



Spring looks as though it is going to be a little late this year and with Easter particularly early, we had to work hard to find a sunny spring picture to head the newsletter! The highlight of the past three months as far as EAP is concerned has been the AGM meeting on March 13th. It was heartening to see such a good turn-out. We were also extremely fortunate in having two excellent speakers. Denis Bowen who gave us an account of the work of Cultivate London and Chris Bunting who gave a presentation exploring the possibilities for introducing Self Management on Ealing Council allotment sites. Summaries of their talks are provided below for those who were unable to attend – with much else. Happy reading!

Cultivate London

Cultivate London is a youth employment project funded by the Pathways charity that runs, among many other things, the Haslemere and Northfields allotment sites. Denis Bowen the project's sales and administration manager gave an extremely interesting presentation on their work at the recent EAP-AGM.

Pathways set up the project to provide a vehicle for giving previously unemployed young people practical experience in horticulture and help in finding related longer term employment. It provides work experience for thirty young people a year and is currently working out of two main sites – Brentford Lock, a patch of derelict land belonging to Isis Waterside Regeneration and a small property in Isleworth owned by the National Trust - but is looking to expand its activities in the West London area. Seed germination, pricking out of seedlings, potting etc. is carried out mainly in a set of poly-tunnels on the Brentford Lock site with crops of salads grown in the ground at the Isleworth site. The aim is to produce organically grown, fully-hardened, locally grown plants for sale to the public at Ealing Farmers Market at Leeland Rd every Saturday morning and they are also sold at local florists. This year the Cultivate range will include a wide range of baby vegetables, herbs and bedding flowers.



Brentford Lock Site



Volunteers and Trainees at work

One aspect of Cultivate London's work which could be of particular interest to the Ealing Allotment Community is that they can provide a range of plants and crops on a sale or return basis for allotment based events. Many local associations organize Spring Shows, Plant Swop/Plant Sale days etc., and a reliable source of extra plants for sale could be very useful. For more details of Cultivate London's activities, contact details etc., go to their website at: <http://www.cultivatelondon.org> call Denis on 07906 763908 or email denis@cultivatelondon.org .

Self-Management

The main theme of Chris Bunting's presentation on the possibilities for Self Management of Ealing Council allotments was the willingness of the Council to listen to, and consult with, the Ealing Allotment community about the way forward on this issue.

The recent rent increases while painful at the time mean that the Allotment Service will, following the planned 10% rent increase this October, be self-financing with rent income balancing projected expenditure thus protecting the service from further budgetary cuts. The main driving force for change he explained, was thus not financial but a desire to see a more efficient management system capable of maximising the potential of Ealing's allotment system.

Ealing Council's allotment holdings are, on all measures, one of the top two in the London area. Despite any rumours to the contrary, he emphasised, the Council has no plans to close allotments and sell-off land for development. On the contrary, it is still actively opening new sites where possible. Over a period of the last fourteen years, the number of sites has grown to forty six and the number of plot holders from 700 to 1700. The ensuing increases in administrative load have put the system under considerable strain and it is beginning to creak at the seams. Given that there is no possibility in the present financial climate of any increased administrative support at Council level, the logical answer from the Council perspective is to tap into the wealth of experience in running and organising allotments at the local level and investigate the possibilities for self management of some sites at least. In doing so, he emphasised, the Council are fully aware that self management would not be appropriate for all sites and that the degree of self management that different sites might

be willing to take on may well vary markedly from site to site. He also emphasised the fact that any system that might be adopted would have to be one that ensured no site was left with a service inferior to the one presently in operation.

He stressed that any new system would have to operate under the present financial constraints. Clearly, sites taking on additional managerial responsibility would expect to retain part of their rent income to cover increased expenditure. This has to be balanced against the necessity for continued central administration costs to service the non-self managed sites and other centrally paid costs such as those for water supply. He concluded by saying that the key to this was consultation, that he together with Stephen Cole were currently trying to map out different possibilities and that their intention was to come back to the allotment community, in the first place to the Self-Management Forum, to get a collective view of any possible proposals.

