

BRIDPORT and DISTRICT ALLOTMENTS SOCIETY

Newsletter

Summer 2013

Community Allotment “Growing Strong”



The raised beds at the Community Allotment

After a slow start to 2013, due mainly to the cold weather, the Community Allotment is now going (and growing!) strong. We have a core group of between six and eight members who meet for a couple of hours on Thursday afternoons plus several others who come as and when their other commitments allow.

We always welcome new members of all ages and abilities who would like to come and have a first go at gardening or who do not have the space to do so at home. There is advice from experienced gardeners on hand if needed plus tea, biscuits and a good natter!

During February and March we concentrated on getting all the beds into shape and ready for the new season. A new planting plan was devised including the creation of a large herb/nectar border from an overgrown and neglected bed. This is progressing well due to a lot of hard work by Susan, our “herb queen”, and is now a real asset to the allotment. Colin, my other half and general handyman, has repaired the holes in the polytunnel caused by gulls pecking and he has put up a wire deterrent along the roof to try and stop them. Time will tell!

As well as traditional allotment beds we also have a dozen metre-square raised beds, nearly all of which are taken for this season. Richard from the Bridport Renewable Energy Group has a couple of these to conduct an experiment involving liquid fertilizer produced by their anaerobic digestion project.

Now that the better weather has arrived we are forging ahead with all the vegetable plantings and we look forward to a warm, sometimes wet and productive summer.

Jenn Baker



Colin weeding

**Date of the next Allotments Society Meeting (Summer Meeting):
Thursday 20 June 2013, meet at the Burton Bradstock allotments, 7.00 pm.**

Update on allotments under threat

In the last newsletter, BADAS committee member Richard Edwards reported on the case of [Farm Terrace](#), the allotment site in **Watford** where the council wanted to build houses on the site in order to fund a new hospital.

The decision was due to be made by **Eric Pickles**, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, who on 14 May gave permission for the change of use, saying there were “overwhelming reasons why the land was essential”. Local campaigners are seeking legal advice about whether to apply for a judicial review of the decision.

The national press have also taken up the story, which on 31 May was the focus of a feature article in the *Guardian* by **John Harris**, [Turf Wars escalate in the battle for Britain's allotments](#). The article brought the Farm Terrace story up to date, and went on to highlight other local cases and some of the larger stormclouds gathering over the future of allotments in Britain.



Farm Terrace allotments - to make way for a “Health Campus”

As ever, the principal threat to allotments is financial, with councils up and down the country seeking in cash-strapped times to make better economic use of land.

Allotments sites are often on land which could be prime sites for housing or other development. In **Watford**, the borough council, led by its Lib. Dem. Mayor, wants to clear the land (first opened as allotments in 1896), which it claims is worth £7m and make way for a “health campus”. However residents believe only two fifths of the land is earmarked for the hospital extension, while “the rest will be given over to development they expect will be completed much more quickly, and which seems to have little connection to health at all: houses, along with ‘business incubator and retail units’, a hotel, restaurants, cafes and ‘urban public piazzas’ – all mouthwateringly close to the M25.”



Manor Farm allotment shed demolished for the 2012 Olympics

Harris reminds readers of the scandalous eviction six years ago of 83 people from the century-old [Manor Farm Allotments](#) in **East London** as part of the preparations for the 2012 Olympics, making way for what one campaigner called a “four-week concrete pathway”.

In **Brighton** a campaign has sprung up, [Don't Lose the Plot](#), initially to fight a proposal from the council (controlled by the Green Party!) to raise allotment rents by 70%, and has gone on to fight allotment closures in **North Yorkshire, Cheshire, Surrey and Essex**.

In **Leatherhead** in Surrey, campaigners are fighting an allotment closure proposed jointly by Mole Valley Borough Council and Merton College, Oxford, on prime land also next to the M25 which was bequeathed by local landowners in 1865 for use by the local poor. The present-day allotment holders include the Leatherhead Youth Project which has a plot used by people at risk of exclusion from school, while another plot is used by a charity which works with homeless people.

Harris contacted the Tory councillor in charge of the council's Communities and Assets portfolio, who replied that “It would be remiss of Mole Valley district council if we did not explore the opportunity to market a site which we own and to assess its full potential... Any such development will provide MVDC with an ongoing financial contribution which could help protect existing services, add a measure of certainty to the council's finances and ensure the council can continue to provide value for money to its residents.”

Even more enlightened councils which are inclined to look more favourably on the importance and value of allotments may find themselves under severe pressure from cuts by the austerity-obsessed Coalition Government, and there are other more serious potential threats (*continued on page 3*).

Update on Allotments threat (*story continued*)

The National Society for Allotments and Leisure Gardeners has through its website drawn attention to the situation in **Poland**, where the largest political party has drawn up proposals to abolish ancient land rights of allotment holders, in what is widely regarded as a land grab to raise funds for the State budget. Readers can go [online](#) to add their names to a petition to oppose this plan.

But it's not only Poland. Only two years ago, John Harris points out, **Eric Pickles' department** "floated plans to relieve local authorities of their obligations to provide 'sufficient' allotments, something enshrined in the **Small Holdings and Allotments Act of 1908**, a remarkably benevolent bit of legislation which belatedly responded to the huge population shift to towns and cities, and was coloured by the early-20th century's concerns about ordinary folks pursuing wholesome interests rather than drinking their lives away." There was a huge backlash against the Pickles plan, and the proposals were binned, but economic pressures may yet drive councils to ignore or neglect their obligations.

