

CHAIR'S REPORT AGM 2018

Rentals since the last AGM: 21 plots and 16 gardening club plots

PATHWAYS' MANAGEMENT

You may remember Clive Wilson who was brought in to manage Pathways and the development, as he had experience in this area. He has left Pathways and since July 2017 Charlotte Graves is the interim Chief Exec of the charity. We gave her a tour of the allotments and we explained the history of the site and how and why EDAS came into being. She told us that she will not be applying for the full time post. But she has been taken on to keep the momentum going with their plans for the development. She has also confirmed that we need to keep 5 plots unrented.

There have been other personnel changes at Pathways. We now report to its new housing manager, Mark Hickson (mark.hickson@yourpathways.org). He joined Pathways in May and I have given him the full tour of the site and the Radbourne Walk.

There are currently only five charity trustees. This is down from the 13 that used to sit on the board.

Probably the most asked question is: "What is happening about the development?"

As far as we know, there are six plots that will be lost under the development. One has already been vacated and is now a gardening club plot (see below). The remaining five are still being rented. I have been told by Pathways to leave five plots unrented for these ploholders to move into - if the worst happens. The five unrented plots are being looked after by volunteers to ensure they do not become overgrown with weeds.

Back in December 2017 we asked Pathways for an update. We asked if they had a timetable or approximate date for submitting the plans to the council. It seems they have NO date and, importantly, NO timetable. Charlotte said that they had a lot of things to sort out, not just the development plans, but she did stress that she would let us know when a decision is made.

So, at the moment no news is good news. But we need to stay alert and be ready if the development does go to planning. We have funds available for professional advice. The market stall campaign was a great way to get the message out to people and the open days have proved invaluable. I have continued to give interviews to the BBC TV, BBC Radio, The Guardian and even Iranian TV. We will keep singing the praises of the allotments to anyone who will listen.

COMPOSTING TOILET

Last year we managed to secure money from the Walpole ward forum for a second composting toilet to go at the North end of the site (by the Anderson shelter). Thanks should go to our councilors Binda Rai, Paul Conlon and Gareth Shaw for giving us funds from the ward forum budget. I also want to mention Pete and Mardien Drew who have been building the new composting toilet on volunteer days and in their spare time. I gather the instructions were more tricky than a set from Ikea, but they have done a great job. It is looking good and will be perfect for the summer open day.

COMMUNAL PLOT

The council youth centre Westside has now moved out of plot 194 – which means we can now go ahead with our plans for a communal plot. I want to thank Nina who has designed the plot. Now we need to raise some money to make it a great asset to the site and somewhere we can all enjoy.

RADBOUNE WALK

The Radbourne Walk had become an area for anti-social behaviour. With the pharmacy and soup kitchen at one end and a drug house at the other it was becoming a place you would want to avoid. That said, the police have closed down the drug dealer's operation. Plus, plotholder Tana Scott convinced Pathways to pay for clearance of some of the hidey holes.

The Radbourne Walk is now much more open, light is reaching parts that have been very shady for a long time. Tana has mentioned that quite a few people have said that the Radbourne is the best it has looked in a long time. We can only hope that the improvements not only continue to make it a haven for wildlife and a pleasure for pedestrians – but a lot less attractive to antisocial behavior.

HEDGEROW

We continue to plant native hedgerow whips into the gaps in the hedgerow. It was good to see that ones we planted two and three years ago have flourished and are looking strong and healthy. The hedgerow is very important to wildlife, which is why it is recognised as a SINC (Site of Interest for Nature Conservation) by the council.

VOLUNTEER DAYS

Pathways pay us just over £3,000 per year to manage the site and we could easily spend that on skips to remove the accumulation of rubbish. Plot 194 required two skips, one of which was for all the rubble the previous plotholder had brought on site. Plot 148 has also taken up almost two skips and needed two large bonfires to clear.

Volunteer days ensure we take care of the whole site for all our benefit and the benefit of the wildlife we have. The time you give is so important and very much appreciated. I want to give an extra mention to Dominic, Tana, Simon, Penny and Pauline for the extra volunteer work they have done on site in-between volunteer days.

PATHS

This tenancy year we want to give more attention to the paths. The long walk is uneven and slippery in the winter. This needs to be addressed. Also, the tenancy agreement says there must be a 45cm path between plots. While many are present and correct, some have been lost altogether. The committee will be doing a full site survey of the paths in the coming months. We need to know which areas need the most work and prioritise the repairs. We are looking at a range of solutions, some of which will obviously cost money. We'll keep you up to date on what is decided.

EALING IN BLOOM

Last year, as a bit of fun, we entered the Ealing in Bloom competition 2017. I still can't quite believe it - we came second in the Ealing in Bloom large allotment category. It really shows that all our hard work in clearing the site has paid off. All our ploholders and especially our volunteers should be really proud. Everyone has worked so hard over the last four years clearing up the rubbish that had accumulated. One of the judges told me they were impressed that all our plots are rented and well tended. He also said they thought it was a beautiful site and that we should encourage some of the ploholders to enter their own plots too as there were some that were of a very high standard.

We have entered Northfields into the 2018 Ealing in Bloom competition. Fingers crossed.

TENANCY AGREEMENT

This year's invoice was a little higher than usual as we shift our year from April-March to October to September. So, everyone has paid for 18months to get us on track. With the tenancy year starting in October, we'll have more time to clear abandoned plots ready for the new tenant before the growing season.

GARDENING CLUB

Last year we set up a gardening club for five volunteers from the waiting list on plot 227. It was a chance for beginners to gain some gardening skills and become part of our allotment community. It worked so well that we decided to expand it and now there are three plots 147, 227 and 240 made up of 16 small beds being rented out to people on the waiting list. Those new tenants will keep their place on the waiting list and will be offered a half plot as they become available, but by then they will have already got some dirt under their nails and know the joy of tending their own patch.

OPEN DAYS

Our open days are becoming a definite (enjoyable) fixture in the Ealing calendar. They are so crucial to good relations with local residents. Their generosity and support in light of the development has been very welcome and much appreciated. But, we couldn't do it without the help of all of you who volunteered – so a huge *thank you* to all of you.

Summer open day: Our third Summer open day was well attended. Just over 700 people attended and enjoyed a lovely day and a nice piece of cake with their tea. The next summer open day is Sunday 1st July.

Halloween: We really have no competition to our Halloween event – we are the bats whiskers. We had over 150 pumpkins carved and lit along a circular trail. Over 3,000 people attended. The twinkly lights were magical. The cobwebs, ghosts and white walkers a triumph.

For me the open days sum up what is good about this allotment community. Summer is about gardening and friendship – Halloween is about fun and community spirit - no matter how old or young you are.

I know as a committee we are very proud to represent and help protect these allotments. But the committee cannot do it all alone. So, thank you too for championing this wonderful place.

Christina Fox

Chair, Ealing Dean Allotment Society.