

## RPA Chairman's report 2022

The first thing that happens after each RPA AGM, is a meeting of the newly nominated committee to select the required officers – Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer. That means that we miss the chance to publicly thank any outgoing officers. I would like to address that right now and say a heartfelt thank you to both David Harnden, who handed over the Chairman's baton after some 10 years, to me; and to David Laughrin who was Hon Secretary for several years. We are fortunate to have Angela taking over as secretary in her first year on the committee. Both Davids left things in good order with great handover notes and ongoing support.

It may not always be apparent to the members how much happens at the RPA throughout the year, so this report is an attempt to cover the main items and remind ourselves of what has been achieved.

One way of keeping up to date with what is happening at RPA is through our website: [www.rpa.org.uk](http://www.rpa.org.uk) This year, it has undergone a significant modernisation program for which many thanks to our webmasters Carol and Mark Buckley. The result is a speedier response time; easier navigation; and simpler access to the site, thanks to the migration to a new domain, (now [rpa.org.uk](http://rpa.org.uk) instead of [paddocks-allotments.org.uk](http://paddocks-allotments.org.uk) – apparently highly prestigious!).

You will have seen a new plaque on the entrance gate which now has our updated web address. We are lucky to have members who are graphic designers, providing the plaque free of charge.

Our waiting list reached more than 80 meaning that any new joiners could be faced with a more than 5 years wait. Having managed to fill all vacant plots at the time, and leave everything in good order, our long serving tenancy lead, Gill, decided it was time to let someone else have a go and Julia kindly stepped in. We closed the waiting list and took the opportunity to move the procedure fully online with the first action being a reconfirmation of interest for the existing list.

In March, several members joined a group from the The Conservation Volunteers to complete the final stage of our living hedge which runs behind the plots along the South Road. This biodiversity project has created a natural hedge, using traditional hedge laying techniques. The aim is to create a natural barrier between the plots and the fence of the Bushy Park entrance path which also provides habitat for birds and other wildlife. A video was made to record the work and this can be found in our News section on the website.

Also in March, the social hub of the site, the Sunday café, reopened. Service has remained outdoors for obvious reasons, but we hope to offer indoor seating next year. We are still looking for volunteers to man the café and bake cakes going forward. Please contact Anne at [café@rpa.org.uk](mailto:café@rpa.org.uk) The café opening was aligned with another successful annual Seed sale and we plan the same for next year.

In June, several RPA volunteers joined forces with the Love Hampton Wick team from St John's church to help kick-start work on the plot for 2 struggling ploholders. This is the third time we have worked together with St John's and the ploholders who benefit are always very grateful

No-one will forget how dry the summer months were this year, and how we were encouraged to water wisely. What a surprise then to be advised by the pump team that despite the weather conditions, the groundwater at RPA held up remarkably well. This was helped by good rainfall last winter. It is also pleasing to know that, despite increased use, the wear and tear on the pumps remained about normal and only a couple of pumps dried out at times. The pump team continue to take care of the routine repair and maintenance as well as trying, where possible, to improve some of the less well performing pumps. We are still encouraged to water wisely.

Events that have been organised thanks to our Social committee over the past year include: 2 talks, 2 practical workshops, a plotters question time and the ever-popular annual events – the seed sale, the plant sale, and the Autumn Social.

A lot of work goes into these events and we are always grateful to the many volunteers – too many to mention - who help make them successful.

Thanks to our improved website, we now have great accessibility to the calendar of RPA events and reporting of them once they take place. If you haven't already done so, do take a look for yourself. All the 2022 events are recorded there along with some great photos in the photo gallery.

A lot of committee discussion went into deciding to go ahead with what turned out to be a very successful Autumn social this year. The mourning period for the late Queen was the concern. We decided that we could go ahead in a respectful way and included the dedication of a Queen Elizabeth rose, planted in honour of the queen earlier in the year. That rose has recently flowered and looks lovely.

Eight work parties ran during the year. Projects covered maintenance of buildings and dead hedges, painting, clearing accumulated rubbish, and generally keeping our communal areas maintained and in good order. As ever, reliance is on the members who volunteer – we can always do with more.

As follow-up to all the research work carried out in the production of our RPA Centenary history book, we are now working with Richmond Council local studies with a view to them keeping our documents. They collect documents concerning the history of Richmond upon Thames and can provide a safe environment to store the documents, and provide public access to the collection for researchers.

At committee this year, we have underpinned financial control procedures to ensure monies are managed appropriately. A budget and expenditure item is on the agenda of each meeting so that budget requests are discussed and approved by the committee before expenditure. To allow for urgent items that may arise between meetings, the Chairman has been given authority to approve requests of up to £100 and the Vice Chairman up to £50 for work party materials. There is a report out on any such expenses at each meeting. The Treasurer's report later will give you more detail on how our funds are managed.

The committee is also discussing the idea of fixed terms for committee members going forward.

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](mailto:info@rpa.org.uk) if you would like to volunteer for any of the teams mentioned. They can always do with extra support.

Thanks go to: the pump team; the café team; the gate team; the social 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 hedge; 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.

I also thank the committee and am grateful for their support throughout the year.

I may be speaking to the converted here, but I would encourage all members to join in and volunteer where they can. You can see that we already achieve much. Imagine how much more we can do with even more volunteers.

Karen Saywell  
November 2022