Update from the Chairman

The sun is shining in a cloudless sky, the birds are singing, balmy breezes are ruffling the lustrous locks of those lucky enough to have such things and you can practically hear the weeds leaping out of the ground. All of this of course tells us that I have had to be reminded to write this, as I should have done it when the wind was blowing a gale and it was generally grey and cold last week. That apart I think my message is ... please enjoy the coming season and have volumes and volumes of veg to reward you for your efforts.

Please could I also add thanks and appreciation for the work the Convenors and Site Reps do to keep us on the straight and narrow of following our bylaws and constitution. An important, difficult and usually thankless task, but very necessary.

You will also have noticed that the Trading Shed is running well, again thanks to the hard work of the Trading Team. It is well worth supporting.

Have a great and productive season.

Jeremy

Jeremy Brecknell
Winchester 856 552
Email brecknell1@uwclub.net

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Reminders

Communal Bonfires: From 1st October-30th April, inclusive.
2018 was the fourth hottest year on record and, this year, my youngest daughter has been one of 1.4 million students taking part in the global school strikes for climate action. You might wonder why I’m telling you this but she has been surprised by the number of people that think it’s not a problem. As I write this I’m wondering how I know that a 1.5°C temperature hike will be irreversible and whether I should ignore it or take some action? I don’t have a scientific bone in my body, I read dozens of articles on the state of the environment and I still can’t prove that we are on the edge of an environmental precipice but, I am a gardener, and one of the things I’ve noticed on my allotment is how the numbers of bugs are falling. A few summers ago I could guarantee that the warm summer evenings would be full of gentle buzzing and chirruping. Last summer the lack of insects was sadly very noticeable.

The other thing we’ve all noticed is the weather. Don’t get me wrong, I’m not a great fan of freezing, wet weather but over the last five years our summers have been longer, stretching from April to November. Last summer’s drought was significant in its length, and the number of consecutive days where the temperature was above 30°C was record breaking. I notice these things as a plotholder.

If this news also worries you then in this newsletter there is some excellent advice from the Site Convenors on how to best look after your plot and how to reduce your water consumption on site. I can also highly recommend coming to our AGM, in November, to get more tips from our professional speaker. In the meantime sharing ideas amongst ourselves is a good place to start. Additionally, there are a number of organisations out there who are looking at the best way to grow crops in a hotter climate and minimise the use of organophosphates and insecticides.

The Nature Friendly Farming Network has been looking at how to reduce the use of weed killer and they suggest inserting plugs into a covering of red clover; the clover stops weeds from breaking through and enriches the soil. https://www.nffn.org.uk/

A farmer in Otter has been trying to grow exotic foods, sometimes not so successfully, you can read his blog on his website. https://www.otterfarm.co.uk/

Finally, there are a number of places you can buy beneficial insects from in the UK. I won’t list them, but a quick web search will give you pages of ads. The ones to particularly look out for are ladybirds and lacewings. Your success with them is going to be dependent on your neighbouring plotholder’s use of herbicides and insecticides. There may be some difficult conversations to have if you want to attract and retain a thriving insect population on your site.

I feel very strongly that one of the joys of allotmenting is the way we all support each other. Together we have a wealth of information, that shared will make us all better allotmenters. So, if you’ve got to the end of this article, my request to you is this; please share your time and knowledge. Give time to the Trading Shed, send me ideas for the newsletter (to the address below), help the site reps and let’s all work towards digging and planting our way to a world fit for future generations.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Emma McMullan
Editor
emmamcmullan@btinternet.com
We have, in total, 12 sites and all except Paulet Place North and Paulet Place South, which currently are full, have applicants on the waiting lists. The waiting list stands at 105 in total across all sites. Park Road and Edington Road, our biggest sites, have waiting lists in double figures, together with Greenhill Avenue. Current site vacancies stand at 1, and this is at Edington Road. This is a very healthy position to be in, but it can also present a problem. Many of our applicants are keen to get started and commonly ask how long they will have to wait, which really is an impossible question to answer since it depends on a particular site and its turnover, the latter being quite slow. It has been quite noticeable the growing number of new applicants set against the small number of plot holders who have vacated their plots. This suggests that allotments are back in favour and can be seen as popular recreation for people across varying age groups. I viewed ‘Gardener’s World’ recently and they have a feature on starting a new allotment near Bristol, which is interesting to follow. Hopefully it will be a useful reference point for advice and as well as being as source of encouragement for anyone new to having an allotment.

