

Chair's annual review 2021

What do we do?.....

I'd like to open by reminding everyone that the Allotment Society Committee are all volunteers and the Society's principal concerns are the well-being of the allotments and promoting the interests of our members.

We manage the day to day running of the allotments on behalf of Richmond Council and organise events such as the Open Day & Annual Show, Sunflower growing and photography competitions, tool sharpening services, visits from the Twickenham Bee Keeping Society and the occasional talk, arrange compost deliveries from Richmond Park, and logs and mulch deliveries, operate the Trading Shed with garden supplies at discounted prices, keep the communal grass areas in Hertford neatly mown, obtain supplies of the Kings Seeds catalogue with a 50% discount on all seeds, and circulate a monthly newsletter – so quite a lot when listed out like this!

No doubt there are more things we could do – so please do feel free to suggest any activities you think others may be interested in. One plot holder recently suggested we have a seed/seedling swapping event in May – so we plan to give this a try at our Open Day in May 22.

I'd like to thank all the Committee and numerous other plot holder volunteers for their time and hard work over the past year and under such challenging circumstances. As a team we aim to keep the 5 East Sheen sites running as smoothly as we are able. We are always looking for fresh ideas and new people who can help us on our journey – so if you think that you might be able to contribute in any way – please let your site rep know, or contact me directly. We would be very pleased to hear from you.

I would particularly like to come back to the monthly newsletter edited by Rachel Walker. This is packed with relevant allotment news and highlights what is in Season that month along with recipe ideas, allotment tips and growing inspiration. We are really lucky to have such a valuable resource.

Gardening through the pandemic.....

During all the difficulties and stress of the past 18 months, we have been immensely fortunate that working on our allotments was deemed as exercise and thus we were allowed to 'escape' lockdown in the early months of the pandemic last year.

We did have to modify how the Shed operated though. After having to close completely initially, a click & collect service was set up by Sheena (joint shed manager) which allowed us to supply most of the usual items sold. We are now back to normal opening operations between 11.00 – 12.00pm at weekends. The card reader facility has proved a great success with most of our sales now being made electronically.

Last year we also introduced a Direct Debit facility for paying/renewing your Society membership, the numbers of plot holders taking advantage of this continues to grow as it saves having to remember to complete a renewal form each year. It also reduces the administration time for the membership secretary.

We currently have 158 society members with 116 paying by direct debit

I read recently that applications for allotments doubled during the pandemic and the national average waiting time for available plots is 18 months. If you apply to the Council for an allotment in East Sheen, you will find that the waiting list is actually closed until the wait time is reduced to 5 years!

Even though we were not allowed to re-let any plots from mid March to mid August in 2020, we still welcomed circa 22 new plot holders over the past year and I would like to particularly thank Helen Lawrence our joint Secretary for her time showing and re-letting vacant plots.

We obviously missed holding our traditional Open Days and Annual Show, however it has been great to see plot holders and their friends or families having picnics and gatherings on their plots over the summer.

Getting back to normality.....

In the Spring, the Society organised a collection of non-compostable woody waste material that plot holders had been storing since the bonfires ban in 2019. Thanks to everyone who held on to this material awaiting the collection day. I know this was appreciated by plot holders, and we plan to do the same again over the next couple of months.

The society also liaises with Richmond Park and organises ad hoc bulk deliveries of their surplus mulch/compost and I'd like to thank Donal and more recently Richard Blackwell for arranging this.

This year was bad for potato and tomato blight – the wet conditions during the growing months were ideal conditions for the blight spores to quickly infect the plants. We do try and alert plot holders to these problems through the newsletter. We urge everyone to try and grow blight resistant varieties if they can.

At this year's AGM I'd like you to consider voting on giving to Charity again as we did in 2018.

FiSH and Glass Door Homeless Charity are local charities who we have supported in the past, but please feel free to suggest any others for consideration at the AGM.

In September we held our Annual Show which was our first event for over 2 years. As usual there were lots of impressive entries into the vegetable, fruit, and flower categories along with a plant sale, children's activities and a raffle. We tried a new idea of plot holders bringing their own picnics with the society providing cakes and tea

Thank you to all the volunteers who gave their time to making this day fun for all and to everyone who visited and joined in.

And the cup winners were.....

The Best Show Person (person with the most points in the Produce and Flowers categories) was John Hynd

The Plot of the Year was won by Dino Franz and Sarah Willard

The Best Newcomers were Cath Brooks and Ben Gothard.

On behalf of the Society, I would like to congratulate all five of them for their impressive allotmenting.

Committee Changes

Halina Kessler (Events Manager) wants to step back from organising our events, but very much intends to carry in a supporting role. If you would like to know more about what's involved, please speak to either Halina or myself.

Natasa Bojkovic joined the committee to help Helen Lawrence as Joint Allotment Secretary, but due to other commitments has decided not to stand again. This is a very interesting role and Helen will be very happy to let you know more about it, if you feel you could help share this role.

Sheena Clark (Joint Shed Manager) has decided not to stand for re-election at the AGM. Sheena did a great job organising the alternative Shed arrangements during the lockdowns and made sure there were sufficient volunteers to run the Shed during normal operating times.

If anyone is interested in helping manage the Shed rota and other ad hoc duties, please let me or one of the Committee know.

John Bentham stood down as site rep for the Triangle and Moira Thomson kindly volunteered to take up this role. I'd like to thank John for all his input on top of a very hectic and demanding day job.

In October 2020 Derek Lawrence-Brown stood down as site rep for his side of the Hertford Avenue site, with Dino Franz taking up the reins. Derek was on the Committee for about 15 years, with 5 of those years as Chair of the Society and also as deputy chair for the Borough of Richmond Allotment Group. I would like to thank Derek for his many years of support and contribution to the allotments.

John Padgett

Chair BHAS (East Sheen Allotments)