

Trap Ground Allotment Association's AGM Newsletter 24 March 2020

Chairman's Report

The main event of the year has been the development of the watering scheme for which we thank Neil McClennan and his excellent team. Otherwise, there are various items to mention:

- The Oxford & District Federation of Allotment Associations is negotiating 21-year leases for the 36 sites around the city which should secure our future use of allotments.
- Our LibDem County Councillor, John Howson, is earmarking his grant for the bridge path to be improved. We await developments.
- The willow pollarding along the northern boundary was suspended as the wet weather made the ground too soft for vehicles. We hope it will resume this autumn. Similarly, requests for trees inside the site to be removed will also have to wait.
- Fruit-tree pruning by Chris Lanczak from Waterperry has been instructive and useful.
- The Harvest Supper was merry and accompanied by a large entry for the photographic competition. The food was particularly delicious.
- Many thanks to the mowing team for keeping the site looking groomed. Please join us if you can; we need a few more in the group.

Tony Hollander

Deputy Chairman's report

Coronavirus precautions and information Many of us have enjoyed getting out on our plots in the recent good weather. The allotments provide valuable exercise and relaxation whilst allowing us to keep a safe distance from other people. The crops that we grow may become increasingly important if there are interruptions in the food supply chain. However, it is essential that we follow Government health advice. We have drawn up a list of simple measures that we believe it is important that members should follow:

- We should all keep the recommended **safe distance** of 2 metres from everyone else other than people we live with. We have put up notices to remind everyone of this important measure. Children should be closely supervised and stay on or near the family plot.
- **The virus can survive for hours and even days on hard surfaces** contaminated by an infected person. The gate keypads are an obvious potential source of infection. **You must use a no-touch technique when opening the lock** and please do not let your children push the buttons without some form of physical barrier. The simplest way of doing this is to use a small plastic bag as a glove whilst opening the gate. Surgical gloves are an alternative. Remember to avoid touching your face with your hands and wash your hands thoroughly both before you leave your house and as soon as you get home.
- As we have no mains water with which to wash our hands on the site, please do not wash your hands in collected rain water which is likely to be contaminated with other bugs. Hand sanitisers can be used if available.
- Do not use other people's tools and please **wear disposable gloves when using communal tools and take them home to dispose of them safely after use.**

Allotment Water Project

At last year's AGM it was unanimously agreed that we should explore the possibility of constructing a reliable source of water for watering our crops, even in the driest summer. A Water Project Group was formed to do this and a presentation of the proposed system was made at a special meeting held for members on 24 November 2019. All members were given the opportunity to vote by email either for or against the construction of the irrigation system. 82 members voted in favour with only one against. They agreed that the project should be funded by increasing allotment fees. Since then we have also received generous loans and gifts to help funding.

A borehole was drilled last August in anticipation of the project going ahead. It has been shown to be capable of producing copious quantities of water which was found to be safe for irrigating our crops.

We have opted to go for a gravity distribution system. The project has been broken down into a number of separate tasks: constructing a steel support for the water tank on top of the shop container, installing the tank on top of the container, making a concrete collar and duct for the borehole, laying overground pipes, constructing and locating troughs and taps evenly round the site, installing a pump in the borehole and solar panels on the roof of the container and laying underground irrigation pipes.

We had planned to have our first working party to lay overground pipes this Saturday but this has had to be cancelled because of the coronavirus pandemic. Work on the system will resume as soon as possible but this may not be for some months or even a year.

Neil MacLennan

Treasurer's report

The 2019 accounts show a margin of income over-expenditure of £1,908. This includes a donation for the water project of £500 for which we wish to express our thanks. There has also been no rent payment to Oxford City Council of £657 in the year due to a failure to collect on their part. Attempts to make this payment have so far failed but it is expected that arrears will at some time be paid. Once these items are taken into the account the net income falls to £751. Hence income has slightly exceeded expenditure in the year. The shop appears to have made a small loss of £81 but this may reflect the difficulty in accurately valuing stocks at the end of the year. It is intended to do a mid-year stock take to keep a better track of the shop finances in 2020. Fees for membership and plots have been doubled in 2020 and 2021 in order to finance the water project. Loans totalling £7,000 have been made by two members and this will facilitate the investment and are greatly appreciated. Jim Moore of Chapman, Robinson and Moore has examined and approved the accounts. His willingness to do this each year is also much appreciated.

Secretary's report

Seeds: It is still possible to order seeds at a 50% discount from Dobies as there is no cut-off date for seed orders. Catalogues and order forms are available from the allotment shop.

