Brackley & District Allotment & Garden Holders Association Ltd

**“ALLOTMENT NEWS”**

**Issue 2** **June 2014**

**Chairman’s Comments:** The Committee’s first attempt at producing a member’s newsletter last November was well received and this is our second attempt. As part of our commitment to keep our members better informed, we are trying to produce two editions a year, one to coincide with Rent Day in November and one to coincide with our Annual AGM in June. If any of you have any ideas or topics for inclusion in future editions please let the committee know or you can E Mail articles to Brackleyallotments@gmail.com or by post to the secretary. If there are any budding editors out there who would like to take on this project would you please let the secretary know.

Rather than reiterate the points I have covered in my Chairman’s Annual Report to the AGM here I have decided to attach a copy of that report to this newsletter so that those of you who are unable to attend the AGM can read it here.

**Secretary’s Comments:** I would like to thank all those members who have agreed to be contacted by email as it has made life a whole lot easier to communicate with you all. Anyone who has given their email address and has not received any mails from Brackley Allotments, please send an email saying so, as I may have your address wrong.

A couple of businesses in Brackley have contacted me to ask if our members would be interested in what they have to offer.

 Barking Mad:- Alternative to kennels using host families - www.BarkingMad.uk.com

 Jake Gold:- Acupuncturist and Massage therapist - www.jakegold.co.uk

If anyone would like more information please contact me.

**Treasurer’s Comments:**  Last year saw some heavy spending on various site improvements, but your Association’s financial position remains sound. As you will see from your copy of the audited accounts, we ended 2013 with a Bank balance that has increased by £350 at the year end, thanks in no small part to the profit generated from the seed orders by Mike Cook, our secretary.

The major items of expenditure were as follows:

1. New gates at Egerton House.

2. Hedging to replace the failing chain link fences at Egerton House and St Peters Mill.

3. Hedge laying at Castle carried out by Colin Wills, the site rep, at minimal cost.

The site improvements have continued into this year and the costs will appear in the accounts for this current year, but our finances remain in a very healthy state.

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**Rent Day 2013:** The committee has received positive feedback from last year’s rent day and most members think it was a success and appreciated having it in the lower Town Hall. It was far better than having to queue at someone’s home. There was still a bit of queuing as a lot people seemed to turn up at the same time and it was impossible for the Secretary and Treasurer to deal with everyone as speedily as they would have liked. They both did an excellent job and now that everyone has signed an open ended tenancy agreement, rather than an annual one, it should be far quicker next year, as long as members remember to bring their membership card with them. We will remind you before rent day 2014.

We also received feedback that you enjoyed having a coffee morning with rent day as it was more of a sociable atmosphere with people enjoying having a cuppa and a chat with friends from other sites. The coffee morning aspect paid for the hire of the Town Hall and also made a few pounds profits for our funds. Thanks must go to our ladies who baked the cakes and ran the coffee morning. Paul Macer, one of the Committee Members on the Cemetery Site, also ran a small stall selling old or unwanted tools which raised £26 for Association funds. He hopes to repeat this in 2014 and therefore if any of you have any old or unwanted tools will you please let Paul know on 702924 and he will happily relieve you of them.

A date for your diaries is that Rent Day this year will be on Saturday 1st November.

**Cheap Seeds:** We hope that all of you who participated in the NSALG/Kings Seeds scheme were pleased with the way it operated. Not only were you able to purchase your seeds at about a 40% discount on garden centre prices but the Association made a commission profit of £276, which helps to keep our rents down. Recognition must go to Colin Wills and Robert Harris who dealt with the seed orders on rent day as they did a sterling job. As soon as the 2015 seed catalogues are available they will be passed to the site reps for distribution to members and we will take orders again at rent day.

On the subject of discounts, could I remind members that you can get a 10% discounts on purchases at Preston Bissett Garden Centre and on the purchase of horticultural glass at Buckingham Glass on production of your Allotment Association Membership Card.

**Southfield School Gardening Club** has purchased new hand trowels, forks, border forks and spades, rakes, hoes and watering cans with the money kindly donated by the Allotment Association. This term 12 children have signed up to the club which meets at lunch time on a Monday.

