

# THE URBAN JUNGLE

The Newsletter of the Ruislip-Northwood Co-operative Small Holding and Allotment Society Limited

Issue 09 - December 2008

## Introduction

Well our house has a roof on now, so I am back editing this newsletter again. Actually I have very little to do this time since members of the committee have written pieces for me to include. Between them they have managed to fill the newsletter, so there will be little room for any of my ramblings! Our treasurer, Mike has produced a write up on our finances, our secretary, Trevor, has a message about Insurance and our chairman, Angela, has a reminder about security. For light relief, I have taken the liberty of inserting a few cracker jokes (groan!) which have a vague reference to gardening.

## Welcome To .....

Robert, who has taken on half of Benny's old plot, and Margaret, who has taken on part of Ted's.

## Cracker Joke 1

What do hedgehogs have for lunch?

## Notes from the Treasurer & a Sneak Preview of our Finances for 2008

From time to time I get asked various questions about our legal status and our finances, so let me have a go at clearing up a few points.

*Why are we a Limited Company?* Our constitution dates back almost 100 years and we were set up as a Limited Company to protect the investment - £1 a head, a lot of money in 1910 – of the original shareholders. It provides for us, among other things, to rent and work land for horticultural purposes. It is very old fashioned, and the Committee are considering whether to try to bring it up to date, but this would be a big job.

*Who sets the financial regulations?* Our affairs are regulated by the Financial Services Authority (the FSA). Luckily things have been simplified for small companies in recent years – and we fall into a category towards the bottom of the scale. Although we are tiny, we fall into the category of having a turnover of less than £90,000 per year and assets of less than £1.4 million. If only!

*What do we have to do to meet the FSA regulations?* In a nutshell all that is required is for us to keep proper records, and to provide a summary in a prescribed format every year. Three members of the Society have to sign the financial summary as a true record before it goes to the FSA.

*Do we need to employ an accountant?* No, because of our size we do not need someone with a formal accountancy qualification, although in practice we have paid an accountant to review and summarise our books in recent years. I think that this makes sense, but it did cost £130 last year.

*Do we need to perform an audit?* We are exempt from having to carry out an audit by a registered auditor. This is just as well as it would be very expensive. Our accountant does an informal audit when he summarises our books, but it's something we could do internally. It would make good sense for someone to check that we do have all the receipts, bills etc. to match our records.

*Would members make a fortune if Tesco's buy the site?* As we said in the previous newsletter, we don't own the site; we lease it from a charitable organisation, so if our site were to be sold, (which is very unlikely), there would be nothing in it for us as a Society, or as individuals. On the other hand, any debts, (e.g. damage resulting from a huge water leak), would be the responsibility of the Society, not individuals.

*So how did we do in the year 2008?* I'll give a summary at the AGM, but here is a brief preview.....

### Balance sheet (provisional)

Start of year balance	£2172
Income	£4607
Expenditure	£3625
Difference	£982
End of year balance	£3154

### Main expense items (provisional).

Rent £1650, water £439, fees & subscriptions £355, fence £306, lockers £213, insurances £197, general maintenance £153, petrol £115, stationary/postage £79, .plumbing £78, awards & donations £75.

The work on the car park and installation of the gates was carried out by Balfour Beatty in return for us allowing them to use our land for storage so there was no cost to us for these.

Our expenditure on water of £439 was lower than expected due partly to the wet summer and partly to keeping the supply under close observation for leaks. However it is still a major expense item and with the price continuing to rise, we will need to continue to monitor our use carefully.

Work on improving the fence and lockers cost £518, mainly for materials. It shows the value of members giving their time to help - we could not afford to employ contractors to do work like this.

Overall our finances are in reasonable shape, but we cannot afford any major investment on the site.

### **Cracker Joke 2**

What vegetable mustn't you eat when it is raining?

### **Note from the Secretary about Insurance**

In common with most allotment societies, we currently have public liability insurance. This has been arranged by the National Society of Allotment & Leisure Gardeners, which is the central organisation representing the interests nationally of allotments and allotment-holders, giving legal & financial advice. They are now insisting that all societies who insure through them are also affiliated; this costs £2 per member per year. We have also been advised that in addition to public liability insurance, we should have employer's liability insurance, which covers anyone "employed" - whether paid or not - by the society, and is specifically designed to include members involved either in working parties, or undertaking any communal job on the site.

We have spent some considerable time seeking advice on this and trying to find a suitable alternative which will not increase our costs. We have not found a scheme as good as the NSALG one, and the general advice is that the extra insurance cover is worthwhile. We certainly cannot be left uninsured. The Committee therefore feels that this is the best option, especially as NSALG also offers several other benefits to the society and individual members. Rather than use funds which are ear-marked for capital expenditure in 2009, the Committee are agreed that the cost - £4 per member per year - should be passed on as a supplement to every member's rental.

### **Cracker Joke 3**

What did baby corn say to mummy corn?

### **A Reminder from the Chairman about Security**

Several members of the Committee have noticed the upper gate left unlocked on a number of occasions. I would like to remind all members that they have agreed to the Terms and Conditions of the Society rule B6, "to keep the gate locked at all times" to protect the security of the site. If any member notices the gate unlocked, it is your responsibility to lock it. We have had some incidents in the past of damage to Member's property from opportunist vandals and fly tipping. Don't allow your negligence to make it easier for them; it could be your property next. If you are waiting for the arrival of family or friends, arrange to meet them at the gates and don't unlock them until they want to get in, then lock up after them. Most of us have mobile phones; some of us have a long walk to and from the gate, but it is in everyone's interest to abide by this simple rule. When you get used to it, it takes very little time now that the keys work and Kevin has kindly attached the padlock to the gate. And, yes, it DOES matter to ALL of us.

### **Cracker Joke 4**

How do snails keep their shells shiny?

### **And finally .....**

In this mailing you should have this newsletter, your invoice for 2009 and a notice about the AGM. Don't forget the AGM; put the date in your diary now. If there is a matter you would like discussed, it might be a good idea to let the secretary, Trevor, know in advance, ([joelstreetallotments@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:joelstreetallotments@tiscali.co.uk)) so that it can have a good airing.

I hope you all had an enjoyable Christmas and that you have a good 2009. Let us hope for better gardening weather in the coming year.

Jenny Jessup

Cracker Joke answers: 1 Prickled onions. 2 A leek. 3. Where's popcorn? 4. They use snail varnish.