



Report on the 2012 Annual General Meeting

The 2012 Annual General Meeting of the Longcroft Allotment Association was held on Monday 5 March 2012 at St Francis Church Hall. Along with committee members, 28 member of the Association attended. Key points raised at the meeting are as follows:

Rent increases. Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council has given notice that the rents for plots will be increased, as of 1 April 2013. The increase will be approximately 78% and the impact of this will be as follows:

- 7 pole plot: currently £43.26. From 2013 will be £77.00
- 5 pole plot: currently £30.90. From 2013 will be £55.00

These figures exclude the £5.00 annual subscription.

Committee. The following were re-elected to the committee:

Paul Canter	(Chairman)	Helen McLean	(Digswell site inspector)
Stephen Brown	(Membership Secretary)	Kathleen Monk	(Broadwater site inspector)
Roger Edgson	(Rainwater Harvesting)	Tony Ridler	(Treasurer)
Don Fisher	(Letting Secretary)	David Rogers	(Distribution Shed Manager)
Kim Haynes	(Broadwater representative)	June Tomlin	(Secretary)

A copy of the minutes of the meeting is attached with this Newsletter.

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Key dates

Sunday 30 September 2012	Seed order forms and Kings Seeds catalogue form to be submitted
Sunday 2 December 2012	Seeds ordered from Kings Seeds catalogue available from the Distribution shed
Sunday 24 February 2013	Onion sets, shallots and potatoes available from the Distribution shed
Monday 4 March 2013	Annual General Meeting
Sunday 18 August 2013	Summer picnic – Digswell site

New members

There have been a number of new members on both sites and a list is provided below.

Broadwater

B10 Jodie Weston
B12 Robert Bennett
B22 Sharon Keenlyside
B23 Andrew Ottaway

Digswell

D107 Helen McLean
D127 Paul Fairclough
D165 Denise Madden
D174 Frank Marsh
D178 Paul Willgoss

Monitoring the plots

Allotments are a precious resource, so we need to ensure that they are being used effectively. The Committee carries out monthly inspections of all plots, to ensure that:

- **they are being cultivated effectively**
- **a sufficient proportion of the plot is being used for cultivation**
- **the borders around the plot are being mowed**

If the committee views that a plot-holder is not meeting these requirements, they will be sent a warning letter, requiring that the plot-holder address these issues. If the plot is still though to be unsatisfactory at the next monthly inspection, a second warning letter will be issued. If at the inspection after that, insufficient progress is still being made, the committee has within its powers to terminate the tenancy with immediate effect. **It should be noted that this will normally be the case – we have a long waiting list of people wanting to have an allotment and, unless there are exceptional extenuating circumstances, the committee will deem it right to allow someone else to make use of the allotment.**

Housekeeping

Mowing

The mowers are provided to help members keep their plots tidy. It's important that they are kept in good condition and they should only be used for mowing grassed areas and should **NEVER** be used on growing areas. The mowers are one of the main items of expenditure for the Committee and keeping them in good conditions is in everyone's interest. If we have to spend money on constantly replacing mowers, then there is less money to spend on other member benefits.

Think of them as your own mowers - if you wouldn't treat them like that at home, then you shouldn't at the allotment either!

Padlock combination

It's important to ensure that the padlock combination is kept secure. So, the basic principle is:

If you are the first person to open the gate or the last to leave, ensure that you don't leave the padlock with the combination showing. If you open the padlock, change the combination. If you close the padlock, change it once you've locked the gate.

Autumn onion sets

Autumn-sown onion sets are now available from the Shed, as follows:

Onion set Senshyu Yellow
80p per 250 grams (approx 65 sets)

Onion set Electric (red variety)
80p per 250 grams (approx 70 sets)

Plant sale – swap shop

Kim Haynes of the Broadwater site is hoping to arrange a plant sale and swap shop for spring of next year.

Wanted this.....but got this?



We often find that we have far more seedlings on our hands than we need for some crop while others don't work. The idea would be that plot-holders would swap or sell our surplus between us, so that we can all get the best range of crops growing as possible.



If you would be interested in taking part in this – which would be held in the spring of 2013, please get in contact with Kim Haynes on:

hayneskim12@yahoo.com

Nothing new under the sun

It's easy to think that, as you struggle with your allotment, that you are alone with your problems. As Andrew Thorne from the Broadwater site has discovered, people have been struggling for some time – here are some of the quotes that he has found, which date back almost a hundred years.

"Back from the Land", Chapter 14 of Frenzied Fiction by Stephen Leacock (1918)

"It appears that the right time to begin gardening is last year. For many things it is well to begin the year before last. For good results one must begin even sooner. Here, for example, are the directions, as I interpret them, for growing asparagus. Having secured a suitable piece of ground, preferably a deep friable loam rich in nitrogen, go out three years ago and plough or dig deeply. Remain a year inactive, thinking. Two years ago pulverize the soil thoroughly. Wait a year. As soon as last year comes set out the young shoots. Then spend a quiet winter doing nothing. The asparagus will then be ready to work at *this* year..."

"...All the books and instructions insist that the selection of the soil is the most important part of gardening. No doubt it is. But, if a man has already selected his own backyard before he opens the book, what remedy is there? All the books lay stress on the need of "a deep, friable loam full of nitrogen." This I have never seen. My own plot of land I found on examination to contain nothing but earth. I could see no trace of nitrogen. I do not deny the existence of loam. There may be such a thing. But I am admitting now in all humility of mind that I don't know what loam is. Last spring my fellow gardeners and I all talked freely of the desirability of "a loam." My own opinion is that none of them had any clearer ideas about it than I had. Speaking from experience, I should say that the only soils are earth, mud and dirt. There are no others."

