

AVAA Annual General Meeting 2017/18 12.05.18

In attendance:

Elly Cooke, Helen Sage, Caroline Hope, Simon Hawtin, Dave Moody, Jonnie Brockwell, Jodi Peacham, Rachel Topley, Adam Jones, Chris Bowles, Fiona Beard, Ena Yarde, Jess Clynewood, Sophy Gairdner, Ollie Bagley, Vanessa Bellaer Spring, Lloyd Harris, Katie Jones, Maggie Moss, Ruth Larbey, Keith Cowling, Belinda French, Katharine Wale.

Agenda:

1. Receive accounts - Report from Treasurer
2. Report from Secretary
3. Decide whether an audit needs to take place – take a resolution as necessary
4. Election of committee members
5. Report from the Farm
6. Report from Wildlife Rep
7. Report from the Committee Chair

1. Receive accounts - Treasurer's report

It was reported that because of a delay in the banking process for this year, the official accounts would be made available to members in several weeks' time, and that members would be able to get in contact with the Treasurer Brian to review them at that time.

Brian reported that AVAA has 2 active bank accounts, which have recently been updated and are now accessible online. At the end of the financial year (FY) 2017/18:

Co-op – contains £573 (from AVAA dues)

HSBC – contains £930 (from a Men's Shed grant)

This year Brian won some additional money from the Tesco Groundworks appeal, which will go towards the shed development; we are due £2000 in FY 2018/19.

Maggie is managing the petty cash box, which will act as a rolling float for events. She is recording all receipts.

Question (Q): why do we have 2 bank accounts?

Answer (A): HSBC was the historic account, and we never closed it. Co-op account was opened as it was thought preferable at the time to bank with an institution closer to our aims as a co-operative.

2. Secretary's report

Maggie reported that the AVAA Committee had met every month, where they had resolved problems that arose, fielded opportunities and organised some successful events such as the Seed Swap and Produce Show.

Keith noted that it is a legal requirement for AVAA to have a secretary, in case, for instance, the regulator needs to contact someone.

3. Audit

The members voted unanimously to pass the following resolution:

"In accordance with section 84 of the Co-operative and Community Societies Act, the Committee proposes that in view of the association's small turnover and modest financial commitments the requirement to audit the 2017-2018 accounts of the association be disapplied."

4. Election of committee members

Keith encouraged all members to express their views on the elections process. [Keith later – after the AGM – expressed the view that dissemination of Election information in good time before the 2019 Annual General Meeting will facilitate a better elections process next year.]

Current AVAA Committee Members present introduced themselves: Jonnie, Jodi, Maggie, Ruth, Brian, Keith, Chris. Helen, Mathieu, George and Sophie were acknowledged as significant contributors to the Committee's work.

Jonnie proposed that all members stand down and be re-elected; Keith seconded; all voted in favour of electing the present Committee Members.

Brian encouraged members who were interested in joining the Committee over the next year to come along to a Committee Meeting (generally held the first Monday of the month; get in touch with Jodi on jodipeacham@hotmail.com)

Keith noted that the Committee elects the role of Secretary within itself, and noted that he thought the Committee intended to elect Ruth as Secretary for the forthcoming year.

5. Farm report

Farm Finances

Jess noted that it had been a tricky year for the Farm financially, with the loss of core funding from Bristol City Council (BCC); however, the Farm is grateful for the crowdfunding which has helped to plug the gap.

Farm management of AVAA allotments

Following the vote from the AVAA members, which indicated that they wanted the allotments to be managed by the Farm, the Farm have been negotiating with BCC, with the aid of a pro bono solicitor. At present, the Farm retains one third 1/3 of the allotment rent; the remainder goes to BCC. The Farm would like to increase the ratio of funds they receive, so they can undertake more active management of the site, and perhaps employ an Allotments Officer with responsibility for maintenance. At present the amount received does not cover the admin costs, so this is subsidised by the Farm.

As stands, they are waiting for BCC to clarify the list of liabilities – for example, to tell the Farm who is responsible for the two long perimeter walls in the case that they did receive a greater ratio. This year, they are hoping for some further movement in negotiations.