As the Chairman of the NSALG, Allan Rees, has pointed out in a recent article, at the same time as the Coalition Government considers abolishing statutory protection for allotments, which are proven to have real health and economic benefits to their occupants, it claims to be in favour of "Community Growing" schemes, something it conspicuously fails to define, and doubtless as woolly and unenforceable as much of the rest of its "Big Society" and Localism agenda.

We are fortunate in Bridport to have a **town council** which has been active in finding and establishing new allotment sites, and credit is due both to council officers and to the elected members who endorse their work. However this cannot be taken for granted - with different individuals things could be very different.

Twenty years ago Bridport town and district councillors of all political persuasions were happy to endorse proposals which would have obliterated the green spaces, allotments and ancient lanes in Bridport's South West Quadrant. This was part of a grand plan for market housing development, a new road, and an indoor bowls building and a car park on the land which was ultimately preserved to become the Community Orchard with its associated allotments. That required a ten-year planning battle and a local campaign (supported at key moments by the **Bridport and District Allotments Society**).

Constant vigilance will be necessary if our allotments are to survive and flourish, and we should express our support for those who are fighting for the future of allotments up and down the country.



Joy Michaud, speaker at the Spring meeting, and "Joy Choi"

"Cut and Come Again"

At the spring meeting of the Society held at Mountfield in March, Joy Michaud (Sea Spring Seeds at West Bexington, stepping in at the last minute for our planned speaker, who was ill), gave an extremely interesting presentation on the subject of "Cut and Grow Again" – more usually called "Cut and Come Again".

Joy explained that many leafy plants could be grown in this fashion but it was important that the growing point – from which new leaves are developed – is not removed if cutting off the top of the plant. This however, is not a problem if adopting the method of removing leaves one at a time.

The examples that Joy brought along certainly looked extremely healthy – she particularly recommends Pea shoots and Pak Choi (variety 'Joy Choi') for this type of growing.

In the question and answer session Joy gave us some invaluable tips – the best one for me was that if you grow tomatoes from seed and the light is too low – leading to 'leggy' seedlings – when you pot them on, you can plant them much deeper – right up to the first pair of leaves – even winding any excess stem around into a spiral.

Joy explained that members of the Solanaceae family (tomatoes, potatoes, peppers and aubergines for example), root very easily from the base of the stem – which is very hairy at the base. These hairs can develop into roots. I've tried this and it works!

Joy's presentation was very enjoyable, and I for one would like her to pay us another visit. Everyone left the meeting full of enthusiasm, and keen to put her tips to use.

Lynne Atkinson

News from Bridport Town Council

The waiting list for Town Council allotments now includes 24 residents of Bridport (who as contributors to the town council's share of the council tax, have precedence), and 44 residents of neighbouring parishes. There has been a reduction in the waiting list numbers following the reallocation of about twenty neglected plots.

News from Skilling

The season is very late this year due to very cold and dry weather.

Easter, the usual designated time for planting potatoes was put on hold and it was the warmer weather at the beginning of May that saw most gardeners get them sorted. In fact the May Bank Holiday was the perfect weekend to catch up if gardeners had no other commitments as the ground had warmed up beautifully. Also it has been followed by plenty of rain, so those who managed to get things done then timed it perfectly. Once the fear of frost has passed all those precious plants raised in greenhouses, cold-frames, window-sills etc, will soon be seen springing up all around.

Good luck to everyone and we hope that the elements will be a lot kinder to us all than last year's abysmal conditions.

Mary Keens

News from Burton Bradstock

Since the weather improvement there has been a lot more activity on Burton allotments. Hopefully we shall not have a repeat of last year's devastating floods.

The six new allotments on land leased to the village by the National Trust have very recently been fenced. All six have received an initial rotovating and three have already been taken. We expect that the other three will soon be "allotted". As an incentive towards breaking in new ground no rent will be charged until October. Anyone interested should please ring Fel Moore, Clerk to Burton Parish Council, on [REDACTED].

Twice a year, Autumn and Spring, we hold a Burton Bradstock Allotment Society meeting - the usual attendance is around twenty-five. Informality is the order of the day. After any announcements to be made or members have matters to raise, we get down to the more serious part of the evening - some nibbles donated by members and a drop of whatever they fancy, accompanied by a great deal of allotment chat. The meetings are very pleasant, relaxed occasions and reminiscent in some ways of the old Greenfinger days at the Dove Inn (both now sadly deceased).

Last Summer's allotment BBQ had to be cancelled as it would have been standing in two feet (or more) of water on the day, but we are planning, fingers crossed, to hold another in July.

We look forward to the "walk-about" of our allotments on Thursday 20th June.

Finally we would like to inform members that Burton Bradstock Village Society Flower and Produce Show will be held on Saturday 13th July (check for times).

David Barnikel



The Palmers' allotments at Gundry Lane have recently been populated by a growing number of white birds, skilfully manufactured from plastic milk cartons by Val, a local resident, who kindly donates them to plotholders.

Bridport and District Allotments Society

Membership of the Bridport & District Allotments Society costs £2 per annum. Our Membership Secretary/Treasurer Mandy Rathbone will be pleased to receive your subscriptions. Please contact Mandy on [REDACTED] or send her an email at [REDACTED].

Receiving the newsletter by email: If any member who currently receives the newsletter/minutes of meetings through the letterbox could receive them by email (and save us delivery cost/time), please contact Lynne Atkinson - [REDACTED] (Email recipients get the pictures in colour!)

Newsletter contributions welcome: if you have any items you would like to see included in future issues of our Newsletter (which comes out quarterly) or if there are subjects you would like us to cover, please contact the Editor, Charles Wild, [REDACTED].

[REDACTED] Contributions to the next edition (articles, news items and/or photographs) are welcome at any time, but by **10 August 2013** please. Many thanks to those who submitted contributions this time— please keep them coming.