**Composting** Over the years some plot holders have got in the habit of piling organic material in communal areas adjacent to their plots and these have now become quite large mounds of soil. At some point somebody has to move these and a typical example has been that a working party had to recently dig out soil which had built up along the wall at the Egerton Site to prevent it causing pressure on the Church wall. The committee would therefore like to urge you all to compost as much as possible of your organic waste on your plots as in time it will give you a valuable source of nutrient rich compost for your plots.

Most vegetation can be composted but there are a few exemptions such as bindweed, mares-tail, dandelions and the stems of brassicas or any vegetation infected by disease such as potato blight. These should all be bagged up and removed from the site and disposed of in your green waste bins at home. To produce good quality compost it is important that you periodically turn over the compost as it helps to speed up the decomposition process. This can also be accelerated by adding “Garotta” an enhancer that can be bought from garden centres.

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**Crop Rotation** This article is for some of our newer members who may not be familiar with principals of crop rotation. This is sound gardening practice to avoid growing the same type of vegetables in the same piece of ground for several years running. This is because certain soil pests and diseases, which attack members of the same botanical family, will build up if they have constant access to their host plants. Club Root is a typical example, when brassicas are grown in the same plot over a number of years. If you get club root in the soil it can affect the quality of your greenstuff for many years.

Wherever possible, try to rotate over a 4 year cycle. The main family groups should be grown together and then moved on another year are Legumes (peas and beans), Brassicas (The cabbage family, including swedes, radishes and turnips), Root Crops (potatoes, carrots and parsnips) and finally the Onion Family (including leeks). The best way is year 1, Legumes, year 2, Brassicas, year 3, Roots and year 4 Onions. Should you require more information, please ask your site reps.

**Water:** Water is a valuable but increasingly expensive commodity for gardeners. Our Association is lucky in having piped water on all of our sites but this comes at a cost, which has to be included in your site rent. The committee strives to keep our rents down but we need the help of all plot holders in using as little water as necessary. Last year the Cemetery Site used double the amount of water as the other 3 sites together and that site is being closely monitored this year. If the same happens this year then it may be necessary to add a water surcharge to the Cemetery Site rent as it is not fair on the other sites to be subsidising the Cemetery Sites water usage.

You can all help keeping costs down by only watering when absolutely necessary and crops such as roots should be rarely watered as when it is dry it encourages the likes of carrots and parsnips to grow deep to find moisture. Overwatering onions can cause them to rot at the base and generally it is not necessary to water brassicas once they are established unless they are showing signs of wilt. Legumes are the main crops that may need extra water.

**Weeds:** The old saying of “one year’s seeds mean 7 years’ weeds” is very true. It is therefore important for all us gardeners to keep on top of the weeds on our plots as the seeding weeds not only cause extra work for us but also many of your neighbours. I therefore urge you all that if you have a piece of ground that is going to seed and that you cannot deal with it immediately, then at least strim the weeds down until you can deal with it.

**Commercial Compost:** In the last newsletter we reported that the committee were looking into the possibility of bulk buying “Professional Quality” compost for our members. The committee did look into this but concluded that to make this financially viable we would have to buy a very large quantity and then the logistics of storing and distributing it was too problematic and therefore we have abandoned the idea for the time being.

**Bees:** We also reported in the last newsletter that due to the lack of honey bees for pollination on our sites last year that the committee would explore the possibility of having some bee hives put on our sites. We have discussed this with a professional bee keeper and while he would be happy to locate and manage hives on all our sites, he advised against it as inevitably, even with the most docile bees, sooner or later somebody will get stung and this could be neighbours as well as plot holders. He recommended a minimum of 2 hives per site and advised that we would have to take out insurance. Consequently, while the idea was good in theory, practically it was not viable and therefore the committee decided to abandon the idea. **Page 3**

**Communal Areas and open spaces Adjacent to Plots:** Could we remind plots holders that in accordance with our rules; you are not only responsible for your plot but also for all paths, haulage ways of communal areas, including hedges, adjacent to your plot. Committee Members have received comments from some plot holders that they are not happy and feel it is unfair that they have to look after large communal areas or long hedges adjacent to their plots. This is just the luck of the draw when people are allocated their plots. Unfortunately the Association does not have the luxury of being able to employ someone to maintain these areas and therefore it has to fall on plot holders.

**New Allotment Land Update.**  The committee are continuing in their efforts to try to obtain new allotment land to satisfy the demand from our fast growing population and our waiting list. Unfortunately at the time of writing there is still no news to report.

