

# **STONEBRIDGE ALLOTMENT SOCIETY**

## **ANNUAL REPORT TO AGM 2016**

This year, the Committee has decided to issue an annual report covering the activities of the Society during the past year, to inform the membership in advance of the AGM, and thus enable the meeting to conduct its business expeditiously, given a full agenda.

### **CHAIR - SALLY KERIN**

The new committee, formed after the 2015 AGM, has held monthly business meetings and arranged monthly work parties. Along with volunteers, we have concentrated on tackling the backlog of repairs and maintenance. In addition to routine clearance of weeds in waterways and bridge decking repairs, this has included:

Clearing and renovating six derelict allotments along Davington Hill (plots 59-63A) which were waterlogged and overgrown

Installing a bridge between plots 53 & 61A to join two separate areas of the site together

Re-establishing a weir on the North stream, which means that water levels throughout the site are self-regulating

Clearance of rubbish and scrap metal on a 'Clean for the Queen' day

Clearance and survey of the 'orchard' area inside the main gate, with the longer term aim of establishing more allotments

Replacement of fencing and gates along Davington Hill and the top of Brent Hill, to improve security. A substantial grant has been obtained from Bensted's Charity and planning permission has been applied for. Work will commence when the permission is received.

My main role has been to liaise with external contacts, including Millfield and North Preston Allotments, Faversham in Bloom, The Friends of Westbrook, The Faversham Creek Trust, and especially:

Faversham Town Council – discussions about the new management agreement and with the Faversham Town Council Allotment Management Group (FTCAMG)

Kent Highways – discussions about part of the blast wall which will need to be taken down by plot 2 to allow 2-way traffic along Brent Hill when the swing bridge is replaced (October 2017-April 2018).

Swale tree officer – to enable removal/management of trees on the allotment site. A planning application has been submitted to Swale Borough Council.

Swale Borough Council – to press for the expeditious replacement of the long bridge.

## **SECRETARY – PAUL EDMONDSON**

As Secretary I have been responsible for the maintenance of the tenant and waiting lists, preparation of meeting agendas and minutes, routine correspondence with members, preparation of posters, emailed news updates and news posts on the web site.

The waiting list has been reviewed at each monthly committee meeting and available plots reallocated as soon as they were relinquished. There are currently 28 on the waiting list. The majority added during the last year. All 117 plots on the site are let.

The Society web site is now in operation and regularly updated with news and information. Members contributions are welcomed.

The minutes of the 2015 AGM were circulated to the email membership after approval at the first committee meeting. The minutes are also posted on the Society web site. No comments have been received.

There are a number of current and future projects planned by the Society. Details can be found in the minutes of the open meeting, Planning for the Future, posted on the web site.

Regular work parties have achieved spectacular results this year. The Committee wish to thank those who took part, on behalf of the general membership, for the contributions they have made to improving our unique site. Some 350 volunteer labour hours have been donated during the last year.

Discussions have taken place with Faversham Town Council Allotment Management Group (FTCAMG) on arrangements for a new Management Agreement to replace that previously operated on behalf of Swale Borough Council, following the acquisition of the Stonebridge Allotment site by FTC.

At the first meeting the delegates from the three Faversham allotment sites were presented with a draft management agreement for discussion. This has been scrutinised by the committee and found to be a 25 year lease placing full responsibility for maintenance of the site, including the defective blast wall and other boundary features such as trees, on the signatories. The latter would have to be Trustees appointed by the Society, who would bear full personal responsibility for the consequences of contracting the lease.

At a subsequent meeting with Claire Belsom, it was explained that the Society currently lets plots, maintains a waiting list, collects rents and applies them to the payment of insurance and water rates, using the balance for the maintenance of the allotments and designated boundary gates and fences, the tenants being responsible for their plots, adjacent paths and hedges. We can see no reason why a similar Management Agreement cannot be arranged with FTC., as it is unreasonable to expect the Society, with an income of £1750 per annum, to take on full unqualified responsibility for the whole site, including features with known defects requiring immediate costly maintenance or repair. Claire has agreed to advise FTCAMG of our position. We expect to be able to agree a suitable management agreement at the next meeting with FTCAMG in November.

FTC has asked to inspect the Society's Constitution. A proposed Constitution is attached, to be presented for approval at the AGM.

## **TREASURER – ANDY FREEMAN**

I assumed my responsibilities as the Treasurer on the 2 December 2015 but my report and the end of year accounts covers the period from 9 October 2015 through to 8 October 2016. This is the period determined by Swale Borough Council as the 'financial year' for all allotments in their charge.

The Society's accounts showed a balance of £2419.99 (+ £21.24 petty cash) at the start of the year and a closing balance of £2817.82 (+£11.33 petty cash).

Full details of income and expenditure are detailed in the accounts, which are subject to financial audit. The final audited balance sheet will be posted on the web site.

Here are a number of significant entries which you may find of interest.

