

Woburn Sands & District Allotment Society Newsletter

November 2012

Administration

The dust has now settled following the events of the AGM in April and Special General Meeting in May and the inevitable consequential difficulties that ensued for your newly-formed Management Committee. However, we are now getting on with our duties and focussing on the day-to-day running of the Allotment Society.

(i) Management Committee

For your information, the Management Committee currently comprises the Members as given below. Responsibilities, e-mail addresses and contact phone numbers are include.

Bob Larbey, Chairman - MK 281728
chairman@wsallotmentsociety.co.uk
Barry Byrne, Vice-chairman - MK 583478
vicechairman@wsallotmentsociety.co.uk - (Manure Orders)
Margaret Templeman, Secretary - MK 587863
secretary@wsallotmentsociety.co.uk
Phil Rutt, Treasurer – MK 582301
treasurer@wsallotmentsociety.co.uk
Tony Gale, MK 647979 – (Seed & Seed Potato/Shallot Orders)
Roger Hansard, MK 582548 – (Field Maintenance)
Phill Rowe, (Field Maintenance)
Trevor Templeman, MK 587863 – (Bonfire Coordinator) trevortempleman@btinternet.com
Derek Blackburn, MK 584893 – (Website Coordinator) – Co-opted

Since the Summer Newsletter we have seen the departure of Anne Corbett and Ralph Pursell from the Management Committee. Anne and Ralph, with the significant assistance of others, worked hard to keep Society afloat during the traumatic period following April's AGM. We are grateful to them both for the contribution they both made to the running of the Allotment Society; we wish them well.

(ii) Constitution & By Laws

Derek Blackburn was co-opted to join us so that we could harness his vast Committee experience and undoubted wordsmith skills. He and Bob are currently in the process of amending these two key documents. Once approved within Committee, changes proposed will be put to Members at next April's AGM. Whist most proposals will be principally editorial, the major change to the By Laws will address the reinstatement of bonfires on the Field.

(iii) Seeds, Seed Potatoes & Onion Sets

The deadline for your orders to be sent to Tony Gale has now passed. By the way, we're sorry to learn that several new allotment holders did not receive their seed catalogues and order forms this year. This was due to an administrative hitch, which shouldn't happen in future. Also worth a mention is that the numbers of orders for seeds, potatoes and onion sets is down this year - so make a note in your diaries for next year. The quality of these products is good and the prices represent excellent value.

Our thanks go to Tony for handling this project.

(iv) Finance

Field maintenance work has been the principal expenditure which includes such items as: five new notice boards, strengthening the fence bordering the Estate's field, putting wire fencing on the Tidbury Close boundary fence and lopping the large fir and elderberry trees that border Woodland Way. Also there has been the annual mowing of the plot access ways and hedge trimming work. In addition, the nettles and brambles have been flailed in the car-parking area and along Woodland Way. All these projects have absorbed a good deal of the funds. We trust everyone has noticed and appreciated the improved appearance of the Field's Bow Brickhill Road frontage with the hedge trimmed and ditch cleared.

We are budgeting for demolishing the dangerously dilapidated Field shed and spreading the compost heap at the Bow Brickhill Road end of the Field. Despite the grass cutting, this area continues to look somewhat scruffy and we'd like to have it better presented.

Your Committee will be putting its mind to budgeting matters this winter and the every-increasing cost of keeping the Field in good shape. Without doubt, we'll need to address within Committee the issue of our pole charge, ie whether to increase it from the existing £2 per pole in order to keep pace with increasing costs.

Our thanks go to Paul Hamer for handing over the accounts in such good order and with a useful cash surplus. We're still in a healthy position even though expenditure is well up on last year.

Field Matters

(i) Bonfires

By now, everyone should be aware that, as in earlier years, Plot Holders are again allowed to have bonfires on their plots, **but with strict conditions applied**. To summarise:

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- Bonfires allowed only during the period 1st October to 30th April.
- No bonfires on Sundays.
- No tyres, plastic waste or domestic household rubbish to be burned.
- Only the individual Plot Holder's allotment waste to be burned.
- Bonfires only to be lit when the wind direction is away from Tidbury Close.
- Bonfires to be completely extinguished before leaving the Field.

All Plot Holders have been sent a letter outlining the terms and conditions for bonfires. Included with it were the amended By Law on Bonfires together with Guidelines. Attached to the letter was a tear-off slip which the Plot Holder must sign, date and return to the Secretary if he/she wants to have bonfires. This confirmed the acceptance of the terms, restrictions and conditions being applied by your Management Committee. Bonfires are only allowed when the returned slip has been lodged with the Secretary. In a nutshell: 'no form - no bonfire'. If you missed sending in your tear-off slip you can download the form from our website:

www.wsallotmentsociety.com - look under "Bonfires".

