



THE FEDERATION OF
EDINBURGH AND DISTRICT
ALLOTMENTS AND
GARDENS ASSOCIATIONS

***Management Committee Meeting
7.15pm on 4th November 2014 at Southside Community Centre***

Present: Stuart MacKenzie - Inverleith (**SMcK**) (Acting Chair) : Ernie Watt - Cambridge Avenue (**EW**) (Secretary) : Patrick Gibb - Dumbryden (**PG**) (Treasurer) : Brian Bleakley - Midmar (**BB**) (Trading Secretary) : John McKinlay - Craigentenny (**JMcK**) : Gilbert Clark - Midmar (**GC**) : Maureen Edwards - Lady Road (**ME**) : Dave Roberts - Restalrig (**DR**) : Jon Gray - Warriston (**JG**) : Neiria McClure - Claremont Park (**NMcC**) : Rosy Naylor - West Mains (**RN**) : Liz Grace - Midmar (**LG**) (observer) : Willie Aitken - Carrick Knowe (**WA**) (observer) : Jake Booth - Carrick Knowe (**JB**) (observer) : Barbara Seel - Leith Links (**BS**) (observer).

1. Apologies: Peter Wright - Lady Road (**PW**) : Rik Hart - Warriston (**RH**) : Paul Kerr - Redhall (**PK**) : Ian Woolard - City of Edinburgh Council Allotments Officer (**IW**).

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting: The Minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

3. Matters Arising: Rent Increase: **SMcK** said this had dominated all activities recently. **PW**, **EW**, **JMcK** and **SMcK** had met with Cllrs. Hinds and McVey at the City Chambers and made a representation of the allotment community's objections. The meeting had been friendly and constructive.

RN said she had spoken to her local Councillors who agreed with FEDAGA's position but declined to offer support as the Council's budget deficit had to be addressed and all measures had to remain on the table at this stage. **PG** said that the Council now viewed the allotment service as a money-making enterprise. **JG** said he had spoken to an official who told him allotments were "No.2 on the Hit List". **JMcK** said that the Conservative group will vote against the budget proposals and the SNP will undertake to look at them again. The Labour position is less helpful. **ME** said she had made the point to Grange/ Prestonfield Community Council that the Council intends to break its agreement with FEDAGA and had persuaded them to formally object. **JMcK** added that the proposal contravenes legislation in two areas: allotment law and consumer protection. He cited three court cases in England where Councils had been defeated although Leeds City Council is currently appealing. **BS** made the point that the proposal goes against Council policy on sustainability, biodiversity and its own Allotments Strategy document. **SMcK** said we should not allow allotments to become a source of revenue generation and that the e-mail address ideas@fedaga.org.uk had been created to encourage members to contribute ideas on how the campaign could be taken forward in line with the position adopted at the AGM. **EW** would publicise this in the next Newsletter. **ACTION - EW**.

ME said that the Council would be looking for ideas that generate income immediately. **SMcK** suggested that the most important proposal to be pushed is that of creation of more allotments. This would immediately convert the decade-long Waiting List into rental income for the Council. **PG** said the Council should consider measures that bring in extra revenue over the short, medium and long terms. **EW** said that proposals such as charging to get on

the Waiting List set against the first year's rent and taking a deposit returnable on relinquishing a clean plot bring forward the payment of money without making allotments more expensive. **JMcK** said the Council could generate income by charging a minimum rent for raised beds. **LG** questioned the practicality of setting fines for dirty plots. The whole question of how that could be applied was fraught with difficulty. **ME** said it would be effectively fining people for becoming old or ill and was therefore unfair. **SMcK** said there was a good case for the Council to enforce standards much more rigorously, as they had done in the past. £100 held in trust on condition of the plot being properly looked after is a reasonable incentive. **DR** noted concern that this could make allotments unaffordable for the unwaged. **SMcK** said that over the next two weeks we should consolidate our ideas and put them to the Council. He asked everyone to apply themselves to the matter and contribute solutions. **ACTION - Everyone.**

EW said the online petition was going very well. Nearly 2000 people had signed it. The next stage is to consider how to make it as effective as possible. If postcode information can be extracted it may be possible to put it to the Council's Petitions Committee as another avenue of protest. He undertook to explore this with 38 Degrees. **ACTION - EW.**

Apple Press: **DR** said that he had delivered the Apple Press to Midmar. **LG** said it had been very well received and many plotters had pressed their own apple juice. It had been suggested that Midmar purchase its own press. It was felt that the press would have been more useful if it had been available earlier. This point was noted and will be acted upon if a decision to purchase a press is taken forward. The press will be at Inverleith and Claremont Park next weekend.

