

Sutton Lane Allotment Society

Sutton Lane Allotment Society Annual General Meeting

Chair & Secretary's Report for 2019 / 2020 Season, submitted to the membership in writing because of the Covid-19 pandemic

A special welcome to all our new members.

This concludes my ninth year as your Chair.

My report is as follows:

Firstly, I would like to thank your committee for their continued support and industry over the preceding twelve-month period.

Honorary Membership

One member of Sutton Lane Allotment Society is an Honorary Member.

Social Membership

At the present time we have no Social Members.

- (i) Unfortunately, our secretary Geraldine Seymour resigned in May / June 2019. I would like to take this opportunity on my and your behalf to thank Geraldine for all the hard work that she put into the role of secretary over the preceding two years. Geraldine rapidly picked up the workings of the Society following the departure of Steve Gillian. The Committee approached Liz Lowe with a request that she consider replacing Geraldine as your secretary. I am pleased to announce that Liz Lowe was appointed as Acting Secretary on 13th May 2019 and was confirmed into the role on 30th September 2019. I am very pleased to report that Liz has become a tremendous asset to the Society.
- (ii) 2019 was a good year for the cultivation of all crops on the allotment plots. It was pleasing to see flowers and fruit growing abundantly on some plots. Once again I personally commend Gill Moore, Dave Edwards, and Ted Sallows for their annual colourful floral displays.

I have to inform you that during the Britain in Bloom Competition (of which Sutton Lane Allotments was chosen to represent Shrewsbury) one of the judges in company with Margaret Thrower went up to a dahlia in bloom (the flower was more than 15 inches across) on Dave Edwards plot 2B and informed the large group of judges that it was probably one of the best examples of a flowering dahlia she had ever witnessed. Margaret Thrower suggested that it could have won first prize at Shrewsbury Flower Show. Shrewsbury Town won a Gold Medal in the Competition and Sutton Lane Allotments were included in the Gold Medal award, they were also Highly Commended for their diversity and general good presentation of plots and produce. A rewarding comment was made about the two quarter plots adapted for persons with limited physical ability.

On behalf of Sutton Lane Allotment Society, I would like to once again congratulate Committee Member John Evans for his continued success at the 2019 prestigious Shrewsbury Flower Show. John was awarded one first prize for his exquisite standing fuchsia, one second and three thirds for a selection of hanging baskets and hanging pots. Just to put the icing on the cake for 2019, John was awarded the best small front garden in Shrewsbury, by the Shrewsbury in Bloom Judges.

During the month of December John illuminated the front of his house with a fantastic display of Christmas Lights, amassing the amazing sum of, £1172.00. The monies have been donated to Alder Hay Childrens Hospital, Liverpool and Gift Aid. On your behalf I congratulate John on another amazing achievement.

- (iii) Sutton Lane Allotment Society entered Mark Pugh in the Shrewsbury in Bloom – Best Kept Allotment Competition - Diane Davis was not allowed to enter – reason given by Shrewsbury Town Council was Di's two half plots which make a whole plot where declared to be too far apart to be able to be called a whole plot!! Unfortunately, Mark was not listed among the winners, although I was of opinion he should have won.

Good luck to this year's volunteer entrant/s, if the competition takes place in these unprecedented times.

- (iv) On 23rd July 2019 for the eighth year running, your Committee held our own Sutton Lane Allotment Society Competition. I managed the competition. We used the formulated matrix marking system created by Shrewsbury Town Council.

Your committee collated the marks and identified a winner for the Best Newcomers Plot, namely Ms Chuanxia Heung (Plot 37B).

In second place was Roy Ellis (Plot 37A + 27B1) and in third place was Doug Williams (Plot 34A). Well done to all our newcomers, and this year they move into the major leagues.

The Best Kept Half Plot on the allotments; the winner was identified as Mark Pugh (Plot 1B) with 93 marks. In second place was Sheila Jones (Plot 31A) and in third place was Terry Edwards (Plot 7B).

