



THE FEDERATION OF
EDINBURGH AND DISTRICT
ALLOTMENTS AND
GARDENS ASSOCIATIONS

Management Committee Meeting
7.15pm on 8th December 2015 at Southside Community Centre

Present: Committee: Stuart MacKenzie - Inverleith (**SMcK**) (in the Chair) : Ernie Watt - Cambridge Avenue (**EW**) (Secretary) : Dave Roberts - Restalrig (**DR**) (Treasurer) : Maureen Edwards - Lady Road (**ME**) : Paul Kerr - Redhall (**PK**) : Brian Bleakley - Midmar (**BB**) : Gilbert Clark - Midmar (**GC**) : Neiria McClure - Claremont Park (**NMcC**) : Rik Hart - Warriston (**RH**) - Observers: Willie Aitken - Carrick Knowe : Jake Booth - Carrick Knowe : Alexis McKay - Ferry Road : Margaret McLennan - Bridgend : Alison Hewitt - Warriston (**AH**).

1. Apologies: Peter Wright - Lady Road (**PW**) : John McKinlay - Craigentenny (**JMcK**) : Rosy Naylor - West Mains (**RN**).

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting: In PW's absence it was agreed that **SMcK** take the Chair. The Minutes of the 13th October meeting were proposed by **ME** and seconded by **DR**. The Committee meeting scheduled for 10th November was cancelled and replaced by a Special General Meeting, a report on which is posted at www.fedaga.org.uk/2015-consultation.html.

3. Matters Arising: Council Allotments Strategy - SMcK reported back on the most recent meeting of the Council's Allotment Strategy Steering Committee (*in italics*). *FEDAGA stated a clear opposition to any move to raise the level of rent until 2020, citing the previous Strategy agreement. There was a lengthy discussion about concessions with the objective of arriving at the fairest outcome. The age criteria was put to one side. A decision based on income was considered to be impracticable. The Council proposed that a sliding scale based on Council Tax banding would be the best outcome. Any change will not be imposed immediately, but may commence in 2017. It was noted that additional costs had been added since the previous Strategy was agreed. Clarity on finance is required. FEDAGA suggested that the Council ask those on the Waiting List what size of plot they would prefer. JMcK was tasked with drafting a suitable questionnaire. ACTION - JMcK. A register will then be created so that applicants can be matched up with available plots more efficiently. To aid the creation of new allotment sites FEDAGA suggested that when suitable land is identified the Council contact those on the Waiting List in the locality, offer the use of the land to a properly constituted association at a peppercorn rent and allow that body to create a new site themselves by accessing community grants and building it themselves. The possibility of using redundant golf course land was raised. It would appear that the Council is interested in exploring innovative solutions to the allotment provision crisis. The concept of a Bond was discussed which would encourage allotment holders to more actively look after their plot. The Council suggested the Bond should be paid into by everyone on an ongoing basis. By paying into it they would be building a sum that they could redeem on vacating a well cared for plot suitable for leasing to the next tenant. The Council is proposing cessation of all Trade Waste uplifts. In future sites will have to organise their own waste management. The logical impact this will have on rent was discussed. A reduction in services should be properly reflected.*

The management of substandard, or “dirty” plots was discussed as the necessary removal of debris accumulated on plots being let out to new tenants is the main contributor to waste generated on allotment sites.

FEDAGA stated a clear opposition to the proposed withdrawal of pest control on the basis that this is a job best dealt with by a professional.

*There was discussion on the definition of an acceptable plot standard with a view to setting parameters for volunteers participating in plot inspections. **SMcK** said he had been tasked with looking at guidelines in use elsewhere and had concluded that most seemed to be based on what is already in place in Edinburgh. For this proposal to be accepted by the Council the volunteers will have to be demonstrably unbiased in having no connection at all with the sites they are inspecting. **ACTION - SMcK.***

A database of skills should be set up to facilitate sites relying on the abilities of their own ploholders to deal with routine maintenance, such as fixing leaking taps and mending fences. Appropriate insurance and health and safety requirements will have to be put in place.

Data Protection legislation has stopped the traditional arrangement allowing new tenants to be welcomed onto their site by a volunteer. The problem is that contact details are passed from the Council to a site representative without the tenant’s permission. The proposal is that in future a leaflet prepared by the site association will be sent by the Council to the new tenant encouraging them to get in touch and meet up on a voluntary basis. It is important that if the new tenant does not wish to do this then they are free to opt out. FEDAGA felt that more should be done to make new tenants feel welcome on their sites.

Water harvesting should be encouraged. To that end the conversion of redundant Trade Waste bins into water butts was considered. Composting education was also discussed. The next meeting of the Strategy Steering Committee will take place on 7th January.

GC suggested that FEDAGA was “weak and misguided” when it agreed to the previous Strategy which implemented the 2010-14 rent rises. Edinburgh ploholders are now paying by far the highest rent in Scotland - and much of the UK. **SMcK** considered the previous negotiations were approached responsibly with a view to facilitating an increase in the allotment provision to satisfy massive demand and safeguard existing sites. **GC** suggested that a better approach would be to deal directly with Councillors and MSPs instead of council officials. It was **AGREED** to discuss this later in the meeting.

It was noted that as services such as waste uplift are to cease there should be a consequent reduction in rent. Regarding Data Protection, it was observed that at some sites including Bridgend, details of new tenants are still passed to the site committee, although this has ceased at most other sites recently.

SMcK said that the most recent meeting showed the Council officials were taking a much more positive approach. **RH** said that all of the creative thinking seemed to be coming from FEDAGA. **SMcK** agreed that the officials seemed to be entirely focused on how to save money.