At this stage, the discussion was opened to the floor for questions and comments. Questions and comments from the floor divided into four main groups. The first involved problems of communication with the Allotment Service. Tenants complained of difficulties in contacting, or lack of response by, the service. Chris Bunting attributed much of this to the very high administrative load of the service being carried by the Allotments Manager and pointed out that this was one of the main driving forces towards the introduction of self management. Suggestions of a contact centre and a FAQ section on the Council website were discussed. The second group related to the partial self-management arrangement currently operating at Blondin Allotments (see "Site Profile" for more details). This scheme was strongly advocated by Blondin tenants and their committee volunteered to help and advise other interested Local Associations. The third group related to fully self managed schemes of the type operating at Pitshanger and related to such factors as length of leases, opt-out clauses etc. Chris Bunting referred to the fact that there are many examples of self management schemes currently operating with leases that tackle such problems (examples of such leases are available in the Information section of the EAP website), The final group involved what would happen to those sites unable or unwilling to take on self management. Chris Bunting undertook that the service to such sites would continue to be at least as good as at present but said that he could not guarantee it would not fall below that of sites taking on self management.

Car Parking

Over the last few months EAP has received a number of requests for information relating to the current situation regarding car parking at or in the vicinity of Council allotments. These revolve around three main issues; parking around sites within Controlled Parking Zones (CPZ), uncontrolled parking in the "Ascott Allotments car park", and parking at sites located off gated alleys. We have looked into each of these issues and our understanding of the current situation is as follows.

Allotment Parking in CPZ: This is a major problem, particularly around sites such as Ascott where parking is restricted 10.00 a.m. - 7.30 p.m. Mon - Fri and 10.00 a.m. - 4.00 p.m. on Saturday. Until recently, allotment tenants could obtain "allotment permits" to allow them to park during these periods. However, a CPZ Specialist Parking Scrutiny Panel report in 2010/11 recommended that these permits be discontinued on the basis that:

“The Panel felt that the small number (46) of permits issued made this permit type expensive to maintain and administer, in addition to the fact that they had no legal basis. It therefore concluded that these permit types be abolished, and parking need arising from allotments be accommodated within the visitor voucher scheme”.

This was subsequently taken up as Council policy. The current situation is that existing permits are being honoured but no new ones are being issued. As regards the visitor voucher scheme, the costs from April 1st this year will be 60p per hour or £4.50 all day. Anybody, visiting their plot on a regular basis is, therefore, likely to be paying much more for parking than the rent of their plot.

***Uncontrolled Parking in “Ascott Car Park”:* There is a small off-road area at the main entrance to Ascott allotments used as a car park by allotment tenants. Complaints have been made to EAP and the Council that this is routinely used by people other than Ascott tenants and that the Council should step in to prevent this by issuing permits and levying fines for unauthorised parking. We have looked into this and it turns out that this particular patch of land is “unregistered land” and not Council property. So, unfortunately, the Council is powerless to respond in this way.**

***Sites off Gated Alleys:* Many sites are approached through alleys and in some cases these now have security gates to restrict access to the backs of houses or garages along the alley - Hayes Bridge and Cleveley Crescent are examples. This raises questions of car access and parking especially at those sites where tenants have previously had free car access to the alley. In most, if not all cases, the Council does not own the land constituting the alley itself and only has rights of pedestrian access as far as their allotment sites are concerned. In a few cases, this is reflected in the fact that allotment tenants are provided access to the alley by a side gate with a separate key but are not issued with a key to the main (vehicular) gate. In others, there is only a single gate used by all: vehicular access is, however, normally restricted to residents. In some cases, resident groups are happy to come to some compromise agreement but this is at their discretion and not a matter for the Council.**

Where does all this leave us? Parking and access are clearly major problems at and around many sites. In our opinion, there is a strong case for the restitution of “allotment parking permits”. This is a policy decision and the logical approach is for individual tenants and/or local associations to lobby local ward councillors. The resolution of the “unregistered land” problem with its legal implications is less clear. Vehicular access to gated alleys - a “good neighbours” approach to local resident groups is the best we can suggest!

Site Profile

Blondin Allotments is the second in our series of profiles of Ealing allotment sites. A very successful and innovative site located in Northfields.

Behind the houses on the east side of Boston Manor Road, and south of the Heathrow branch of the Piccadilly line, are Blondin Allotments.

