

Hackney Allotment Society
Minutes of the Annual General Meeting
Held Wednesday 7th October 2009 St Mary's Community Centre N16

Present: David Shenton (Chair), Sue Carling (Secretary, minutes), Jackie Breakwell (Treasurer), Jon Fuller (President)

Committee members: June Lancaster, Amanda Scope, Phillip Pearson, Joss Bany, Jessica Datta, Martin Klucowicz, Neil Irons, Henrietta Soames

Plot holders: Aden Terrace 7, Church Walk 3, Overbury Street 1, Springhill 7, Spring Lane 5, St Kilda's 1, Springdale Rd 1 member

Waiting list: 7 + 4 later arrivals.

Apologies

Apologies received from Sarah Kissack, Elsa Hamaz, Eugene Clerkin, Guy Dehn, Diana Whitworth, Chris Waller.

Matters Arising

It was noted that June Lancaster (site rep Church Walk) had attended and her name had been omitted from the minutes of the AGM 2008.

Report from the Chair

David Shenton presented his report to the meeting:

On 2nd and 3rd of February this year, London saw one of the heaviest snowfalls in 18 years. Boris Johnson said "It's the right kind of snow, just the wrong quantities" as Hackney ground to a standstill. This late deep winter was followed almost immediately by a very warm spring. All the blossoms and insects arrived at the same time, there was a massive pollination this year. Most of us have seen the best ever red and blackcurrants, gooseberries, plums and sloes.

I even had 18 bunches of grapes from my little vine.

Annual Progress Reports from the Sites:

Each site has reported a peaceful year on the whole, with, and I quote, greatly loved, well maintained plots. Probably influenced by programmes on the telly, a lot of site holders have abandoned back-breaking gardening and have invested in raised beds instead, to good effect and because communal areas, during well organised site-clearing days, are being looked after too, sites look very good from outside the fence.

Excellent stuff!

The forecasted 'Barbecue Summer' didn't quite pan out as you all know, and the staycation most of us were forced to take this year because of the credit crunch, turned out to be wet and muggy. Everything grew though, including the weeds.

Most site reps report on the increase in wild life this year... both friends AND foes: foxes, frogs, flocks of wood pigeon, massive bright orange slugs... tons of native ladybirds and the alien harlequin type.

A noticeable increase in inner city butterfly and bee numbers this year on the plots, despite the general decline... plus sightings of brand new enemies which include the rosemary beetle (*Crysolina Americana*), a golden looking ladybird type thing that kills rosemary, lavender sage and all woody herb bushes.

On our site there is a tiny black bug with a bite that is so virulent... some people call them NO-SEE-UMS.

From June on I usually go to my plot covered in Jungle Formula but this one bit me on my eyelid and my whole face ballooned out for 2 days. I've tried to discover exactly what this insect is and even after consulting with friends in the bughouse at London zoo, all I can come up with is the ORIUS, a man-introduced thrip bio-control. If anybody knows any better – or can suggest a repellent – please let me know.

Specific Site Reports

Aden Terrace

A dangerous section of high fencing has been replaced after much council chasing by Sue.

Church Walk

The only critical observation made by your rep is that a bit more boundary control is needed in terms of trimming and cutting back any overhang from your plot.

Leaside

Leaside has become, at long last, a great community site. Plot holders are now working with a team spirit organising bulk compost delivery, shed sort-outs, putting up gutters and installing rain barrels, holding barbecues and have even installed a straw-box loo behind the aforementioned shed.

Overbury Street

This site has suffered extreme dehydration throughout August because Clancy Docwra (replacing Victorian water mains) cut off the water supply completely. It's been quite a job tracking down who was responsible... I gather that's all settled now. Still, not much joy to plot holders who could only watch their lovely crops die of thirst.

Queensbridge

Queensbridge, too, suffers from water shortage problems... there isn't a supply on site there at all, and plot holders still have to rely on clever ways to catch as much rainfall as possible.

