

Owlsbury Allotment Tenants' Society Meeting 26th October at the Plough & Horses, Walshes Road

Present: Graham Brown, Carol Forster, Ros Marriott and Jo McChrystal

Apologies: Jo Hobden, Terry Ferdinands, Shirley Croughton and Di Lewis

1. Agree minutes of last meeting

1. Ruts

In previous discussions with David Foot, Graham was under the impression that he would organise the filling-in or dangerous ruts. However there has been no action on the part of the Council to level any areas as yet. It was generally felt that the ideal solution would be for the Council to bring in a roller; Graham will enquire if this is a possibility. Members of the Committee have personally filled in some of the obvious ruts and it was agreed that individuals will fill in ruts as best they can when they come across them.

2. Theft

There are still some instances being reported of a variety of fruit and vegetables being stolen, although there does not seem to be any increase in thefts. There was a suggestion that some damage and disappearance of produce may be due to rats; however most instances seem to have clear evidence of human action.

3. Dog fouling

No further instances have been reported.

4. Educational talks

There has been no interest expressed by any members in educational talks following the query included in the last Newsletter; therefore it was agreed not to pursue this at present.

It was mentioned that there will be a talk by local beekeepers Ben and Maggie Pratt at the CCA hall at 7.30pm on 24th November at a cost of £1 entry.

To be included in the Newsletter

2. Treasury report

Shirley Croughton was unable to attend the meeting. The Committee will ascertain the current budget at a later date.

It was established that a formal report need be produced only once annually.

3. Update on site facilities

1. Shed / Sheds & Toilets

There has been no recent update from David Foot as to the outcome from the latest Sports, Recreation and Cemeteries (SRC) Meeting regarding the above.

When there is news available it will be posted on the Owlsbury website.

OATS are aware that the current financial climate is likely to result in CTC reigning in spending and that this will impact upon the budget for the allotment site. The possibility of OATS organising fundraising in the event of a decision that the Council cannot provide the necessary funds was discussed. Graham has researched the details of a number of organisations that OATS could apply to for grants to pay for site developments.

2. Notice Board

Graham is currently attending a carpentry course and is in the process of constructing a notice board for OATS use.

4. Seed/seedling Orders

Carol has been negotiating with Thompson & Morgan and has a number of catalogues and order forms for interested members. There will be a 40% discount on seeds and 15% discount for potted fruits and onion sets. The seeds will be packaged individually per person at the cost of a £2.00 packing service. Orders are to be made to Carol by 15th January, cheques made payable to Thompson & Morgan.

The possibility of ordering seeds in bulk through Jordan's Nursery, however there were issues with ensuring sufficient interest in seeds orders to make it financially worthwhile and the complexity of distributing orders.

Garden Organics were also suggested as a possibility but require a £170 group order before they will offer a 25% discount.

Lynne's Organics are prepared to grow certified organic seedlings if orders are made in the next few weeks; a minimum order is needed with money paid in advance. An order form will be made available; Graham is happy to receive payment.

Details of the above offers to be included in the Newsletter.

5. Compost heap misuse

Recently a carpet has been left on the compost heap. While it is thought that this was left by an allotment holder to retain warmth in the rotting vegetation it has been removed that as the foam backing is likely to rot. It was agreed that a more suitable piece of carpet would be beneficial.

Other rubbish such as food wrappers has also been noted. A sign will be erected to remind allotment holders and passers-by of its proper use.

A request was made by a member for guidance on what weeds are suitable to put on the compost. It was agreed that most are acceptable with the exceptions of bight-addled crops and couch grass.

6. Signs for gates

Graham has a large number of sign boards for use for reminders and notices as needed.

7. Any other business

1. East Sussex County Council grants

Carol has the information booklet detailing the grants available for a variety of possible projects including planting trees, recycling, hedging and providing compost bins. This is available if any member wishes to look further into the possibilities. No-one present felt able to take on a long-term project.

2. Fruit growing along fencing

A member has suggested that sections of the fencing could be used to grow fruit and queried whether plot holders would need to rent a section of fence for the purpose.

Graham will check this with CTC but it was thought that it is likely that we will be free to grow fruit on the fences.

This might also provide a useful windbreak although the concern that light might be compromised was raised again.

3. Security

This continues to be an issue of paramount importance for many members.

The possibility of the Council providing a padlock/combination lock was raised at the SRC meeting; the Committee are awaiting feedback.

The theft problem is relatively small, and while this is no comfort to those who have lost produce it was questioned if the current level warrants the complication of access codes. Other than the thefts there has been no reported anti-social behaviour on the site. If there is strong feeling from members then OATS can impress this upon CTC.

4. Discounts at garden centres

It was reported that members continue to receive excellent service from Royal Mires and Jordan's Nursery.

Membership partners are continuing to make customers aware that they offer discounts to OATS card-holders.

5. Membership value

Graham queried whether members are getting value for their membership fee and reiterated the suggestion of purchasing a handcart for members to use. This was generally thought to be a good idea providing that all members are prepared to take responsibility for ensuring that the cart be replaced for others to use.

There was a request for further composting facilities nearer the lower end of the site. It was pointed out that space may be a problem. It was proposed that OATS could use Association funds to rent a plot and use this for composting and storage.

This was unanimously agreed to be a good idea.

This led to a general discussion of the rules surrounding shed ownership on the site. This was related to the recent legal rulings concerning the right to keep a shed within specified dimensions; it was questioned whether AONB status overruled this.

6. Manure

Ros requires four orders if a quarter load before she is able to place an order. This has led to some people waiting for their loads.

7. Garden Organic

Some OATS members have expressed an interest in the above and group membership is a possibility. As membership would be paid for with collective funds it is important that there is sufficient interest and agreement from members. Information about the benefits of joining will be made available on the Owlsbury website and membership discussed at the OATS AGM in the New Year.

8. Bulk buying

The suggestion was made that some seasonal items may be bulk-bought for the benefit of members.

It was pointed out that any such undertaking would require an individual prepared to organise buying and distributing and that interim storage would be likely to be an issue. It was queried whether the discount would be worth the effort; some items (such as nematode worms) are significantly cheaper bought in bulk.

This provoked the question of whether OATS need a designated person for organising the ordering of seeds etc.; it was agreed that this was a matter for discussion at a following meeting.

9. Owlsbury website

The forum currently only has seven members.

Members have reported that the forum is difficult to use. Members were invited to provide suggestions for the improvement of the site.

Graham suggested that it may be a good use of OATS funds to pay for an official host and management for the website. This was felt to be a good idea. To be formally agreed for the new OATS year.

10. Date for next meeting

The provisional date for the next OATS Quarterly meeting is **Monday 26th January 2010**

Meeting finished at 8.36pm