Membership cards are not compulsory but are needed to benefit from discounts at Yarnton Nurseries, Burford Garden Company and - new last year - Cassington Nurseries. Current membership cards will expire on 1 May 2020. New cards are available at the allotment shop.

Plant sale and swap Members brought, swapped and bought plants at the allotment shop during normal shop hours in May which worked well with the swapping element proving particularly popular. We'll do the same during all shop opening hours in May 2020.

Allotment rules will be updated to bring them in line with Oxford City Council allotment rules.

Virginia Wallis

Lettings Secretaries report

There are now 47 whole plots, 134 half plots and 24 quarter plots. The bad weather have delayed the usual spring inspection which is scheduled to take place after Easter some time in April, Coronavirus precautions permitting. There are currently 38 people on the waiting list which includes existing plot holders who want to take on an additional half plot.

Roger Mumby-Croft

Website and machinery

I would like to remind people that there is a list of shared equipment which is available for members' use. The list is on the website at <http://www.trapgroundallotments.org.uk/shared-equipment>. Your safety, and the safety of other members, is of paramount importance and so we ask that before you use any piece of equipment you ask to be shown how to use it safely, and that you sign a piece of paper to say that you have been shown how to use it. Once you have been shown how to use a machine, you are able to approach any equipment shed key-holder to borrow their keys to get access to the machines. We don't police whether you have been shown how to use the individual machines - it's your responsibility to only use what you have been shown how to use. The key-holders and people able to demonstrate the use of the machines is on the web page.

Manuals for all the equipment are stored in a folder in the equipment shed, and of course they all have a section on their safe use. You should also familiarise yourself with that advice before you use a machine and make sure you wear sturdy footwear when using the equipment. Also wear please make use of the ear defenders and eye-shields which are available in the shed. Don't fill machines with petrol when the engine is hot, and don't pour petrol out when you are in the shed. Do it outside where any vapour can dissipate rapidly.

When using the strimmer or brush-cutter be aware that it can throw out stones and pieces of plant material at high velocity at just about a young child's head height. Don't use the strimmer within 10 metres of anybody else, and especially watch out for children. This is one reason why our rules state that parents should supervise children on the allotment site at all times.

Please make your own decision about whether you consider Corona Virus to be a sufficient concern that you would prefer not to make use of shared equipment. If you feel the need to wear gloves when using the machinery, feel free to do so, as long as it does not limit your ability to control the machine.

Finally, please treat the equipment with respect and report equipment failures to me - I can be contacted at webmaster@trapgroundallotments.org.uk. I am fed up with finding fermenting grass cuttings in the mowers' grass collectors, left there by inconsiderate users. Please don't do that. The big mower was damaged last year - I found one of the front wheels bent to the side. It has been bent back but the chassis will have been permanently damaged and it will be a weak spot from now on. Take extra care not to damage it again, and let me know if it happens again, so I can address it.

Jonathan Clark

Communal compost and bonfires

After the three main compost bins were repaired last year, we have been able to have the JCB in periodically to turn them over to produce good compost. For small plots this is useful as there is no room for a local bin, although these are very much encouraged too.

Please throw material well up on to the open heap. A good mix of twiggy stuff and green material works well, but no stones nor plastic please.

The central bonfire is best so please avoid individual bonfires on your plot, especially if it is slow-burning and smelly. We try to have a short hot bonfire as necessary, with minimal smoke.

Please do not stack excess material around the wooden compost posts and please, no plastic or polluting materials. Twiggy material such as raspberry canes do compost well and the less we have to burn the better.

Michael Wheale

Allotment shop

The shop had an average year, but made an £80 loss. It is thought that this is due to the approximate nature of the stock taking process. Thanks to the eight-strong band of shop helpers who volunteer for shop duty from March to October.

For now the allotment shop will continue to open (11.00 to 12.00 on Saturdays, 3.00 to 4.00 on Sundays) but not quite as normal. To be on the safe side, please do not go into the shop itself and keep a safe distance (2 metres) from each other and the person in charge of the shop. It would also be helpful if you could have the right money - or a cheque (bring your own pen) - so that any cash is handled as little as possible. Thanks to everyone who kept their distance last weekend. We now have a card reader ready to be installed in the shop so that – preferably - you'll be able to use a debit or credit card to pay for things rather than cash.

Chris Beckett

Photo competition

The theme for last year's photo competition was 'texture'. Voting for the 2020 theme took place at the 2019 Harvest supper but I am struggling to remember what the final outcome was. Please help.

Jonathan Clark