St Kilda's

St Kilda's has got rid of the non-too-safe brick raised beds and has designed and replaced them with new wooden ones.

Springdale Road

Springdale's year has been, I am assured, a very positive one. They are especially enjoying their new fencing and have managed to gain access to a neighbour's garden to cut back a 15ft hedge which was causing severe shading problems.

Springhill

I'm afraid I have had no annual report from this site.

Spring Lane

More repaired fencing enjoyment on this site too, plus a mended pump.

Thanks to all our site reps who have obviously been doing a great job keeping an eye on the security, maintenance and general upkeep on all these sites. If you don't know who your site rep is, you should find out tonight. Any Committee queries you have should be addressed to them in the first instance.

Well done all.

Site Figures and Waiting List

The Society has 114 full size plots, 11 half plots and 2 raised beds:

Aden Terrace 26

Church Walk 8

Leaside 17

Overbury 8 + 1 raised bed

Queensbridge 2 and 1 half

St Kilda's 4 + 1 raised bed

Springdale Road 4

Spring Hill 33 + 7 halves

Spring Lane 16 + 3 halves

The number of members on the waiting list is 193 (this time last year was almost 300). It's coming down, but as only 9 plots were relet this year, the Committee has decided to keep the waiting list closed until the numbers become more realistic.

Some plots have been split into two for gardeners who are finding a full plot too difficult to cope with... and some split plots have been rejoined.

As we suggest each year, let the Committee know if you discover a potentially useful site, soil, not concrete preferably – some access and safety to be considered.

Although only 5 Neglected Plot Letters have been sent out this year, we had a complaint that the wording was too harsh and could be upsetting to some people. This letter, in my opinion, should wake you up to the fact that your messy plot has been noticed and something has to be done about it, and a no-nonsense letter is needed. Anyway the Committee has had another look at it and have made it that bit kinder and friendlier looking... but the message remains the same: Use it or lose it.

Thirty Years of HAS

Thirty years ago, in 1979, an article appeared in the 'Hackney People's Press', a now defunct free radical paper. The article was written about the borough having empty land and wanting to find a use for it. It was written by a man called Ashley Godfrey who worked in the Planning department. Some locals responded to the article suggesting allotments and an open meeting at the Town Hall was arranged.

I've been in contact with 2 of our members, who said they would try to get here tonight, who were at that meeting and who indeed formed a committee, the original Hackney Allotment Society Committee.

The very first site was in a road off Mare Street... the Committee held a ballot to see who would get it – and it went to 2 of the frailest old ladies who looked the least likely to be able to develop it... The Council grabbed it back soon after.

BUT it went on from there: Springfield, I believe was the first of the larger sites – and others were collected on the way.

You lot wouldn't be at this meeting tonight if it wasn't for this pioneering group of veg growers.

We have Ashley Godfrey, the Hackney Planning Officer to thank as our godfather... and, hopefully here tonight, Jon Fuller (our President) and Chris Waller so... on our 30th Anniversary ... maybe a round of applause?

Lastly:

I am very impressed by the Society's website. It is always up-to-date with the things we're up to. It is very nice looking, sleek and professional... and one thing I like a lot is by clicking the Google map that shows the location of my Leaside plot, an advert pops up which says "BOOK HOTEL NOW".

David Shenton then gave a vote of thanks to Sue Carling who has held the post of secretary for 11 years and is standing down at the AGM.

Questions and Comments on the Chair's Report

Phillip Pearson gave a verbal report on Spring Hill site to the meeting. During the year there has been damage to the gate and boundary fences due to work carried out by contractors on behalf of Thames Water. The Council have now taken responsibility for the repairs.

It was noted that the longest standing plot holder present tonight was Tim Maby who had held a plot at Aden Terrace for 24 years.

Treasurer's Report

Jackie Breakwell presented the statement of accounts and reported that income is reduced from membership fees as the waiting list is closed. Interest from the investment account is also down due to the current economic climate.

