

Alsager Garden's Association – Annual General Meeting Tuesday 9th March 2021

REPORTS TO ACCOMPANY THE AGENDA

1. Chairman's Opening Remarks – Adrian Ford

Hello everyone, the last 12 months have certainly been very different with many challenges for us all, from getting to grips with 'zoom' 'committee meetings to a socially distanced open day.

Thankfully, we have still been able to use our allotments.

As you will be aware this year's AGM will be a virtual one due to the ongoing pandemic, and perhaps next year we can get back to normal whatever that is.

It will be great to 'see' as many of you who can join us virtually.

Please join us to hear about what we have achieved since the last AGM.

You will also find out about the activities and changes that have taken place on our 4 sites and the plans for the next year.

Unfortunately, this year you'll have to provide your own refreshments.

So, please join us from the comfort of your own home on Tuesday 9th March at 8pm.

5. Treasurer's Report – David Pitt – See separate Accounts and Notes.

As I said at the last AGM this is my last year as Treasurer and I will be handing over to the new Treasurer as soon as possible after the AGM.

Regarding the accounts for the year ended 31/12/20 and the attached notes I have only the following to add.

The sales this year of £6,136 are a record by a good margin and the team on hut duties, David Spall and Adrian and Judith Ford, need congratulating for their efforts under such difficult circumstances.

The sales were split as follows:

- Fertilizers and composts £2200
- Canes and pots £348, Garden sundries £1486
- Seeds and plants £2102.

The high sales plus some good margins on manure and wooden plank sales (thanks to Mike Hubbard and John Nixon) have enabled the Association to make a small profit of £77 despite

the high amount charged for asset depreciation. This is the first profit made for a number of years.

Finally, I would like to say it has been a great honour to have been the Associations Treasurer for all these years, 38 I think, and I wish the new Treasurer every success. I will give the new Treasurer all the assistance they require and I will remain on the committee until the end of the year to hopefully ensure a smooth changeover.

I finish with a touch sadness but this the best for both the association and myself.

David Pitt - Treasurer

6. Trading Secretary's Report – David Spall

Can I thank all members for their support for what has proved to be a difficult and very unusual years trading. The need to close the hut for normal trading, then with reduced openings for trading has made the associations ability to meet members needs difficult and at times impossible.

The normal service from our seed supplied Kings, has following my members order in October been particularly difficult. The original order supplied by Kings took 8 weeks (normal year is 3 weeks) it was short on many items, but over supplied seeds not ordered which required a major effort to sort out. The seeds short at the time of writing this report have still not been supplied and are expected by the end of February so I hope all members will have had their seeds by the time of this AGM.

Our local supplier of Potatoes has also experienced major problem from their supplier following crop failures and very reduced yields of certain varieties. Normal delivery is late January, I finally had the associations order mid-February. I am pleased that most members received the potatoes they ordered and if I had to substitute a variety I hope it was OK and you are satisfied. All members orders have been completed and as normal I have a few potatoes for sale when trading opens on Sunday March 7th.

I am informed by the Treasurer that he thinks due to Brexit and the Corona Virus there has been a major price increase in fertilizers required to replenish the stock in the hut. These increases, unfortunately, will be passed on, but only at the same rate as the supplier charges.

I hope you are all keeping well and continue to support the hut trading thus ensuring a good year's allotment growing success.

David Spall – Trading Secretary

7. Secretary's Report – Pauline Hubbard

1. The Year in Summary

Following our last AGM we were quickly thrown into the COVID world having to keep our selves safe and adapt to new ways of working. Face to Face meetings were prohibited and we had to find a way to continue to manage our allotment sites and communicate with our allotment tenants and members of the association.

We turned to “Zoom” for a series of virtual but short meetings, initially on a weekly/fortnightly basis to agree what we needed to put in place and what actions we had to take to keep our allotments open and our members safe.

Our first action was to ensure we complied with government regulations. We minimised risks by closing the Trading Hut and our Toilet buildings, putting up notices and by providing general advice to our members on hand hygiene and social distancing via a new bulletin “Be Safe – Keep Safe”. The whole world was saying Hands – Face – Space.