For the third year running the winner for the best kept garden again went to Diane Davis (Plots 19B and 30B), and in second place was Jackie Leach (Plots 10A & 11A). In third place was Steve Doyle (Plots 28A & 28B).

I personally congratulate all the entrants. Once again your committee reported that they were very impressed with the state of the plots at the time of judging. This was reported at the time so I do not intend to repeat, suffice to say well done to all concerned.

- (v) In March & April 2019, Sutton Lane Allotment Site received two one-ton deliveries of wood bark from Shrewsbury Town Council.

- (vi) In August 2019, Sutton Lane Allotment Site received two five-ton deliveries of ‘chippings’ from Shrewsbury Town Council. The stones have been laid at the Sutton Lane end of the roadway with a view to laying a foundation for a small car park, to cater for two possibly three vehicles.
- (vii) On Sunday 8th September 2019, Sutton Lane Allotments held its annual social gathering, namely ‘**Beer Buns & BBQ**’ at the Community Shed. Thirty (30) members attended the function throughout the afternoon.

Burgers and sausages were served in fresh baked buns, alcoholic beverages and soft drinks were also supplied. The members enjoyed a very memorable afternoon in the sun. The annual presentation of trophies was made to the winners.

Thank you to the members who supplied burgers, sausages, ‘chutneys’, homemade Victoria sponge cakes, lemon drizzle cake, beers, wine and home-made wine. If I have missed anything or anyone out, I apologise.

- (viii) I would like to mention again, the Food Hub – it was commented on by the judges of Britain in Bloom. I am sure that we scored highly for this facility. Your Committee say thank you ‘again’ on Nicola Craddock’s behalf to all the members who contributed to this worthy cause for those less fortunate than us. Nicola is no longer a member of the Society. I have taken on the mantle of delivering your produce to the Food Hub via a third party. The Judges’ comments were directed towards the representatives of Shrewsbury Town Council, (always good to remind them that we exist).
- (ix) On your behalf, your committee have formally thanked Helen Ball and Gary Farmer of Shrewsbury Town Council for all their assistance to date in helping to improve the infrastructure of the allotment site.

(x) ACQUISITIONS:

Member John Edwards donated a rotovator to the Society. The rotovator (which goes forward and in reverse) has been repaired and serviced by a local engineer at a very reduced cost of £70.00. The machine when new had an insurable value of £949.00. It is available to the members after guidance on how to use it; details of which will be circulated at a later date, (subject to lock down conditions). The member using the rotovator will be responsible for purchasing petrol for its use.

The Society received a complaint via Shrewsbury Town Council from two residents in Snowdrop Close regarding the Russian vine and Blackberry bushes that run along the metal fence on the South end of the allotment site. Your Committee members decided to purchase an all-purpose tool. Accordingly a Mountfield 2 stroke petrol 5 – in – 1 Multi-Tool i.e chain saw, strimmer, hedge cutter, metallic grass cutter, and an extension arm @ £239.99. It has been purchased and is secured on site. This machine will only be available to a Committee member who has had guidance on how to use it; details of which will be circulated later.

Ear protectors and safety goggles have also been purchased for their protection, together with a storage cabinet and securing mechanism (thanks to John Evans for all his input). The Committee have determined that the person requesting the use of the Mountfield multi- tool will be responsible for the purchase of two stroke oil and petrol prior to its use, (subject to lock

down conditions). It is proposed that the machine will be used in the near future to cut back the Russian vine at its source. Your Committee propose that a skip will be hired in the future, (subject to lock down conditions) to remove the detritus from the allotment site.

Because of damage and wear and tear to our long-shanked combination padlocks it has been necessary to purchase five (5) more at a reduced cost of £120.40 via Amazon and Abbey Hardware. Our previous suppliers no longer trade. The latest purchases are guaranteed for five (5) years.

