Chairman’s annual report for 2019

Before I start, I’d like to draw your attention to our new Chemicals Policy – there are copies on the chairs. Following problems in recent years, we thought it necessary to draw up a guidance and to give the committee some teeth if chemicals are misused, especially when neighbouring plots are affected. I’d be grateful if you could look at the policy during the course of the meeting – at the end of this meeting, I’ll ask you if you support this policy.

Most of this report is devoted to thanking people for their contribution to the allotments, which I think is a very good sign. The Sunday café and the social events play a key role in making the allotments a thriving and pleasant place. I’d like to thank Anne Wingrove and all the café volunteers who bring us excellent home-made cakes, tea and coffee 50 Sundays a year and provide a venue for us to get together. And the social events are both very useful – Seedy Sunday and the plant sale – and very enjoyable, with the highlight of the year being the Autumn Social. So many thanks to the Social Committee: Jenny Bourne, Ruth Walker, Janet Baylis, Anne Wingrove, Joanie Fulton, Flora Souper and Carol Ager.

And there are the many people who enable the allotments to function. Ashley Catto and his small team of helpers are responsible for unlocking and locking the main gates each day. There’s Karen Saywell and the inspections team, who inspect all plots three times a year and select the candidates for the Best Plot awards, while David Laughrin writes to the miscreants. Ray Hulm and his team look after our pumps, the lifeblood of the allotments. Chris Pocock, backed up by Theo Christophers, maintain the compost toilet and a team of volunteers keep it clean and pleasant. Andrew and Susan Saunders manage the hedge that screens the compost toilet, while Andrew puts in an enormous amount of work on the hedge of native species that has been planted along the southern side of the allotments. Andrew and Jem Negus recently planted an evergreen holly and pyracantha hedge to provide additional screening for the beehive area. I’d also like to thank Jon Anderson, who looks after the beehive area.

Martin Scotton takes care of the huge task of rent renewals, which takes up all of October and then much of November and December as he chases those who have not paid. Gill Hiley does a great job on lettings and on keeping the plotholders information pack up-to-date. Gill has let 26 plots since the start of 2019, and there are currently 14 individuals or couples on the waiting list, plus 7 existing tenants requesting another half plot. And there are the two committees, the Plotholders’ Committee and the Management Committee, and I’d like to thank everyone who gives up their time to serve on them.

Many thanks to all those who turned up for the workdays: David Boyd, Bob McIntyre, Cecile Ferrari, Flora Souper, Jochen Kronjaeger, John Hourigan, John Greaves, Gill, Jenny and Andy and others – apologies to anyone whose name I’ve omitted. Among the jobs we got done were creating a dead hedge by the bee area, putting on a new shed roof, maintaining the fig planters and Jenny’s flower bed near the seed store and putting up the new pump signs.

Several people put in a lot of work on the pump signs. Gill Hiley designed them and also drove with me to buy the stakes on the hottest day of the year. Dan Johnson very kindly manufactured all the signs at no cost to the allotments, while Ben Wilkins put points on all the stakes.
Ben also played a key role in another initiative this year, along with Ray Hulm, Christine Thorp, Andrew Stanley and me. You have copies of the Water Group’s report, which is intended to stimulate thought and discussion on the future of water on our site, as well as showing us all how to harvest water and use it in the best way possible. The Water Group has already had a practical result – the splendid array of three linked water barrels, plus a proper tap, that Ben installed at the Seed Store building. The report is on the website – and I’d like to thank Mark Buckley and Carol Dukes for all their work on maintaining and updating the website. There is a wealth of information on the website – please do use it.

Another new project this year was the work put in by the volunteers from St John’s, as part of their Love Hampton Wick weekend. Their team did an impressive amount on plots whose tenants, due to age or other reasons, are having difficulty with some of the more physical tasks. Many thanks to Karen for all her organisation, and to David Laughrin, Christine, Gill, Andrew, John and others for helping out on the day. Everyone enjoyed themselves and St John’s would like to repeat the exercise next year.

Speaking of enjoyable occasions, this year we have had Plotholders Question Time and talks by Mary Ewing on Spring Weeds and how to use them, ‘What Has Wildlife Ever Done For Me’ led by Stephen James from the Environment Trust and a visit by Jim Arbury of RHS Wisley to look at the old fruit trees by the bee area. Ruth Walker put in lots of work co-ordinating the talks and visit, and is now forming a group to look after these fruit trees. If you are interested, please see Ruth.

Another welcome initiative this year has been the steady supply of free manure brought in by Nick Cheadle, who along with David Auld runs the community plot. Nick and Dave are building a container for the compost using pallets provided by Stuart Wisdom of Tiles of Wisdom and stakes sharpened by Ben. Stuart has generously agreed to provide pallets for plotholders who want to construct compost containers on their plots and he will leave these by the communal compost area for people to help themselves. There is a lot of demand – I received requests for over 100 pallets before I stopped counting – so please don’t take more than three at a time at first.

Of all the new things we did this year, the biggest project was the work on the roads. I’d like to thank Nick Baylis and Gill Hiley for all the work they did in obtaining and evaluating bids, and then the daily liaison duties carried out by John Hourigan and Grey Rigge to ensure everything went smoothly. The work is a huge improvement, which benefits us all.

There are also people who quietly contribute by doing things like mowing the communal areas and fixing the gate lock. To all these people and those I haven’t mentioned – we have to be out before the deer cull – a big thank you. There’s plenty more to do – such as putting in more dead hedge stakes and more pump signs – so please do come along to the work days next year.

David Harnden

November 14th, 2019