May I wish everyone at the start of this Gardening year all success.

Mike Moore
Membership Secretary

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Firstly, a massive THANK YOU to all the volunteers who keep the Trading Shed running – helping with deliveries, stock refilling and working in the shop at the weekends (even in the freezing weather). Managing the shop is significantly lightened with ‘many hands’, and if anyone else could spare a couple of hours a month, please let us know.

Now is the time for sowing – seeds, flower tubers and corms, seed potatoes and spring planting onion sets, not forgetting the grow bags or specific composts to start them off. Only a few seed potatoes and spring planting onion sets left! We also have a large range of fertilizers to suit your crops, and soil and bagged manure to improve the structure of the soil.

To protect your crops, we stock all you need to construct fleece, net or enviromesh tunnels and fruit cages or alternatively/additionally grow some bee friendly flowers and companion plants. We also have a range of organic products to fight pests, disease and weeds, including ‘Invigorator’ as mentioned by Ray at the AGM, he particularly recommended this to combat whitefly.

We are expecting bean poles and pea sticks in April. However we’ve been advised that supply will be limited this year, so 8ft bamboo canes and pea netting is available as alternatives.

If you’re looking at your lawn and thinking that ‘something needs to be done’, we have moss killer, lawn seed, lawn sand and spring lawn fertilizer available to bring your lawn back to a healthy condition to withstand whatever summer will bring. We are trialling the new ‘no rake’ moss killer and welcome reviews from customers to pass on to others.

Best wishes and look forward to seeing you soon

Jo Townsend & Janet Thornton

Notes for the diary

Winchester Horticultural Society Late Summer Show
~ Saturday August 17th
~ Badger Farm Community Centre
~ 2pm to 4pm

Littleton and Harestock Show
~ Saturday 7th September
~ Littleton Recreation Ground
~ from 12 noon

Schedules for these two shows will be available in the Trading Shed in due course. They will both hold open and novice classes for gardeners interested in showing produce.

Also ... New Forest Show
~ 30th July – 1st August
~ The Showground, Clay Hill, Brockenhurst SO42 7QH
~ From 9am

WNAHS AGM Westgate School
~ 21 November
~ 7pm – Note earlier time
~ Speaker Ray Broughton

Winchester Horticultural Society
This holds two meetings a month on topics of interest to gardeners, it also organises visits to gardens in Hampshire and adjacent counties. Visitors are welcome; there is a fee of £3.

For further information or to join, telephone 01962 866818.
It has been brought to my attention that some plot holders are bringing dogs onto the site and not keeping them under proper control. I must ask that dogs are kept on a lead at all times while on the site. The last thing anyone wants is for a dog to damage other plot holders’ plants. It must be remembered that not everybody is a dog lover and they don’t want to see dogs running loose and making a nuisance of themselves.

I must also ask that plot holders do not wander about on other peoples’ plots, please look at what others are growing, but only from the side access paths.

We are finding that quite a number of non-members are coming onto the site, thinking that access can be gained to the river and beyond, even though there is a notice at the site entrance stating that it is private property and for plotholders only. If this persists we may have to resort to having a padlock on the gate.

Our waiting list is now at a reduced level of around 25 names. However, getting your name to the top of this list, and having a plot allocated, still takes around 18 months. Therefore, we still need to ensure that plots on the site are kept in good order and are cultivated to confirm the continuing need for and success of the site. If your plot is not being maintained the committee will

Edington Road News

Sorry to have been rather negative in the above, all I can do now is wish you all a successful growing season.

Nigel Dobbie
Site Convenor

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nigel.dobbie@btinternet.com
A very pleasant autumn and mild winter have resulted in most people having their plots ready to go this season. If, by the time you read this, there is still work to do preparing the ground, make a big note on your calendar to remind yourself to get to grips with things from September onwards, so you are better placed next year. The early months of the year are the time to be planning your plantings, and buying seeds, onion sets and potatoes from the excellent range stocked in the Trading Shed.

There have been some complaints from neighbours on the other side of our boundaries about items leaning against their fences or hedges. Please don’t do this as it can cause damage, and please always ensure that two feet of space is left between the end of your plot and any boundary.