At 1st November, we had 51 of our 142 individual Members (36 per cent) applying for permission to have bonfires. We're delighted to report that, at the time of writing, there have been no complaints about bonfires and associated smoke!

I'm sure everyone will want to thank Trevor Templeman for all his endeavours in this area.

(ii) Gates & Locks

Thanks to Roger Hansard's efforts, the locks appear to be working much better, but if you do have difficulties, or you need a new key please contact Roger (Tel. 01908 582548).

Please don't spray locks with WD40 – we spray regularly with an appropriate silicon-based fluid specifically designed to do the job. Also, we ask everyone to lock the gate behind them when entering and leaving the Field.

(iii) Vermin Control

We are well aware of the damage being done to some plots by the rabbit, squirrel and pigeon population on the Field. We do have two plot-holders who are currently licensed and approved by the Committee to shoot vermin and we are monitoring the situation. Note that shooting on the Field is restricted to air rifles and if only

approved by the current Committee. All previous permissions granted by other Committees are rescinded.

(iv) Manure

Last year's supplier has been contacted regarding this year's deliveries. Barry Byrne posted a notice asking plot holders to contact him with their orders. The price is £45 per load and deliveries will commence as soon as conditions allow. The deadline for responses was 31st October '12 but we may try to get deliveries in late winter – keep an eye on the Notice Boards and website regarding this possibility.

Many will have noticed that fresh manure is being heaped (delivered to us free-of-charge by a local stable owner) at the Bow Brickhill Road end of the Field. It's for the benefit of all Plot Holders and disappears fast! We're thinking about having some delivered to the opposite side of the Field for greater convenience of those Members with plots in this location.

(v) Rubbish & Fly Tipping

Plot Holders may have noticed that the hedgerows have been trimmed back and we ask you to dispose of plot rubbish by either composting, burning or taking it home – please do not put it in the hedgerow as this can encourage vermin. This is a noticeable problem on the Field's borders against the Estate's field, which we ask Plot Holders in this location to address. Also, we note that fresh plot rubbish has been deposited into the brook running close to our boundary just up from the large Notice Board. This is environmentally irresponsible, inexcusable and won't be tolerated!

It's our view that anyone found indiscriminately dumping rubbish should be expelled from the Society!

(vi) Vehicles on the Field

Due to the heavy rains this autumn and the extremely soggy ground conditions, we've had to display notices instructing Plot Holders not to bring their vehicles on to the Field. Unfortunately, we've had recent complaints that this request is being ignored and that damage has been done to both tracks and, in one case, a plot. If you see anyone with a car or van on the pathways and tracks then let us know. Action will be taken unless there are any extenuating circumstances.

(vii) Water Supply

Please note that the mains water supply to the Field's tanks has now been turned off for the winter months.

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(viii) Plot Inspection

A plot inspection took place in September when 10 plots were deemed to be "uncultivated". The Plot Holders have all been contacted and asked for their intentions. One has subsequently relinquished their plot. Allowances have been made for the difficult plot conditions this spring and summer, and for Plot Holders experiencing personal or domestic difficulties. Anybody with extenuating circumstances which have led to plot inactivity is asked to get in touch with Bob or Margaret. This year, the new Committee has deliberately taken a somewhat 'soft' line on uncultivated plots. However, our intention is to 'toughen up' in 2013! We have an ever-increasing list of new applicants wishing to take an allotment so it's unfair if Members don't work their plot.

(ix) Plot Judging

Dave Simmons from the Seed Box in Flitwick judged the Field in June. The 1st Prize winner was Jane Roberts.

The other winners were:

- David Biles – 2nd Prize
- Ralph Pursell – 3rd Prize
- Jacob Proctor - Best Junior (Ralph's grandson!)
- Nigel Farrar - Best 5-pole Plot
- David Savage - Best Novice
- Jacqui Glover - Most Inspiring Plot (Peter Leadbeater Shield)

Well done and heartiest congratulations to all the successful gardeners!