- (xi) All allotment plots have now been supplied with identification markers at a total cost of £118.82 i.e. £1.76 each. Paid for by your Committee on your behalf.
- (xii) Your Committee have instigated a formal induction process for all new members together with a welcoming letter to your Society.
- (xiii) Your Committee approached Shrewsbury Town Council following a complaint from the tenant of Plot 15A. A quarter of the plot is shaded by a very large walnut tree and cultivation was very poor. The Council agreed that the Society would not pay for a quarter of the plot (the shaded area). Rather than condemn that area, Committee member Di Davis approached the Committee with a suggestion that the plot be cultivated with wild flowers, e.g. lavender and rosemary the remainder being grassed. A bench has been placed in the shade of the walnut tree. Your Committee propose that the quarter plot is to be used by dementia sufferers and their carer's under the supervision of a Committee member. The use of this area will be subject to the pandemic lock down conditions.

The Community shed would be made available to them in the event of adverse weather, again subject to lock down conditions being lifted.

(xiv) Our Web Site

During September, several areas of improvement were identified for the website and it became apparent, after consultation with Jane Halsworth that the BT Community Web Kit (our web hosting company) was quickly becoming unable to cater for our needs. Jane also expressed a concern in taking on additional work for the website.

At this time, it came to the Committee's attention that 123-Reg, our domain name host had sent out 'renewal notices' to the SLAS, and thousands of other customers, relating to an additional domain name almost identical to our current address. This misleading email read as if it was a legitimate renewal for our existing domain name. Those who wish to read the article surrounding this matter can contact Liz Lowe for the link.

Whilst this move by the company was technically legitimate, it attracted much criticism from the public regarding the tactics used to elicit further funds from additional domain addresses.

Because of the similarity of the domain addresses, it was not noticed at the time and it was thought the renewal was in relation to our original domain name .co.uk. Unfortunately the window to stop payment or request a refund passed before we became aware, resulting in SLAS being the owners of two domains, .co.,uk and .uk.

It was decided therefore, in order to minimise risk, it would be better if the responsibility and administration was transferred to the SLAS Committee. Liz Lowe and Clare Ardill volunteered to take this on and research began on alternative web hosts that were more stable and have the capacity for improvement.

Our grateful thanks go to Jane Halsworth for the hard work and commitment she has shown over recent years in administering the BT Community Web Site.

It had become clear that the BT Community Web Kit was beginning not to meet our needs. Customer Service is virtually non-existent (taking well over a week to respond to enquiries), and the site is not maintained sufficiently well enough to offer an efficient service.

There is no customer service 'chat' when administering the web pages which leads to a frustrating time lapse in getting things done. Notwithstanding the above, this is a free service albeit it a very poor one.

Research identified a user-friendly web host company (site123.com) no relation to our domain host providers (123reg.co.uk) which offers an extremely easy-to-use web hosting service and a very competitive three-year contract for just £4.52 per month.

The basic package offers everything we need, including uploading the Newsletter onto a bespoke page, automatic menu creation, video uploads, fast manipulation of pages, themes and styles, uploading of images either from personal files or from an internal library; uploading of documentation with the ability to edit once uploaded and an efficient support/chat facility when required by the web administrator.

A decision was taken by your Committee to go ahead and the new website was launched on 29th January at which time members were informed.

We sincerely hope members will use this site as a point of reference and offer suggestions for improvement.

On behalf of all the members, I publicly thank Committee Members Liz Lowe and Clare Ardill for all the hard work that they have put into this project.

- (xv) I wish to inform the membership that your committee met nine (9) times during the year, undertaken five (5) plot inspections and three (3) Health & Safety Inspections. The membership currently stands at seventy-five (75) members plus an Honorary Member, with a waiting list of **twenty-one** (21) external and five (5) internal applications. **We have never been so popular.** The majority of our applications originated from our web site.

(xvi) Lawnmower Rota - MY ANNUAL MOAN

Your Committee have got to address this problem, because the grass is not being cut. We have got 2 very efficient petrol lawnmowers which are regularly serviced. Petrol and oil is supplied. The only problem is that the mowers are not being used!!!

