

Moorside Allotments Association

Chairman's Report 2011

1. The Moorside Year

I need to begin with the committee which met no fewer than eleven times during the year. Thanks therefore to Krys Gaffney, Nicola Loose, Sue Pownall, Sue Brophy, Sue Johnson, John Reid, Neils Souter and Tony Whittle for all their hard work in keeping the association running smoothly. Thanks also to the Show Committee, and for everyone who helped out, for producing a highly successful Moorside Show with more entries and more trophies than ever. Rob Germany and Neils Souter kept feeding us with juicy gardening tips at the Gardening Club, Emma Hughes again organised as successful seed and seedling swap day, David Vincent doubled up with Health and Safety and our Kings Seeds order and Rob Germany continued to edit and produce our quarterly Newsletter. A special thanks also to our Trading Hut volunteers who kept the hut open rain or shine (and in sometimes freezing conditions and snow) all year round. For our gardening year in 2011 the weather again played tricks on us in 2010 with snow at the beginning and end of the year book-ending a dry early summer. For excellent accounts of how the summer affected Moorside gardening, look no further than the articles by granddad Dave Easson and Sue Johnson in the Winter Newsletter.

There were a number of highlights of the Moorside year. Firstly we were chosen to represent Newcastle for Northumbria in Bloom and under the guidance of our floral director Krys Gaffney we put on a good show which was praised by the judges, despite winning no individual prizes. However I have to report that Newcastle lost out as best City in Bloom to Sunderland. Secondly we were visited by the Guardian Society Environment Editor who is writing a book on urban bees. She was impressed with our beekeeping and our bee garden and Moorside will get a mention in her book. Overall Moorside has a good city reputation now for being wildlife friendly. Thirdly Moorside had yet another successful City Show with George Taylor again winning Best Full Plot with Glass and Harry Carter winning the City Master Gardener Plate. We also won 13 first prizes, 14 second prizes, 11 third prizes and 11 fourth prizes..... Well done everybody!

During the year we were awarded almost £10,000 in grants for bee conservation and beekeeping and for a tailor made canopy to keep us dry between the two huts. However it looks as though it is going to be much tougher to obtain grants in the future as funding dries up with the coming austerity and competition for the remaining grants intensifies. Nevertheless in 2011 Committee intend to work up proposals for creating special raised beds for the less able next to the toilet block and for the creation of green energy with photovoltaic cells.

On the downside last year we continued to be plagued by shed break-ins and petty pilfering and the Committee has to advise plot-holders not to leave anything of value in sheds, even if locked. Secondly we continue to suffer flooding off the Town Moor. The Freeman and Council seem at last to have accepted that something needs to be done i.e, a drainage ditch dug round our north and east boundaries, but we are no nearer obtaining a formal commitment as to when such works may be done.

2. The outside world

Last year was a busy one for Newcastle Allotments with the completion of the Newcastle Allotment Strategy and its adoption by Newcastle City Council in November. The driving force behind the strategy has been the huge waiting list for Newcastle Allotments of over a thousand. This is reflected at Moorside in that despite taking on six new plot-holders over the year, our waiting list still remains around forty. There is a firm commitment by the Council in the new strategy to maintain and if possible expand its allotment stock, but in return it is insisting that existing allotments are used to their fullest capacity. In this regard the Council will begin this month a process of regular inspections of all allotment sites with their new Buildings and Cultivation standards regulations. Briefly this affects us at Moorside in two ways:-

A) Before any new structure is erected a plan of the structure must be submitted to the Secretary beforehand and permission to proceed obtained

B) 75% of each plot must be under full cultivation

Details of what constitutes cultivation and what is an acceptable building are contained in the detailed documents posted on the internet and sent by post to members without computers. "I didn't know" is not a viable excuse!

3. Major issues for Moorside in 2011

The Committee has identified the key aim for 2011 to be of sustainability in terms of finance and maintenance.

1. Rents

The rent discussion document highlights that our Moorside rents over the past two years have not been covering our basic running costs, so in effect the Association has been subsidising members. This is not a sustainable situation and the Committee has concluded we must now raise rents. At the same time we wish to protect our financially vulnerable members and we propose to keep concessionary rents to a very small increase. In the spirit of everyone sharing the pain, the Committee voted at their last meeting to abolish honoraria for Moorside Officers. This will save the Association around £100 per annum. It is also proposed that any Trading Hut surplus be used for one-off capital items the Association would not otherwise be able to afford.... an example being the purchase this year of the canopy.

2. Maintenance

As Moorside has acquired more assets and has increased its aspirations, the sustainability of maintenance becomes problematic. It is important that communal tasks are shared out rather than left to inspired individuals or a small core of Committee members, whose enthusiasm can easily burn out. Taking the successful Trading Hut volunteer model as a basis, the AGM pack contains your rent form together with a list of community tasks every member is invited to join in with. It would be very helpful if everyone could take time to complete the form so the 2011 Committee know where they stand in relation to all these tasks. In addition it is very important you let us know how many keys you have in order to accurately assess our key deposit liabilities and transfer all the data to an electronic system

Happy gardening to all Moorside members for the coming year

Peter Whewell Chairman 2010