# Chair's Report 2024

## Haslemere Allotment Association

### Introduction

It has been another busy year on Haslemere, with improvements to the communal areas and the site overall. As a result of these improvements and the efforts of our plot holders, Haslemere Allotments won first prize in its class in the Cultivating Ealing 2023 competition for the first time in its history. This was the third time we entered the competition after being awarded Highly Commended and third prize the two previous years.



Glendra Read and Clive Herring visited our site on behalf of Cultivate Ealing to hand us a trophy with our name engraved on it. The first engraving on the cup is for Jubilee Allotments in 1980, so the competition has been going for a long time and we are very proud to have won it.

This has been my last year as Chair for this Committee as I have served my fifth and final term permitted under our constitution. I became Chair in 2018, only a month after taking on my plot which was certainly a deep dive learning experience! It has been an enjoyable 6 years, not least because of the great people I have had the pleasure being on the Committee with over the years.

### Thank You

The smooth running of the Association, the organisation of events and workdays, the management of projects and general maintenance of the site is 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 those who do so for their efforts, which I am sure are appreciated by all members.

Please consider joining the Committee, or offering help if you feel that you can. The more volunteers we have, the more we can achieve. And aside from myself as Chair, several other members of the Committee have come to their final term and are stepping down, so we need new people to join.

## Plot Lettings

| Year | Total plots | New tenants | Waiting list |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2024** | 132 | 11 | 85 |
| **2023** | 132 | 9 | 85 |
| **2022** | 131 | 13 | 81 |
| **2021** | 130 | 10 | 70 |
| **2020** | 130 | 18 | 26 |
| **2019** | 127 | 7 | 26 |
| **2018** | 127 | 15 | 15 |
| **2017** | 123 | 9 | 44 |

This year we welcomed 11 new tenants, two more than last year. Two tenants were evicted for failing to cultivate their plots. The number of people on the waiting list remains unchanged at 85.

The number of plots also remains unchanged at 132. There are 8 whole plots, with the remainder being half plots. It is Pathways' policy that when whole plots change hands they should be split in half, so the maximum number of plots will eventually be 140.

The gardening club is now established and we think it is a great success, with the lovely unintended consequence of connecting these new plot holders with each other every year - creating new links in our allotment community

All of last year's cohort have now graduated to plots and 11 new GC members are starting for 2024.

## Events and Charity

Once again, we held a very successful plant sale, blessed with glorious weather, and plot holders raised an amazing £450 through their donations of plants and purchases. The proceeds have been donated to the Ealing & Hanwell Allotment Association to support their activities in running the trading hut and organising the annual show. This year's sale is provisionally planned for Saturday 11 May.





We also had our third annual summer barbeque since the pandemic, in July. It was a lovely event and despite the wet weather we a good turnout, complete with a face painter and the burgers and sausages supplied by top-class butchers, Lidgate's.

Vinka Reeves (Plot 43) organised the collection of surplus summer produce with help from several volunteers. This surplus was distributed to several Ealing Soup Kitchens and used in the preparation of meals and food parcels for the less fortunate residents of Ealing. This year we are partnering up with a charity called City Harvest, who are working with allotments in London to donate their surplus fruits and vegetables to 27 charities in Ealing. More details about the scheme will be sent out later in the season.





In this past year we have also seen a visit from students from OpenEaling watercolour class, which is attended by plot holder Gillian Brown (Plot 34B). Not wanting to pause during the summer break, they agreed amongst themselves to meet on our allotments for painting en plein air.

More recently, we had a visit from 11 children from St Paul's Playschool. Kate and Michael Horn (Plots 4A and 5A) showed them the site and their plots in more detail. We look forward to welcoming them again to see another season and learn more about how plants grow and where our food comes from.



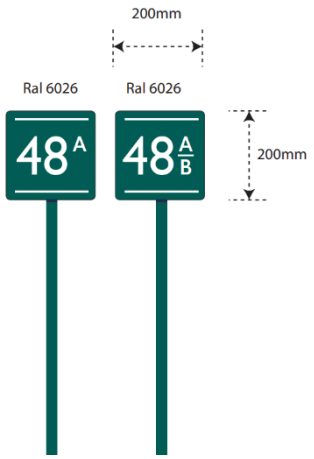
## Site Maintenance

Firstly, I want to thank John McArthur (Plot 14A) for his work in keeping the site well maintained by cutting the grass and looking after communal plots. I would also like to thank Ian Hayes (Plot 23A) for looking after our water supply for maintaining the trolleys, and Nick Lee (Plot 60B) and Ronan Hammond (Plot 46A) for carrying out repairs and adding water tanks.

