



Apologies for the delay in circulating the Winter edition of the newsletter but we waited for the snow so that we could have a truly wintry picture and, more importantly, until after the Workshop on Self-Management organised by the Council. As promised there is a full account of the proceedings below. The big up-coming event as far as EAP is concerned is our AGM – details below. Try to come along! It provides a good opportunity to find out what is going on in the Ealing Allotment Community, air your views about what is right and what is wrong with our allotments, and most importantly an opportunity to catch up with old friends, and make new ones, in a convivial atmosphere.

Self-Management

The situation regarding the possible self-management of Ealing Council allotments is getting clearer. Chris Bunting (Assistant Director of Leisure), with Stephen Cole in attendance, recently ran a workshop for a group of twelve members of the Ealing Self-management Forum on the possibilities for introducing a self-management scheme in Ealing.

Ealing Council with 100 acres of allotment space, 46 sites and 1700 plot holders has the largest allotment holdings among London Boroughs and the administrative load associated with the ongoing management of allotments is proving a major challenge. Various solutions have been looked at by the Council. Expanding the administrative support is not a viable option in the current financial climate. Contracting-out allotment management to a private firm has also been rejected. Introduction of a self-management scheme has been suggested as a possible means of reducing the administrative load at the centre whilst offering scope for developments that could not otherwise be afforded at the local level.

What might self-management involve? There are three main variables. The number of “self-managing associations” – this can vary from one association managing all of the borough’s sites to multiple independent associations each managing a single site or clusters of sites. Borough-wide or mixed schemes – borough-wide schemes involve every site in the borough taking on self-management; mixed schemes allow those sites that feel they can take on self management to do so while the remainder remain under direct council management. Finally, there is the extent of responsibility taken on by self-managing associations for such factors as infra-structure.

Given the number of sites involved, their present management structure and the existence of a number of well-established local allotment associations, all present at the workshop were of the view that any workable scheme would need to be on a local management basis. It was also agreed that as many, indeed most, of Ealing sites have no existing allotment association, it would need to be a mixed scheme with such sites remaining under direct Council control as at present. The question of the extent of self-management responsibility was also aired. At present, Ealing has one Council site Pitshanger run by the Pitshanger Allotment Conservation Society (PACA) that takes responsibility for all aspects of management including allotment infrastructure (water supply, fences etc.). A second site, Blondin run by Blondin Allotment Association, takes responsibility for issuing rent bills and rent collection, issue of non-cultivation orders and minor repairs. Several other sites have local associations that co-operate very closely with a council-appointed manager but have no direct management responsibilities.

So where does this leave us? The Council is keen to continue its investigation and the Self-management Forum have agreed to participate in a continuing consultation exercise. Both sides recognize that any viable solution has to result in an appreciable reduction in central administration and remain within the present financial constraints. Clearly, any local association willing to take on extra managerial responsibilities will be looking to retain a proportion of the site rental income to finance its activities. At the same time, it is important that sufficient funds are retained centrally to fund the management of those sites that remain in the existing system. Problems relating to the capability of different associations to take on managerial responsibilities also need to be addressed.

Is the effort worth it? There are numerous self-management schemes currently operating in the London Area and elsewhere. Most of those involved say that they are very happy with the situation and that self-management opened up many opportunities for site improvements and developments. We all recognize that the present system in Ealing is under strain. Given that we have the assurance that failure to come up with a viable scheme means that the “status quo” is still available, there seems little to lose in trying to come up with something better!

Want more information? Then come along to the EAP-AGM - details below- where Chris Bunting will be giving a presentation on “Possibilities for Self-Management in Ealing”

For more details on self-management, take a look under “Information” on the EAP website where we are collecting information about what goes on in other boroughs

EAP-AGM

EAP will be holding its AGM at 7.30 p.m. Wednesday, March 13th in the Polygon, St Mary's Church, South Ealing Road

Followed by Guest Speakers

Denis Bowen - talking on:

"Cultivate London "

and

Chris Bunting (Ealing Council) - talking on:

"The Possibilities for Self-Management of Ealing's Allotments"

Goodbye (Square) Pole

A recent Freedom of Information Request to Ealing Council questioned whether any services were provided in non-metric units. Allotments are measured in poles and priced accordingly, and it transpires that under the Weights and Measures Act 1985 this is illegal. The upshot of this inquiry is that the allotments service will, from October, change the way council allotments are let.

The only legal measure that can be used is the metre. One (square) pole, as I am sure everybody knows, is equal to 25.3 square metres so a standard 10 pole plot is 253 square metres. Allotment measurements can't practically be maintained to that degree of accuracy – the cost of doing so might easily exceed the rent charged and most plots would have to be re-measured each year – so the council is likely to move to a simple system based on a price per plot, with the size fixed at whatever it is currently. From time to time, plots that appear to have changed or are divided or merged will be reassessed to ensure that the pricing remains fair.

The net result should be no change in the eyes (or pocket) of the gardener.