In April it became evident that our usual schedule of events would not be possible, so our **Allotment Open Weekend**, which would also have been a VE Day celebration, was cancelled along with **The Annual Gardens and Allotment Competition**. Our Annual Show, planned for 5th September, was looking questionable but we remained hopeful.

In early May the government announced a relaxation of the regulations and the AGA Committee reviewed what we are able to do as an association. Subsequently, on **Saturday 23rd May**, we held a highly successful “**Plant Day**” at our **Cedar Avenue Allotment site**

It wasn't our usual “Big” event just an opportunity for members to purchase some plants and vegetable seedlings at great prices. We organised the entrance and exit to the sale and with the help of our volunteers “marshalled” visitors safely through the “socially distanced” sections of plants applying “safe distancing queuing” to ensure there was no gathering of people.

By June we were up to Bulletin Number 6 and your committee reviewed the reopening of the Trading Hut. This involved risks assessments and lots of paperwork but on **Sunday 28th June our Trading Hut re-opened staffed by members of the committee**.

We put a system of purchase and collection in place and wherever possible asked people to pay by direct bank transfer. This process put a huge overhead on our Treasurer in keeping track of payments, but overall the system worked well, and the Trading Hut remained open for the last Sunday in the month up until the end of October. It became evident that our Annual Show could not take place due to the restrictions placed upon us and the Alsager Civic, where our event is normally held.

In the absence of an Annual gardens Competition we undertook an assessment of our allotments many of which were looking quite spectacular as they had been able to receive extra attention during lockdown. As a result we made several “**Best Allotment Awards**” and these were reported in our September 2020 Bulletin Number 8. It showed the award ceremony which was conducted outside of the Civic, all socially distanced with masks and gloves were required! We were thankful it didn't rain as we had no cover!

The awards were funded by Alsager Town Council and presented by the Chairman of the Alsager Town Council.

2. Keeping you up to Date

Our bulletins are only be sent electronically to those on email, so they do not reach between 30-40 members for who we have no email address.

Bulletin 9 and 10 took us up to Christmas at which point we were again placed in lockdown. The AGA Committee were keen to get the Autumn Newsletter out to all members and undertook to hand deliver if needed or send out the paper copies by post. Several volunteers were enlisted for this task and with a lot of effort the copies of the Newsletter should have landed in your inbox, or through your letter box by January.

The production of the Newsletter is a big task, and this is undertaken by David Spall who is not only the Editor, but also undertakes all the printing and the collation of the Newsletter to present it as the booklet you receive.

Our Thanks go out to David Spall for this ongoing task

Also

To those that undertook the “Walk Lists” and “Hand Delivery” of our Newsletter a huge “Thank You”. It is such a time intensive task your help is so much appreciated.

We are now in February and up to bulletin No 12. We hope to be able to continue to update you in this way going forward. We will continue to review what we can do and when and will continue with the AGA Committee meetings by Zoom until we can return to face to face meetings.

3. Our Site Managers

Since March 2020, the site mangers on each site have been working extra hard to ensure that tenants can continue to work on their plots. We have also been inundated with requests for allotment plots, a significant number of which have been from outside of the Alsager area, which we have had to reject. We have only a few vacancies across all of the sites and these are being retained to fill the requests from Alsager residents, as this is what we are funded to support.

The site mangers have supported dealing with new plot holders, facilitating a social distanced site visit and being the main contact for managing the official paperwork that goes with all new tenancies.

The site managers continue to respond to running repairs, water meter readings, sort out manure and chippings and generally ensure that the site is maintained to our established standards.

Without our site managers we would see a significant deterioration in our sites.

A huge “Thank You” goes out to each one of them.

4. Our Achievements in 2020/21

Coronation Avenue. Work to reduce the overhanging trees that shadow the allotment paid for by Alsager Town Council.



- The installation of a pathway from the gate to the toilet building paid for by Alsager Town Council. An excellent addition to the site which completes the work on our accessibility project.

- **Cedar Avenue.** The removal of dangerous trees bounded by the Valley Brook that have been a major safety issue for several years making the rear of the allotments that bound the site a much safer area. Paid for by Cheshire East. (See Bulletin 11)

- **The Trading Hut** – Compliance with

Covid requirements – PVC safety screen purchased and installed paid for by AGA.

