter pruning.]

The Committee has apparently chosen a high maintenance strategy that will require regular remedial work. My friendly expert suggests that this should already have been started if the trees are to recover within the next two to three years.

Rather than attend the meeting on Tuesday I feel it better to circulate this note so that my views are clearly recorded and immediately available in a discussion.

John Porter  
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