

## **OWPC Patch Allotments Bi-monthly report**

A Patch allotments report will be prepared for each PC meeting. It will contain project progress reports, notes to any proposals for the PC meeting agenda plus any general news or comments considered relevant to allotments management. This first edition is necessarily longer than will be case subsequently, when updates will be the norm.

### **BACKGROUND**

The ultimate intention is to try to make the Patch Allotments financially self sustaining, some capital expenditure will be needed to arrive at this position. The time-scale is difficult to forecast but is expected to take two to four years. A couple of problem areas were inherited by OWPC. Inadequate maintenance left us with boundary security issues, poor condition of some ridings and a significant number of broken, rotted or simply missing plot marker posts. Lack of site management has resulted in the encroachment of sheds, shrubs and cultivation onto many inter-plot paths. These issues are addressed below.

Our first year of our tenure was a steep learning curve, time needing to be spent on setting up a suitable database, assessing plot cultivation standard followed by warning letters, and the rent renewal / new keys exercise. A devolved management agreement was drafted and negotiations started with the PAA. Unfortunately, during the second year the PAA committee failed to function, see below, and inevitably, work towards devolved management ceased. In our opinion some form of devolved management is a pre-requisite to a self-sustaining site.

### **PAA**

The lack of an active viable PAA in the past twelve months has made it difficult to engage properly with the tenants in understanding problems. Instead of a common voice, we received as many points of view as the number of tenants spoken to. On Sunday 11 May a new and larger committee was elected and we look forward to a more engaging and productive relationship. Their first committee meeting, to which Ray and I are invited is on Sunday 18.

### **Pyracantha Planting**

The planting has stumbled along somewhat due to the difficulty in G4S guaranteeing work times of the community workers. Nevertheless, much progress has been made and less than 50 of the original tranche of 420 remain to be planted. The plants were delivered in good condition and are growing well, there seems no reason to change our supplier for the remaining tranches.

### **New East Gates and Palisading**

The supply and fitting for this project has been delayed due to a problem with the supplier's workforce. Work currently scheduled for mid-June.

### **Chicken Co-operative**

We have received a letter (copy attached) from the team leader of the chicken co-operative asking us to reconsider the decision to start to charge them a rental for their three plots. We bring the appeal to the PC meeting as the decision was by full Council.

The allotment sub-group is split on this issue and therefore unable to table a recommendation. Points you may wish to consider:

Pro appeal i) the plots are waterlogged for much of the year and are otherwise unusable (points 1 & 2 in the letter relate to agreements made with WCC by which we are not bound) ii) other tenants may keep chickens subject to our new chicken policy but the conditions are quite draconian including specification of housing and mandatory checking and provision of fresh water every day.

A fragmentation of the co-operative could lead to several individual chicken plots and consequent management difficulties for the P.C. iii) about half of the members of the co-op tenants receive 50% discount on their own plot so making the pitching of a 100% rental on the co-op plots somewhat debatable.

Anti appeal iv) 100% discount is considered highly inequitable by non co-op tenants v) (relating to iii) above), an individual is free to go it alone if concerned about receiving their appropriate discount.

## **Maintenance**

We will be hiring a skip to remove existing rubbish near to the huts. Prior to this the PAA is arranging the removal of metal objects by a dealer at no cost to us also they will burn the wood, this will considerably reduce skip volume required.

The hut, toilet and a small amount of outside furniture require painting. The PAA will provide all the labour and the white paint for interior walls, we propose to contribute by providing approx 30 litres of brown and 10 litres of dark green preservative paint for external surfaces.

## **Notes to Agenda items**

### **Patch Security planting**

Planting of original tranche of 420 identified in the Patch Security Document is nearly complete. The remaining 800 pyracantha could be sourced as 4 x 200 or 300 + 300 + 200 total delivery charge reduced by £50 in the latter case. Accepting the original 420 as a single delivery proved a bit difficult to cope with. As for timing, the suppliers have recommended we should plant the remainder of current stock but miss mid-Summer planting and not re-order until end of August. We are assured a price increase by then, if any, would be negligible.

**Proposed:** to purchase remaining 800 pyracantha from supplier of original tranche. £1,960.

### **Aggregate for Ridings**

Some parts of the ridings are in a poor state and require work as soon as possible. If left until wetter Autumn / Winter, deterioration will substantially increase the maintenance required. Cementing, especially at the intersections should increase the life of the surfaces. Cost of bulk supply rather than by the ton bag is to be investigated.

**Proposed:** to purchase 10 tons type 1 aggregate. Approximate cost £250. Possible small extra cost for cement if deemed necessary to bind the aggregate. Hire of roller approx £250.

### **Noticeboard**

A board holding 12 x A4 is proposed rather than two smaller boards, the PAA will be allowed to use it for such as agendas and minutes. Price differential between different capacity boards is relatively small – an 8 x A4 would be £60 (excl. VAT) less. PAA have agreed to install it for us, we will need to provide the ready-mix from maintenance budget.

**Proposed:** to purchase noticeboard £545 excl VAT

### **Post Box**

The current very small box is attached to the outside of the old gates and has been forced open several times (including last week). The new one, requiring a vertical slot, will be welded to the inside of the new palisaded gates. The added security will, for example, allow tenants to return keys on termination and we could consider deposit of cheques at rental time in early October with a daily collection by us for a week or two.