As temperatures rise and the grass starts to grow again, remember you are responsible for keeping the paths round your plot mown. Weed-killing the edges of paths is a lazy, unsightly and inappropriate way to keep things neat, so please use edging shears or a strimmer.

There has been a lot of investment from new plotholders both in time and in new sheds, and I am looking forward to seeing their plots develop over the summer. Neighbouring plotholders are usually only too happy to give advice or lend a hand, and a visit to the Trading Shed at the weekend has supplied the answer to many a query.

It has been good to see so many manure deliveries across the site this year. The quality and quantity of crops is directly related to the state of the soil they are grown in. As well as handy bags from the Trading Shed, farmyard or processed manure can be ordered and delivered to or near your plot by Tony Fletcher 07888 881962 or Henry Stanley 07722 284198.
If the approaching summer is a repeat of last year, manure, mulches and home-made compost can be used to help the soil retain its moisture, lessen the effects of thundery downpours and also deter weeds. Other suggested tips to cope with a dry summer include planting more closely together than usual, so there is less bare soil to bake and crack, and using more perennials such as rhubarb, asparagus, artichokes – globe and Jerusalem – which also provide shade, and herbs such as fennel, sorrel and sweet Cecily. Their established roots will do better than thirsty annuals in a drought and save both time and Society money spent on water. Widening the variety of vegetables grown will spread the risk of some succumbing to the heat.

As the busy season approaches, please always remember to be as quiet as possible when entering or exiting the site. Take time to open the gates without noise, don’t leave the engine running or the car radio on, and avoid slamming the car door.

When you bring your car to the allotment, please try to park as closely as you can to the adjacent car so there is room for more people. Parking at an angle and leaving big gaps between cars means that at busy times there is not enough parking space for everyone.

The contact details for our site reps are on the notice board outside the Trading Shed, so please contact me or them should you have a problem or just something you want bring to our attention.

Finally, on a personal note, I’d like say a big thank you to the plotholders who gave up so much time and put in so much effort to help get my new polytunnel erected. Thank you Mike, Jim, Chris, Dave, Alan, George and helpers from the Perlins Community. You are stars!

Successful growing this summer!

Maria Keniston
Site Convenor
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My report for the April newsletter is usually an account of the various projects we have undertaken during the less productive season of the year. This year we had no planned projects, but a variety of unplanned ones to keep me on my toes.

In late September, I discovered that a small area of the access path to the Cromwell Road site had been covered in tarmac, including sealing over the inspection hatch over our water meter and stop cock. I reported this to Southern Water, telling them that, before the winter, I would need to access the stop cock to turn off our water before the frosts came. A few days later I was told that the work had been done by a private contractor – who had been working elsewhere in the road and had some tarmac excess to requirements. As this had been done privately, Southern Water had no responsibility to do anything about it. I asked them how they intended to read our meter in future to calculate our water bill and they said they would call me back – a call for which I am still waiting. When we did start to get a few frosts, I took a pickaxe to the tarmac to expose the inspection hatch and turn off the water. I still don’t know whether our water meter has been read since September.

Another unusual event started with a complaint from a local resident that the cockerels on our Cromwell Road site were spoiling the slumbers of the neighbours. I replied that nobody on the site kept poultry, so the disturbance must be caused by someone else’s birds. However, a further complaint and a visit by the Membership Secretary confirmed that there were indeed, three cockerels wandering around the site. I visited most of the neighbouring properties but nobody admitted to owning poultry or knowing of a neighbour who did, so I can only assume that they had been stolen from elsewhere and dumped on us when it was pointed out to the thief that such old birds were virtually inedible and without value. Hampshire Constabulary said they had no reports of stolen cockerels. I had thought that my animal husbandry days were over and never expected, when I became Convenor, that they would be a vital part of the job!

Waiting list: For the past three or four years, the number of people applying for plots in Stanmore has more-or-less matched the number giving up their plots voluntarily for a variety of reasons. This has meant that the Society in general, and myself in particular, have had no incentive to enforce the requirement of the Constitution that plots must be cultivated and that, if not, the plot holder would have his or her membership terminated and the plot repossessed. However, we have seen a healthy growth in applications for plots, so I must advise that if you have a plot and are not using it satisfactorily, you must expect to have it taken from you. If you don’t think you can cope with your plot, please let me know.

Best wishes for an enjoyable and productive season on your allotment.

David Barber