

GROUND BREAKING!

Autumn
2016

NEWSLETTER

of THE LOW MOOR ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION

www.lowmoorallotments.co.uk

@LowMoorAllots



WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

Well finally, after months of delay, all tenants have received notice from the Council of the options being considered for future funding and management of allotments across the city. In October the Association arranged a special meeting with Dave Meigh from the Council, who gave some very honest answers to a number of questions that were raised by those present (20+ tenants).

Several Low Moor plot holders, along with representatives from 11 other sites, have volunteered to be involved in the next stage – workshops facilitated by Dave and Darren Lovatt, the Council's Allotment Officer, held in November, which were split into two sections. The first part aimed to explain why the review is happening, pass on feedback from tenants and provide background information on the service. Then attendees were asked for their views on the way forward and ideas and options for new management arrangements. Tenants' feedback was very wide-ranging – there's certainly no consensus on the right way forward! Dave was very frank in explaining the financial situation, giving us a clear breakdown of income and expenditure to explain the current shortfall of around £16,000. However, this doesn't take into account some significant items (such as invoice processing, office space and IT hardware), which are provided by the Council but not costed to the allotment budget. The discussion on future options focussed on the one that would devolve management of all York sites to a new organisation, either through volunteers and/or with a paid employee, although they were keen to stress that nothing has been decided. There'll be follow-up meetings in early December to look at what has come out of these workshops, so there's still time to voice your ideas and opinions.

The Council's timescale for bringing in any change seems pretty unrealistic (they have suggested it may be possible to launch a new organisation in spring 2017), but we shall try and keep you informed of any progress achieved.

PATH WORK

The idea of improving the north-south path through the allotments was first mooted at the beginning of September, during a site walk around with members of the Association committee and Darren Lovatt. By the end of October, the work was done! Angela Johnson applied for Ward funding on behalf of the Association, to pay for the materials – she drafted the application really quickly and it was approved even more quickly. Meanwhile Darren secured the services of the Community Payback team to do the hard graft on four Sundays in October.



Each week around 20 lads (with a bit of help from plot holders) worked steadily, cheerfully and efficiently, filling wheelbarrows with the road plainings, transporting them, then laying and levelling the path, while we provided much-appreciated refreshments. With materials left over, Darren extended the work, concentrating on other paths that can get tricky in winter and improving the access route to the City of York Council Community Apiary which is being considered for plot 37: this development is currently subject to consultation with neighbouring plot holders. All in all, access to around 100 plots has been improved and as a bonus less grass cutting will be needed in future.

While not perfect (we'll have to keep an eye on weed regrowth, it's hard work with a wheelbarrow and a white knuckle descent by bike!), as the before and photos show it really is an improvement. Instead of slithering up the muddy channel in the middle in single file, you can use the whole width of the path and even hold a conversation en-route!



STORE REPORT

The shop will be closing on Saturday November 26th for the winter and will reopen on Saturday February 4th 2017. We would like to thank all our members for using the shop and buying local this year.

When we reopen, it will be fully stocked with everything you need for the new growing season – 14 varieties of seed potatoes, three varieties of onion sets, two types of garlic and two varieties of shallots, growing media, tools, timber and a full selection of seed packets for 2017. The shop is completely run by volunteers and the discounts we get for buying bulk are passed on to the members, where we can, so our prices are as competitive as we can make them.

Currently your membership card entitles you to 10% off goods in Deans Garden Centre at Stockton on the Forest. After negotiations, the Storekeeper has secured a further saving: starting in 2017 your card will also entitle you to 10% off goods at Vertigrow Garden Centre on Malton Road. These offers will be clearly marked on your new 2017 card.

While the majority of our customers are tenants at Low Moor, we also have a lot of members from the local community and from other allotment sites across York who use the shop regularly. We are always looking for new members to build our shop community, so please let others know about us. We look forward to seeing you all in the shop in 2017.

A PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM THE ASSOCIATION CHAIR

The Association Committee is planning a number of Low Moor community projects for the next 12 months, which have the potential to improve the site for all and to benefit many tenants. We have been disappointed by the response to our appeals for help and the low level of support offered by Low Moor plot holders to the activities over the last few weeks. There are honourable exceptions and people who indicated that the particular weekends (over which we had no control) were not convenient (you know who you are!), but before the Committee put time and effort into planning community projects on the site, we need to know that there is some general support available that we can depend upon to offer some help. Ideas we have discussed are:

- **Support for new / inexperienced gardeners who take on plots on Low Moor**

Turnover is high on the site and one reason may be the lack of knowledge of new tenants. Many of us will have seen new tenants getting stuck in enthusiastically, only to abandon their plot a few months later, leaving it neglected, then the cycle is repeated when it is let again. Could you help to pass on your knowledge and encourage new gardeners?

- **Hedging Volunteer Working Parties**

A small group cut back the hedge on the southern boundary at the beginning of the year. We are looking at the possibility of laying the hedge, which would be a longer-term solution. While some of the work could be carried out by the Conservation Volunteers, it would be too expensive to get them to do the whole hedge. However, they are willing to train plot holders in the necessary skills so that we could complete it ourselves and maintain it in the future.

- **Tree Management Volunteer Working Parties**

The Council is paying for a Tree Survey on Low Moor (other allotment sites will also receive this). Once we have information about the size (height and girth), health and variety, it is proposed that we will develop a Tree Policy for the management of the trees on site. For example, any trees that have grown too big for their location and too big for an individual tenant to deal with, may need a professional to remove them, but volunteers could get involved with cutting up and chipping the wood.

In the current climate, all of these, and any similar projects, can only be achieved with the participation of tenants. Any offers of help, ideas and comments would be very welcome.

Angela Johnson, Chair, Low Moor Association Committee

PLOT CRAWL

This year's plot crawl attracted around a dozen participants, a mix of newcomers and established tenants, with plot sizes ranging from half to one and a half. We visited all corners of the site on a well-planned route – as ever, this brings home just how extensive Low Moor is. People have very different approaches to growing: some concentrate on vegetables, others cultivate a mixture of crops, while some prefer flow-

ers. One plot even used to be home to a colony of bees, which have since moved to York Cemetery. We are all successful with different crops – I came away with a bad case of onion envy, but the onion grower was impressed by my parsnips! We also seem to suffer localised pests – pigeons bother me, while for others it's rabbits, although that pesky game bird seems to get everywhere.

Despite our differences we have a lot in common. There wasn't a single plot, no matter how intensively cultivated, that didn't have an area set aside just for sitting – whether you eat your lunch, mark student papers or simply contemplate your hard work, this is very important to people. Another common bond is the frustration felt at having to deal with the weeds from badly-maintained neighbouring plots. Everyone really appreciates their outdoor space, especially those without a garden at home.

We finished up with tea and cakes and some general chat and site gossip. Thanks to Lucy Wild for organising the event, look out for next year's date.



The plot closed as usual at the end of October after another successful growing year. Although we ran two children short (10 out of a potential 12), the enthusiasm of those regularly attending made up for the shortfall. After a slow start to the season, our plots were very productive and again our produce won awards at Fulford Show and York Organic Show.

In the Yorkshire in Bloom It's Your Neighbourhood category, we were judged "Outstanding". The judge commented on the enthusiasm and knowledge of the children as "wonderful to see" and said: "The allotment is run on sound and varied environmental practices and the children are very much involved and aware of the benefits of these". With "Outstanding" in four consecutive years, we were also awarded one of the eight National Certificates of Distinction given out by the Royal Horticultural Society to projects around the country this year. Not bad eh, for a small community project on Low Moor!!

Any plot holders who are interested in receiving more information, able to offer any help or whose child (the age range is 7–12) might be keen to attend in 2017, please contact Angela Johnson.

CONTACTS

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