Chair's Report 2021

Haslemere Allotment Association

Introduction

This has been a strange, unprecedented year with the COVID pandemic. At this time last year, the Committee had just made the decision to postpone the 2020 AGM which we were then fully expecting to take place that autumn. Now, one year later, we are still not able to meet in person due to COVID-19 restrictions. For this reason, this year's AGM is taking place on 15 April via Zoom instead and I very much hope you can join us.

Despite the COVID situation, it has been a busy year for the Association with lots to report on, including security measures, communal projects and other site improvements.

It has also been a sad year for us. In the autumn we unexpectedly lost Bernd Gauweiler, who had been a plot holder since 2018 together with his wife Dagmar. Bernd had been a huge supporter of the Association and he was heavily involved in communal projects, such as the construction of the greenhouse. He is very much missed by all of us. Many of you will also have known Tina Regan, who ran the Trading Hut with husband John. Tina sadly passed away last summer. And late last year we also lost John Rohan, a long-standing plot holder who will have been a familiar face around the site to many of you.

Thank you

The smooth running of the Association, organisation of events and workdays, the management of projects and general maintenance of the site is totally dependent upon Committee members and other plot holders giving up their time to arrange them and take part, so it is only right to start by thanking each and every one of those who do so for their efforts, which I am sure are appreciated by all members.

In the past year, the Committee has been able to operate largely as normal thanks to meetings held via Zoom. There have been two Committee changes: Ruth Dales has left and her place has been taken by Sean Lewis (plot 33A). Many thanks are due to Ruth for her contribution to the work of the Committee.

Please consider joining the Committee or offering help if you feel that you can. The more volunteers we have, the more we can achieve.

Plot Lettings

In the table below you will find some plot statistics. As you can see, the number of new tenants we have welcomed has halved. We assume this is a Covid effect, as plot holders have appreciated the opportunity to work their plots during lockdown and possibly fewer people have moved property. At the same time the waiting list has ballooned to 70. Shortly before the pandemic the number was in the mid-teens and the waiting time for a plot fell to under a year. We are now warning new applicants that they may have to wait for five years or so for a plot to become available.

Year	Total plots	New tenants	Waiting list
2017	123	9	44
2018	127	15	15
2019	127	7	26

2020	130	18	26
2021	130	10	70

The list of plot holders and the waiting list used to be recorded on a spreadsheet held and updated by the secretary of the Committee. This information has now been migrated to a free application called Airtable. We are also using Airtable to record any permissions granted to a plot holder – to erect a shed or greenhouse or plant a tree, for example – and to record any warning notices they may have been sent. All members of the Committee can access Airtable either on their laptop or via an app on their phones, so they are able to check information when out on the site. The plot letting team can also update records themselves without having to ask the secretary to do it for them.

In the last year we have migrated the website and email hosting to Eco Hosting which says it provides 'carbon neutral web hosting based entirely in the UK, powered by renewable energy'. The service is cheaper than our previous host, and the webmail search functionality a considerable upgrade.

Events and Charity

Covid restrictions have limited what we have been able to achieve this year. However, the plant sale/swap held in May was a great success, with over £400 raised in support of Havelock Primary School in Southall. Vinka Reeves organised the event with help from other volunteers and she and Anne Uwechia are planning to organise it again this year, some time in May.



Thanks are also due to Vinka for organising manure deliveries and Trading Hut orders during lockdown. Vinka has also joined the Committee of Ealing and Hanwell Allotments Association, which is responsible for the Trading Hut.

We could not have our summer barbecue last year because of the Covid situation and it is too early to tell whether we can have it this year, but we can hope.

Site Maintenance

Firstly, I want to thank the site maintenance team consisting of John McArthur (Plot 14A) and Alan Raine (Plot 29A) for their work in keeping the site well maintained and improving its condition and appearance. The team plays a crucial role by organising repairs and maintenance, cutting the grass on main paths, looking after communal plots and checking the water tanks and taps.

Ian Hayes, who joined the Committee in 2019, is co-ordinating the team.

Here are some of the main maintenance activities:

- Skips
    - Two skips were hired at a cost of £336 each. The skips were full to overflowing very quickly, causing a few problems. We hope to avoid this in future by closer monitoring of skip use.
    - The next skip delivery is scheduled for April.
- Tree surgery
    - The large communal cherry tree near plot 5A was pruned and reduced in height by a professional tree surgeon at a cost of £530. This was paid for by Pathways.
    - Bernd Gauweiler carried out a lot of pruning on the plum trees on the communal plots and used the prunings to create dry hedging for wildlife on plot 61.
    - Sean Lewis, who joined the Committee last year, has recently pruned the two apple trees on the communal plots.
- Communal trolleys
    - The trolleys have had numerous repairs and parts replacements over the year, mainly due to them being overloaded or being used for large loads that bend the sides. Over £220 was spent on equipment maintenance, and most of that was on trolley repairs. Please try to avoid loading too much into them: each wheel costs £30 to replace or repair. Also remember that the trolley sides fold down to create a flat bed.
    - Two more sturdy trolleys are on order for delivery in April.
- New entrance signs
    - We now have two smart new entrance signs by the gates, featuring an eye-catching design by plot holder Julie Perkins. The manufacture and installation of the signs was paid for by a charitable donation.





