

RPA Chairman's Report 2023

This annual report is the chance to review events and achievements of the last 12 months.

The following is a summary of the main items in calendar order

In December we held the annual Christmas café. It was a very festive affair, with members socialising over a mince pie and mulled wine.

Things were quiet through January with the café closed for the winter.

In February, we had a timely demonstration of winter fruit tree pruning. We were lucky to have a guest - expert gardener from Marble Hill House and we would hope to repeat the event next year.

Things started warming up in March when we held our Super Sunday – the reopening of the Seed Store café with indoor seating restored plus the annual seed sale. Generous donations meant that a repeat seed sale was held a couple of weeks later.

April was an interesting month with ups and downs. On the positive side, a very successful appeal was launched for volunteers for the café. With the possibility that the café might not open every Sunday, several plotholders stepped forward to ensure that we have volunteers in depth to keep the cafe going on a regular basis. We also benefitted from the annual Plotholders Question Time with our more experienced plotholders offering their advice.

It was Easter Sunday when a problem arose. The pedestrian gate lock broke. Very bad timing and the result of 2 different master keys having been used to cut new keys from. How lucky we were to have a couple of plotholders willing to give up their time and with the patience to fashion a temporary solution to ensure a secure close for the night.

Then who can forget the hugely successful Plant Sale held in May.

Everything was sold out in record time – and there were even more tomato plants than usual.

The project of the year took place in May. The pump team put in an awful lot of effort preparing for the drilling of 11 new bores - 4 replacements for poorly working pumps and 7 new. There was then even more work installing pumps and tanks and managing them through the initial period. Only 1 bore failed and a temporary solution was put in place in hope that it can be recovered.

The project came in within the £5000 budget allocated and was much appreciated by plotholders.

In June, on a glorious summer day, we held our annual collaboration with St John's Church for the Love Hampton Wick initiative – helping a couple of struggling plot holders.

Also in June, we held a special café to remember two long-term plotholders who had passed away earlier in the year - George Loosemore and Joe Sell. Victoria sponges were the order of the day as George used to regularly make these for the café.

Sadly August brought bad news – there was an overnight break-in and several sheds and lock-ups were damaged. Some power tools were stolen and the Seed Store window and internal door were smashed. Again, we were fortunate with some plotholders stepping forward to make things secure.

In September, on a suitably sunny day, we held the event of the year – The Autumn Show.

It was another huge success which relied on great organisation from our Events lead and the many volunteers who contributed their time and effort.

Sadly, our cricket club neighbours suffered a devastating fire at their pavilion later in September. Unfortunately, the initial report to the fire brigade advised a fire at the allotments, so the first responders broke through our vehicle gates before realising they were in the wrong place. Yet again, we had an urgent security issue and our volunteers managed to save the day.

In addition to all the above, we held several Work Parties throughout the season, focused on maintaining the communal areas around the site. These have included: dead hedge maintenance, rubbish clear up, path laying, bramble management, erecting new pump signs, committee shed repair and, more recently, revealing the paving near the Seed store to create a café sun terrace. A special mention is reserved for the small team of volunteers who spent many hours clearing the unbelievable amount of rubbish that an ex-plot holder had accumulated on their plot. Please remember that it is in everyone's interest that no plot holder accumulates large amounts of stuff on their plot in the vague hope that it might be useful one day.

So, with much of the above relying on our small army of volunteers, what about the committee.

We meet every 2 months, have established a standard agenda, with focus on good budget management to ensure funds are used appropriately and in accordance with our aim to manage and maintain the Royal Paddocks Allotments for cultivation by members.

In addition to the formal Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary roles, others take on responsibility for managing inspections, lettings, café, shed approval and work parties.

There is one new initiative that we have introduced this year. It is a trial approach to offer a way to continue to be involved with the RPA for long-term plot holders who have difficulty continuing to maintain a plot. The offer of 'social membership' is made by the committee to identified individuals. It means the member hands back the plot, stays on the communication list so they may participate in RPA events, and is offered the opportunity to take advantage of the Community plot.

We do want to ensure that being on the committee is not seen as a heavy commitment. The intention is to maintain focus on the single aim of supporting allotment cultivation, keep meetings to a minimum with a simple, standard agenda and aim for a regular turnover of members. Please do consider putting your name forward next year and do contact the committee if you would like more information.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all the various teams and individuals who volunteer to keep things going on the site. It is a long list and please let us know by writing to info@rpa.org.uk if you would like to volunteer for any of the teams mentioned. They can always do with extra support and the Events team in particular would appreciate some new members to help with planning and running events.

Thanks go to: the pump team; the café team; the gate team; the events team and all those who volunteer at events; the web masters; our professional photographers; our graphic designers who prepare notices; the inspection team; the people who clean the compost loo and the men's urinal; those who cut the grass, look after the bees, maintain the flower beds, the heritage orchard, the dead hedge, the living hedge and willow fedge; all those who volunteer for the work parties, pick up rubbish and everyone else who does their bit, from helping their plot neighbours to supporting our café and events.

Thanks also to the committee for their support throughout the year.