



Welcome to the fourth EAP e-mail newsletter. The major issue that has dominated the news over the summer, as far as Ealing allotment tenants are concerned, is the rental increases planned by the Council. The final resolution of this matter and some of its implications are discussed below. Another matter that has received rather less publicity is the rash of break-ins on sites over the Borough. There are still many Ealing tenants who are not on our circulation list and are largely unaware of either of these issues. So, please draw the attention of fellow allotment holders to the newsletter's 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

### Rental Increases

Ealing Council has introduced a 40% increase in annual rentals on its allotment sites. Notices to this effect should have been posted on site gates by the time that this newsletter arrives. This increase is part of a large number of cuts in subsidies to Council services announced in response to recent cuts in Local Government grants. Similar, and in some cases much larger percentage increases have been introduced in a number of London Boroughs such as Barnet, Brent and Greenwich.

The Council justifies its increase on grounds of a decision to make the Allotment Service self-financing. For many years the Service has been subsidised by the Council to the tune of about £50-55K per annum. A decision to make the service cost-neutral was taken, in

principle, some time ago. At the time, Parks and Leisure (P&L), who are responsible for the Service suggested that a saving of about £75K was required corresponding to an approximately 140% increase in rental income. This was based on a flawed analysis of allotment finances and was subsequently amended by P&L to a more realistic £50-55K corresponding to the actual deficit in the Allotment Budget over recent years. The first public indication that major increases in allotment rentals might be in the pipeline, came in the Allotment Manager's annual report tabled at EAP's AGM in early March this year. In the course of the report, it was pointed out that the allotments service was currently subsidised by the Council by roughly 50% and that in light of funding cuts from central government it was likely that the council would seek to remove this subsidy, either by reducing the amount spent, or by increasing charges, or a combination of the two. Although not spelled out as such, this suggested that rental increases of 75-100% might well be introduced in 2012/13. Since that time a sustained campaign has been in progress both inside and outside EAP to oppose, or at least reduce, the size of these planned increases.

Following an open letter to all Ealing Councillors from the Chairmen of all Ealing Local Allotment Associations detailing their opposition to increases of this size (a copy of which can be seen on the EAP website), the Council announced that it was going to retain the Pensioners' Concession but that the size of the underlying rental increases was yet to be decided. They also agreed to set up a meeting between Council Officers and a group of tenants to discuss the proposed increases. This meeting, chaired by Cllr Bassam Mahfouz (Portfolio holder for Transport and Leisure), and attended by Roger Jones (Director of P&L) and Ian Ross (P&L Manager responsible for the Allotment Service) together with a dozen tenants, consisting mainly of Site Managers and Local Association representatives, was eventually held in mid-September.

The tenants' group, while at pains to emphasise that they did not consider themselves to be the official representatives of Ealing allotment tenants, pointed out that increases of the size contemplated by the Council would lead to hardship for many of the less well-off tenants who would be "priced-off" their plots. This in turn would inevitably lead to knock-on costs on Council health and welfare budgets that would largely off-set any savings made on the Allotment Service. They pointed out that such increases, and the consequent lowering of allotment occupancy and reduction of overall rental income, would almost certainly trigger a vicious spiral in which the Council was forced to bring in further increases to compensate in a vain attempt to balance their books. They also pointed out the illogicality of the Council spending money on developing new sites at the same time as they were risking a large fall in occupancy. The Council side agreed to look into the possibility of spreading the increases over two years, and reducing the budget deficit by reduction in expenditure as well as by increases in rental income.

The final figures from the Council of a 40% increase in rentals in 2012/13 followed by a further 10% increase in 2013/14 were announced in late September. They are based on a reduction in annual expenditure from about £112K to £100K, some minor adjustments on the pricing policy as regards overgrown plots, and an agreement by P&L to fund a £10K deficit in 2012/13. While a far from satisfactory outcome, as far as tenants are concerned,

**the final increases do represent an appreciable improvement on those originally planned by the Council. The whole exercise also puts down a very strong marker that in future the Council needs to consult with tenants before making major decisions of this type.**

**In the course of the meeting Cllr Mahfouz also raised the possibility of altering the management structure for Ealing's allotments to give tenants more say in how they were run (Self Management, or some form of Trust Management). The tenants' group responded that while they were not against such moves in principle this would need detailed discussion and stressed the importance of setting up a credible consultation procedure well before such changes were introduced.**

