

# Burnside and Vinery Rd Allotment Society

## AGM April 2020

### Chair's report, AGM

In addition to the accounts, site reports and website report I would like to present an overview as Chair of the Committee. In particular I would like to thank all committee members, and especially the site managers, for a huge amount of work; also all those who volunteer on a more ad hoc basis on both sites. You may not be aware of how much work this involves so here is a **summary of tasks undertaken by the Committee and volunteers:**

- Waiting list management, letting of plots, distribution of rent notices, collection of rents
- Site surveys, ensuring adherence to site rules, dealing with conflict, dealing with vacant plots
- Maintaining water supply and keeping the troughs clean
- Distribution of Kings seed catalogues and collection of seed orders
- Planning social events and volunteering days
- Preparing annual accounts for the AGM and the FCA
- Managing the Store (organising a dozen volunteer staff, ordering and taking delivery of stock, and pricing). Note: NSALG are even pointing to our online Store ordering system as a model for other site stores nationwide in the Covid-19 crisis
- Maintaining and cleaning composting toilets via volunteer toilet teams
- Keeping the website up to date with information and photographs (our website is streets ahead of most other allotment websites)
- City Council liaison
- Monthly committee meetings dealing with planning and management of all the above.

It is impossible to overstate the part currently played by the Burnside site managers in terms of new initiatives, site development, overall waiting list management and the Store.

As we are unable to meet face-to-face for this year's AGM, I would like to **invite discussion of a number of questions**, set out below:

- Are rents too low? Too high? OK?

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- Would you like to suggest and help to implement any site developments?
- Are there any regular jobs you would be willing to take on, in addition to the regular volunteering day tasks set out by the site managers?
- Are there ways to increase use of the Store by Vinery tenants?
- Are there ways to increase use of the Kings seeds scheme?
- There are around 50 people on the waiting lists. It takes time and effort to clear overgrown / abandoned plots in readiness for new tenants. Should we use Society funds for this or increase volunteer help?  
Notes: if Society funds are used for this purpose, rents would have to go up; some plot clearance includes safe disposal of asbestos from old sheds.
- Our water bill (almost £1000 a year) is an enormous percentage of our rent and utilities outgoings: how should we address this as we have more summer droughts? We will aim to offer advice to tenants via the website but other thoughts would be of interest.
- In the current situation we should, at best, be thinking about increasing volunteer input so that the two sites cease to rely so heavily on a few people; and at worst about succession planning in case any committee members become ill. As a minimum we need to pull together all relevant information and contacts so that this is held centrally. How do you, as tenants, feel we should achieve all this?

Note: a major City Council site survey is expected this year so we must pull out the stops to make sure there is no risk of our allotments being taken from us for prime development sites.

### Committee 2020/21

Because of Coronavirus we will continue with the same committee, as all are willing to continue to serve and committee business is being conducted remotely. I have been Chair of the committee for almost a year and am willing to fulfil the 2-year commitment. If vacancies come up, we can co-opt new committee members. Please let us know if you would be interested in joining the committee.

Please email [webmaster@burnsideandvineryallotments.org](mailto:webmaster@burnsideandvineryallotments.org) in the first instance with any suggestions and input.

Penny Henderson

For AGM April 2020.

# **Burnside and Vinery Rd Allotment Society**

## **AGM April 2020**

### **Financial Report 2018 -2019.**

As you will see from the accounts the Society remained in good financial shape, ending the year with £8500 in its accounts. There have not been a lot of changes in many areas from the previous year, however there are several things to highlight.

Firstly thank you to all those who contributed toward Trevor Taylor's memorial plaque for the Vinery Site.

Also within the expenditure you will notice that our rent paid to the City Council appears much higher than the previous year. This is because the City Council did not invoice us for our rent for the second part of 2017-2018 until the financial year 2018-2019. Function costs, which include the AGM, have increased. This is a reflection on the increased communal activities that are taking place such as volunteer days where the Society has contributed toward food and drink. It is interesting to see that our water costs were lower, a slightly wetter summer than the previous year! Repairs and renewals include the fitting of outside lighting at the Burnside Store and the removal of asbestos from the site.

