

Wendover Ashbrook Allotment Association

Newsletter – Autumn 2020

After a somewhat nervous start to the year, due to the threat of Covid 19, we were extremely fortunate to be able to make the most of our allotments with little hindrance. Social distancing is not difficult on the plot and most of us were able to enjoy fresh air, honest toil and shouted conversations. Much better than staying at home!

The allotments are in great condition and continue to provide a colourful display of flowers, fruit and vegetables. This growing season has been very productive and the new vegetable donation system has benefited as a result. This initiative has allowed us to put our excess crops to good use and help others.

SITE MANAGEMENT

The recent site inspection, carried out by our Secretary, John Currell, together with Margaret Winstanley and Robin Beattie, showed that most plots were being maintained to a very high standard this year. There has been a lot of interest in allotments as people seek healthy pastimes during the Covid crisis. We have recently welcomed several new tenants and at the time of reporting we have 5 empty plots and a waiting list of 17.

There have been many requests for us to reinstate the provision of equipment such as mowers, trimmers and rotavators for use by tenants. This equipment is housed in a small shed behind the garage and the access code for the lock can be provided by Robin Beattie or Francis Biggerstaff. We have decided to make this equipment available again on the condition that users take due precautions; use the hand sanitizer supplied, wear gloves, where appropriate, and wipe down the equipment using the sanitizing wipes before and after use.

Tenants are not permitted to make use of the maintenance equipment stored in the garage.

SITE MAINTENANCE

Special thanks go to all who contribute to keeping our site safe and tidy, especially our volunteer team of Francis Biggerstaff, Robin Beattie, and Alison Woods. They were again supported by Simon Axtell, Christian Hodges and Wayne Griffiths who assisted in the renovation of vacant plots. Christian also carried out nearly all of the mowing of the central grass tracks.

The communal muck heaps have been replenished and the charge for muck remains at £1.20 per barrow load. If using the wheelbarrows provided please remember to wear gloves. As the record book is currently not available we ask you to keep a personal record of your barrow-loads and if possible make payment to our Treasurer, Neville Morton, by bank transfer.

Despite several previous requests to desist, some tenants continue to dump inappropriate materials on the site maintenance bonfire heap. This is unacceptable. The bonfire is for site maintenance purposes only. It is tenants individual responsibility to dispose of all waste from their plots by either composting, burning (where appropriate) on their own plot or disposing of at the local refuse tip. **In future, tenants must not place any waste material on the site maintenance bonfire.**

The boundary hedge at the West side of the site needs some care and attention. Alison has inspected the hedge and on her advice we intend to make some selective planting in November, to repair areas that have become too thin and to remove overgrown bushes and trees where appropriate. Tenants with plots adjoining the hedge are asked to assist where possible. Alison has prepared a short note outlining the benefits of having a well maintained hedge:

“Allotment hedges, the good, the bad and the wildlife”

Probably the most basic function of a hedge is to mark a boundary and form a barrier, so why not a fence? Hedges are generally cheaper and easier to install and maintain and, when properly managed, can last for centuries. The oldest rural hedges are often parish boundary hedges which could date back to Bronze Age clearances of woodland for farming where strips of woodland were left to mark boundaries. Planting new hedges is thought to have started in Roman times, reaching a peak in the mid 18th century with the Enclosures Act.

A well maintained thick hedge is stock proof and can dramatically reduce wind speed for a distance of 10 times its height. Figures of up to 75% reduction in speed at that distance have been recorded!

This provides protection to plants and structures including greenhouses, runner bean frames and sheds. It is also part of the reason that it is warmer in winter and cooler in summer near the hedge although the downside is that the hedge can shade and take moisture and nutrients from the nearby soil. Where gaps appear this effect is not only reduced, it often leads to turbulence around the gap which can cause more destruction.

Pests and their predators also use hedges with obvious consequences for crops. The ideal is to have as varied a hedge as possible both in its plants and structure – trees, climbers such as ivy and bramble are important sources of nectar for pollinators and together with the main hedge structure provide shelter and nesting spaces for a wide range of animals as well as acting as corridors that aid movement to and from feeding areas. A wider diversity of plants and animals means more likelihood we will benefit from the “good guys”.

To aid the diversity it is recommended that hedges are not cut more frequently than one year in 3 which has been shown to increase flowers and then fruit in Hawthorn and Blackthorn by 250% - less work for us.

A final thought: a good hedge can be a thing of great beauty, not just for the flowers and fruit they produce, but watching the birds, bees and other insects and inhabitants is also a joy to be savoured.

WEBSITE and NOTICEBOARDS

The website, (wendoverashbrookallotments.weebly.com), provides a valuable source of information on allotment gardening and can be used to post comments, contact the committee and keep yourselves informed. Rebecca Miller, who manages the website would like to see us make more use of the forum, perhaps to post recipes for those excess courgettes.

As well as through the emails sent out by the Secretary, we also post details of meetings and forthcoming events on the notice boards by the gates and on the central garage.

SOCIAL EVENTS

Sadly we had to cancel all of our Social Saturday coffee mornings and also our intended 'Evening Hog Roast Barbeque' to celebrate the Centenary of the establishment of Wendover Ashbrook Allotment Association. We hope to rearrange these events in 2021, Covid 19 permitting.

RENT DAY

Rent Day this year will be on **Saturday 26th September** and Neville Morton will be at the allotment garage to receive your payments between 9:30 and 12:30. We have held the rental charge at £2 per pole for the present. Rent can be paid direct to Neville by bank transfer so you don't need to attend the site this year to renew your tenancy. It would be helpful if you would also settle any outstanding charges for hire of equipment or barrow-loads of manure at the same time.

The Association's account details are: **30-90-38 Acc. No. 52348168** It would also be helpful if you could email Neville to let him know that you have paid in this way. nevmorton@tiscali.co.uk

Unfortunately we will not be serving coffee and tea on Rent Day this year.

If you are considering giving up your plot, downsizing or perhaps require additional growing space, please contact John Currell **before Rent Day** so that he can make the necessary arrangements.

AUDITOR NEEDED

Unfortunately Judy Sturley has had to relinquish her post as Auditor. We, therefore, need a second auditor to assist Paul Frost in the local auditing of the Association's Annual Accounts. This is not an onerous task - a once a year responsibility. There must be a tenant or tenant's spouse, relation or friend who would be able to help us with this simple issue. If you think that you can help please contact either the Treasurer or myself.

MEETINGS

The next Committee Meeting will be held by Zoom on Monday 26th of October. Please let the Secretary or me know if you have any items you would like to be brought to the attention of the Committee.

Due to the ongoing situation with Covid 19 we have decided that the shareholders **Annual General Meeting** will be conducted as a Zoom meeting at 7:30pm on Friday the 27th of November. Details of how to join this meeting will be sent out nearer the time.

Bob Bulpett – Chairman WAAA

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