## **Mass Break-ins**

**Another very worrying development over the summer has been the occurrence of a series of mass break-ins at Ealing allotment sites. It is not clear when this started but Brentham allotments experienced a major break-in by an organised gang on the night of Friday 29<sup>th</sup> July in which 30-50 sheds were broken into, followed by an even larger repeat raid in which every hut on the site was broken into just over a week later. On alerting other sites, it was discovered that similar raids had been carried out on most, if not all, of the major allotment sites in the borough. The pattern in all cases was very similar. In many cases, the thieves were in possession of keys to the main gates and simply drove on to the site. In those cases where they were not in possession of the keys, they simply cut holes in the boundary fences and drove their vans straight through. The main targets were agricultural machinery such as rotavators and strimmers – possibly for onward sale via car-boot sales. Other targets were scrap metal of all sorts – including in some of the later raids - metal from shed roofs. In all cases, the thieves seemed to have prior knowledge of the site and brought appropriate equipment extending, in the case of the raid experienced by Pitshanger, to equipment to break into a secure area where rotavators were stored and an angle-grinder to cut through the securing chains. In no case, to our knowledge, was any serious attempt made to break into Trading Huts – presumably because the resale value of compost etc. was too low to be deemed to be worth the effort.**

**Whilst there is a long history of allotment break-ins in Ealing, the raids this year appear to have been on a much bigger scale. We have also learned that they have not been limited to Ealing. A major problem is that each raid gets reported to the local police “safer neighbourhood team” but there appears to be little or no communication between the teams and no central recognition of the scale of the problem. Any suggestions regarding how this might be rectified would be very welcome. Given the experience of Pitshanger, which is very security conscious and has invested heavily on security measures, it is hard to see how such raids can be thwarted. The obvious solution of never keeping anything of value in an allotment shed is as always probably the best advice that can be given – although we realise that this is not always easy for those with limited home storage capability. It is likely that the “break-in” season is drawing to a close as the nights draw in but be aware that this problem will almost certainly return next spring if not earlier.**

## Around the Associations

The items below have mainly 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.

### *Spring, Summer and Autumn Shows:*

As usual, it is Horsenden Allotments and Gardens Association (HAAGA) that lead the way in this area with its three shows a year! By all accounts, the usual high standards were maintained, and although entries were down in the Spring – a show much more dependent on the weather – both Summer and Autumn showed a small increase. There was a pleasing number of new exhibitors obtaining places, many being 1sts but, as the organisers pointed out, there are still the individual trophies and other awards to aim for. To encourage this HAAGA has opened a new revamped “Garden Centre” on their Whitton Avenue East site where plants as well as a full range of fertilisers, compost and other garden requisites are available.

Not to be outdone Oldfield Allotments in Greenford have also been on the “show-trail” with their annual produce show in July - again, a great success. There have, no doubt, also been other shows around the Ealing Associations which we would love to hear about.

### *Oldfield Allotments and Ealing in Bloom*

Oldfield really seem to have scooped the jackpot as far as the allotments section of this year’s Ealing in Bloom competition is concerned with four prizes and a special award!

1st Large Allotments Site - managed by Michel le Guilcher.

1st Large Allotment Plot - Kristine Kristensen.

2nd Large Allotment Plot - Joanna Jackson.

3rd= Large Allotment Plot - Marion and Guy Hillman.

Judges special award - Michel le Guilcher

Congratulations to all involved!

### *Wildlife seems to be the Theme at Blondin:*

Two matters of note – both to do with health. First, a warning about the potential danger to some of red ants. Recently a Blondin plot-holder had to go to hospital for treatment after disturbing a nest of red ants whilst mixing up her compost. Some people have an allergic reaction to ant bites and she was unlucky to be one of them. She was given drugs to bring the reaction under control and is now fortunately fully recovered. Secondly, a health warning for frogs, or rather those concerned with their welfare, to make sure that an air-hole is maintained in the ice of any pond containing over-wintering frogs.

*On a Sadder Note:*

**Haslemere has lost two of its best-known tenants - Jim Daly who has run the Ealing and Hanwell Allotment Association Trading Hut for many years and George Tranter the longest serving plot holder with over 50 years at Haslemere. They are a sad loss and will be greatly missed.**

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