"Urbs in Rure" from Me and Frances by Anthony Armstrong (1930)

"Weeds are one of the most important things about gardens, and yet every single book on gardening that we have looked at merely dismisses them with a few words such as, "weeds should now be hoed up", or "hand weed between rows during the spring", or some such guff. These statements are all absurd. Firstly most weeds can't be hoed up, unless you propose to combine the hoeing with some more useful thing such as excavating for the foundations of a new house. Secondly, the best time for weeding is not the spring but from early January to late December, which allows (perhaps unwisely) for a short Christmas holiday."

"...Weeds are divided into three parts. There is the green part which sticks up above the ground and is useful as indicating the fact that you have a weed; there is the root which you can by infinite labour and patience excavate to about two feet deep to the detriment of anything within a yard radius; and thirdly, there is the root below two feet which you invariably leave in the ground and which grows up again within a week – or in the case of the dandelion within four days. After about three or four feet in depth the dandelion's root forks into two to make it more difficult. The dandelion is called wurri-wurri in Australia. This is probably the other end of our dandelion."

My thanks to Andrew Thorne for providing these extracts.

Future plans for the shed

After many years running the Distribution Shed on the Digswell site, Dave Rogers now feels it time to plan for the future running of the shed. As members will know, the Distribution Shed is a great resource and Dave Rogers has provided an excellent service to the membership over the years, providing a wide range of products at very competitive prices. So, it's important that it keeps going and Dave Rogers will continue to provide advice and support while it's needed.

The committee is pleased to announce that Barbara Wilton has agreed to become involved in the running of the Shed, with the aim of taking it over in the next financial year. However, she would like other Association members to help her with this task, to ensure that the handover is as smooth as possible and that the task of running the Shed is effectively managed. The types of work involved would include:

- planning and ordering the range of products to be stocked
- helping to take deliveries of stock
- managing the cash
- liaising with the volunteer rota manning the Shed

If you would be interested in becoming involved and helping Barbara run this important resource for the membership, please contact her on 01707 339285.

Rainwater harvesting – an update

It may be perverse still to be discussing rainwater harvesting when we're enduring one of the rainiest summers we've seen, but the long term situation is still one of drought. Here, Roger Edgson, a plot-holder on the Digswell site, reports on his experience of installing a rainwater harvesting system on his plot on the Digswell site.

'It's not a thing of beauty, but I managed to get my rainwater harvesting system up and running, (See photo below). The problem is that almost as soon as it was finished the rain stopped. In spite of that I still collected about three dustbinsfuls of water in a very dry period.

Just to give a bit of feedback on the 'project', the overall cost of the structure itself was less than £100 which is still a bit high (see cost breakdown below) and I think that if you have already some of the materials you could reduce this quite

a bit. Old corrugated iron would do just as well as plastic sheet for instance. I did reduce the timber costs significantly by using recycled timber from a place in St Albans.



Cost of elements of the structure

Wood (purchased from St Albans Wood Recycling 01727 568202 - they do delivery for £15)

12 metres of 4"x2" at £1.10 per metre = £13.20

10 metres of 2"x2" at £0.60 per metre = £6

Total wood cost with a bit of waste say £25

Corrugated plastic sheets

Three 760 x 1830mm plastic sheets
About £9 per sheet from Homebase or B and Q

Say £30 including a few fixings

Metposts

Four 50mm x 50mm x 450mm long posts @
£6.50

Total cost of £26

Miscellaneous

Screws etc

Say £10

Total cost of about £90

I made some mistakes and if I did another one I would approach it in a different way. The main issue was putting metposts in the ground first and then trying to build it up from there. It would have been much better to build the timber structure in its entirety and then sink it into the ground or set up the metposts at the corners. Doing it the way I did meant that I was fiddling around a lot trying to get things square and with the right fall on the roof etc. The other thing to mention is that a battery operated drill/screwdriver is pretty much essential. It was taking me ages to do until I got a combi drill.

The main problem I had was in respect to what you put the collected water in. I had three old dustbins and thought that I would try those but the first one was made of a rubberised material and fairly early on leaked. The other ones are more substantial plastic and they have done OK but the volume that they provide is well short of the, on average, 700 litres of capacity that would be needed to store the winter rain captured. Buying 100 litre water butts at £40 or so a throw is not on and so I am investigating some other alternatives. Someone mentioned to me that some farmers use 1 metre cubed (1000 litre) plastic containers for fertiliser that are discarded and can be got hold of pretty cheaply. If anyone knows a friendly farmer that wouldn't mind letting us have just the one, or maybe a few if other people were interested, that would be good.

At the moment the drought conditions are not affecting our allotment activities but this could change and in any event finding ways to be more sustainable in respect to water would be seen by some as something to make a contribution to.

I was really surprised at just how much rainwater could be collected from such a small roof area. The average 700 litres over an average winter equates to over 70 standard 2 gallon watering cans. By having your own harvesting system you make the contribution to sustainability but also have access to rainwater which is much better for plants, you have water right on your plot rather than having to carry it over from a tank and it offers the opportunity for setting up automatic watering systems for when you are on holiday.

Some say that it doesn't work but I have been trying a soaker hose fed from a tank and it doesn't seem to be doing too badly. Such a system with a timer on it could work well, I think.

Any suggestions on how we could get access to materials for other interested plotters and other general ideas on this would be welcome.'

Roger Edgson
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This issue is likely to remain important, despite the wet summer, so we will continue to report on this.

If you have any news items, features, recipes or photographs that you would like to submit for future issues of the Newsletter, please contact Stephen Brown, newsletter editor:

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