Plot Inspections

Full plot inspections, which are normally carried out twice a year as part of our self-management agreement with Pathways, were not carried out last year. The Committee will resume plot inspections this year with the first inspection expected to take place in May. Please read the Cultivation Guidelines. There are good reasons why we conduct plot inspections.

We need to make sure that plots:

1. Are put to good use, with the plot holder as the main contributor – this is only fair on the people who are on the waiting list, even more so now demand for plots has risen and new applicants must wait many years to get a plot.
2. Do not create a nuisance to other plot holders, for example due to seeding weeds, trees or structures casting shade or unsightly rubbish.
3. Do not become a financial or otherwise burden to the Association after a plot is vacated.

Ecological Survey

In September we were visited by Georgina Knibbs from the Ecology Consultancy. Georgina was documenting wildlife habitats and species that exist on the site and is examining links with neighbouring green spaces that provide a foothold for different plants and animals in our area. The purpose of the survey, which was commissioned by Ealing Council, is to create a local action plan for wildlife and improve the habitats in our green spaces locally.

She was happy to see several ponds on plots along with wildflower plantings, bug houses and fruit trees. These various features encourage pollinators and other fauna to take up residence on our site.

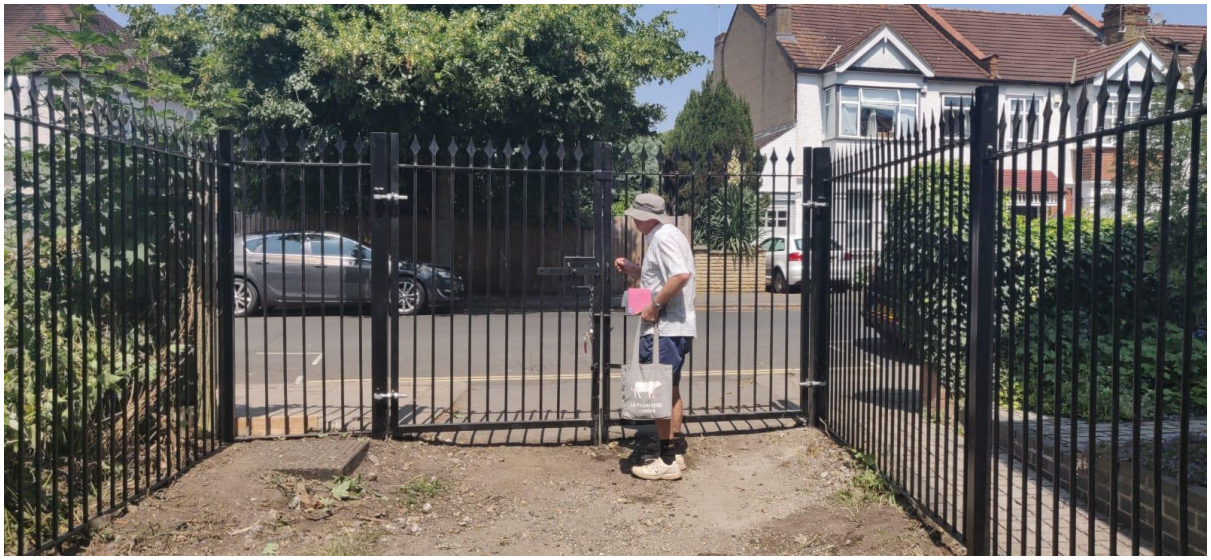
Site Security

In 2019 we started to experience regular break-ins to the site, with damage done to sheds, greenhouses and plants. In conjunction with the local police and Pathways, we have taken several steps to improve protection of the site:

- A new gate was installed in the alley behind Midhurst Road, leading to Haslemere Avenue.
- A new taller gate was installed at the Haslemere entrance.
- New taller railings were installed between us and the Trading Hut.
- A section of 6m close board fencing was replaced on the Chalfont Way side.

The total cost for the measures was £10,579. However, Pathways agreed for the costs to come out of our sinking fund and therefore our operating finances are not affected.

The security situation seems to have improved since implementing these measures, particularly since five youths were apprehended and cautioned by the police.



Plans have been drawn up to replace the Midhurst gate. However, on consulting with the neighbouring residents near the gates, some concern was expressed about the visual impact of raising the Midhurst gate. The Committee and Pathways are discussing a way forward in this case.

Communal Projects

Covis restrictions have meant that it has not been possible to organise proper “community days”. However, the Committee has managed to meet in small numbers to continue with the plans for the community plots, focusing on the half plot 61b nearest the Midhurst Road gate, where a new shed has been erected and a new composting toilet is in the process of construction.

The shed costs totalled £600 for purchase and construction and will be used for HAA communal items currently stored in the small decrepit shed on that plot. The small shed will then be dismantled and that area transformed into new trial beds – the ones on plot 1b having proved very successful.





The composting toilet costs to date total £1,368, offset by an award of £500 from Ealing Council Ward Forum and a contribution of £650 from Pathways.

Committee

Johan Ditmar, Chair (Plot 36A)
Rachel Walkowiak, Vice Chair (Plot 62B)
Colin Hewson, Secretary (Plot 42A)
Ann Tierney, Treasurer (Plot 58A)
Caro Sanders, Committee Member (Plot 41A)
Ian Hayes, Committee Member (Plot 23A)
Orla Kelly, Committee Member (Plot 41B)
Sean Lewis, Committee Member (Plot 33A)