**Site Reports:**

**Castle:** During the year a significant effort addressing neglected plots was given a  key amount of attention. Several tenants agreed to vacate their plots and were reallocated to those on the waiting list. The committee spent some considerable time dealing with these matters including the issue of 'helpers'. The hedge fronting Hinton Road has been cut and laid at minimal cost to the Association. A new lockable notice board has been installed at Castle site. During the year a simple suggestion from one of our tenants resulted in surplus plants being offered at the gate to other plot holders. Let’s maximise this great idea to its full potential again this year. The conifer hedge to the West of the site continues to cause some difficulties and the Management Committee continue to work on this issue. A collection of scrap metal from the site has been completed, again at no cost. A similar task is planned to remove unwanted timber later in the year.

**Cemetery:** The Cemetery Site is generally in good order at present and after a very wet winter and a slow start, everyone’s produce appears to be growing well. All plot holders bordering the hedge between the site and the neighbouring houses eventually got it trimmed but it is already growing again. All the previous year’s prunings have now been burnt which has further helped to tidy up the site. There is one ongoing problem on site which is the 2 green bins near the entrance. These are frequently overfilled, often with soil and the bin men have refused to empty them on more than one occasion. These were obtained to accommodate vegetation, such as bindweed and brassica stems which cannot be composted but not general vegetation. The next time the bin men refuse to empty them, will result in the bins being removed and all rubbish will then either have to be composted or removed from the site.

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**Egerton:** The proposed works at the site have now mostly been completed. The quick-thorn hedge is now growing quickly. The tree works were completed in early April and the resultant timber has been removed from the site by members. The removal of the large sycamore tree and the pruning back of branches from the overhanging trees has greatly improved the site. The day after the tree work the digger arrived and the pipe work and the new water system was installed. Keys to the sheath taps are still available from the site reps at £2.50 each.

A working party was organised on the 17th May and soiled against the dry stone wall was removed. Unfortunately, a few days after this and following a period of heavy rain, a large section of the wall collapsed into the churchyard causing quite a bit of damage. Fortunately it was not where the working party had been working but on a section which had been in a poor state for some years.

Finally, the Town Council have agreed to fund a fence between Jenny’s Pond and our site and at the time of writing, we are eagerly waiting for this work to start. The site reps would like to thank all those who have given their time in helping to bring the above projects to fruition.

**St Peter’s Mill:** Several trees have been cut down along the fenceline adjoining the play area in a joint effort by Brackley Town Council and ourselves. This was done at zero cost to the association. The hedgerows alongside the footpaths have also been planted with quickthorn whips to fill in several gaps and a long empty stretch by the old wood yard.

**Chairman’s AGM Report 2014**

As my second year as your chairman comes to an end and I reflect on what has happened during the last 12 months, I am quite surprised at how much has been achieved in that time. Before I outline those achievements, I would like to say a big thank you to all the Management Committee who have worked so tirelessly on your behalf to make our Association and our sites better for all of us. Without their dedication, enthusiasm and hard work, a lot of the projects would not have come to fruition.

The first thing that comes to mind was Rent Day 2013 and the coffee morning. I hope that you all found this a more pleasant experience being in the lower Town Hall rather than queuing at someone’s home. It also meant that as well as paying your rent, you were able to have a drink and a chat with fellow plot holders from the different sites. In addition you were also able to place your seed orders and benefit from the reduced prices. The cost of hiring the Town Hall was covered by the profit from the coffee morning and over £1,577 worth of seed orders were taken providing the Association with a net profit of £276. The overall profit, including seed sales, the coffee morning and the sale of some old tools and after the deduction of costs meant that the Association was better off to the sum of £326. This all helps to keep our rents down and by the way the Town Hall has already been booked for rent day 2014 on the 1st November.

On the subject of the National Society of Allotment Holders/Kings Seeds initiative, I think this was a great success and everyone who placed orders (over 50% of our members) will have saved more than their National Association membership fee. Personally I have been very pleased with Kings Seeds and have found the germination rate extremely good and the feedback I have received from other plot holders is the same. We will repeat the seed scheme again this year and I hope that even more members will participate.