Here are some of the main maintenance activities:

- New plot signs

  As announced at the last AGM, the Committee organised the installation of new plot signs. The total cost for the signs was £3,356 + VAT of which £1,100 was covered by an external donation. We do ask plot holders to look after the sign on their plot and take care not to damage it, as replacement is expensive.




- New gate locks

  The padlocks on both Midhurst and Haslemere gates were replaced after receiving increasing complaints from plot holders that the locks were difficult to operate. On three occasions, plot holders had to be "rescued" by members of the Committee after they were unable to unlock the gate to leave! After much discussion, it was decided to replace the padlocks with a different type and issue new keys to all plot holders. Several types of locks were evaluated, and the decision taken to purchase and install ABUS 83/55 locks. These are modern high-security padlocks that are easier to operate (and don't require a key to close) and more resistant to picking and other forms of forced entry compared to the previous ones. The total cost for 3 new locks (including 1 spare) plus 290 keys was £1,144.

- Midhurst gate

  The Committee arranged for the Midhurst gate to be renovated and instructed Urban Iron, a local metal fabricator, to undertake this work. This involved (1) removing the railing panel to the left of gates to repair wasted iron at the bottom; (2) taking the gates away for straightening, making square, and repairing bent bars, as well as shortening gate leaves to give ground clearance for opening; and (3) to replace the rather unattractive wooden gate on the right by a panel in the same fabrication. Urban Iron also straightened and levelled the heavy gate posts.






All metal work was subsequently primed and painted in Fern Green – the original colour. The total cost for this renovation was £3,670, half of which is paid via an external charitable contribution. In a next stage, the metal panels running alongside the path behind the gate will be restored and painted. This is however a costly project and will be done gradually.

- Fencing

  The Committee has instructed Harrow Fencing to replace approximately 8m of rotten fencing near Chalfont Way by new closed board fencing with concrete posts and gravel boards.

  Harrow Fencing will also install 36m of green metal mesh fencing alongside the boundary near Chalfont Way, in front of the current fence which is owned by the neighbouring houses rather than the association. Some of these resident fences are dilapidated and one contains an unauthorised gate. Installing the metal fencing will not only improve security, but also prevent residents from encroaching onto allotment land. The cost for this metal fence is £3,000, which will be paid out of our sinking fund.

- Bamboo removal

  In May last year, the Committee organised the removal of a large invasive bamboo from plot 32A. This bamboo had grown so large, and the root system had grown so deep that hand digging was no longer an option and hiring an excavator was the only option. In the end it took many hours of digging and help from several volunteers from the Committee to clear the area. The total cost, including disposal of the bamboo, was £558, which comes out of our maintenance budget that Pathways have set aside. We obviously don't want a repeat of this and have updated the tenancy guidelines to forbid the planting of bamboo and other invasive plant species.





- Waste Disposal
  - In October, one skip was hired for plot holders to use at a cost of £384. We are planning to hire another skip in autumn.
  - More rubbish was collected after dismantling and clearing dilapidated sheds from plot 45B and 72B (one of which was situated on the edge of the plot and made the side pass impassable) after they had been vacated by the previous plot holders. This cost £403.
  - Waste removal is very expensive and takes a lot of effort - particularly as skips have to be managed by volunteers to ensure that they are loaded efficiently - so plot inspections do focus on rubbish accumulation.





- Asbestos Removal
    - The Committee conducted a survey of the entire site and identified three plots with asbestos.
    - This asbestos was removed by the specialist company Advance Clearance at a cost of £780 which was paid by Pathways against our maintenance budget.



- Paths

    At last year's AGM, the poor state of some of the paths was raised and it was agreed at the meeting that John McArthur would carry out a survey of uneven paths that pose a risk of injury, or where plot holders had encroached on them. Some path issues highlighted in the report have been addressed since, and the Committee will focus on the state of paths at upcoming plot inspections and raise issues with plot holders where required. The Committee have also spoken to a specialist contractor to potentially address some of the issues, a decision on this will be made in the future.

    We do remind plot holders that the ground surface on our allotments will not always be even and care should be taken when walking around the site. The maintenance of allotment paths in a safe and good state is the responsibility of all the allotment plot holders. Each plot holder is responsible for the paths surrounding his or her plot, shared with adjacent plot holders; and all plot holders are jointly responsible for the maintenance of communal paths (such as entrances or main paths).

