



Welcome to the third EAP e-mail newsletter. Circulation is still growing but we are well aware that there are many Ealing tenants out there that are not on our circulation list. So, once again, we would be very grateful if you could draw the attention of fellow allotment holders to its existence and pass copies on to those who don't have access to e-mail and the web. To subscribe/unsubscribe to the EAP newsletter, or to contact EAP, please use the "Contact Us" facility on the EAP website. Also, don't forget to check the website from time to time for news updates

General News

There are two major items of breaking news as far as Ealing Council run allotment sites are concerned at least. The introduction of a ban on the attachment of hosepipes to the taps on the dip-tanks installed on council sites and the gathering storm relating to rental increases.

Hosepipe Ban: Use of hosepipes for direct watering of plots is strictly banned on Council sites. Ealing Council has, however, until recently allowed the attachment of hosepipes to taps fitted to dip-tanks for filling subsidiary water butts, tanks etc., situated around individual plots – a very useful concession particularly for older or disabled tenants. Without warning, the screw threads that allowed hosepipe attachment were removed earlier in the year, leading to an enormous amount of bad feeling on the part of those affected. The background to this move was at least partially explained a few weeks later in a letter from the Council but by then the damage had been done. For those tenants of charity-run sites, who will not have received the Council letter, the facts as EAP understands them are as follows.

One of the key aims of water supply legislation is to ensure a discontinuity between delivery systems (such as hosepipes) and the mains systems so that in the event of a loss of pressure following a water mains leak contaminated water is not back-siphoned into the drinking water supply. In the course of a rare inspection visit to one of the Council sites, Thames Water discovered that a tenant (now an ex-tenant) had interfered with the plumbing of the water system in an illegal and potentially dangerous way. Following a thorough site investigation by a Thames Water inspector, the Council was threatened with prosecution and a potential fine of £1,000 pounds for every screw-fitting to dip-tanks on their sites - on the grounds that their provision contravened water safety regulations regarding back-siphoning - giving them little choice but removal of the fittings. The alternative of fitting non-return valves to prevent back siphoning was thoroughly explored but Thames Water claimed that allotment sites are Category 5 risk environments and that as such an air-gap is required between the mains and the point of water delivery. Allotment sites are not specifically referred to in the relevant regulations (Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999) and their guidelines and the assignment of allotment sites to Category 5 by Thames Water is, in principle, open to legal challenge. However, references to non-domestic soil watering systems, horticultural sites, fertilizers, pathogens etc., elsewhere in the guidelines suggest that any challenge is likely to be unsuccessful and it is our understanding that there is little, or no chance of the Council mounting such a challenge.

Rental Increases: As reported on the EAP website, many London Councils have announced large increases in allotment rentals over the last few months. Brent Council has announced increases in the rent for a standard 10 pole plot from £66 per year to £150 year. Greenwich Council are planning even larger increases from £66 to £200 per year and Barnet Council has announced increases from £60 to £170 for borough residents and £340 for non- residents. These increases have been widely condemned as disproportionate.

Ealing rentals for 2011-2012 have already been published and the percentage increase is relatively low. There is, however, no question that Ealing Council will be announcing larger increases for 2012 onwards. Their aim, as EAP understands it, is to make the Allotment Service self-financing. Currently, the allotment service is subsidised to the extent of about 50% by the Council. In the absence of other steps, this would require an approximate doubling of current rentals. While there is some scope for cutting expenditure, it is difficult to envisage how such a policy could be implemented without bringing in rental increases of much less than 60-70% at best. In the opinion of EAP, increases of this magnitude are totally unacceptable on two counts. Firstly, on grounds of fairness - allotment tenants are mainly pensioners on low/fixed incomes or, if working, on low incomes. They are thus among the least able to afford such increases. Increases of this size are also totally disproportionate with the likely increases in other Council funded/supported leisure activities. Secondly, on grounds of practicality – increases of this magnitude will lead to the departure of many of the current tenants. Agreed, there are waiting lists for Ealing allotments but it is nevertheless likely that a sharp increase in individual rentals will lead to a significant shortfall in the uptake of plots and a consequent drop in overall rental income leading to calls for yet more increases. The loss of the health and social benefits of allotment activities, particularly valuable in the case of the older and

the less well-off, is also likely to throw additional burdens on other areas of Council activity/expenditure.

Is there anything that can be done to avert these increases? As EAP understands it, the final size of the increases; their detailed make-up (removal/reduction of the pensioners subsidy, introduction of “out-of-borough” and variable rates for different holdings have all been suggested); and the timing of the increases (one-off or staged) are all still to be decided. The time for tenants to influence these decisions is now. The one thing that we must not do is simply to wait until the rates are officially posted on site gates – normally sometime in August. Once a coherent set of proposals emerges they will be very difficult to reverse. Local Associations (and individual tenants) should make their views clear both to their local councillors and relevant Council officers as a matter of urgency. Allotments are not high on most councillors’ agendas. With many other cuts in Council services/budgets in the pipeline, their attention is likely to be elsewhere and, unless alerted, any proposals on allotment rentals are in danger of simply being nodded through. In the absence of concrete proposals, the best line of approach is probably to seek assurance that Ealing Council will not try to impose the same sort of disproportionately large increases proposed by Brent, Greenwich and Barnet and to emphasise the fact that the majority of allotment tenants are either pensioners or among the less well-off in our community.

Organic Gardening Course: Turning to a rather happier theme, two batches of twenty plus participants have now successfully completed the Organic Gardening Course funded by “Awards for All” and organised by EAP. The take-up on the course was spread throughout the borough with representatives from most, if not all, of the larger sites and several of the smaller sites. The first part of the course covered the basic principles of organic gardening, soil types, organic sources of plant nutrients, composting, weed control, soil structure, the “no-dig” system and the role of mulching. The second was devoted to pests and diseases and how to deal with them, beneficial animals, plant selection (which plants to grow where) crop rotation, feeding and enriching the soil, permaculture and forest gardening. Time was spent both on background theory (covered in talks by lecturers based at Kew) and practical sessions on a local allotment (Ascott). Feedback indicated an extremely high level of satisfaction with the courses. The courses were greatly over-subscribed and EAP expresses its regrets that it could not find places for all applicants. We are, however, considering seeking funding for repeat sessions.





Around the Associations

The items below have been gleaned from the current crop of Local Association Newsletters. More details can be obtained by clicking on the Local Association Newsletter page of the EAP website from where you can download a copy of the original newsletter.

Plant Swop Day:

Brentham Allotments and Gardens Society (BAGS) held its second annual plant swop day on Sunday May 15th. The weather didn't co-operate as well as last year but a judicious shift of venue into the trading hut saved the day. Plants were swopped and/or sold, hamburgers and hot dogs were eaten, beer and wine were drunk and a good time was had by all who attended.

HAAGA Summer Show:

Horsenden Allotments and Gardens Association (HAAGA) are holding their Summer Show on Saturday 9th July at All Hallows Church Hall, 72 Horsenden Lane, Greenford, The show is open to the public at 3.00 p.m. Everybody is welcome and admission is free.

Japanese Knotweed:



Japanese knotweed has been discovered along the canal-side boundary of an industrial/warehouse site neighbouring the Oldfield allotments in Northolt. Fortunately, there is no evidence of it having reached the allotment site itself. Japanese knotweed is notoriously difficult to eradicate. Tenants with plots close to the Grand Union Canal or other waterways should keep an eye out for this highly invasive weed and report any they see to the Council.

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