Income to the Society was also good with the store making a profit. Within the store income figures are included the sale of items on empty plots such as greenhouses and sheds as well as rotavators and wheelbarrows. One tenant made aprons and bunting for the society to sell which are also included in the store income. The donations section is where tenants have rounded up monies when they have purchased items.

Given the global pandemic it is good that we are in a financially secure position but more importantly we are fortunate to have our allotments to spend time at.

Matthew Whitelegg, Treasurer

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### Vinery Site Report

The site enjoyed another successful growing season with all plots fully let for most of the year.

Sadly this year we said goodbye to one of our long standing tenants, Lucy Finelli, who passed away over the summer. Lucy and her husband Michael made the place look occupied when demand for plots was much lower and pressure for affordable housing was higher.

Expanding their cultivation to a total of six plots they brought a small piece of their native country to the Vinery site and have left us with a wonderful fig tree and several grape vines. Their plots will be tidied and re-let as half plots as soon as conditions allow.

We also said goodbye to Jason Daff, an enthusiastic grower and member of the site management team. Jason left us for a new job in York and his place has been taken by Barry who joins Suzy and Alex to take care of the day to day management of the site - mug shots on the notice board for those of you who don't know us already!

Perhaps the highlight of the summer was a visit by a group from the Cambridgeshire Natural History Society led by Jonathan Shanklin. Allotments are not subject to the herbicide regime of modern agriculture and so could be refuge for some of the more unusual members of our native flora. Whilst not finding anything spectacular the visit resulted in some beautiful photographs of our favourite weeds. Please take a look at the website for details:

<http://burnsideandvineryallotments.org/gallery.php?index=vinerysurvey>

The Society continues to host a project with Tanya of TJ Kids which aims to give young children exposure to the natural world and an appreciation of the issues surrounding food production.

In January a small team of volunteers armed with assorted saws and loppers tackled the hazel coppice and produced a good crop of poles, all of which have been used on site as sturdy bean poles. The coppice will be more closely managed in future to produce more straight poles and a smaller pile of small branches.

January also gave us a few seasonal gales but very little site damage. The year ended with Covid-19 restrictions.

Plans for next year include:

- Clearance and re-instatement of the communal area. The communal compost heap has not been a success and has become a "rubbish

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heap". Composting will be suspended and the area re-developed as a community space.

- Toilet: we hope to update the toilet in line with the Burnside facility.
- Asbestos: many older sheds have corrugated cement panels as either roofing or side panels which may contain asbestos cement. It is proposed that we should carry out an asbestos survey and remove asbestos containing materials from site.

Suzy Ashworth, Alex Considine-Tong and Barry South (Vinery Site Management Team)

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### **Burnside Site report**

Plots that had become vacant were let out to new tenants throughout the year. There are currently a number of vacant plots which will be let once the restrictions on people's movement and meetings have been eased or lifted.

A number of very successful Burn Bin sessions have taken place, disposing of many dozens of wheelbarrow-loads of non-compostable plot waste, such as blighted tomato stems and potato haulms, woody fruit bush cuttings and tenacious weed roots. The oven in the Burn Bin was always put to good use, cooking chickens, baked potatoes, camembert cheese and Yorkshire puddings.

The Burnside store re-opened for the season on Saturday April 28th 2019 with takings of over £550 on the day. It was available to Burnside and Vinery tenants on Saturday and Sunday mornings in May, and Saturday mornings in June and July. Further improvements took place during one of this year's volunteering days, making more room and the whole space easier to work. New products this year included insect micromesh, which has sold well. An on-line store process, flagged by NSALG as an example of how to run a non face to face store, was running very well in March 2020, with takings of over £350. However, this is currently suspended due to the escalation of the COVID-19 crisis.

The toilet is a great asset to the site, and it has been kept in a nearly new condition all year by the toilet team. Sadly, it is temporarily closed due to COVID-19.

The troublesome gate to the Tiverton Way estate play area was "put right". The gate post was leaning in, making the gate almost impossible for the Council to access the play area in order to cut the grass. Sometimes the gate had been left open, allowing non key holders on to the site. The top corner of this very large gate had also rusted away making adjustment of the hinges impossible. Digging out the steel gate post and re-setting it was hard work but not a problem, if electricity was available for the concrete breaker. So, a couple of plot holders went to nearby homes knocking on doors. Luckily a very kind local resident allowed us to plug in for a couple of hours, refusing any financial reward. He was however very happy to receive a bag of freshly dug new potatoes. Not only is the gate now easy for the grass-cutter to use but, as the Society is now maintaining the gate, it is locked with one of our site padlocks, giving tenants with young children access to the play area.