Questions and Comments to the Treasurer

Tim Maby asked the Treasurer how the accumulated capital might be used. The Treasurer explained that this could be spent appropriately for the benefit of the Society and any ideas and requests would be considered and decided upon by the Committee at the monthly meetings.

Election of Officers and Committee Members

Penny Miller was unanimously elected as **Chairperson**. Proposed Jessica Datta, seconded Neil Irons

June Lancaster was unanimously elected as **Secretary**. Proposed Sue Carling, seconded Neil Irons

Jackie Breakwell was unanimously re-elected as **Treasurer**. Proposed Neil Irons, seconded Joss Bany

Henrietta Soames was unanimously elected **Vice-chair**. Proposed Sue Carling, seconded Jackie Breakwell

Amanda Scope was re-elected as **Newsletter** editor and elected as **Vice- Secretary**

Maggie Henton and Bob Geater were re-elected as **auditors**.

Joss Bany was re-elected as Committee member without portfolio

Site Representatives

Aden Terrace: Martin Kluowicz was re-elected.

Church Walk: June Lancaster was re-elected.

Leaside Road: Neil Irons, Guy Dehn, Diana Whitworth were re-elected.

Overbury Street: Anna Harding & Amanda Scope were elected.

Queensbridge Road: Phillip Turner was elected.

Spring Hill: Jessica Datta & Phillip Pearson were re-elected and Emily Mytton was elected.

Spring Lane: Simon Hughes was elected.

St Kilda's Road: Henrietta Soames was re-elected.

Springdale Road: Annie Wilson was re-elected.

The Chair thanked the site reps standing down, especially Lorraine Cooper from the waiting list covering Queensbridge Rd, Eugene Clerkin from Spring Hill, Gavin Everall from Spring Lane.

Phillip Pearson acknowledged the important work of all Committee members during the year.

Sue Carling thanked David Shenton for his work as Chair during the year.

Plot Awards

Plot inspections were held in July; criteria for the awards were variety of produce, creativity, productivity, most improvement.

Aden Terrace: best plot 5 – Chris Coe

N16 Small sites: best plot St Kilda's plot 1 – Marie McShea

E5/E8 small sites: best plot Overbury Street Plot 2 – Anna Harding

Leaside Road: best plot 18 – Hilaire Kerr and Jack Eldon

Spring Lane: best plot 14 – Rowena Altheer

Spring Hill: best plot 36 – Sophie Matthias

David Shenton presented certificates and gift vouchers personally to Rowena Altheer and Jack Eldon who were present at this meeting.

Organic Seed Order

Sarah Kissack will be organising a combined seed order for those interested, catalogues from the Organic Gardening Catalogue are available at the meeting. Orders are to be emailed through to Sarah, collection will be from Sarah's house.

Any Other Business

Vehicle Access to Spring Hill Site

Access by car has been prevented since the Parks Department changed the lock earlier this year and have been reluctant to give access. Jessica Datta, the site rep, agreed to take this up further with John Wade, Head of the Parks Dept, L.B. Hackney.

The Society's 30th Anniversary

Thanks to Jessica Datta and in particular her daughter, for the slide show provided at this meeting. The photographs of the sites included some historical photos of the official opening of the Spring Hill site in 1984 by Mayor, Ken Hanson.

Jon Fuller, the President of the Society, spoke of the 30-year history of the Society, summarised in the Chair's Report. Jon noted that he and Chris Waller are the only two remaining original members of the Society from 30 years ago. Chris Waller gave up his plot at Spring Hill earlier this year. Spring Hill site had been an allotment site during the war. With the support of the National Association of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners the Council were persuaded not to charge full rates for rent of the land. Leases were negotiated and the Society was subsequently registered as a Charity in 1986.

Subsequently, Aden Terrace site which was managed by Stoke Newington Gardeners Guild integrated with the Hackney Allotment Society in 1990.

The Chair invited the membership to stay for refreshments after the meeting to celebrate the anniversary and look forward to the next 30 years of allotment gardening in Hackney.

The meeting closed at 9.15pm.