- rent collected during the year exceeded £ 2600
- voluntary donations exceeded £600
- grants totalling £690 were received from Faversham TC and Swale BC for the purchase of a specialised brush cutter
- a sum of £1776 was expended to facilitate the creation of 5 new plots
- an honorarium of £300 was paid to Joe Coppins

We are extremely grateful for the generous donations made by tenants, over and above annual rental, which will be put towards specific projects. Please be assured however that there is no obligation on any plot holder to make such donations.

Finally thanks to everyone who paid their rent promptly as this substantially reduces the work load of the Treasurer.

## **FUND RAISING – LAURENCE YOUNG**

The management committee recognised the funding needed by the society to complete necessary maintenance work and improvement projects was beyond the income available to it solely from rents. It was agreed grants would be sought to help support those works.

To date two grants of £345 each have been obtained from Faversham Town Council and from Swale councillor Mike Henderson to pay for the new specialist brush-cutter and Sally has done excellent work in obtaining a £3,795 plus VAT award from the Bensted Charity for fencing work.

In addition, Faversham's county councillor Tom Gates has pledged £1,000 from his KCC member's fund. A number of other Swale councillors have expressed an interest in helping the society when requested. An application for work on the 'orchard area' is being put together to go to local charity the Queenborough Fishery Trust.

Other funders who support allotmenting and similar activities have also been identified and these will be approached in due course.

The committee is extremely grateful to all the funders who have supported the society's work, their help is vital in helping us continue to maintain and improve the site for the benefit of tenants.

## **SOCIAL EVENTS – NOEL PERKINS**

I have always greatly appreciated my contacts with fellow allotment holders. Ideas and materials can also be usefully exchanged. Hence our hopes to arrange further social days for those who are interested. These will include similar events to those organised this year, such as:

- Buzz about Bees talk
- May Plant Swap and picnic
- June open day
- October Apple Day and picnic

Any ideas from members will be considered.

## **WILDLIFE AND WATERWAYS – BOB GOMES**

The loan of a reciprocating brushcutter, that cuts underwater vegetation, enabled us to start on management of Bulrushes that are encroaching and partially blocking the channel of the north reach. Our aim is to divide the long stretch of Bulrushes on the northern margin into blocks, by the creation of small channels that will make it easier for tenants to gain access to extract water to irrigate their plots. The open channels through the Bulrushes also create more edge habitat for wildlife. First indications are that cutting the Bulrush stems underwater starves the rhizomes of oxygen and has been successful in preventing re-growth from the underwater rhizomes. Channels were created and the front edge of the Bulrushes was cut back by approximately 2 metres on winter work parties. A follow up management task in the spring removed rhizomes that had started to send up shoots and the cleared areas remained free of new stems throughout the summer. We will continue this work during the coming autumn/winter. Coots, moorhens and little grebes nested within the managed area.

A trial cut of Bulrushes in a completely silted ditch showed that cutting is not successful when the stems and rhizomes are not permanently submerged and have access to the air. It was hoped that the underlying silt could be dug up in the summer, but because there were greater priorities for the work parties, this was put on hold. Although removal of the floating mat of rhizomes and underlying silt can be achieved using hand tools this is very labour intensive. The use of a mini 360 °excavator would be more effective in clearing choked ditches.

Thanks to 100% external funding, the Society purchased its own reciprocating brushcutter. This will enable the continuation of bulrush control and will also be of use elsewhere on the site.

Management of the water bodies elsewhere included summer removal of Watercress from some of the more choked areas of the channels and removal of willow scrub from one of the main channels. The latter task opened up the channel and facilitated the removal of Watercress. The boundary stream next to Morrisons Green was cleared by the Friends of Westbrook Stream on a joint working party in August. Substantial areas of Watercress were ravaged by the Water-cress beetle *Phaedon cochleariae* and possibly also Mustard beetles *P.armoraciae* with some patches completely shredded by the beetles.; a natural control!

Key bird species that are significant in a Kent context and made use of the waterways during the year included, little grebes, water rails, kingfishers, grey wagtails and Cetti's Warbler. 23 bird species were recorded nesting or holding breeding territories on the allotments and other species nesting nearby made use of the allotments for feeding. Chiffchaffs overwintered on the allotments taking advantage of the mild winter, feeding on insects in the scrub and trees overhanging the water channels.

## **SITE IMPROVEMENTS AND PROJECTS**

A number of projects are planned following discussion and agreement at the open meeting held earlier this year.

### **Orchard Area**

The area has been largely cleared and the bonfire will be lit late October. The area has been surveyed and a suggested layout produced, to be discussed at the AGM. Once agreed, the project cost will be determined and funding sought to progress the work.

### **Brick Shed**

This is the only fixed structure on the site and was in the past the site store. It has been vacated, cleaned out and surveyed. The necessary repairs and security measures have been scheduled and will commence once funding is received.