4. Allotment Officer's Report: **SMcK** addressed the report submitted by **IW**. He noted that the rent proposal had increased the workload of Parks and Greenspace officers. The wall inspection had started at Redhall and Pilrig Park. The new site at Northfield Drive is open. Of works identified by the Wish List and being progressed all that remains is the gate repair and resurfacing at Lady Road. The water supply at Drumbrae is not yet complete, but the track has been dug. Water taps will be turned off for the winter soon. The Trade Waste uplifts will continue through the winter. Tree work is yet to be done at Midmar. Results of the winter inspection will be issued soon. Much of December will be taken up with preparation of invoices for January and Waiting List enquiries. A summary of letters issued to plotters was supplied.

SMcK noted that **IW** had supplied an update on expenditure. **DR** said he was satisfied with progress. He is clear on what has been done and what remains to be achieved. He will meet with **IW** in December and agree the next tasks. **ACTION - DR.** It was acknowledged that some jobs slip from year to year and the tree work at Midmar appears to be one of these. However, **IW** has no control over the availability of tree workers and can only make use of them when they are available. **JG** said that tree work at Warriston in the area between the fence and the wall at Warriston Road was still outstanding. Trees are damaging the wall and it will get worse if not addressed soon. He also said that subsidence was further damaging the wall and the pavement was becoming dangerous to pedestrians. The problem is not within the allotment, yet nothing was being done as it was to be paid for out of the allotment budget which is insufficient for the scale of the work required. The matter had fallen into limbo. **LG** suggested these matters should be added to the wall inspection and tree work schedule.

DR said that due to vandalism, repairs had to be done on the fence by the walkway at Warriston. Damage to a fence at Ferry Road is to be repaired. **JG** said that there was still fallen barbed wire at the Warriston fence and it was potentially hazardous to pedestrians. **EW** will draw this to **IW**'s attention. **ACTION - EW. BS** suggested this could be reported by the public to the "Fix My Street" website. **DR** said that £2K remained in the allotment budget, which he said was reasonable for this stage in the Financial Year.

5. Consideration of Reports: Secretary's Report: **EW** referred to the report he had circulated prior to the meeting. He had spoken to Leith Central and Leith Links Community Councils on the rent rise proposal. There has been no reply yet to **PW**'s Freedom of Information request to ascertain the level of subsidy to golf courses. There had been a request by Green Room Films, doing some work for the Scottish Government, to use an allotment location. **NMcC** said that Claremont Park had offered to help out and the filming took place last week.

Website and Newsletter: The website is being regularly updated and the November Newsletter is ready to be issued.

Treasurer's Report: **PG** presented a summary of accounts from 1st August to 31st October. The current account balance on 1st August was £5702.53. Income to 23rd September was: Bond interest, £19.91, and fees from Portobello East Junction, £51. Expenditure to 23rd September was SAGS fees, £75, Treasurer's expenses, £22.94, and Site fees and commissions, £621.02. The balance on 23rd September was £5054.48. Expected income to 31st October is Bond interest, £8.99. Expected expenditure (uncashed cheques) is Southside Centre (accommodation for meetings), £20, Edinburgh in Bloom Prizegiving BBQ, £225.90, Secretary's Expenses, £114.10, and Fees and commissions to Redhall, £122.67, Findlay Avenue, £14, Hutchison Loan, £16, Chesser Crescent, £27.65, and Dumbryden, £179.70. The balance on 31st October assuming all expenses are paid is £4334.46. The Bond stands at £4508.06. The total balance stands at £8842.52.

PG referred to the uncashed cheques to sites. He said small sites often don't have a bank account and the sums involved are not great so he suggested that FEDAGA holds the money in trust for them. **BB** said that in the past it had been given as cash, but he had been uncomfortable about this. However, there was not really any other way around this if small sites didn't have bank accounts. **GC** said that FEDAGA should be exceptionally careful about financial accountability as it was distributing public funds provided by the Council. He suggested Council-derived money should be held separately from trading money. **PG** said he could foresee difficulties in managing this as he would have to ensure both accounts were kept in credit. He will discuss the matter with the bank to see if there is an easy answer. **ACTION - PG.** In the meantime, he suggested that by keeping a clear track of funds there should be no problem.

ME noted that only four Committee members had taken up her suggestion to join the Southside Community Centre as individuals. As a gesture of goodwill, she proposed that FEDAGA pay for individual memberships in recognition of the exceptionally generous rates enjoyed by the committee for accommodation for meetings. It was **AGREED** that **PG** arrange refunds for those who have already paid and pay £70 to the Centre to cover the Committee's individual memberships. **ACTION - PG.** [It should be noted that membership does not confer any benefit to Committee members.]

As **PG** is now Treasurer, a new Examiner is required to join **RH**. It was **AGREED** that **JMcK** be appointed Examiner. **PG** has bank forms for new signatories to the account, himself and **EW**. Arrangements will be made for this to be done. **ACTION - PG**.

