

Moorside AGM 2009:

The Chairman's Report

1. The Committee

As a relative newcomer to the Committee I have been extremely impressed with the amount of hard work accomplished on behalf of the Association by the members of the Committee. Firstly I would like to pay tribute to George, our outgoing Chairman, for the characteristic energy, hard work and enthusiasm which he brought to being Chairman and with which he prepared for the Show. It was desperately hard for all involved in the organization of the Show that it happened to coincide with the worst weather we have had for years and we had no option but to cancel at the very last minute amidst puddles of water and flying tarpaulins! Secondly thanks to our outgoing Treasurer Neils who has shepherded and protected our finances very ably over the past five years, keeping strictly to the lonely task of being the man who takes on the responsibility of saying "wait a moment" or "no". As a result we inherit a healthy bank balance in our current accounts and we are able to keep next years rents at 2008 levels. Thanks also to Krys in her umpteenth year as Secretary and to Vice-Chairman Frank, able to illuminate any issue with forty years of Moorside experience. Thanks to Harry and Stan for keeping the Trading Hut open every Saturday and Sunday come rain or shine, a prodigious achievement and for providing such a good service for all our members. Finally thanks to the members of the Committee who turned up for Committee meetings on freezing nights in the Community Hut, endured the befuddling complexities of hammering out a new constitution and tramped endlessly round soggy allotments on inspection duty.

2. The Committee and the outside world

The Committee's primary role lies in supporting the members of the Association but it also has to interface with the increasingly fraught and unstable world in which we live with its financial, environmental and resource stresses and catastrophes. Allotment holders are typically fiercely independent creatures who resent bureaucracy and meddling and want to get on with growing in peace. But we have to comply with the demands of our leaseholders, the City Council, and the owners of the Town Moor herbage rights, the Freeman, and both inspect us to see we are tidy and in good order. At the same time allotments have been catapulted in the past five years from a position of unfashionable backwaters to being a publicly valuable commodity, partly because of the real perceived need to be self-sufficient in uncertain times and partly because of television gardening programmes that make growing vegetables look absurdly simple. In Newcastle alone there are up to a thousand people on allotment waiting lists and over twenty on the Moorside waiting list. The Newcastle Allotment Working Group has as its strategy priority the creation of more allotment sites but new land is costly and hard to find. There is corresponding pressure on the Committee to manage the allotments with this community demand in mind and members will have noticed that we have begun regular plot inspections. At the same time the Committee wants to be fair to plot-holders and to take account of temporary changes of circumstances which happen to everyone sooner or later. If you are having difficulty in keeping up with allotment tasks for personal reasons please let

the Committee know as soon as you can so that we can adopt a sympathetic frame of mind and also possibly help out! A stitch in time saves a barrow-load of old weeds!

3. Our gardening year

It was a damp miserable year with flooding and blight sweeping the allotments. Nevertheless Moorsiders performed creditably in the Newcastle Show with Frank Lightfoot winning Top Gardener award and a number of others winning first prizes in categories. In the Allotment competition we had three second prizes, David and Marie Wilson for best full plot with glass, Frank Lightfoot for best Wildlife and Wingrove Primary School for Best Project. Well done everyone. Our own show was cancelled but George Taylor won best allotment, Susan Hrisos best newcomer and Sue Johnson and Cynthia Walton won the new Trevor Storey Memorial Unsung Heroines of Moorside Shield for their sterling work in the north-east corner.

4. Projects and Problems

The Trading Hut continues to go from strength to strength, with a turnover of £4,673 in the last trading year and stock assets of over £2,000 and the Hut accounts are appended to this report.

A major project has been rewriting our constitution in line with current leasehold requirements. This is now complete and awaits ratification later in this meeting.

A project initially hatched several years ago, the heritage interpretation of Moorside Allotments, came to fruition this year and the City Heritage Dept. in conjunction with Wingrove Primary School have produced a teaching resource pack based upon our history. Marian Jones of the Heritage Dept is currently designing a notice-board to be sited opposite the Trading Hut. This next year we hope to set up three working parties, on flood prevention, a garden club and a bumblebee conservation project, details of which are in the AGM notes. The Committee hopes that members will volunteer, in a spirit of community involvement, to join the working parties. Moorside also hopes to host a Newcastle-wide seed swap day in conjunction with Transition-Newcastle sometime in March.

During the year we have had continuing problems with sporadic theft and vandalism on site and the Committee's advice is not to leave anything valuable on site. We have also been dismayed by a potentially catastrophic decline in small bird and song bird populations. Although this is mainly due to two bad breeding summers, the decline is also probably also related to increasing numbers of crows and magpies on site and to conserve our small birds, a cull of the crows and magpies is proposed and will be further discussed in the open forum later this evening.

Successful gardening to everyone for 2009

Peter Whewell Chairman