

# ST THOMAS ALLOTMENT HOLDERS' ASSOCIATION

## STAA Annual Report November 2023

### Background:

This year has seen a much more stable situation for the Committee and the STAA sites, which has enabled them to recover from the recent turbulent past.

Over the past year we have been able to fully access the allotments, offer full services and maintain the sites in good order. This continues to be possible by the desire and commitment of the plot-holders and to the drive and dedication of the site Let & Check and Trading Sheds volunteers, who have let vacant plots and ensured an appropriate level of standards are maintained. The Committee members have worked hard to maintain the association and respond to requests and needs of the sites and individual plot holders, increasing the services with more site trading sheds, and toilets. A vote of thanks to all.

### Committee:

Over this past year we have experienced the Committee operating at close to full strength, being able to meet in person and able to focus on the development of the sites for the benefit of its members.

The current STAA Committee members are:

John Butler – Chair

Paul Collier – Treasurer

Becky Wells – Secretary

Ed Noonan - Membership Secretary

Jim Clark – Web & Data Manager

Chris Webb – Events Coordinator

Charlie Knill – Trading Shed Manager

Claire Richards – representing Pinces & Regents

Richard Brownbridge – representing Clapperbrook

Rob Shields – representing Rackfields

Rob Harding – representing Ide Lane

Bill Turner – representing Ashwood

Ron Blakey & Andy Harris – representing Cowick Lane

Rose Brooks – representing Guys & Hylton

Currently we have no representative for Newman Road

After this meeting Charlie Knill will be stepping down as Trading Shed Manager for which all plot holders should support the Committee in a vote of thanks for the generous effort and commitment Charlie has given in providing this excellent service. We are pleased to announce, subject to endorsement by the members, that Charlie's role will be taken over by Ron Blakey and Andy Gordon.

All current members, with the exception of Charlie, are standing for re-election this time, but we are very keen to fill the following vacancies:

- Site representatives for: Newman Road, Guys & Hylton x 1 and Pinces.
- Guys & Hylton polytunnel manager.

## **Constitution:**

This is the first year of STAA operating under the new Constitution endorsed at the last AGM, and the Committee is pleased to inform you that there has been no major issues and all members have benefited from having public-liability insurance indemnity, fully operating and supplied trading sheds, and the return of the Annual Show to celebrate the achievements of our outputs.

## **Membership:**

Since the introduction of the new membership scheme, which enables plot holders to opt out of membership of STAA, we are pleased to inform you that no plot holder has taken up this option over the past year, but communication with members remains problematic. This is largely due to issues around GDPR and finding the right tools to communicate with you, but under the guidance of Jim Clark the Web & Data Manager who has improved the website and introduced STAA Facebook, and the Committee has erected noticeboards on all sites to post the latest developments and encourage the members participation in the development of the sites for their benefit. The STAA Committee is also working closer with ECC to improve this communication.

## **Treasurer's Report:**

### General

Financial Report for year ended 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022 produced by V A Accountancy.

Trading shed turnover rose over the previous financial year (19%) to £13,091. The deficit from trading reflects the decision to increase stock levels by £1207 so the cost of goods purchased is higher than sales. The results are flattered by a one-off donation from Pinces of £1,981 but with expenditure of £2,447 on site enhancements there is a small overall deficit of £168.

Draft Uninspected Account for year ended 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023 produced by the Treasurer.

Trading shed turnover rose marginally to £13,504 (3%) reflecting a falling volume of sales when account is taken of the steep increase in the cost of goods bought in for resale during the year. The gross margin of 26% is larger than the previous year reflecting the small gross loss in 2021-22. Other significant receipts of £1,555 came from E.C.C in the form of grants and payment for letting services and letting polytunnel plots.

Running costs were lower than last year £614 against £891 last year. A major additional cost incurred was the Annual Flower and Produce Show revived for the first time post-Covid. The £528 spent includes £100 for the reusable banner and £208 for the mugs given as prizes. The Association also spent £1,431 on site enhancements, which is down from £2447 last year. The major proportion is for tree work at the Pinces site.