**Proposed:** to purchase substantial lockable post box to be welded to inside of new palisade gates approx. £150-£200

## **Composting Storage**

The compostable toilet residue is disposed of on a four year cycle requiring simple slab structures.

**Proposed:** to purchase 16 paving slabs approx. £120.

## **Plot Staking**

Previous lack of management has left us with a few areas where the grass walkway between plots has either disappeared by encroachment of cultivation, or in some case, structures such as sheds and compost heaps have been built on them. The lack of a path could be disastrous in a medical emergency situation. Additionally many of the corner posts are rotted or broken exacerbating the situation and on re-letting the plot sizes have often been found to be incorrect. We wish to combine the re-measuring and re-staking exercise to correct the situations. We are considering the possibility of staking being done during the Summer by the community workers when pyracantha planting is suspended. This exercise would commence with the worst of the groups of plots, and most probably take two years in all.

**Proposed:** to purchase stakes to enable re-staking of plots. Costs approximately £5,000. Cost of installation yet to be negotiated.

## **Container**

The hut is currently used as both shop and meeting room, this very much restricts stock that can be carried and needs a major operation to re-arrange the room for a meeting and reset-up as a shop. It has suffered several break-ins, including loss of safe. The idea is to retain the hut solely as a meeting and social space therefore requiring minimum security. The container(s) would be used for stock storage and shop. Long term benefits are hard to quantify for the PC, but we should benefit from the resultant increased financial capacity of the PAA. It may also be a significant stepping stone in achieving a state conducive to devolved management.

**Proposed:** to agree the purchase of either 2 x 10ft, 1 x 10ft and 1 x 20ft or 2 x 20ft used shipping containers for use as store and shop. Cost approx £2,500-£2,800. (little cost difference between 10ft and 20 ft, a 10ft one being a shortened 20ft). Decision depends on further investigation of delivery issues because of restricted turning points inside in the Patch gates and PAA's storage requirement.

## **Rental 2014/2015**

Discount structure for period beginning October 2014, as agreed November 2013:-

Pensioners 50% discount

OWPC residents 15% discount

WCC residents 5% discount (October 2014 decreasing to 0% October 2015)

Chicken co-operative 0% discount

Bee co-operative 100% discount (Currently not on site and no immediate expectation of return)

Theoretical annual rent at point of renewal for current and previous rental years:-

October 2012 to September 2013 - £3891.30

October 2013 to September 2014 - £4053.02

These were the expected rents as per the demands issued for the annual renewal. At this point terminations, non-renewals and new plot lets were unknown.

Actual rent for current and previous rental years:-

October 2012 to September 2013 - £3046.64

October 2013 to September 2014 - £3629.36

This includes the main rental renewals and subsequent mid year plot lets.

Rental options reviewed by allotment team:-

- i) Retain rents at 22.5 pence per m<sup>2</sup> (same as October 2013). The rental bill issued will be £4163.58
- ii) Increase rents to 23.6 pence per m<sup>2</sup> (approx 5% increase) and adjust OWPC residents discount to 19%. This means that OWPC residents will pay the same rent as in October 2013. WCC residents will see an overall 10% increase. The rental bill issued will be £4338.66
- iii) Increase rents to 23.6 pence per m<sup>2</sup> with no OWPC adjustment. The rental bill issued will be £4367.14

**Proposed:** to adopt option ii).

We have been approached by the (new) PAA officials to consider collecting the PAA subscription with the rental. This course of action would solve our current problem concerning the public liability insurance our Rules and Regulations require of the tenants. The cover may be achieved by joining the PAA or as part of a tenant's household insurance cover. Unfortunately this is difficult to manage, especially in this last PAA fallow year due to non-collection of PAA dues.

We would offer an opt-out on production of proof of alternative cover.

**Proposed:** to agree to the request.

## Financial Summary

Current revenue expenditure exceeds rental income but we expect to considerably reduce, for example, the sum paid to the contractor through tighter plot management. Below is an estimate of the capital expenditure we believe is required to achieve our zero cost goal.

### CAPITAL EXPENDITURE

		F.Y.
Pyracantha to complete the planting exercise	£2,000	2014/15
Aggregate and cement for Ridings	£550	2014/15
Re-staking including labour (£5k+£1k)	£6,000	2014/15 and 2015/16
Palisading and new East gates	£2,870	(2013/2014)
One-off West boundary tree pruning	£800	2014/2015
Lockable post box	£200	2014/2015
Noticeboard	£650	2014/2015
Toilet storage bins (16 slabs @ £7.50)	£120	2014/2015
Containers	£2,800	2014/2015
Total	£15,990	

### REVENUE EXPEDITURE

Anglian Water	£1,500
Grass cutting x 8	£960
1 cut flower meadow	£150
Postage x 3	£280
Stationery	£75
Printing	£75
Skip x 2	£400
Maintenance troughs and associated plumbing	£250
Maintenance boundary	£250
Discretionary items e.g. open days	£250
Maintenance, contractor	£2,800
Compost-able toilet consumables	£250
Total	£7,240