It’s quite a big site with over a hundred plots, varying in size from four poles to twelve. Back in the post war period the site was twice the size, but due to a lack of interest in growing your own in the sixties and seventies, much of the site fell into disuse, so half of the land became the Blondin Park Nature Reserve.



*Blondin in the Winter
..... and in the Summer*

Traditionally allotment sites have managers who carry out routine maintenance work and keep an eye on who is and isn't working their plots on behalf of the council. But in 2000 the plot-holders at Blondin formed an Allotment Association to take over the responsibilities of the manager and the running of our site.

The fledgling association initially had trouble with some plot-holders who were resistant to change. But then the association applied for, and managed to secure, external funding to improve paths and provide essential amenities, and plot-holders started to see the benefits of the new way of working.

Each autumn we hold an AGM and vote in a committee. The committee is responsible for allotment admin, site inspections, letting plots and collecting rents. The committee holds monthly meetings to discuss how things are going and plan for the future.

Alongside the rent that tenants pay to the council, plot-holders pay a small sum each year (currently £5 each) to the Allotment Association. This pays for things like strimmers, a rotavator, petrol, materials for maintenance tasks, skip hire, printing and postage for newsletters etc. We also receive a percentage of the rents we collect back from the council, which adds to our funding.

Three times a year the committee organises a Sunday workday and plot-holders get together to do plot measuring, path clearing, litter picking and other necessary tasks. We follow this with a barbecue and social get together.

At the back of the site, next to the Northfields tube depot fence, we have an old shipping container. This is where we store our barbecue and workday essentials, communal tools etc, and, next to the container, and the envy of allotments throughout the land, is our state of the art composting toilet with disabled access.

We have a wonderful range of ages, experience and ethnic backgrounds at Blondin. Walking around the site you meet plot-holders from every continent, people who are totally new to

growing and some who have been growing fruit and vegetables for more than fifty years. And, as in every cross section of society there are sociable people and some of us who like to be left alone to get on with their digging.

All our plots are currently let and there are over 40 people on our waiting list.

If more self-management is introduced throughout Ealing we don't feel that it should affect Blondin particularly, as the plot-holders, through our Allotment Association and their committee, already take on a lot of responsibility for day to day admin and maintenance of the site.

*Roger Sealey,
Blondin Allotment Association*

Around the Associations

Ascott

Friends of Ascott Allotments:

On a cold Sunday in March threatening imminent snow, a group of around 30 plotheolders assembled to form the Friends of Ascott Allotments. The aim of this new group is to represent the interests of the plotheolders at Ascott and to organise workdays around the site and promote social activity. True to their word, they've already held one workday and cleared a large compost heap that had sprung up on an unoccupied piece of the allotments. The group has no formal positions or official capacity at present, but on a site without a dedicated local manager to organise workdays it is clearly a very welcome bit of assistance. Ascott tenants wishing to be kept informed of activities can email john@johnkenton.net with Friends of Ascott in the subject line, or look out for posters on the gates.

Brentham

You know how it is. Rusty scrap iron accumulates year by year on different plots throughout the site. Raiders come and go – allegedly looking for scrap iron to sell off to dodgy dealers. Our taps get stolen but do they do the decent thing and take our scrap iron with them? Of course they don't!! So Sunday March 6th was officially designated "Scrap Iron Sunday". An area in the car park was marked off for scrap iron. Scrap iron came in from all over the site – and Brentham is a big site. A small proportion got recycled - obviously a few people wanted different scrap iron rather the stuff that they had been looking at for years. But the net result was two large loads of scrap iron that Alberto and friends loaded into his very big red van and drove off to a happy home with a reputable scrap merchant dealer – they do exist!

Now we're working on broken glass – anybody want a couple of tons of broken glass?

Horsenden

HAAGA will be holding their Spring Show on Saturday 13th April. The venue as usual is All Hallows Church Hall, Elton Avenue/Horsenden Lane North, Greenford. It will be open to the public at 3.00 p.m. Admission is free, there is a raffle, plant stall and refreshments so make a point of coming along and supporting one of our longest standing Ealing allotment associations.

Northfields

Last but not least, we have just heard that work on the long-heralded new fence around Northfield allotments is due to start 2nd April 2013.