- Tree surgery
    - Various apple and cherry trees on the communal plots were pruned and reduced in height. Several other trees were felled that were either diseased or dead.
    - A large apple tree was removed on plot 72B after the plot had been vacated. This tree had grown too tall and made large part of the plot not suitable for cultivation.
    - In total, £1,914 was spent on tree surgery by the association which was paid for by Pathways out of our maintenance budget.





- As in previous years, a “chipping day” was organised to let plot holders dispose of their prunings without the need to burn them. This is not only better for the environment, but also minimises the impact that bonfires have on the surrounding households.

- Water
  - Mains water supply is available between 1 May to 30 September, but in practise the water is available beyond that period if the weather permits. Switching on water is not a quick job: the mains water tap is by the Haslemere Gate and is accessed by lifting a cover using lifting keys. Once the water has been turned on, all the taps and tanks across the site must be checked. This year, one of the standpipes had developed a leak over winter and had to be repaired before we could switch on the water again. The Committee would like to thank Ian Hayes for switching on/off the water and Nick Lee for fixing the leak.



  - We are continuing to look to increase water availability by increasing water tank capacity through joining tanks together. Five extra tanks have been installed across the site over the past year, and more will be added this year.
  - We remind plot holders that we pay for all water used on the site on a metered basis; the more we spend on water, the less we have to spend on upkeep of the site generally. We would urge all plot holders to install guttering to their sheds and greenhouses and connect to a water butt to supplement the mains supply.

## Trading Hut

The Searchlight trading hut, which is situated right next to the Haslemere Gate, is undergoing some changes. Thanks to a number of volunteers organised by Vinka the trading hut is being tidied up and will become a more pleasant place to get all your horticultural needs.

The Hut has been around since 1917 and offers cooperative trading (basically competitive prices) on a range of useful products for the allotment or garden. You have to become a member at a cost of £2 for the year, this then allows you to buy any of the products on sale for example multi-purpose compost costs £3.30 for 40 litres.

The Hut is run by Ealing & Hanwell Allotment Association and is separate from Haslemere Allotments itself. There is a concern that if people like us don't use it the Hut might be lost, and this would be a shame. A number of people believe it could be a wonderful local asset and have started to work on the site to improve the whole appearance. It would be wonderful if you wanted to help or entry their annual flower and veg show or just become a member and buy products.

Hopefully, you will notice a change in the coming months new fencing, new signs and a wider range of stock.









If you would like to help out please speak to Vinka Reeves (Plot 43). For more information about Ealing & Hanwell Allotment Association and the trading hut, please visit their new website: www.ealinghanwellallotments.org.uk.

## Communal Projects

We had a community workday most months this year - don't forget they are held on the first Saturday morning of every month, and all are welcome! Thanks to everyone who comes to help. A lot was achieved this year - supported by cakes, tea, coffee (big thanks to Gillian!) and much banter:

- A new communal shed was added on 48a to store teamaking equipment, barbeque, and a gardening library.
- Ornamental beds were added to 48a and 61b using plants donated by the RHS.



- Some extremely neglected plots were cleared of the worst of waste and junk to make the tasks for the new plot holder less monumental.
- Trees and hedges were trimmed, tree clippings transferred to the shredding area.





Plans for this coming year:

- Install further water butts on communal greenhouse.
- Annual summer BBQ event on plot 48A.

In addition, we have ongoing maintenance of the communal/gardening club structures, keeping trees and shrubs under control, and odd jobs that pop up from time to time – so there's always something you can help out with!

The composting toilet on 61B is a great success - much appreciated on our BBQ day and by parents of small children. Don't forget you can have the access number if you are prepared to go on the rota to keep it clean and tidy.

Shelf space in the communal greenhouse on 48a was rented out to 12 plot holders for 12 months, apart from the day of the annual BBQ in the Summer when the tables and stools are needed. The lucky 12 were selected by ballot in January and the nominal rent paid goes towards the upkeep of the greenhouse.

## Committee

Johan Ditmar, Chair (Plot 36A)
Orla Kelly, Vice Chair (Plot 41B)
Stuart Alexander, Treasurer (Plot 42B)
Colin Hewson, Acting Secretary (Plot 42A)
Caro Sanders, Committee Member (Plot 41A)
Debbie Coates, Committee Member (Plot 47A)
Letizia Tiley, Committee Member (Plot 50B)
Lisa Hammond, Committee Member (Plot 46A)
Vinka Reeves, Committee Member (Plot 43)