



SUNNYSIDE ALLOTMENT SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

www.sunnysideallotments.org.uk
email: info @sunnysideallotments.org.uk

3/2007

When you read the last newsletter, we were in the middle of the driest and warmest spring on record. These last three months have continued to be record breaking but not in the right way for gardeners. This time we have suffered from the wettest July known since records began and although we have been lucky enough not to be under water like many allotments in other parts of the country, conditions have been difficult. Not only has the weather been particularly inclement but we are also having to cope with an infestation of rabbits. They have been enjoying the new green shoots of beans, lettuces, leeks, anything they could find to gnaw and have been seen hiding away among the weeds which have grown very prolifically! Your committee is very concerned about this ongoing problem and you will read below the advice to tenants from our Chairman, Angela Wheeldon and there are also copies of advice in the tea hut about how to cope with rabbits from the head of Capel Manor. If you have any further ideas on how to cope with this problem please get in touch with Angela.

Please also be aware of the big water infrastructure scheme which hopefully will be carried out in November with tenants help. It will benefit us all.

Our annual allotment open day took place recently as part of the National Allotments Week. There was a great deal of preparation, particularly by Angela and Jenny, in organising the Scarecrow competition and the Photographic competition. Despite the gloomy weather we had a good number of visitors, you can read more in the following pages.

Your editor visited the RHS Garden at Wisley recently and would thoroughly recommend the experience. In spite of the wind and the rain, the herbaceous borders were a riot of colour and profusion of blooms and the new installation of the Glasshouse, just recently opened by the Queen, was equal to anything to be found at Kew or the Eden Project. There were several words of gardening wisdom to be seen and I liked this quote, "the flowers of tomorrow are but the seeds of today and yesterday". A good thought to be going on with.

Water infrastructure

SAS proposals to renew the water infrastructure on SS Old and on part of SS New, on behalf of the Council, have been approved by the Finance and Policy Committee. It still has to be agreed by full Council. John Driver has agreed to be Project Manager and we have had to provide a Risk Assessment and Method Statement. The work is planned to take place between 3rd November and 11th. November, the weekend of 3/4th November being the crucial time. Briefly, we will be laying a new pipe from the Grantham Mews gate up to C road with stopcocks to isolate each roadway. The metal pipes on each roadway will then be replaced. In order to avoid future expensive repairs, where the pipe goes under Ivy House Lane, the water will be capped off after the tank on plot A35. Finally we will run a new pipe down the central roadway on SS New to supply the tanks on plots New 6 and New11.

The water will be turned off for the duration of the work and to comply with the Risk Assessment there will be no vehicular access to parts of the site while the work is being carried out. Pedestrian access will be maintained.

This is a major undertaking for the Society. We have to lay about 650 metres of pipe. But it should result in a

robust, flexible and reliable water supply for all of us. A mini-digger will be used to excavate the trench, but we will need a lot of helpers to lay the pipe and backfill. ***Please make a note in your diaries now; the more helpers we have the easier the job.***

Your current Committee Members

Chairman :

Angela Wheeldon 874440

Vice Chairman:

John Driver 862734

Secretary :

Jenny Sippings 865890

Treasurer :

John Powell 878640

Fiona Duck 874334

Patrick Stileman 874457

Brenda Baynes 865853

Ted Dyer 872684

Anna Dolan 870918

Prue Schofield 878559

Rabbits

It seems unlikely that Berkhamsted Town Council will sanction the shooting of rabbits on site, on the grounds of safety. We are still pressing the Council to come to an effective arrangement with Network Rail regarding fencing and/or grassing along the boundary. In the meantime according to all the research we have done, and the people we have spoken to, the only really effective protection against rabbits is netting.

Tenants had to net their plots in the 1970s. The Council has no objection to several tenants banding together to net a block of allotments to reduce the cost, provided that gates are installed to give access to pathways. (G.&M.B. Mannings of Hog Lane, Ashley Green: 866264 can offer a 10% discount on wire mesh rabbit netting and posts for SAS tenants if you collect.)

But an attack on other fronts is called for. We are in touch with the Cats Protection League who are looking for homes for working cats as "an environmentally friendly rodent control service for small holdings and locations such as ours." They catch rodents and rabbits, so the rabbits would not feel safe to settle in the site. We are also considering birds of prey but we are not yet sure if our site is suitable for hawking or falconry.

Also, more rabbits have been seen recently suffering from myxomatosis. It's a horrid disease but it may help to reduce numbers. There is a fungicide Thiram which is commercially available as a rabbit repellent and it pays to clear any area of cover near your plot. Any other ideas would be most welcome.

