

STONEBRIDGE ALLOTMENT SOCIETY
PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE – OPEN MEETING 18.5.16, 7PM – FLEUR HALL

1. CHAIR

1.1 Opening remarks

Sally Kerin opened the meeting and thanked the members for attending in such large numbers. This was an important meeting which would allow membership to understand the challenges the Society faces and make decisions on planning the future of our unique site.

To ensure that all matters are covered expeditiously, it was proposed that various committee members present the items listed on the agenda provided, with questions and comments taken at the end.

1.2 Top plot judging Preliminary internal judging will be from 3rd to 9th July, with final independent judging between 10th & 16th July

2. SUBJECTS FOR DISCUSSION:

2.1 Official transfer to FTC 10th May- Sally Kerin

New management & tenants agreements (common to all associations)

These are to be agreed with FTC.

An initial meeting has been arranged for 24th May to start the process of drawing up a new management agreement. It is hoped to be completed by September so a new tenants agreement can be sent out with rent notices.

FTC are to set up a sub-committee

The sub-committee will oversee and liaise with the allotment societies. No details as yet.

Councillors visited the site on 10th May.

We pointed out what we had achieved in first 6 months and the problems still to be tackled. The feedback was positive:

Very impressed with site; positive and supportive comments.

Said they will be more involved than Swale

Some Councillors have asked to be invited to AGM; one has put his name on waiting list!

Rents

These will need to increase to pay fixed costs (insurance; water; repairs/improvements) and the need to match-fund grants Sally pointed out:

Currently pay less than other allotments in Swale (£3 per rod/£3.40)

Not increased for about 6 years

Have used up existing funds to bring Davington allotments back into use; install bridge between plots 52/57 to join site together; re-instate small weir on Sunday. (with the assistance of around 200 volunteer hours so far)

We have a number of capital projects (listed on agenda) for which we will apply for grants: we need to match-fund these.

Andy will talk later about income/outgoings

2.2 Website- Bob Gomes

The web site is in preparation and will be launched shortly. The address is: www.stonebridgeallotmentsociety.org

The site will display notices, news items, and standard information. This will be expanded to include other useful information, historic information about the allotment site, etc.

2.3 Open Gardens- Noel Perkins

Noel explained the arrangements for Sunday 26th June and asked for volunteers to assist him in manning the gate. A full compliment of volunteers came forward at the end of the meeting.

2.4 Projects- Paul Edmondson

Paul briefly outlined details of the various projects that have been identified by or suggested to the committee, to address deficiencies or improve the site. These were to be considered by the meeting, with comments and further suggestions to be taken at the end. To carry out the projects will require a level of funding that cannot be provided by the rents currently charged. Fund raising and finance will be discussed later.

Orchard Area

The area has been partially cleared. The remainder will be cleared later in the year after the nesting season is over. The area will then be surveyed and the layout and usage finalised.

In accordance with our mandate to provide allotments, the primary use is proposed to be allotments. It appears that four 4-5 rod allotments could be established on the site plus other peripheral uses. These could include wildlife areas, raised beds and shelters for the disabled and elderly.

Once the area is cleared, the security at the stream end of the perimeter wall can be improved. Security can be enhanced by removing sycamore saplings and raising the tree canopy by the weir to improve visibility from the entrance area.

Carpark area

The rear area of the carpark by the stage could be used for raised beds for the elderly and disabled, with carparking in front.

Brick Shed

This is the only fixed structure on the site and was in the past the site store. It is currently overgrown with ivy and in need of repair. Several tenants unofficially use it as their shed. The society is required to insure and repair the building.

The society has a number of items of equipment currently stored in members houses off site. These include a strimmer, underwater brushcutter, tools, a boat donated by FCT, etc. The building is required to securely store these items in a convenient location so they can be used by authorised members of the society.

It is proposed that the building is vacated, cleaned out and surveyed. It can then be repaired. At present this appears to involve removal of ivy and repair of roof tiling, although other items may be discovered. Security will have to be improved by

overhaul of the door, plywood lining of the roof, sealing the rear window, etc., so that the proposed contents can be insured.

Metal Store

The metal enclosure at the end of the main drive is required as a central composting area for weeds and bullrushes cleared from streams, grass cuttings from communal areas, etc. It has not been used for years and currently contains junk, which will have to be disposed of, and a few ply boards to be used for bridge repairs.

Longer Term projects

Fencing

The fencing along Davington and Brents Hills is in poor condition. There are frequent breaks, the gates are vulnerable and in need of repair. One gate on Davington Hill, has been repeatedly vandalised. Preliminary estimates suggest that it will cost £4000 to replace the fencing and gates.

When the swing bridge is replaced, the top corner fence by the junction may be taken down and replaced for us.

Gates

The main gate post requires replacement and the gates require overhaul. FTC has been asked to clarify if this is their responsibility as part of the blast wall enclosure.

The two gates on Davington Hill require replacement or repair.

Bridges

The bridges over internal waterways on the south side of the site are generally in need of frequent repair. We should plan to replace them before they become beyond economic repair and unusable.

We have received a report on the long bridge replacement, asked that the centre span be raised to allow the punt to pass and understand that the procurement process has now started.

