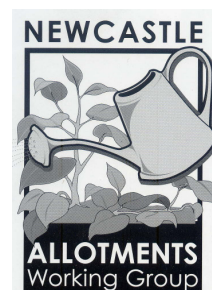




SPRING 2011



Welcome to this edition of Dig This the first after the 2010 Allotment and Garden Show. Unfortunately, due to a technical hitch the Autumn/Winter editions were not issued for which I apologise. Anyway back to now. It would be remiss of me if I did not give firstly a huge vote of thanks to all of you who contributed so magnificently to the show. It was a mighty success and has generally been agreed the best yet. Special thanks must go, however, to the staff of Parks and Countryside Services whose efforts over several days made such a major contribution to that success as well as all those who gave their time freely to that end. The AWG stall raised £1200 for the groups funds, the Peoples' Kitchen gratefully accepted a pile of veg from the exhibits left and the remaining exhibits raised over £100 for the Lord Mayor's charity fund.

PUBLIC LIABILITY INSURANCE

The lease under which the Council lets its land to individual associations, and signed by your association, contains a condition that the association takes out public liability insurance(PLI). This is to protect the association and the Council should someone suffer an accident or loss whilst on the site. If your association does not have that insurance it is in breach of the lease agreement and that could lead to the site being closed. If your site does not have PLI information or advice about this can be obtained from Mark Todd or our NSALG rep Peter Horrocks who can be contacted via the website.

NEW SITE TO GO AHEAD

Permission has been granted for a new site at Greenwell View Cowgate. There are some problems with rubble clearance but this is a step in the right direction and a feather in the cap of Parks and Countryside Services. Let's hope that this is the first of many.

BONFIRES

The time for bonfires has now passed. I and other AWG members have regularly listened to moans about the short period fires are allowed. This is down to members of sites (unnamed) who failed to observe the criteria laid down in the Code of Practice. It is important, if your site does not wish to have a complete ban, that everyone reads and abides by that code. If you have not seen it ask your secretary for a copy or in cases of difficulty Mark Todd can supply. I cannot stress enough how important this is so if you have had problems it may be best to sort now.

CRIME ON ALLOTMENT SITES

I make no apology for repeating the request to all site management to please ensure that the police are informed whenever your site is broken into. We need to ensure that the scale of the problem on

individual sites is well known to the police and that they have the opportunity to do something about it.

The AWG have discussed this at length and during the consultation period of the draft Allotment Strategy received a very positive response from the police to the aims expressed in it. It seems, therefore, that we can expect appropriate help from the police and it would probably benefit all sites to approach their Community Support Officer as a liaison exercise if you have not already done so. It is also a good idea, if you have to leave valuable items on site, to mark them with a UV pen to allow easy identification if they are subsequently stolen. A shed alarm can also be a deterrent or as an alert to neighbours. Protect your property if you can, it can cost more than you think to replace.

ALLOTMENT STRATEGY

I hope everyone has had the opportunity to see or discuss the strategy which has been agreed as Council policy. We hope to see the full published document soon. The next stage will be to follow up the targets, which are set out below, and to ensure that we are in a position to meet the demands of the strategy. One very important aspect is that we make the best use of the land that we have available to us and to this end the AWG and Allotment Officer have decided on the standards of cultivation that will be applied to all plots and these have been issued to all sites. Those standards will be applied and confirmed by annual inspections and the inspections will commence soon. You have now had prior warning.

TARGETS

These have been set as a result of the aims and aspirations within the strategy.

1. NAWG to set minimum standards for plot cultivation, and ensure that each site carries out regular inspections based upon these standards with annual inspections by the Allotment Officer, NAWG area representative and site secretary.
2. All new plot holders will be given a maximum of a half plot to cultivate. Those demonstrating the ability and desire to cultivate a full plot will be given the opportunity to do so. This requires each site to hold two waiting lists.
3. The City Council will undertake to protect Newcastle's existing 62 allotment sites. This will necessitate negotiation with the Freemen on the management of sites on Town Moor land, significant progress towards the re-designation of sites from temporary to statutory status.
4. Newcastle City Council and the Allotment Working Group will investigate the suitability of private and public land for new allotment sites within the City and when opportunities arise will identify adequate funding for establishing new sites, with the aim of providing for current and future allotment demand
5. Management will be improved by more active liaison with councillors and by more designated strategic and monitoring time at a senior level above that of Allotment Officer
6. The Newcastle Allotment Working Group will work towards ensuring that all allotment sites in Newcastle have the basic facilities of: water, secure perimeter fencing or hedging, on-site toilets and for the old and less able.
7. The Newcastle Allotment Working Group will continue to promote a sense of a Newcastle allotment community, to promote an increase in social facilities and events on sites and will facilitate communal tenure of plots, with a central register of all communal plots as a first step in encouraging disadvantaged and minority groups into allotment gardening.
8. The Newcastle Allotment Working Group will encourage school involvement in allotment sites and will create a template children and vulnerable adult protection policy.
9. The Newcastle Allotment Working Group will hold a central register of crimes on its 62 sites and produce a co-ordinated plan to deter crime and encourage associations to involve local community policing.
10. The Newcastle Allotment Working Group will collate information upon flooding throughout