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Rent day also coincided with our first attempt to produce an Association Newsletter which was well received and a second edition has been published to coincide with this meeting. This is part of the committee’s commitment to keep you better informed. If there are any budding editors out there who would like to take on the job of a twice yearly newsletter then please make yourself known to me. In addition, now that about 95% of our members are on E Mail, Mike has worked hard to keep you informed about what is happening via this means and he also continues to place information on our website. For those of you who are not on-line then we still post notices on site notice boards.

At the time of last year’s meeting we were expecting to lose 8 full plots of Allotment at the Cemetery Site in 2016 when the Town Council plan extend the Town Cemetery. As the result of negotiations with the Council we have now agreed to reduce this loss to 8 half plots and we will be able to retain the remaining 8 half plots for another 10 years. It has also been agreed that in 2016 the Council will renew our leases on the remaining Cemetery Site plots and those on the Egerton and St Peter’s Mill sites for a further 21 years which is good news.

We still have about a 4 year waiting list for people wanting Allotments and a considerable amount of work has been done during the last year to try to get more Allotment land but to date without much success. I submitted a comprehensive report to South Northants Council earlier this year as part of the consultation process for the new Local Plan, insisting that the provision of allotment land must form an integral part of all planning gain on future developments. Shortly the District Council will receive £120K from developers in lieu of providing allotment land on the Radstone Fields development to be used to try to acquire allotment land. Unfortunately at present land owners will still not release land for allotments use when there is a possibility they can make a fortune by selling their land for development. The money must be spent within the next 5 years or it will be lost. Mike and I have attended a number of meetings with BTC and we are still pressing them to use their statutory powers to buy or lease new land for us in the North or West of the Town but so far to no avail. I can assure you that we will continue our efforts to secure more land and to ensure the £120K is not lost.

Over the last year work has been done on all our sites to either improve them or to rectify problems which have developed over time. These include the felling of a large Lime Tree and reducing back tree branches at the Cemetery Site. Cutting back and laying of the very overgrown hedge bordering Hinton Road and the provision of a New Notice Board at the Castle Site. On this, I must say a special thank you to Colin Wills and his team of helpers as this was a mammoth task very well done and the laid the hedge is now showing good signs of re-growth. The St Peters Mill site has had some boundary trees removed and some quick thorn hedging planted to fill in gaps in the existing hedge and last but not least over the winter months the Egerton site has benefited from a new quick-thorn hedge planted along the boundary line with the Egerton Playing Field as the chain link fence, which is our responsibility was in poor condition. The cost of replacing the deteriorating chain link fence ran into thousands of pounds and the quick-thorn hedge was a cheaper option and in time it will act as a screen from the play equipment in the playing field. The single broken tap has been discarded and replaced with a new water system and 3 taps together with collection water butts. The large self set tree in the corner has been felled and branches removed from the trees overhanging our site from the Egerton Field. Finally following negotiation with BTC, a new fence is to be erected, at their cost, along the boundary with Jenny’s pond which will better secure our site. I would especially like to mention Mike Cook, Alan Styles, Bob Hodson and the various other plot holders who helped with the manual work involved in these projects.

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 I would like to remind members that Brackley Allotment Association is a Limited Company, limited by Guarantee and that we are all shareholders and all have a joint responsibility. Any organisation is only as good as its members and therefore the Allotment sites reflect on all our members. Can I therefore take this opportunity to commend that vast majority of you for keeping you plots in excellent and well cultivated condition. I have received comments from people visiting our sites to say how tidy they generally are. However, there are a few members who are ignoring our rules and this will not be tolerated. The Management Committee have now undertaken to do quarterly site inspections, the first of which took place in April, to hopefully identify problems at an early stage and advise members of the remedial action necessary. This is not something the committee take lightly as we do not want to be dictatorial and give the impression that big brother is watching you but we do have a responsibility to ensure our sites are in good order for our wider membership and our landlords. I therefore urge you all to take an interest in the management of YOUR sites and try to keep them in good order and free from weeds and rubbish. Please also try to maintain the communal areas and do not use them as dumping grounds but take any non-compostable rubbish away with you off site.

Finally, I have been proud to work with your committee over the last year and am pleased that a lot has been achieved but there is still work to do. The current committee have all indicated to me their willingness to stand for re-election for another year and in the interests of continuity, I would ask that when we come to the section of the meeting on election of officers and committee that you re-elect them all en bloc.

I wish you all a very successful 2014 growing season and hope you continue to derive pleasure and good produce from your plots.

Geoff Wilkins

(Chairman)

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