



Grass Cuttings



Newsletter of **S**ale **H**orticultural & **A**llotment **S**ociety - September 2005

Chairman's Report

Hello to all our members. We are now in September having, I hope, enjoyed this wonderful summer. A lot of people have moaned about this summer as a non-event, but without a doubt our gardens (except lawns) and our allotments have each produced good shows and yielded high quantity & quality levels of crops.

Our allotment waiting list continues to grow. We believe there are several reasons for this continuing interest; TV and newspaper/magazine articles featuring the improved taste from home-grown produce, exercise and companionship being the most common.

Sylvia and I visited six or seven allotments within Stockport Borough along with officials from other Trafford allotment societies. We found these visits very stimulating, comparing SHAS with these diverse sites. Some had many sheds/greenhouses, most had very few; some had special enclosures for growing of sweet peas with controlled rainwater irrigation producing warmed water! Another site ran a monthly coffee morning with a prize draw for participating members. Most sites had a trading hut similar to SHAS, stocking similar items although we did see some possible additions for next year.

During our tours, the most common comment from other committees was that more help was needed and this continues to be my lament. We still have too few members willing to offer a little of their time to help with administration and to inject new ideas.

Anyway, back to our waiting list: we, your committee, decided to try and reclaim certain areas which have been unusable for several years and to offer more plots to our ever increasing waiting list. We hired a digger and dumper and we managed to reclaim two full plots and two half plots and to spread around over 60 tonnes of soil donated by Trafford Borough Council. These reclaimed plots were an eyesore making our site look neglected. Not any more though and each reclaimed plot has now been let to new members!

Whilst our waiting list continues to grow, we have had to write to several plot holders who have allowed their allotments to significantly deteriorate to check if they still wished to continue-albeit on a probationary basis- or if they wished to relinquish their tenancy. We feel this is only fair to existing plot holders and to potential new members on the waiting list to try and fairly use what plots are available.

Please note that if you having trouble maintaining your allotment for whatever reason (health, work, time etc), please discuss this with anyone on the committee and we can accommodate most things. It is not knowing that causes problems.

Our most recent plot inspection was on Monday 12th September, and whilst it was mostly encouraging, several letters and phone calls had to be made giving some

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members the equivalent of a final warning.

Moving on, we recently hosted a talk on correct and best composting practices by a lady from WRAP, Waste Resource Action Program. It was very enjoyable and extremely informative. Plus we managed to obtain from WRAP 40 large green hexagonal composters and are in the process of distributing them to allotment holders. A leaflet explaining good composting is available.

The committee recognised that the site was looking neglected due to the build up of large amounts of rubbish and waste. So, as an alternative to hiring skips, which are very expensive, we started a bag scheme for non compostable materials. This proved a huge success, but unfortunately a few plot holders have nearly ruined it for the rest by dumping compostable materials and even household rubbish brought from home! You are all responsible for the correct and considerate disposal of any waste produced by your allotment. If this bag scheme is further abused then it will be suspended and you will all have to return to taking your own rubbish to the recycling centre in Trafford.

Your committee is concerned that we have been unable to arrange talks and or visits for our members. We had hoped to offer two or three activities this year having managed to get the society back on an even keel last year. We are still hoping to fit something into this year's calendar but are limited due to the lack of volunteers! You can help even without being on the committee. We are hopeful that some existing and new members will come forward. We do, however, have one function booked and that is the SHAS Awards & Buffet Night on Saturday 22nd October. Tickets are £8 each. To book, complete the attached form or see any committee member for tickets. **Please watch the notice boards for additional information and we hope to see you at our Awards Night at St Mary's Church Hall, Moss Lane, Sale, on the 22nd October, so please contact Sylvia or any committee member for tickets.**

Best regards **Don Jackson**

Sylvia Steer writes:

Compost

It is more or less compulsory, morally at least, to have a compost heap! This was the feeling generated by the enthusiastic and informative talk by Isobel from WRAP held in our amenity building. Most of our organic waste can and should, be composted to produce good soil enhancing compost and to stop the landfill sites filling up with methane.

