

THE URBAN JUNGLE

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

Issue 15 - December 2009

Introduction

Here is the last Newsletter for this year and, even though I edit it, I think it is a cracker, (groan). Our Chairman, Angela, has written a really interesting background piece about our Society and the site. Mike, our treasurer, has given us a sneak preview of our finances and there is more on the subject of manure. Once again, for light relief, I have taken the liberty of inserting a few cracker jokes which have a vague reference to gardening.

The Joel Street Allotment Site

Trevor and I have often been asked about the background of our allotment site, particularly by new members. Because we have been fortunate enough to attract a number of new, active members this year - and at the risk of boring those of you who have been loyal plot holders for years - I thought it might be useful to them to discover more about the Society.

Q. Who owns the site?

A. The Ruislip-Northwood Co-operative Small Holding and Allotment Society Limited (Joel Street Allotments) rents land from the Ruislip Combined Charity which is run by a Board of Trustees. It is not a Council owned site, but is fully independent. The Society leases the land in perpetuity.

Q. Why was the site set up?

A. At the turn of the 19th Century the Government had been concerned for some time about the poor. After the enclosures, agricultural labourers had drifted to the towns in search of work where there was no land to grow food or keep a few animals to feed their families. The only help for the destitute was from the Poor Laws and that usually meant the workhouse. In 1908 The Allotment and Small Holdings Act was passed, which set out provision for those with little funds to rent a plot large enough to feed a family of four. The land had to be for local people and the rents affordable. In 1910 an enterprising group of local men persuaded the Trustees of the Ruislip Cottagers Charity to rent them the land which we still cultivate. They set up a Society to run it and registered a Constitution which is the one we still use today. Because the members had limited financial resources, the Society sold shares to the members to raise money to run the Society. Members would initially pay a small portion of the share's value, but could be called upon to honour the rest if required. (I can still recall this arrangement when we had a plot in the '70s.) In the event of foreclosure, this was the limit of the members' Liability. Hence we are still a limited Company and we still pay a pound for a share.

Q. Why do we now pay rent and to whom do we pay it?

A. Over time the money raised from the shares was woefully insufficient for the needs of the Society, and it became necessary to levy an annual rent. Plot holders and tenants of the Small Holdings all pay rent to the Society, according to the amount of land we have. This is intended for the upkeep of the site. In turn, the Society's annual rent to the Trustees is based on the rate of inflation.

Q. Who runs the site?

A. The Committee runs the site on behalf of the members and is elected annually at the AGM. Meetings are currently held every 4 - 6 weeks. Every member has an equal right to run for election to the Committee, provided they are proposed and seconded by two other members. This is YOUR SOCIETY. Come to the AGM and air your ideas for the future.

Q. Who owns the footpath running alongside the smallholdings?

A. The Ruislip Combined Charity owns the land up to the hedgerow bordering the fields formerly owned by Joel Street Farm. Our entire site has been registered as Common Land by the Trustees in order to preserve its future; to do this the Council agreed to maintain the public footpath which was in existence.

Q. Who owns the two main paths on the allotment site?

A. The Ruislip Combined Charity. There is no separate rent levied for the two main paths; they are there to provide access to members of the stables and the allotments. For Health and Safety reasons these should be kept clear at all times.

Q. Who owns the gates?

A. The Society members paid for the lower gate in 2004. Tim Wood pays for the electric opening device. Balfour Beatty paid for the installation and cost of the upper gate and the main car park in payment for their use of the land in 2007/8.

Cracker Joke 1

Why does Santa have three allotments?

Notes from the Treasurer - our Finances for 2009

Here is a sneak preview of our finances as they stand at the end of November. We started with £1110 in our current account, £2015 in our savings account and £27 petty cash, making a total of £3152. At the end of November, we had £3094 in the current account, £2022 in the savings account and £162 petty cash, giving a total of £5278. There are a number of items outstanding, including a water bill and various items due to be claimed by members which should, in total, be around £600. This means we should have about £4600 when our financial year ends on December 31st.

Our income for the year was £5175, mostly from plot rentals. Our expenditure to date is £3456, the major items being our site lease of £1740, site maintenance £320, skip hire £207, insurance £162, fees and subscriptions £220. I expect our water rates for the year to be about £700.

People sometimes ask why we can't invest in any improvements to the site, such as toilets or a better water system. I think the answer is clear from the figures – we simply don't have the money. The only way we could do that would be to raise special funding, or increase our rents significantly. That might be a good item for someone to bring up at the AGM.

Once again I plan to use Ian Adlington to audit our books. The charge works out to be around £150, but for that we get a thorough examination of our books and paperwork, and a financial report suitable to be sent to the Financial Services Authority, whose rules we must comply with.

Cracker Joke 2

What is purple and yells for help?

Urgent Appeal – Treasurer Required

At the next AGM, Mike will be standing down as Treasurer. The Society has to have a Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer in order to continue to exist. Will you please consider whether you could contribute to the Society by taking on this role.

Cracker Joke 3

What is the most popular Christmas wine?

More about Manure (the saga continues)

Ignore what was said in the last Newsletter - it is now legal for Tim to pass on his manure to us! So, the good news is that, as Tim needs to get rid of it, we can help ourselves. He has also offered that if anyone wants a personal, bulk delivery to their plot he can oblige (access permitting) - please see him to make arrangements. In view of the logistical problems in the past with managing a large heap, Tim does not want to accumulate huge quantities, so if it builds up he will continue to follow Defra's advice and spread it on his fields.

The other good news is that we can be certain that any fresh manure will be free from hormone weedkiller. Aminopyralid has only been re-licenced in the formulations used either for road & rail verges or for sheep and cattle - but not horse - pasture. The slight downside is that what is available is very fresh and certainly can't be just be dug in or used as a mulch. We need to stack it and let it rot down for several months at least.

Cracker Joke 4

Why are herbalists so rich?

And finally

In this mailing you should have this Newsletter, your invoice for 2010 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) so that it can have a good airing.

I hope you all have an enjoyable Christmas and that you have a good 2010.

Jenny Jessup

Cracker Joke answers: 1 So that he can hoe, hoe, hoe. 2. A damson in distress. 3. I don't like Brussels sprouts. 4. Because thyme is money