The Committee welcomes applications for costed projects from sites.

Total funds are £16,667, up £3006 on the £13,661 held at the bank last year. Funds must be retained to provide for working capital to buy stock and cover expenses, recover the polytunnel, and any unidentified contingencies.

(Professor Paul Collier BSc, PhD, FCA, Treasurer, 21<sup>st</sup> October 2023)

## **Trading Sheds/Polytunnel:**

We have had a tricky year in the trading shed but with everyone working together and with good support from the committee we have had a fantastic year trade wise.

In November our main supplier retired, we had to find a new supplier between us we overcame this hurdle and now have a well-stocked shed.

In one month alone we sold over 500 bags of compost the volunteers had to move sometimes 6 pallets of compost a month off a lorry and into the trading shed, without these wonderful people this just would not happen so well done and a big thank you for your efforts.

At the end of the trading year we had total sales of £14344 and spent £10063 on stock we also had a value of at cost £3664 in stock.

We have managed to cut down waste by acquiring smaller amounts of perishables and throwing very little away this has helped improve the bottom line.

I feel we are in a very strong position and the future looks bright.

The one thing I have failed to do is manage to get green waste compost delivered, but this is ongoing and hopefully we now have a contractor who will be able to deliver to us.

I would also like to wish Ron and Andy good luck running the trading shed in the future as I am stepping down from the position which I have greatly enjoyed.

(Charlie Knill, trading Sheds Manager, 13.10.23)

We should also offer our thanks and gratitude to Paul Tregoning, who has carried out an excellent job of running the polytunnel at Guys & Hylton but is regretfully stepping down.

The Committee can also inform the members that the Secretary Becky Wells was successful with two Ward Grant applications to improve the Cowick Lane Trading Shed with skylights.

### **STAA Summer Show 2023**

STAA's aim was to hold an event that would appeal to, and be of benefit to, allotment holders and growers from all the sites in the area and to the communities of St. Thomas and Exeter. After some discussion it was decided the most sensible option was to hold a produce show. Planning for the show started early in the year, booking the venue, setting the classes, organising publicity, amongst other things. All in all, quite a lot to think about to ensure the day ran smoothly.

The event was well supported, with so many different entries and from all ages. Beautiful flower arrangements, lots of fruit and vegetables, crafts and delicious homemade goodies. There was a real buzz of enthusiasm, and everyone seemed to be enjoying the day.

Many thanks to everyone for entering their items.

- to Claire and members of STAA for their help with the planning and organisation.
- to the judges of all the classes.
- to all the bakers for the delicious cakes.
- to Sainsbury's and Bernaville Nurseries for donating prizes for the draw.
- to Councillor Rob Hannaford for visiting us on the day.

(Chris Webb, Events Coordinator, 16.10.23)

The Committee thanks Chris for the excellent job of organising this very successful event.

## **Exeter City Council arrangements:**

Over this year we have had three meetings with Amanda Ziff (Principal Environment Support Officer) and her line-manager Nick Mead, (Commercial Operations Manager) which has resulted in improved communication, payment for outstanding administration fees, and has helped foster a better working relationship. We have offered and been invited to contribute to the rewriting of the contract between plot holders and the ECC to make more transparent the responsibilities of each partner which we believe is a positive step forward, but we must remain vigilant to obtain the best conditions for our members.

We have recently been informed that ECC is increasing the fee for the letting L&C agreement from £10.30 - £11.35, but we have been assured that the whole fee will be paid back to STAA. The ECC has agreed that in future we will be given advanced notice when the rent and/or the administration fees will increase.

The Council has resurrected the Allotment Forum, which at the last meeting led to frank and open discussions, but unfortunately the proposed next meeting this Autumn was postponed to the next Spring.

## **The future:**

The Committee continues with its mission, with your support, to improve all sites, identifying priorities for each and fundraising to realise them. Please work actively with your representatives to help us achieve this goal.

John Butler  
Chair  
STAA 28.10.23