In mid summer weeds are growing fast and if you turn your back for half a week there's a forest on your plot. They are all food for the compost heap and if gathered up will quickly rot down in the heat. Compost needs a balance of wet 'green' stuff and 'brown' such as card board egg boxes, toilet roll centres and dried stems and leaves. Try layering them with manure, currently in the middle bay, to get a good high temperature. Nettles (not roots) and Comfrey will help speed up the process. Urine is an accelerator recommended by Bob Flowerdew but for those exposed heaps, you could add a commercial accelerator such as Garotta or Biotol. In 8 to 10 weeks the heap will be ready for spreading on the soil or in the bean trench. Don't put deep rooted perennial weeds like dandelions, couch grass dock and that awful mare's tail in the heap. Rot them down separately in a black bin bag for as long as it takes. Many plots have a clump of Comfrey growing. This can be added to the heap as above and its leaves can also be soaked in a barrel of water to make a free fertiliser to be watered down to the colour of weak tea and used as a foliar feed. Be warned it smells as good as it feeds.

Trafford are subsidising large recycled plastic composters at the moment. They are ideal for people who can't make the large wooden bins. As a soil improver you can't get much better than good home grown compost and you're helping the environment too. In future, plot inspections might include a look at and comment on, your composting! There are some excellent heaps around!

Thanks

Thanks to Peter Taylor, Ground manager at Bowdon Croquet Club, for giving up a long and very hot weekend to drive the digger to reclaim some of our un-lettable plots. Peter, when not wielding a mallet, is no stranger to driving a digger. He lead members at the Bowdon Club in a huge project to excavate and relocate 200 tons of earth to extend the lawn. These lawns are some of the finest in the country and have attracted and enhanced the play of some top croquet players, notably the winner of the 2005 Open Championship who lives in Ashton village.

Plot report

Welcome to our new plot holders from earlier this season. I hope you're enjoying the fruits of your labour. First the good news:- The following plots were commended in Trafford's July judging :- 56, 13, 31a, 36, 48,56a Highly commended certificates go to plot holders 37a and 46.

And now the bad:-

Our own recent appraisal of the site found seven plots in a sufficiently neglected state to warrant a warning letter. It is always sad to have to relinquish a plot which is getting too much to cope with. We hope we show tolerance to our long-standing plot holders if their plots become neglected temporarily. If you find you have taken too much on we will

also appreciate an approach from you and try to offer an alternative sized plot or to be put on the waiting list for a plot when circumstances have changed. This way we hope to avoid sending out the letters starting the process of eviction. For your information, this process lasts two months and two weeks from the first plot inspection which finds your plot to be neglected. With a waiting list, we are trying to be fair to all.

Please note your grass paths are your, and your neighbours' responsibility and must be kept mown to ensure safe passage between the plots. Shears and hard work are often the only answer. Please ensure no trees or fruit bushes overhang the paths so that it is safe to walk along between the plots. An overhanging apple branch can cause quite a bruise or even damage eyes. It is becoming an increasing concern of the committee's that several plot holders do not have the basic courtesy to ensure that their paths are well maintained and their crops do not overhang the paths. There is a map of the site with those paths that need to be addressed immediately at the Trading Hut.

Constitution

The new constitution, with slight changes, was accepted at the AGM along with the Allotment By Laws. A 'Welcome booklet' will be issued to new members as they join the society and copies of all these documents may be seen in the Trading hut and Amenity building.

Win a Voucher!

Plot inspections will take place three times a year during April, June and September. We're not just looking out for neglected plots but also for candidates for a voucher, to be spent in the trading hut, as a prize for hard work and good practice.

Good wishes to:

Jean Robertson who has relinquished her plot 24b through ill health. A successful and enthusiastic plot holder for many years, she helped regularly in the Trading hut and our good wishes and thanks go with her for her hard work.

Keith Jones who has broken his ankle while on holiday. Not easy to dig at the moment!

Volunteers needed for :

- Delivering newsletters (let us have your email address if you have one)
- Helping in the Trading Hut
- Making tea/coffee in the amenity building on Sunday mornings
- Social Events

Treasurer's Report:

Hello – everything is now on an even keel following a tumultuous year last year. I would just remind all members and allotment holders to pay their rents & subscriptions on time to Ken Bostock. Remember, they become due 1st January although we accept that those members without plot rents to pay will be slightly later.

Best regards, Jonathan Richards

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The Newsletter of **Sale Horticultural & Allotment Society** – September 2005
PLOT RECLAMATION 16th & 17th July 2005