Plot rent

The plot rent has all been collected for this year. There are 12 plot vacancies that they will be looking to fill.

Site maintenance and improvement

BCC have undertaken some maintenance of the wall next to the City Farm Cafe.

The Farm have secured the services of Tom Owen, an arborist who is giving his time for free to maintain some trees on the site. Jess encouraged members to get involved on this day as volunteer ground-crew; more information will be available in due course.

This year, BCC have installed double check valves on all the taps to prevent backflow, and also cleared some paths.

The Farm has worked with Propagation Place and AVAA to build a pizza oven near the sheds

Propagation Place (PP)

The Propagation Place unfortunately did not manage to break even this year, as it experienced a gap in its funding. The team are still actively looking for more funding.

In the interim, the tables have been rented to allotment holders, organised by Jodi, which is going well. 12 people are renting half ½ a table each. The group is fairly self-managing, with a WhatsApp group to manage opening and closing times. It seems to have made some connections between allotment holders from different areas of the site.

The accessible garden beside Propagation Place is being looked after with the participation of several different groups, for example, older people (who enjoy a shared meal afterwards), a Syrian women's group, schools. A wheelchair accessible bed is currently being hired and tended.

Site manager

Jess mentioned that the Site Manager Anna was on maternity leave, and that Jess had stepped up to cover some of her responsibilities. Any queries about the site can be directed to Jess on garden@swcityfarm.co.uk

Jess finished with a thank you to the AVAA Committee and Field Reps.

Q: Keith noted that the Propagation Place was serving as a valuable resource for allotment holders, and requested that some legacy planning for some form of hired greenhouse space be undertaken by AVAA and the Farm.

A: Jodi and Jess agreed that legacy planning should be considered.

Q: Maggie asked would the Farm provide a skip?

A: Jess met with Janet Holloway and will chat with her to work out what BCC will provide. Jess is happy to feedback on the outcome at next Committee meeting.

Q: Can we have an update on plot checks?

A: Plot checks have been carried out – even though they were late this year because of the weather.

Maggie noted that George has joined as Field Rep in Field 4.

Q: Chris asked to what extent did renting table space plug the gap in PP funds?

A: Jess noted: not really at all – it was a nominal amount in comparison with the required.

Maggie noted that allotment holders in general need to understand that there is little to no funding coming from BCC. All maintenance that needs to happen need to be managed by either the Farm (which also has highly constrained resources) or allotment holders themselves. Maggie encouraged people to do things they see need doing, to get in touch with their Field Reps, or to volunteer for upcoming workdays.

Q: Is there any plan for shared resources – for e.g. the possibility of having a shared petrol strimmer for AVAA members?

A: Maggie responded that there was a plan to make the current Committee room of the sheds available to store allotment holders' machinery – expected to be complete at the end of July or August. Members may be able to store one piece of machinery, and would have to pay for a key.

Keith also noted that it is unfeasible for AVAA to hire out shared tools to allotment holders – as it is an uninsurable risk given AVAA funds. However, he noted that it would be fine to purchase tools between several allotment holders and store them in the AVAA store room. Keith also noted he has purchased a small tractor and is happy to tractor around.

Q: What is the plan for pollarding trees on the site?

A: Jess noted that they have procured an arborist to come and do a day's work on the site – but they will be trying to recruit some ground-crew to help with this – more info to be confirmed.

It was noted that crop trees on people's sites would be safe from interference – and that the arborist would be concentrating on non-crop trees in communal areas.

Keith thanked the Farm for all their work for the allotments over the year.

6. Wildlife report

Maggie introduced the report by listing the different wildlife habitats on the site:

Scrub edges; hedgerows; marked areas/nettle patches; walls; dead wood dumps; grassland remnants; 26 ponds.

Wildlife News

Maggie informed members that she had worked with Harry McPhillamy to set up a formal Butterfly Transect on the AVAA site. The Butterfly Transect runs between April and September, and feeds into a national picture on the status of butterflies in the UK, with the aim of flagging potential changes in population levels brought about by agribusiness, chemicals or climate change, for example.