Tenancy Changes

Goodbye to:

Nicola Fulcher	N46
Errol & Mireille Reilly	N64&65
Jane & Adrian Busnert	N70
Shani & Paul Lee	N69

Welcome to:

Matt Shapland	B146
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Allotment Open Day

Our annual Open Day took place on Sunday 19th August. There was a steady flow of visitors during the day braving the gloom and patches of drizzle!

The Photographic competition proved very popular and we had a varied selection of over 30 photographs on display in the SRT hall. We were very grateful to have professional photographer Colin Sturges judging the pictures, see below for the results. For those of you who missed the display, we will be publishing some of the pictures in next years calendar.

Many allotment holders displayed their creativity in the Scarecrow competition. This was judged by the Town Mayor - Carol Green, who was given a tour of the whole site by our Chairwoman - Angela. The Mayor presented the prizes to the winners and complimented the allotment holders on their talents and the appearance of the two sites.

There were lots of other attractions during the day; the children were entertained with pot painting and the second hand book and tool stall had a steady flow of browsers. As in previous years the produce stall was very popular – it was filled with a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, jams and cakes donated by allotment holders.

Tours of Birtchnells Copse took place throughout the day and the kettles in the Tea Hut were kept constantly boiling, providing refreshments whilst the visitors and gardeners sat and chatted under the Gazebo.

As ever, this type of activity relies on the help of many people, so a big 'Thank You' to all of you that lent a hand – before, during and at the end of the day.

It was a very social and pleasant day and although we are fully tenanted at the moment, there was interest from some of our visitors on being added to the waiting list, and so for that reason alone it was a big success.

Photographic Competition Results

1st Prize:

Freda Earl 'Sunflower in bud'

Highly Commended:

Christine Locke 'My Grandaughter'

Highly Commended:

Andy Dolwin 'Frosty Morning'

Scarecrow Competition Results

1st Prize:

Annabel and Alex Hall N38

Highly Commended:

Sunnyside Rural Trust SRT garden

Pictures from the open day

(with thanks to John driver for recording the events)

1. The winning scarecrow by Annabel and Alex Hall.
2. Scarecrow made of willow - Sunnyside Rural Trust
3. The Mayor presents the prizes for the Scarecrow competition.
4. The winning photographs
- 5, 6, & 7. Some of the other scarecrows to be seen on the Allotments - wonder what the rabbits think of them?!

Dates for your Diary – Working Parties

Saturday and Sunday 3rd-4th November

Monday 5th to Friday 9th November

Saturday and Sunday 10th-11th November

Please report to the Tea Hut on these days



1



2



4



3



5



6



7

**Breaking new ground –
or how to turn a 'forgotten Jungle' into a 'cultivated allotment plot'
By Clive Smith**

Part Three

Bonfires

An allotment holder's divine right? Maybe today, but unlikely tomorrow! Traditionally, perennial weed roots, even rough grass turf is burnt and sin of sin, annual weeds.

What has to be burnt by common consensus are certain diseased crops, and possibly some weeds that have produced seeds e.g. tall grasses, although a good hot aerobic compost heap, can kill even these off. Whatever you do, aim to have as few bonfires as possible (two, maybe three a year is all that is really necessary) and always allow vegetable matter time to dry out first – you'll be amazed how little is left to burn and how quickly it all goes up. Unless very heavy rains persist, bonfire piles do not get saturated throughout and the top quickly dries again – and they can be covered easily with carpet, wood to be burnt or an old tarp. Choose your moment, check the wind direction and try not to annoy your neighbours - or the local townsfolk. Have a good flare-up occasionally if necessary – but don't smoulder heaps of dank vegetation for days on end. (Some allotments already have a strict ban on bonfires at certain times or seasons).

NB ... learn to distinguish potential perennial nuisances... (it takes most newcomers a while learning to spot the devil incarnate at thirty paces!). Bindweed, both field and hedge varieties (convolvulus) come into this category, as does Dock - until you get stung, when its leaf-juice becomes the perfect panacea. Nettles, in the right place, are useful and are a good indication of fertile soil as well as excellent composting matter. Comfrey, perhaps in the same category as nettles, is valued highly by the organic gardener for general composting and making comfrey concentrate liquid feed but having a tap-root akin to Dock. Another character is Horseradish – love it or hate it – very hard to eradicate due to its deep roots. And don't be fooled by Buttercup – remove all traces, it's a fast breeder and if it gets in amongst say, strawberries – move them, dig it out and then dig it out next year too.

Please Note: To offset rising printing costs, an electronic version of future editions of the newsletter will be sent to all those people that supply an email address to Jenny Sippings – (jenny.sippings@ntlworld.com).