

# Moorside Allotments Association

## Chairman's Report 2010

### **1. The Moorside Year**

The weather wasn't kind again for our produce with another wet summer, but at least we were able to hold the Show this year. As a community we had a good year and the Committee has to be congratulated for their collective hard work with no less than 12 meetings throughout the year. Sitting huddled in a cold and slightly dark hut straining to see documents is not inherently fun but the Committee managed to make it a cheerful experience. It's perhaps not fair to single out individuals for additional praise, but I can't help mentioning Krys Gaffney's longevity as Secretary; Neils Souter (with help from lots of Moorsiders) delivering a good, enjoyable and profitable Moorside Show; new faces Nicola Loose and Susan Hrisos tying up our accounts nicely and Sue Pownall conducting the superb Trading Hut orchestra like a true maestro. I must also mention Rob Germany's erudite editorship of the Newsletter and Rob and Neils dispensing gardening knowledge in bucketfuls at the Garden Club. Outside the Committee, thanks also to Emma Hughes for organising the successful seed and seedling swap days and David Vincent for managing our Kings seed orders despite the time constraints of his own seedlings.

A sign of health of an allotment site is success in the City Allotment Competitions and this year Moorside did itself proud. Pride of place goes to George Taylor with his first place in full plot with glass... there are 2,500 plots in Newcastle so that's some achievement George. Secondly Frank Lightfoot kept the flag flying with yet another Top Plate win and another first for the most Wildlife-friendly plot. Slightly lower down the league table Moorside won a commendable second in best large allotment site and Liz Whewell was the creative director behind a third place in full plot without glass. Finally well done to all those Moorsiders who contributed to our haul of 16 first prizes, 18 second prizes, 16 third prizes and 11 fourth prizes in the City Show which I think is our best ever performance. Whilst we are still on the subject of prizes, well done indeed to the Comfrey Project for winning a prestigious Guardian Charity Award for 2009.

During the year we received a grant for printing our new constitution and with help from Northumberland Wildlife Trust, a grant for putting in our new wildlife friendly security hedge along the east boundary. I have just heard this week that the Allotment Working Group will match a grant from Muckle Solicitors to put in paving and ramps up to our toilet block. What about the future?

### **2. Future directions**

On the allotment there needs to be a balance between tolerance of individualism and promotion of communalism. For some plot-holders the sense of community on site and participation in the life of the community and its promotion are primary. Others may value most getting away from the stresses of worldly responsibility in favour of

just doing their own thing. Committees tend to be composed of the more communally minded and the activity of our Committee as evidenced in the questionnaires sent out to you last week which must make Moorside the most bureaucratically harassed site in Newcastle. So when I go on to list some possible future directions for Moorside we need to know what the membership as a whole thinks about where we want to go, hence the agenda item later.

Some possibilities are as follows:- we have an estimate for a tailor-made canopy easily erected and dismantled to cover the space between the community hut and the trading hut, allowing possibilities for use of the covered outdoor space for more social events and as a focus for various aspects of community life. This will be put up for a ward grant in April. We would like to push for first prize, large allotment site, at next year's City Show which will inevitably mean chivvyng plot-holders into even more tidiness than has been the case. We would also like to get more Moorsiders exhibiting at the City Show and even put in an allotment plate to stretch Frank a little. With climate change we are increasingly suffering from flooding on site and we need to map the flooding and take requisite measures. We would like to greatly expand the range of goods at the Trading Hut. Last year a lot of fruit and produce on Moorside was un-harvested and ways of getting such produce to the Trading Hut and selling it or exchanging it could be addressed. I hope we can continue to be proactive in supporting wildlife, particularly songbirds, and we are continuing to search for a grant to place two educational signboards round our bumblebee garden. These are just some possible future directions but we need thoughts about this and your suggestions too.

### **3. The world in which we live**

The Committee have responsibility to look after the needs of the membership but must also comply with the demands of the outer world. In particular we have two masters, the council and the Freemen and a less tangible responsibility to our local community.

#### **The Council**

The council own the land we garden and we have a detailed council lease, renewable every three years, we need to adhere to. In return we have access to the Allotment budget for some maintenance items and access to the Allotment Working Group via an elected representative. The Allotment Working Group helps manage Newcastle's allotments in conjunction with the Allotments Officer and has, in the last year, been a powerful lobby promoting the interests of allotments. This system of relatively autonomous allotment associations coming together to manage is an excellent example of local democracy in action in which Newcastle leads the allotment field. The profile of allotments nationally has increased enormously over the past three years and there are now around 800 people waiting for allotments in Newcastle.

In response to the growing public demand for allotments the Council has belatedly realise that its draft allotment strategy of defensively conserving existing allotments needs to be radically changed to a strategy of creating more allotments. As elected West of Newcastle representative on the Allotment Working Group I have been co-opted onto a small subcommittee rewriting the Allotment Strategy. At the same time the Council are becoming more concerned that existing allotments are used to their maximum and there will inevitably be more top-down pressure on allotments in future in terms of plot size and cultivation levels. There is no doubt that at present

Moorside is recognised as one of the best cultivated sites in the City and we need to keep it that way.

#### The Freemen

Secondly we are responsible to the Freemen of Newcastle who own the herbage rights of all Town Moor land by Act of Parliament, giving them legal jurisdiction upon anything we erect at Moorside and the right to demolish the whole site should they choose to do so. The Freemen inspect us from time to time and did so in October. They seemed pleased with Moorside and we believe we remain in good standing with them, although we never receive any written feedback.

#### The Community

There are now 30 on our Moorside waiting list, overwhelmingly living within walking distance of our allotments. A petition delivered on behalf of those waiting was delivered by myself to council in November and was helpful in beginning the shift of council towards a more proactive stand on allotments. My own reading of the situation is that climate change, population growth and peak oil will produce enormous pressure in forcing up food prices over the coming decade and that community demand for allotments is likely to escalate further. Increasing food prices may lead to even more severe security problems for us on site. The Committee has responded to the waiting list demand by informally adopting a new system of plot allocation:-

1. All new plot-holders are offered a half plot to begin with
2. All half plot holders, can, on demonstrating competence over time, apply to move up to a full plot
3. This means that in effect we have two waiting lists whose demands need to be balanced
4. New plots can only be taken on the basis of one plot per household.

This is the same general scheme as other progressive sites such as Littlemoor. Overall in Newcastle currently 25% of plots are half plots whilst at Moorside only 16% of plots are half plots. However it is important to state that the Committee support the notion of the right of a competent plot-holder to aspire to a full plot.

As I write this it looks highly probable that there will be vacancies on the Committee this year so anyone reading this who feels they would like to contribute and be a part of Committee.... you can be nominated now!

Finally best wishes to all Moorside members for a good gardening year in 2010

Peter Whewell    Chairman