Stephen Cole.
Ealing Council Allotments Manager

A Small Victory

EAP has been battling away for some time trying to get Ealing Council to update the "Allotment Sites" section of its website. The details for most sites said that there were no vacant sites (independent of whether there were or not) and in many cases referred applicants to site managers who were no longer in post. A constant frustration to those managers with vacant plots to let, ex-managers hoping to enjoy a peaceful retirement and

exasperated would-be plot holders feeling that they were being given the run around! EAP's complaints have finally paid off. Check-out the updated site by clicking on [site](#) (or go to the link below). A definite improvement but still not perfect. There are sites with genuinely long waiting lists and it would help if this were indicated somehow to save both site managers' and applicants' time but at least now the messages are going to the right people.

http://www.ealing.gov.uk/directory/20/allotment_sites

Site Profile

Most of us while very familiar with our own sites have little knowledge of what goes on elsewhere in the borough. It seems, therefore a good idea to incorporate a series of “site profiles” into the newsletter. The first in the series is Village Park Allotment site - a small site comprising 21 active plots in South Ealing off Pope’s Lane currently managed by Ealing Transition.

Only 7 of the 21 plots were cultivated when Ealing Transition agreed to take over the day-to-day management of the site in 2010. A lot of clearing was needed and we were pleased when Steve Cole organised some earth-movers to clear the worst of the undergrowth on the neglected plots and cut down the biggest trees. We have 11 half plots (5 poles) and 10 quarter plots (2½ poles). One other plot is still very overgrown and will need a work day to clear it and we have designated yet another plot as a conservation area as it is almost permanently flooded.

I manage the site on behalf of Ealing Transition and do the record keeping, rent gathering etc. We have an active steering group of seven people. Each one of us has some particular skill to bring to the group – Kathy is our plants-woman; Sarah is our engineer and architect (having designed and constructed our greenhouse from skip contents) and she also runs the website; Christopher is wonderful at weed identification and removal and digs for victory; Mari specialises in the growing of Japanese vegetables; Ellis is very knowledgeable about organic growing and permaculture as well as being the pizza oven builder; while Carrie has a strategic overview of planting. One of our plot-holders has a hutch for chickens and ducks and another has three beehives. In addition, two of our steering group members (Sarah and Kathy) are training to be bee-keepers. We are very community conscious and nearly all the plot holders live within easy walking distance of the site.



Twice a year we have community open days when we meet together to undertake some task like hedge clipping, ground clearing or pond digging. On these days, we fire up our home-made clay pizza oven and everyone brings something along to eat or drink and we bake home-made pizzas. The photos above are from our October open day and show some beds of veg. and a basket of produce from Plot 1.

The recent increase in rent appears not to have dampened people's enthusiasm for growing their own and by October 7th (when we had our autumn open morning, planting winter veg and enjoying pizzas) everyone had paid up. At the moment, the present management system is working well for us. If self-management were to be introduced, we think it would probably be impossible to self-manage our site as an independent unit because it is so small but would be prepared to consider amalgamation with other small sites

Information about Ealing Transition is at www.ealingtransition.org.uk and a blog of our work on the allotment can be found under 'Ealing Transition Community Garden'

*Glendra Read,
Manager of Village Park Allotments on behalf of Ealing Transition*

Around the Associations

Ascott - has embarked on monthly community workdays to improve our appearance and make ready some abandoned plots. Like most sites, we find that there can be a considerable amount of clearing to be done before a vacated plot can be re-let, and often there are hazards such as broken glass or objects lurking in long grass waiting to fell an unsuspecting newcomer.



Working as a group to tidy plots is both quicker and safer than leaving it to one person, particularly if they are unfamiliar with what they'll encounter, though we have the problem of where to store the rubbish without attracting more, and how to dispose of it. A plot holder with a van is an invaluable help, but Acton (our nearest waste and recycling centre) won't allow vans on site and sometimes everything has to be carried by hand from the street.

In December we tackled our hedge – 300 metres of fairly dense mixed thorny hedging which had got a little overgrown. The main problem wasn't the pruning, but where to store the prunings until they were dry enough to burn. It took most of a 10-pole plot, and a host of people working hard to move it all. But the result is a hedge that should thicken up nicely this spring, benefitting the wildlife that in turn helps us by predation of slug eggs

and the like. In January, in the snow, we collected up sufficient wood (from dilapidated sheds and rotten raised beds) to make a decent bonfire, and this took care of the previous month's hedge – so now we have space for the next couple of months' tasks – collecting up broken and abandoned glass and scrap metal.

If your site would benefit from a workday, here are some basic tips: Plan in advance, so you have various alternative tasks should weather make some things impossible; prepare something to feed the troops, otherwise they'll disappear when they get hungry; make it sociable – people can work hard and enjoy themselves at the same time, and are more likely to come again; spread the word – don't rely on a few stalwarts, they'll become disillusioned if others don't help occasionally.

Stephen Cole

Horsenden

Two sure signs of the approach of spring each year.

One, when Bob Axeby puts word around that the potatoes are in – they are. HAAGA handles the bulk seed potato orders for their own sites, Brentham, Oldfields and Northolt so every year about this time word goes out to come and collect them and the vans arrive!

Two, when Colin Lathwell – show organiser supremo – announces, as he has, that the booklet listing the details for the coming year's shows (yes, they do need a booklet!), is available to be collected.

Keep up to date by checking out “Latest News” on the EAP website and signing up for the EAP newsletter using the “Contact Us” link