Ditches

The main waterways are owned by Swale, but we are responsible for clearing ditches off the main waterways. Swale allow us to clear the waterways provided we observe standard H and S procedures and that work party members are trained and insured.

Some internal waterways and ditches are silted up and full of bullrushes. These require clearing to return the water flow. The rushes and roots can be removed to the metal store area to compost.

The retaining walls to the edges of the waterways are generally in poor condition. The tops of many have been repaired with sheeting, some of which has collapsed. These are the responsibility of Swale BC. We have been asked to suggest which waterways require dredging and where walls require repair.

Trees

As the site is in a conservation area, trees cannot be pruned or removed without permission. The Swale Tree Officer, Paul Hegley, has visited site and provided advice on how to go about applying for permission to manage trees on the site.

Bob Gomes has prepared a tree plan. He will prepare a schedule of immediate works plus details of long term maintenance for the whole site as part of a planning application to maintain the trees.

Some tenants have already advised works they wish to carry out, and trees they think should be maintained. These were discussed at the visit. Tenants are being asked to advise any other works they wish to undertake so these can be included in the application.

The sycamores at the bottom of Davington Hill are in poor condition. FTC has been advised that several branches have fallen in the road, as we believe these are their responsibility.

Brown water systems

At the recent councillors visit, we were asked how water was provided. It was suggested we should make greater use of the stream water to replace the use of mains water, currently a significant cost. It is proposed to explore this further, possibly with trial runs for plots remote from the waterways.

2.5 Fund Raising and Finance- Laurence Young/ Andy Freeman

Andy explained that the funds available for maintenance of the site raised by the current rents after essential overheads such as insurance and water rates was insufficient to cover any other than essential repairs. If major projects and improvements are to be undertaken, rents will have to be increased even if grants are obtained.

Rent levels are currently set by Swale. Future rent levels will be set in consultation with FTC. It is understood that these would be uniform across Faversham sites, but have still to be discussed.

Laurence explained that whilst grants can be applied for they will often have conditions attached that are incompatible with the secure use of the site. Open access is a common requirement. Grants will often be conditional on matched funding, where the Society would have to provide 50% of the funds. The current rent levels will only build funds slowly.

3. MEMBERS COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

A lively discussion took place on the various presentations. The meeting broadly endorsed the proposals, but asked that the matters listed below be given consideration

3.1 Orchard area

The members had numerous suggestions which were debated. The principal items are summarised below.

It was suggested the area be replanted as an orchard. It was pointed out that the land is intended to be let primarily as allotments. It is also policy that all areas of the site be managed by tenants, to ensure they are maintained.

It was suggested that the area be developed as a wildlife area. Again, the land is intended primarily for allotments. Areas not suitable for allotments can be wild life areas, but these would have to be maintained. The perimeter outside the space given allocated for allotments could be used in this way.

The suitability as allotments was queried as it was understood that there was a lot of rubble on the site. It was pointed out that this was encountered adjacent the weir where the material from a temporary dam had been deposited.

The presence of culverts and swallow holes was queried. The location of culverts will be identified when the area is cleared and suitable covers or fencing planned. The hole that opened up in a former allotment resulted from the defective construction of the adjacent bank, allowing water to penetrate. The defect was rectified by Swale.

Security at the boundary wall was queried. It is planned to extend the existing metal barrier temporarily once access is gained. This can then be reinforced with suitable planting.

It was suggested that access to raised beds for the elderly or disabled would be problematic.

It was agreed that once the orchard area has been cleared and surveyed, the committee would draw up preliminary plans for circulation to the membership for comment. The final plan would then be costed and funding sought.

3.2 Carpark area

The idea for raised beds in the carpark area was discussed at length and overwhelmingly endorsed. The practicalities of access, planter size and spacing were aired and noted.

3.3 Main gate post

Responsibility for the gates was queried. The Society maintains that FTC is responsible for them as part of the blast wall, which it is their responsibility to maintain. This is being clarified by the Town Clerk. If FTC accepts responsibility we can obtain quotations for repairs and press for them to be carried out..

3.4 Fencing

It was agreed that the fencing should be replaced as early as possible and that funding should be sought.

3.5 Plant Swap

Noel and Margy were complimented on the successful plant swap and picnic. It was hoped to have many more such events.

3.6 Lettings

New Tenancy Agreements, once agreed with FTC, will be sent out with the rent notices this year.

3.7 Flowers

The growing of flowers on plots was queried. It was confirmed that plots are primarily for the growing of fruit and vegetables, but the growing of flowers, particularly bee friendly varieties, is encouraged. Flowers enhance the appearance of plots and are useful to fill odd corners. A poster listing bee friendly varieties was circulated earlier in the year and is posted at each gate.

3.8 Bonfires

The restrictions on bonfires were queried. It was explained that the restrictions are not new and have been place for some years to prevent nuisance to other plot holders, residents and road users. Bonfires should be used to dispose of non-compostable vegetable matter arising from plots. A small bonfire in the autumn is all that is normally required.

3.9 Plot labels

These are often missing or the writing has faded. The cost of purpose made labels for all plots was considered prohibitive. It was suggested that faded labels be restored with painted numbers by the tenants.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting will be published on the Society web site once this in operation, along with the minutes of the last AGM, which were circulated to the email membership earlier.