- **The Annual Show.** A grant for has been awarded to us by Alsager Town Council for the Annual Show. At the Alsager Council meeting on 12th January 2021 it was agreed *“That, a grant of one free room hire of Alsager Civic for the Alsager Gardens Association Garden Show be approved in the 2021-22 budget and that it be included in the budget year on year without the requirement for a grant application.*

5. Cedar Avenue Open Space

This is the area where our Trading Hut sits and is used by a variety of people and is in an extreme state of disrepair. A public footpath runs through the area and it is used by residents and the public for access, dog walking and parking including members of the scouts, the guides, St Gabriel’s School, residents, and ourselves. The land is owned by Cheshire East.

The following was agreed by the Alsager Town Council, at its meeting on 15th December.

Resolved:

- a) That, the Town Council prioritise the enhancement of the Cedar Avenue Joint Use area and instruct the Working Group to work with Cheshire East Council, St. Gabriel’s School and the Scout and Guide groups. Regular reports will be brought to the Town Council whilst there are no scheduled meetings of the PEC committee.
- b) That, the Council agree to undertake Phase 1 of the project. Funding to be by utilisation of the CIL allocation for 2021/22 of £53,583.10 (£40,654 + £12,929.10) together with the use of Capital Reserves, sum to be determined and approved upon further investigation work.
- c) To approve further consultation with key stakeholders and the wider community on the scheme.
- d) To approve a desire to transfer this piece of land to Alsager Town Council from Cheshire East Council by way of a lease agreement and to incorporate up to £2,000 in the draft Town Council budget 2021-22 to cover legal fees.

This is excellent news, and we will all look forward to the improvements this will provide for our community.

Pauline Hubbard -Secretary – Alsager Gardens Association

8. Membership Secretary Report 2020 – Hilary Robinson

We had a total membership list of 269 but that included many who had not actually paid subscriptions last year. The number of paid-up members was approximately 200. We were unwilling to delete members in haste, because of the difficulties caused by Covid-19, e.g. the reduced trading hut opening. We hope that many people will re-join, as we cannot afford to provide membership benefits indefinitely to those who do not contribute.

Of the 269 members on our list, approximately 170 are plot holders, renting approx. 218 mixed size plots. This compares to 157 in 2019 with 203 plots and shows the continuing trend towards smaller plot sizes.

We are charged £3.00 per member for NAS membership and its benefits.

The remaining £1.00 is used toward the running of the Association, including the publication, printing etc. of the Newsletters we send out to members twice a year. Where possible newsletters are hand-delivered. If that is not feasible because of the member's location, they are posted. Total postage costs exceed £30 for each newsletter.

To reduce these overheads, be more "Green", reduce our carbon footprint and act in a more environmental & sustainable way, we would like to reduce our use of paper and we are now planning to move to sending the Newsletter out by email, and/or directing members to view a copy on the website where it can be read or printed on demand.

Paper copies will still be available to those members who request them, and copies will be available to pick up from the Trading Hut.

Hilary Robinson – Membership Secretary

9. Presidents Address – Derek Hough

Every report on 2020 must include the word COVID. Well that should satisfy that. So on with my report of the gardening year. As previously reported via the bulletin, I had a great year last year with good crops of most things. The failures are becoming apparent particularly the Purple Sprouting Broccoli. So we go on to 2021.

We have to mention the weather. It has not been the best we have had. On Monday this week we had temperatures down to minus 8. That was the end of a cold snap which had lasted a week with temperatures at record minus levels. Now, it is only Thursday and it is plus 9.

Prior to the cold snap it was raining incessantly with allotments under water. Now look at it from a plant's point of view. Take garlic, a crop that I am growing more intensively this year. The advice for this dry ground plant is to plant early because it likes a period of cold weather. So early February is the time. Done it. Then it rains until ground is sodden. Oh well! Then it freezes. Good oh! A period of cold weather. Then it goes on being frozen. Not so sure, so think of the plant. Does the flood drown me? Is the frost just the cold which does me good? Will I grow?

Now is the time to dust off the old adage, "Time will tell" and so it will. Good luck little bulb and good luck to all our members. Have a great season.

Derek Hough - President