The Burnside Friends and Family Summer party took place on Saturday September 7th. The weather could have been better but there was no rain, plenty of food for all and everyone had a great day. The "GOLD" (tin of chocolates) prize for the Pirate Themed Mystery Treasure hunt was won by a

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team of teenagers. They passed the tin around to share their prize, which was a great confirmation of a lovely shared day.

Following on from the popular autumn 2018 children's gathering, similar events took place this year at the end of March and in mid-August. Many thanks to Rachel van Marle for planning and running these lovely days.

Volunteering days: -

- April 6th - A bit chilly, and no Burn Bin due to the wrong wind direction, but a good day was had by all, plenty of work was done and we did have baked potatoes and baked beans from the BBQ plus homemade cakes.
- July 16th - the Community Payback Team came on site in the summer to help with two problem plots. One plot in very poor condition covered in rubbish, with rotten sheds full of rubbish collected over many years, was completely cleared. Another plot which also had a lot of rubbish on it was tidied up. The cost to the Society of having 8 guys working on site all day was a little over £5 for cold drinks. Both plots have since been re-let.
- August 31st - The orchard, which looked lovely in the summer with poppies and wildflowers had become rather overgrown. It was mowed a few days before, then raked up and then re-mowed on the day. The store was also reconfigured to make more space.

Plans for the coming year: - COVID-19 restrictions will stop all communal activities for the foreseeable future and possibly most of this year. However, as and when current restrictions reduce, we will endeavour to have some Burn Bin sessions (without food in the oven), and the extension of the picnic area will continue over the coming months, to include a larger grass seating area and a tea-room with a sink and running water. Hopefully we can make use of this when it's all over.

The Polytunnel project is currently on hold. A list of the most interested people has been produced: as and when that list becomes large enough to ensure a constant fully let tunnel, the project will progress.

Site waste:- this is a major ongoing issue. It is incredible how much "stuff" continues to be brought on to site. Most plots have a stock of items that "might be useful one day". In reality, the majority is never used and just disintegrates in the sun and rain. If all plots are "clean and tidy" the site will be too. The high winds of recent storms prove this, as a large variety of items were blown around the site, many of which were never reclaimed.

Andy Kurdynowski and Matthew Whitelegg, Burnside Site Managers.

# Burnside and Vinery Rd Allotment Society

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### Website

[www.burnsideandvineryallotments.org](http://www.burnsideandvineryallotments.org)

The website continues to flourish and to be updated regularly. It streamlines applications for plots and hosts key documents such as AGM minutes, rules, our constitution and annual accounts.

It had a major facelift towards the end of 2019 to modernise it and improve its look. The main place for members to dip into regularly is now the Weeder's Digest page: this is always up to date with all the latest news and information, so it's ideal if you haven't got time to check out the rest of the website regularly. In particular, it contains up-to-date information and advice about Covid-19 (coronavirus) and NSALG recently linked to our site as a good example of how to run online store ordering.

As ever, the site is also full of other useful information and articles:

- A list of committee members and generic email addresses, so you know who to contact about specific things
- Dates and information about upcoming events on both sites
- Articles by members about their allotment experiences
- Tips, advice, recipes, photographs and reports of events
- News about the community projects we support
- External links to useful advice and events elsewhere
- A noticeboard where you can advertise needs, offers and items for sale
- A history page, outlining the history of the two sites since 1924 (yes, we are nearly 100 years old)
- Occasional quizzes.

Our website has averaged about 550 unique visitors per month during this report year, April 2019 to March 2020, an increase of 150 per month over the previous year. If you google 'Cambridge allotments' our site appears on the first page.

Do please make use of the website, even if you just visit the Weeder's Digest page, and please contribute to it if you can. New tips, advice, reports and articles are always welcome, not to mention photographs taken around both sites to refresh the images on the Home Page and elsewhere. Please mail any offerings to [webmaster@burnsideandvineryallotments.org](mailto:webmaster@burnsideandvineryallotments.org)