There will be two Transect walks organised on the second Saturdays in July and August, starting at 12pm; more information will be shared in due course.

Maggie reported that she had sent a honey sample from the AVAA bees to the National Botanic Gardens of Wales for a pollen analysis (to find out what the bees are eating), but hasn't had specific feedback yet. She noted that the evidence released so far from the pollen analysis project indicates that bees prefer British native wildflowers, so encouraged allotment holders to grow as many British native wildflowers as possible on their plots.

During the cold snap this spring, Maggie fished 20 dead frogs from one of the ponds, and encouraged members to actively manage their ponds, including keeping the leaves out, fleecing during cold weather, and topping up the pond water in hot weather. In general, newts are doing fine, and tadpoles have been spotted this year, so the frog population is expected to recover.

Maggie has prepared a list of more unusual wildlife on the site, has had two articles about AVAA allotments published, in Butterfly Conservation magazine and Better Bristol magazine, and has appeared on BBC's Gardener's World, talking about the allotments. Members can request copies from Maggie at maggie.moss@live.co.uk.

Keith thanked Maggie for all her work for the site's wildlife this year.

Q: Is there a buddleia policy on the site?

A: Maggie responded that if they are getting too invasive then it's fine to cut them back, but if you want to keep them then it's fine to leave them for the pollinators to feed on.

Q: Is there any info available on making a child-friendly pond?

A: Maggie responded that the 26 ponds on site seem to be fine, but it is worth remembering that it is not a child friendly site, and that children should always be supervised. She also noted that dogs should always be kept on a lead while on the AVAA site.

7. Committee chair's report

Jodi thanked all members for coming, and reported that the events this year had gone well. She noted that AVAA events always run on the second Saturday of every month, from 10:30 until lunchtime, and will often end with tea and pizza. The next events are:

9th June 2018: The Farm Summer Fair – volunteering forms are available on the Farm website (with free entry and a pie);

14 July 2018: Volunteer day (meet at the sheds) and butterfly transect walk;

11 August 2018: Volunteer day (meet at the sheds) and butterfly transect walk.

The plan for the volunteer days is to evolve the shed area into more of a community resource and undertake any feasible work to maintain the site's shared spaces. It is also an opportunity to share information on what needs doing.

Jodi finished by mentioning that Committee Meetings are usually held on the first Monday of every month and reiterated that members are free to come along and find out more about being on the Committee.

8. AOB:

- Keith mentioned the ongoing issues with securing a more regular supply of compost to the site, and Jodi mentioned that she had managed to organise a trial delivery onto Ashley Road, which seemed to work. The Committee Members will keep this on the agenda to try and find a solution that works for all AVAA members.
- Keith noted that, while plastics and carpets used to be regarded as untidy on an allotment site, they are now being recognised as serious pollution – and some are being recognised as endocrine (hormone) disrupting substances. Having recently inherited a plot full of small pieces of plastic – which will not ever degrade, and may eventually find their way into the food web – Keith urged allotment holders to be vigilant about not bringing plastics onto the site. He also recognised that there was a need to help people remove some existing plastics from the site, for example via the use of a skip.
- Communications
Maggie plugged the AVAA Facebook page, and encouraged members to make use of the range of relevant material shared.

Keith mentioned the newsletter had not been as regular as he would have liked this year, and that there remained a need for a communications system that worked for members. Ruth mentioned that Mathieu had set up a newsletter through MailChimp which could serve as a simple way to update members.

Ruth requested members to vote as to which methods of communication they would read:

Email: all members voted yes

Facebook: about half voted yes

Poster: about 70% voted yes

It was requested that the Committee did not give up on communicating via email, as some members are not planning to join Facebook. It was mentioned that some members are not on email either, and there is a need to continue to communicate with them too.

Q: If I am not the official plot holder, can I still receive the AVAA newsletter?

A: There is a form to sign up to the newsletter on the AVAA website, where you can sign up to receive the newsletter: <http://www.swcityfarm.co.uk/grow/avaa-archives/>

//End of meeting//