

TRAP GROUND ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

Autumn Newsletter 2009.

Summer.

Sceptics among us doubted the certainty of a “barbecue summer” but, despite the usual assaults by micro and macro predators our crops were only partially discouraged and the mixture of rain and shine seems to have promoted abundant growth and much healthy harvesting.

Access.

Whilst the fence and gates seem to be doing their job, the new push-button keypad is reported to be welcomed with relief and we hope it proves to be effective and convenient.

We have reminded Chiltern Railways of our concern over their policy to close the level crossing and await their considered reply to the case we put in defence of its continued use.

Likewise, the need for our car park is on the County Council’s agenda for the proposed allocation of the land triangle to Phil and Jim school.

The Orchard Pond.

During a dry spell in June we hired an excavator to dig out the new pond and used the spoil to raise the surrounding ground level. After working parties [see on] have cleared the usual debris, the ground will be seeded with grass and the formerly unusable north east corner should become a pleasant recreational area.

Apple, pear and plum trees have been planted, decorative willows will replace some of the old, dead willows removed by the council, and a space left for bee hives. The complete path circuit along the eastern perimeter will include a turning circle by the remaining mature trees which the council will pollard this autumn. Like the southern pond, this one is unlined so water levels fluctuate with the water table.

Our Rules.

We naturally wish to intrude minimally into everyone’s enjoyment of the site, but feel some revisions of our conditions of letting are necessary. With a constant waiting list of twenty or more, the Lettings Secretaries do their best to allocate plots to newcomers as they can.

Their problem is that some people who habitually neglect their plots offer aggressive defence of what the committee considers to be misjudgement of our expectation of a state of reasonable cultivation. The conflict can be embarrassing and prolonged, and the end result is a plot needing major restoration, and a slightly sour taste in the mouth.

At a recent Oxford Allotment Federation meeting enforcement of rules was discussed and the responses to neglected plots shown to be a common problem. The City’s conditions of lease, incidentally, require that 75% of each plot is cultivated; pause for thought.

We propose that our first letter of enquiry as to whether or not the tenant is able to work the plot is sent after four weeks of apparent neglect, and that the second letter - the notice to quit - is sent two weeks later if no satisfactory reply is forthcoming. We will need to debate this and confirm it at the next AGM.

Waste.

John Ashby’s new territory in the NE seems to be a boon for disposal of weeds and surplus foliage. Products of composting will become available, and the drying and burning process seems to be as discreet and effective as it can be. Our thanks to JA for these admirable additions to our facilities. Please follow his instructions and we will keep you posted on the products.

Soil Analysis.

The City's Environmental Health Department cannot advise us about the outcome of the results as they await revised guidelines from the Environment Agency who determine the evaluation of the figures. Apparently lead and other materials are being re-classified, their earlier advice having been over precautionary, and we await their decisions.

Wildlife.

We are doing what we can to reinforce the fence against badgers and rabbits and using bait against the rats. Apart from trying to remove resident rabbits we will complete the installation of the additional two feet of chicken wire over the remaining length of the fence. Deer seem to have been excluded although badgers have not, so we are also strengthening the fence, and repairing it after damage by incursions of determined human intruders.

Machinery.

Thanks to Jonathan Clark for organising the mowing team and to the mowers who keep the main areas looking welcoming. People's individual "lawns" need to be maintained by them, and the motor and push mowers are available for this. In response to requests, we will buy a small tiller to cultivate on a small scale rather than a more robust plough which could restore a badly neglected plot. We thought the latter could be hired as necessary. The existing rotavator produces a good tilth only after the soil has been broken up by other means.

Harvest Supper.

Stuart Skyte has booked St. Margaret's Institute for the evening of Saturday 14th November. He and his committee have devised a few revisions to the customary arrangements this year and will keep us posted.

Plant Sale.

This was a record-breaking event this year, having raised just short of £800. Our thanks to everyone who took the trouble to pot up and label their plants, and to Peter and Carol Jarvis for their hard work pricing and organising and brilliant salesmanship. We also thank the St Margaret's Institute Committee for letting us use the place.

King's Seeds.

Vibeke Mannion asks for all completed seed catalogue orders to be delivered to her at 30, St. Margaret's Road, by Thursday 5th November.

Working Party.

Thanks to those who have been removing glass and so on from the Orchard Pond area. To get it sown with grass seed in the next phase, we need to clear remaining debris, iron out the bumps, and rake it over. Please join us at 10.30 am on Sunday 20th September to make light of quite a big job. A fork, a rake and a pair of gardening gloves are the necessary kit and we will transfer the rubbish to the skip with the tractor and trailer.

The city council will pollard the remaining two large willows in the next few weeks.

Tony Hollander [Plot 69].