Bob Larbey and Anne Corbett present Jane with 1st Prize and the 'Best Plot' winner's trophy

Awards & Social Evening

Friday 13th July saw 50+ Members attending and enjoying our annual Awards and Social Evening in the lower Edgewick Farm field. Loan of a marquee from the Music Festival organisers was very much appreciated. The Society laid on, totally 'free of charge', soft drinks and wines, as well as hot and cold food. Paul Hamer and Tim Kirkland kindly provided their usual barbeque extravaganza, with sausages & onions, beef burgers and tandoori chicken on the menu. The focus of the evening was presentation of the awards resulting from the Plot Judging – as covered above. The entire catering exercise was expertly organised beforehand and overseen on the evening by Heather Rourke, for which we're all very grateful. Thanks, Heather! Feedback from those present suggests the evening was a great success. A bonus was that it stopped raining all evening, just for us!

Plot Administration

Previously vacant plots have now been allocated to new members who join us for a probationary period as Tenants, or what we call Associate Members. Roger Hansard has done a great job in his capacity of showing newcomers around the Field, explaining their obligations and how the Society operates. Other allocations are in hand.

We've found that Members thinking of relinquishing their plots are reluctant to do so until we get to the end of the so-called 'Plot Year', which is 20th March 2013.

Plot Holders with uncultivated plots are under pressure to do better next year.

Our Waiting List continues to grow steadily with a number of existing Aspley Guise allotment holders showing keen interest to join us due to the uncertainty over the lease on their field.

Website

We are very grateful to Jeff Wiemer, one of our erudite Members, for stepping up to the mark and putting a lot of effort into upgrading our website. This is still "work in progress", but the site is well worth a visit. It includes some useful links to other sites covering such diverse issues as the use of rotavators and the impact of bonfires on the environment.

Members are encouraged to write contributions for posting on the website, for example offering advice on how better to grow certain difficult crops. Anybody interested is asked to contact Derek who will work with Jeff to get this done.

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Chairman's Perspective

After six months in office, I thought it was time to pause, take stock and for reflection

First, I would like to express my gratitude to fellow Management Committee Members for all the hard work they've put in over the past six months on behalf of the Allotment Society. As well as working hard, they've had to put up with my 'ticks' and somewhat autocratic style of operating!

Sometimes due to total lack of experience and occasionally due to the inevitable lack of adequate hand-over from the previous Committee, we've often struggled to keep things going. Mistakes have been made and we've got things wrong.

It didn't help that in our first three months the Committee lost both Anne Corbett, the only re-elected Committee Member at the AGM, and Ralph Pursell, who is vastly experienced in horticultural and Society matters. It was Anne and Ralph who kept things together after wholesale resignations at the AGM and who were instrumental in recruiting many of today's Committee.

There's much worthy of review and additional comment on business we've had to deal with over the past several months but I'll focus on just five key areas.

(a) Bonfires

Most of you will have noticed that changes were made to the original proposals adopted at the AGM & SGM. I make no apology for us making the amendments and for how we've managed to date this potentially contentious issue. Importantly, we made the conditions associated with having bonfires significantly much stricter than originally voted for. We firmly believed that banning bonfires on Sundays was essential and felt that a £200 fine for non-compliance was simply unenforceable. Also that that potential expulsion from the Society was a greater deterrent for non-adherence to the conditions set than a fine.

So far, I'm extremely pleased to see that Members having bonfires are doing so responsibly and no problems have arisen to date. But it's still early days and we're not at all complacent. Thanks again, Trevor, for all your hard work in this area.

(b) Field Maintenance Costs

These have risen significantly this year. As reported above, we've addressed several areas where expenditure has been necessary to ensure good

husbandry and the overall appearance of our Field. Some projects we've dealt with were long-standing issues, eg lopping the huge conifers and elderberry tree on Woodlands Way. Hopefully, you think the new Notice Boards are an improvement.

This year, total Field maintenance costs will exceed £2,500, ie equivalent to approximately 80 per cent of our annual income from the existing £2 per pole charge. Clearly, this is not sustainable given inflation and other significant expenses we incur. One answer is to raise the annual pole charge to, say, £2.50 or even £3 per pole of plot at next April's AGM.

We do help reduce costs by employing, on a paid basis, one or two Plot Holders to do jobs that would be more expensive if carried out by engaging professional contractors.

Of course, some of you may think that the Field's appearance is relatively unimportant and that funds should not be spent in this area. If so, please let us know.

Lastly on this topic, my thanks go to Roger Hansard and Phill Rowe for overseeing and carrying out most of the Field maintenance work.

(d) Working Parties

One way to reduce costs is for Members to do some of the jobs required rather than employing a contractor. Forming Working Parties is certainly not a new idea but it needs the support of both Committee and Plot Holders alike. If you'd be prepared to participate in a Working Party please contact me or any other Committee Member. And let us have your preferred weekend day.