It is evident that the same 4 persons cut the grass, this is not good enough. Yes, you have to be Health & Safety trained to use the mowers, but that is not a problem because a committee member will take you through the process of starting and stopping the mowers.

The lawnmower rota will be displayed on all the Notice Boards and in the Community Shed, the member indicates on the rota the dates that he/she will take responsibility for cutting the allotment site grass. Please can we have more volunteers???

(xvii) **Site Security: - Burglary**

Sometime between 0900 hours on Friday 13 December 2019 and 1100 hours on Saturday 14 December 2019, Seven (7) garden sheds on the allotment site were broken and entered. It would appear that nothing had been stolen. Your Committee considered the possibility that the offenders had 'tested the waters' and would return later. To that end your Committee changed the security numbers on our padlocks. We thank you for your co-operation over this matter.

I am pleased to report that the new long shank padlocks are performing well and John Evans continues to keep all our locks in a good and efficient working order.

Please do not interfere with the padlocks, if you have a problem with entry or exit involving the locks please contact a committee member.

Once again, I must stress that all the storage sheds must always be kept locked, if any building is left insecure our comprehensive insurance cover for the buildings is compromised.

Gates must always be kept locked to prevent non-members accessing the site unless accompanied by an SLAS member. I cannot emphasise enough the importance of practising security on the site.

During Storm Dennis five fence panels which were parallel with Plot 31A were badly damaged.

The main contributory factor was the ground retaining the steel posts had been disturbed by contractors acting on behalf of the householder in Sutton Bridge when creating a tiered garden. Exacerbating the situation, the householder had placed screening along the fence which acted as a sail attempting to hold back the gale force wind. The householder has contacted a contractor and is having the fence repaired under the supervision of Shrewsbury Town Council. Because of the damage caused to Plot 31A and the upheaval suffered by the Plot holder, your Committee have negotiated with STC and they have agreed to halve the rent for the season.

THANKS

- (xviii) On behalf of your Committee, I thank Elizabeth Lowe for taking on the responsibility of Secretary.
- (xix) We would like to say thank you to your Treasurer, Terry Edwards. He has now completed his fifth year in office and his financial reports to the committee meetings are always very well presented. Thanks to Rob Lea for auditing the books.
- (xx) On your behalf your Committee thanks new Committee member Clare Ardill for the excellent quarterly newsletter that she produces, with a view to keeping the members informed of all activities on and off the allotment site.

- (xxi) We would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to committee members Liz Lowe & Steve Bowen, who have taken on the mantle of Health and Safety Officers for the allotment site. Steve, Liz and I carry out Health and Safety visits on the site on a number of occasions throughout the year. Steve is your Vice Chair and performs the duties of Chair in my absence.
- (xxii) We would like to say a personal thank you to Committee Members Mark Pugh, John Evans and Les Jones for all their assistance with ongoing maintenance issues on site. We also wish to thank our resident plumber Chris Mansell.
- (xxiii) We thank committee members Di Davis, Mark Pugh and Ron Milner for assisting me with plot inspections throughout the year.
- (xxiv) We thank Diane Davis she has taken on the mantle of Membership Secretary, Plot Allocator and with Mark Pugh carries out our new member's induction. Unfortunately Di has since resigned and co-opted committee member Roy Ellis (Plot 37A) has taken on the role. I personally thank Di for all the hard work she put into the role over the previous year.
- (xxv) We thank Committee member Martin Brayne who ensures that the first aid boxes are maintained. He manages the accident book and notifies me of any incidents on the allotment site.
- (xxvi) We wish you every success with your cultivation and very productive allotments during the coming year. Your Committee thank the membership for their consideration regarding the 'banning' of tractors on the site because of inclement weather (namely heavy rains), until the ground is suitable for further deliveries. This ban remains in force until Covid-19 restrictions are lifted.
- (xxvii) That concludes my report.

John Ingham
Chair