PG gave **EW** the signed copy of the Statement of Accounts 2013-14 for safekeeping. Advice had been received that suggested that FEDAGA is not liable for Corporation Tax in respect of non-trading income.

Trading Report: **BB** said potato and onion forms had been issued. The deadline is 27th November. **EW** said a spreadsheet for orders developed by **RH** was available to Site Reps. He would e-mail it out. **ACTION - EW**. **WA** had asked if Pentland Javelin could be added to the list and **BB** agreed. **JMcK** said he had passed his own forms on to Baronscourt and **BB** agreed to supply him with a replacement set for Craigentenny. **ACTION - BB**. **SMcK** asked if the prices would generate a reasonable profit for FEDAGA and **BB** replied that they would. **PG** questioned if a profit was required. **SMcK** said that the shop stock was not always sold and any potential loss had to be covered.

Site Reports: **SMcK** said that serious vandalism and anti-social behaviour at Carrick Knowe had been reported to the AGM. **WA** said that incidences of stone throwing from the path by the tram track onto the allotment site were continuing. Again, last weekend, a plotholder had nearly been hit. The Police have made a report and the identity of the culprits was known. **SMcK** suggested that an approach be made to their school to try to get the children onside. Once youngsters have visited an allotment site and understood what goes on they generally stop causing trouble, as had been found at Inverleith. **WA** said he would speak to the plotholder concerned. **ACTION - WA**.

EW and **LG** had attended a Dumbryden members' meeting about setting up a site association. It had gone well and a decision to go ahead was agreed. It had been useful to hear of ideas to improve the site, such as an apron to park a car on entering or leaving and the continuing pressing need for toilet provision. As **PG** is about to move to West Mains, Julie Guy has agreed to act as Site Rep. for the time being.

EW and **JMcK** had attended a social event at Baronscourt. **JMcK** spoke about FEDAGA and left some information about the Trading Scheme. Again, it had been useful to hear of ideas for the development of the site, such as a container for tools and shelter and the plans for the communal area. Lorna Frost will act as Site Rep. and she told us of a forthcoming meeting organised by Edinburgh East Save Our Services at 7pm on 27th November at St. Augustine's Church, George IV Bridge. This will be publicised via the website. **ACTION - EW**

SMcK said Inverleith had won an award from It's Your Neighbourhood for the "apprentice beds". He said a short video had been made of their construction and development which was available, along with a video of the Inverleith Allotment Show at www.inverleithallotments.org.uk

JG said that a couple of plots at Warriston had been left to get into a dreadful state, with weed seeds now being blown over adjoining plots. He said that **IW** was too slow to turn such plots over to new people with the result that the plots were now unfit for letting. He pointed out that by allowing for this to happen the Council was losing rent income.

Strategy Report: There was no report.

SAGS Report: **EW** said a statement on the proposals for the Community Empowerment Bill has been issued and would be included in the Newsletter. The evidence stage of the consultation process is about to take place.

6. Any Other Business: **SMcK** noted that this would be the third year without an Allotment Show and if it was left any longer the tradition would die. He said that he had the experience to organise a Show. He would be willing to organise it in 2015 if he had a volunteer to train up and take over within a couple of years. There was no-one willing to take up the gauntlet. The old arguments for and against staging a Show were gone over again. **JMcK** said that a thorough review of FEDAGA's activities was made a couple of years ago and this identified two areas where members wanted help. These were the formation of site associations and a new Plotolders' Guide. The former was ongoing with notable successes and the latter had been achieved. **LG** said that providing horticultural training would be appreciated by many younger plotolders and specifically mentioned the Edible Gardening project at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.

LG said that the Laing Trust, who owned the land at Midmar, were proposing to sell of the open land to the south. As there is no planning permission it would be to a speculative buyer. However, there was anxiety as the Craighouse and Royal Edinburgh Hospital projects showed that pressure to build on greenspace is huge. The Scottish Government is pressing the Council to allow development on greenbelt land. **SMcK** said that there is a real concern that if development is eventually allowed here Midmar faces being sold and built upon.

GC said that FEDAGA would do well to re-examine it's automatic opposition to development. The City's Economic Development Strategy to 2017 aims to create or safeguard 20,000 jobs and to do this more building will be required. Land set aside in the past for allotments has been or is now being developed for building. He said the need to make a profit underpinned the economy and the greenbelt largely consisted of arable land run in an environmentally unfriendly way. It would be better to see development that included allotment sites as part of housing projects.

JMcK noted that Edinburgh had won Gold in the Entente Florale, which could translate as Europe in Bloom. He noted that the allotment community played a small part in this civic achievement and in recognition of this, he and **RH** have been invited to attend a City Chambers reception in December to mark the event.

WA said he had received enquiries about the Talaton Plants bare root fruit tree offer. **EW** said that this had not yet elicited much interest but would again be promoted in the next Newsletter. **ACTION - EW.**

7. Date of Next Meeting: 2nd December.