Data Protection legislation prevents FEDAGA from directly contacting its members. It was **AGREED** to take up the offer of having a FEDAGA notice sent out by the Council via their database specifically addressing the budget and strategy proposals. **ACTION - EW.**

Recipients will be encouraged to visit the FEDAGA website and subscribe to the Newsletter if they have not already done so. It was disappointing that only 650 out of nearly 1500 members have taken this up. The Council have agreed to print a reminder to visit and subscribe on the 2016 invoice.

DR said that FEDAGA had asked the Council to consider bringing forward the issuing of invoices from January to November as it seems the arrival of this demand often encourages uncommitted ploholders to relinquish their tenancy. The present timescale

means that the growing season is often well underway before the plot is reallocated. Starting this process earlier may mean new ploholders are established in better time to take advantage of the growing season. This suggestion is being considered.

DR said the FEDAGA delegation had made the point that the service withdrawals represent around 20% of the budget. Add in the 10% rent rise proposal and the package represents a 30% cut in value for money and is therefore unfair, unjust and unacceptable. It was **AGREED** that a Newsletter stating the salient points and urging participation in the budget consultation process be issued in good time for the 17th December deadline.

ACTION - EW.

Telferton - DR said Avant Homes had submitted their application and the closing date for objections was 4th December. The planning portal showed 240 objections and there were probably a good number of written objections as well. The strong response had ensured that the proposal would be heard by the full Planning Committee. Additionally, there has been support from local parliamentarians including Kezia Dugdale and Kenny MacAskill. He was confident all that could be done has been done and Telferton allotments now await the Planning Committee in January. SAGS and FEDAGA will join the long list of those who will be making objections on the day.

DR observed that if the proposal is defeated Avant Homes would likely appeal to the Reporter. This had happened twice before and in each case the Reporter ruled in favour of the allotments. If the allotments are defeated then the Council would then have to provide similar open space on an adjacent site, which may prove difficult.

It was noted that this case may act as a precedent for the proposal to build housing on the field to the south of Midmar. **GC** said that being situated on a green belt is no longer a useful defence against developers.

4. Allotment Officer - NMCC had just received a Report from the Allotment Officer and had not been able to distribute it prior to the meeting. She noted that only £320 is left in the budget for the Financial Year to April 2016. She believed that a tree at Claremont Park that had been requested to be removed years ago, but was not a priority, was due to be taken down this week. It was also believed that matting for paths at Midmar had been delivered. Tree work and hasp repairs at Carrick Knowe were still to be done. **NMCC** will distribute the Report to the Committee. **ACTION - NMCC.**

5. Consideration of Reports - Secretary's Report: A report detailing correspondence over the month was circulated. **EW** noted that Inverleith was again one of the winners of the Keep Scotland Beautiful - It's Your Neighbourhood allotment awards. There had been correspondence with members about the Allotment Show. It was **AGREED** to form a subcommittee to look at staging an event in 2016. **NMCC, PK, ME, EW, RH, SMcK** and **AH** will meet next Tuesday to take this forward. The show would probably be smaller in scale than before and concentrate on allotment produce rather than crafts. It was further **AGREED** that **EW** explore the possibility of using the Botanic Cottage. **ACTION - EW.**

Website and Newsletter: **EW** said there had been 2 editions in November to keep members up to date with the latest developments arising from talks with the Council.

Treasurer's Report: **DR** circulated a report detailing transactions to 5th December.

Income: Telferton affiliation fees (£93).

Expenditure: Stationery, printing and postage costs for AGM (£68); Steering Group meeting expenses (£11.95); Southside Community Centre - accommodation expenses (£70); Website - power lead for pc (£5.79).

Paid but not yet banked: Cheques to Prospect Bank, Baronscourt and India Place as well as payment for power lead. Sites with no accounts: Dumbryden, Findlay Avenue and Hutchison Loan, for which £179.70, £37 and £16 is being held, respectively.

The bank balance on 18th November is £6374.75. Committed expenditure: £295.09.

Funds minus committed costs: £6079.66. Bond: £4510.56. Total assets: £10,590.22.

DR said there appeared to be confusion at the Bank of Scotland over who is currently an account signatory. Their records appear to be out of date. Approval from a former official is required before the Bank will take action to update their records. **BB** will again approach the Bank and **DR** will contact Andrew Reid, former Treasurer, to ask him to sign the necessary paperwork. **ACTION - BB and DR.**

Trading Report: **BB** is just waiting for Midmar's papers before submitting the order which he anticipates will go this week. The size of the order is broadly in line with last year's at around £1200. **ACTION - BB.**

SMcK reported that a member had pointed out a fault in Kings' online ordering system. This has now been remedied.

Site Reports: **EW** said that a derelict plot at Cambridge Avenue was now home to foxes. A member, frustrated at the damage being caused to crops and holes being dug, had requested pest control. An approach to the Allotment Officer by several members to bring the plot back into use and encourage the foxes to move on was refused. The Council's policy on foxes is to not treat them as pests and so ignore them. An advice leaflet was issued which recommends undergrowth is cut back and holes filled in to discourage them. However, ploholders are forbidden to carry out the advice given. Catch-22.

SAGS Report: **EW** said he was aware that SAGS is involved in the drawing up of guidelines subsequent to the passing of the Community Empowerment Act and preparing for next year's Conference. **DR** said Telferton was grateful for the detailed objection SAGS had lodged on their behalf.

6. Any Other Business: The meeting concluded with a general discussion on how FEDAGA can learn from the events of the recent past and how to best adopt a more successful strategy to represent members and advance the allotment community.

7. Date of Next Meeting: 12th January.