(e) Administration

It continues to amaze me, and incidentally Margaret and Phil, too, just how much time needs to be spent to run the Society's affairs efficiently and effectively. I have to say that it's a growing concern for me. If the Secretary handled everything that traditionally is dealt with, then I believe this position could only be held by somebody who is essentially retired, which Margaret is certainly not. She survives in her post by others on the Committee helping her with the duties.

It's interesting to note that, in previous decades, the Secretary received payment for his/her services. But I'm not suggesting we go down this route again.

It's clear from all the 'hard' copy and electronic files Marie Baker passed to the new Committee that she, Peter Toogood and Paul Hamer had shared the majority of the time-consuming administrative duties of the Society since their involvement with managing affairs. Again, we thank them all for their past contributions.

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Today's information technology, particularly e-mail systems, saves a great deal of time. But not everyone in our Society has this facility. Some 24 Members, ie 17 per cent of the membership, do not have an e-mail address. In these cases, all communications have to be sent by post, at a significant expense and with time being consumed in copying, labelling and 'stuffing' envelopes. Sometimes delivery is by a Committee Member's car at the expense of the driver. This latter is done to keep postage costs to a minimum. Should we charge such 'non-email' Members a pole supplement to cover these extra costs? Or, would this be unfair?

Members who currently receive all communications by post, but who now have an e-mail address since joining the Society, are urgently requested to let the Secretary know. Just send Margaret an e-mail!

A level bureaucracy could be removed if we did away with the Tenant (Associated Member) category of membership. Here, new Members join the Society for a probationary period, ie usually for 12 months – they then move to being a full Shareholder after the following AGM, assuming they've been diligent in cultivating their plot.

We'll be discussing this possibility with the Committee.

(f) Rubbish Tipping

Just an important reminder, please note our comments in the section above! Indiscriminate tippers will have their membership of the Society terminated! Fly tipping in my book is defined as putting rubbish and plot waste anywhere on the Field other than on your plot or in clearly designated areas.

A special word of thanks from me to our Secretary, Margaret, who I coerced into the job and continues to perform wonders under difficult circumstances. Also to Phil whose patience, calm authority and financial stewardship have been greatly appreciated.

Finally, best wishes from all of us on the Management Committee for the rapidly-approaching Festive Season and 'all the best' for 2013.

So, that's it! Please note that my views expressed above are not necessarily those of the Management Committee.

Bob Larbey

Lastly, as always, it would be great to hear from you about any comments, suggestions and ideas you may have on aspects of managing the society's business and

related on- or off-Field activities. Please telephone or send an e-mail or a letter to us with your contributions. Remember, this is your Society!

Postscript – 'Society & Field Facts'

We thought you'd like to be given some facts and figures on the history and current status of your Society. These will be provided as a regular 'PS' in future Newsletters using information extracted from past meeting Minutes and other files in the Society's archives.

- The Society was formed in 1920/21 when the Field, which is approximately 11.5 acres, was purchased from a Mr Cawthorne for £600 (£30,000 in today's money!).
- Ernest Bathurst, the local chemist shop owner, and William Harrington were the first Chairman and Secretary respectively.
- A £60 deposit to purchase the Field was made with the remainder being borrowed by the 50 or so inaugural Members. Wallace Foll, the local estate agent, handled the sale for Mr Cawthorne.
- 'The Agricultural Organisation Society', based in London (with the nowadays quaint phone number of 'Victoria 716'), provided the know-how to set up the rules and arranged for registration of our current name (and, subsequently, annual accounts) with the Industrial & Provident Society, as required under the 1893 Act!
- Early Committee meetings were held in the Billiard Room in the Swan Hotel.
- Today, some 140 Members share around 1560 (square) poles of plots on the Field. These equate to 9.8 acres. There are 38 5-pole plots and 136 10-pole plots.
- Conversion: 1 pole = 5.5 yd. 1 square pole* = 30.25 sq. yd. 1 acre = 160 (sq) poles = 0.405 hectare.
* Usually referred to simply as a pole.
- Our current annual charge is £2 per pole – in 1921 it was 3d (pence) per pole. This is 1.25p today.

So, enjoy the winter break. If you're currently hibernating, no muddy boots to clean for a while! If you're still active on your plot, we hope it doesn't continue to rain so hard and that you get a mild winter. Let's all hope that next year is kinder to us for gardening than 2012!

Happy allotmenting!

Your Management Committee, November 2012