### **Bridges**

The bridges over internal waterways on the south side of the site are generally in need of frequent repair. We plan to replace them before they become beyond economic repair and unusable. Funding will have to be sought in order to undertake these works.

We have received a report from Swale BC 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, as funding is in place. Swale are being prompted on a regular basis for progress reports.

### **Waterways and ditches**

The 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.

We have been asked to suggest which waterways require dredging and where walls require repair. A report has been passed to Cllr Cosgrove for presentation to Swale BC.

### **Trees**

As the site is in a conservation area, mature trees cannot be cut back or removed without permission. Bob Gomes has prepared a tree plan. He has also prepared 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.

The planning application has been submitted. Once approved, the details will be published on the web site. Tenants will then be able to agree final details of tree works on their plots with the Committee before proceeding.

### **Brown water systems**

A trial brown water system is expected to be in place for next year adjacent plot 50. The main tank and water pump have been donated to the Society, together with other building materials. The success of the trial will inform plans to replace the mains water feed with pumped water from the streams.

**Raised beds for disabled and elderly**

The rear area of the carpark by the stage could be used for raised beds for the elderly and disabled, with carparking in front. Plans for this provision will be progressed through the coming year.

# **STONEBRIDGE ALLOTMENT SOCIETY**

## **AGENDA FOR AGM TO BE HELD ON 9<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2016, 7PM, AT THE GUILDHALL**

1. Welcome and introduction by the Chair, Sally Kerin
2. Claire Belsom, Chair of Faversham Town Council Allotment Management Group
3. Presentation of the Annual Report, including minutes of AGM 2015, previously circulated to Members
4. Proposed Constitution, attached, for approval by members.
5. Elections  
  
The current officers are willing to stand for re-election, to continue the improvement works detailed in the Annual Report. The current committee considers that three more co-opted members would help to share the workload. Interested volunteers would be welcomed. Contact the Secretary for information
6. Discussion of proposed plans for improvements and projects
7. Any other business.
8. Closing remarks by Chair.

**Paul Edmondson**

**Secretary, Stonebridge Allotment Society**

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# **STONEBRIDGE ALLOTMENT SOCIETY CONSTITUTION**

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## **NAME**

The name of the Association shall be "STONEBRIDGE ALLOTMENT SOCIETY"

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE SOCIETY**

The Society exists

1. To manage the Stonebridge Allotment Site on behalf of Faversham Town Council, the owners, under the terms of a Management Agreement dated (to be inserted), maintaining members and waiting lists, letting plots, collecting rents, and applying these to the routine maintenance of the allotments.
2. To promote the interests of allotment holders and to take joint action for the benefit of members
3. To co-operate with any committee set up by government, local authorities or other bodies, to further the interests of allotment holders
4. To co-operate with any committee, local authority, national or local body set up to provide seeds, potatoes, tools etc for allotment holders
5. To take whatever steps are required by the local authority for the good management and cultivation of allotment gardens
6. To protect members from damage, trespass or theft where ever possible
7. To arrange lectures, film shows, demonstrations, competitions and other social events
8. To co-operate with other gardening associations in matters of mutual interest

## **MEMBERS**

All persons who are current, legal, holders of allotment gardens on the Stonebridge Allotment Site will automatically be members of the Society.

## **OFFICERS**

The Officers shall be the Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary, who shall be ex-officio members of the Committee. They shall be elected at each Annual General Meeting (AGM). Retiring Officers shall be eligible for re-election.

## **COMMITTEE**

The affairs of the Association will be conducted by a Committee of Management of not less than 4 members. The Committee will retire at the AGM but will be eligible for re-election. The



Committee shall fill casual vacancies as necessary. The members so appointed shall hold office until the AGM. A quorum at committee meetings shall be not less than 3 members.

## **GENERAL MEETINGS**

The AGM, of which 7 days notice will be given and at which the audited accounts and Chairman's report shall be submitted and the officers for the ensuing year shall be elected. If a Special General Meeting is necessary, it must be called by a minimum of six members at Committee or a General Meeting. Six members shall form a quorum, and in the case of equal voting, the Chair shall have the casting vote. Voting shall be on the basis of one vote per allotment holder, irrespective of the number of plots cultivated. Members shall be notified in advance of any proposed changes to the constitution, which will be discussed and voted on at a General Meeting.

## **EXCLUSIONS**

No party-political or sectarian discussions shall be raised or resolutions proposed at either Committee or General Meetings.

## **FUNDS**

The Committee shall open a Banking account in the name of the Society and all monies received from any source on behalf of the Association shall be paid into such account. 2 out of a possible 3 signatories shall sign cheques. Association funds will not be spent by the Committee other than to pay rent to Faversham Town Council or its successors, or unless it directly benefits allotment holders on the site.

## **AUDIT**

There shall be appointed an Auditor, who is not a member of the Committee, to audit the accounts and submit a Report to the Annual General Meeting.