

Barnes Horticultural and Allotments Society (BHAS) Annual Report 2020

Chair's report

Towards the end of June each year on a hopefully sunny day, the Allotments Society holds its AGM on the grass next to the Trading Shed.

This year unfortunately that wasn't possible due to the Covid-19 restrictions on gatherings, so we have postponed our AGM until such meetings are allowed (this may mean rolling over to June 2021) and I pleased to let you know that the current members have agreed to remain on the Committee until that time.

There are however two interim changes in roles;

- Sheena Clark has decided to retire as Minutes Secretary and Pam Islip has volunteered to take on the Minutes Secretary role on an interim basis in addition to her site rep role for Priory.
- Sheena Clark will now share the Shed Manager role with Mark Gourlay and remains on the Committee.

As a reminder, the Committee are all volunteers and the Society's principal concerns are the well being of the allotments and promoting the interests of our members. We manage the day to day running of the allotments on behalf of Richmond Council and organise events such as the Open Day, Annual Show and the occasional Talk.

I'd like to thank all the Committee and numerous other plot holder volunteers for their time and hard work over the past year – as a team we aim to keep the 5 East Sheen sites running as smoothly as we are able.

We are always looking for fresh ideas and new people who can help us on our journey – so if you think that you might be able to contribute in any way – please let your site rep know, or contact me direct. We would be very pleased to hear from you.

What's been happening over the past year?

Last Summer a few plot holders got together to dismantle the old turkey pen next to the Trading Shed that hadn't been used for a number of years. The reclaimed space has allowed the communal lawn and garden to be extended right up to Beverley Brook and has given us some much needed extra space for our events.

In September we held our Annual Show with lots of impressive entries into the vegetable, fruit, flower and baking categories. We also enjoyed a delicious BBQ with homemade salads and Victoria sponge cakes along with a plant sale, children's activities and a raffle. Thank

you to all the volunteers who gave their time to making this day fun for all and everyone who visited.

And the cup winners were.....

The Best Show Person (person with the most points in the Produce and Flowers categories) was John Hynd

The Plot of the Year was also won by John Hynd

The Best Newcomer was Dino Franz

The Best in Baking was Natasa Bojkovic.

We hope to be able to run the Annual Show this September (we'll confirm closer to the time) but just in case this isn't possible, Dino Franz and Sarah Willard organised a Giant Sunflower growing competition. Seeds from the same batch were made available to plot holders during Spring. We'll be measuring up in September, looking for the tallest stem and widest diameter head.

In October fellow plot holder and amateur mycologist Pam Islip gave us a talk on fungi at All Saints Church in East Sheen. Over thirty people came out on a chilly Autumn evening to hear Pam Islip's great talk about Fungi. Pam is a knowledgeable amateur mycologist and she brought with her a vast array of fungi foraged that very morning from Surrey. There were excellent examples on display of everything from poisonous fungi to the very edible. Pam explained their role as agents of decay in our compost bins and also as the symbiotic promoter of growth offered by mycorrhizal fungi to our roses and other plants. There is much to learn about fungi and how they can benefit our allotments.

In January this year, payment by card and contactless payments became possible at the Trading Shed. This has become a very popular way of paying, especially over the past few months as cash handling became less attractive.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, we have been extremely lucky in that the Government deemed working on allotments as allowable exercise. Many of us are extremely grateful for this and our allotments are probably looking the best they have ever been for some time!

The Shed had to close unfortunately but after a couple of weeks the Council approved a non-contact "Order & Collect" service set up by Joint Shed Manager Sheena Clark with gardening supplies now available via email thetradingshed@gmail.com

As well as setting up the card payments facility, the Treasurers, Sophie and Alastair Kennedy, also introduced the Direct Debit system in April, for plot holders to pay their annual Society membership. This will significantly reduce the administration required to process all the renewals each year and make it easier for plot holders to simply collect their membership cards from the Shed.

It is over a year now that bonfires were banned on all Council allotments. We all seem to have adjusted fairly well to this change, by increased composting, creating dead hedges, or removing non compostable woody material from the site. For those unable to do any of the previous solutions, the Council advice is to store the material on your own plot and await a Council shredding/chipping service.

Last month, the Council contractors removed 4 truck loads of rotten wood and general rubbish that had been dumped by the side of the wood/woodchip and mulch bays by the Hertford Avenue main gate. This was becoming an ever-increasing eyesore – just where all visitors and most of us enter the central allotments. The area has now been fenced off so please do not dump anything here – or anywhere else for that matter.

Lastly, I'd like to thank everyone who has observed the social distancing etiquette on the narrow main paths, by stepping aside and allowing safe passing. As I said earlier, we are extremely grateful that the allotments remained open from the start of the pandemic. They are a safe and wonderful place to be during these difficult times and long may they remain so.

John Padgett

Chair: East Sheen Allotments