all sites and will liaise with relevant bodies to alleviate flooding and identify sources of finance for this work.

11. The Newcastle Allotment Working Group will research the current use of pesticides and herbicides on its allotment sites with a view to a focussed educational programme advocating organic gardening.
12. The Newcastle Allotment Working Group in conjunction with a further education partner will conduct research to show the carbon savings of Newcastle's allotments.
13. Newcastle Allotment Working Group in co-ordination with Newcastle City Council will initiate a pilot project to produce renewable energy on an allotment site with a view to a larger renewable energy project for Newcastle's allotments.
14. Newcastle Allotment Working Group, in conjunction with the new Wildlife Strategy, will support sites in joint projects with voluntary wildlife conservation bodies and will create a specific plan designed to educate allotment holders about how to improve the conservation of wildlife and eliminate threats to wildlife on their 62 sites.
15. Newcastle Allotment Working Group, in conjunction with the Bee Strategy, will encourage bee-keeping on its allotment sites; will promote education about the importance of bees, their decline, and how plots may be improved as a source of year-round forage for bees.
16. Newcastle Allotment Working Group will arrange a citywide survey of allotment hedging to gauge the potential for an extensive hedge-planting campaign.

These look a bit daunting and will, no doubt, take a great deal of achieving, but in the spirit of a green and pleasant Newcastle and making the best use of the land resource we have, we have a responsibility to ensure that we do our best in the next five years to meet them. The task will be made easier if you all please ensure that you meet the conditions of the Council leases and your own site rules.

JOBS ON THE PLOT

It's all go on the plot now and I notice that, with the recent spell of warm weather, weed seedlings are showing themselves.

BEEES AND ALL THAT

The Newcastle Allotment Bee-Group (NABG)

The Newcastle Allotment Bee Group is a new association for allotment bee-keepers. It was formed in the Summer 2010 in response to the Newcastle Bee Strategy (see www.newcastle.gov.uk/bees) and it is directly responsible to the Newcastle Allotment Working Group. Meetings are held every three months or so and the aim has been to produce a set of rules and recommendations for allotment beekeeping, to secure funding for allotment beekeeping, both start-up grants and training and to act as a forum for discussion the particular benefits and problems associated with keeping bees on allotments. So far the group has been successful in:

1. Producing a governance document of rules and recommendations. These have been acknowledged by the Guardian Society Environment Editor as the most comprehensive and detailed allotment bee governance she has seen and will be included as an appendix in a forthcoming book she is writing, to be published in May 2011 entitled "Urban Bees".
2. Obtaining grants totalling nearly £10,000 for three allotment sites to be used for starting up coasts for bee-keeping including training. This funding will allow about fifteen new allotment bee-keepers to start-up and be trained this year. The funding has come via the Sustainable Communities Fund. The funding applications have to be prepared by the allotment sites own committee, rather than by individuals, but NABG has advised on how to apply and fill in the complex application form successfully.
3. Arranging a mentoring system whereby new allotment beekeepers can get ongoing advice from

established and experienced allotment beekeepers.

4. Obtaining via the Newcastle Bee Strategy a communal honey extractor for the use of NABG members

The group would like to involve any existing or potential beekeepers in its activities. Any queries can be directed to the Chair/Secretary of NABG Peter Whewell on peter@moorsideallotments.co.uk The next NABG meeting will be held at the Scotswood Natural Community Garden Offices (John Marley Centre NE15) on Tuesday the 30th August at 6.30 pm . All welcome.

WHAT ABOUT THE WEBSITE!!!

Newcastle Allotments Website is *the* local resource for information about allotments in your area - and beyond – Jim recently had an email from USA re. young students using the ‘Young Gardener’s Page’ as a resource for their schoolwork!

Have you had a look there lately?

Information about the work of the Allotments Working Group, all allotment sites in the city, including waiting lists, which sites have shops and a host of other related info and links can be found at www.newcastleallotments.co.uk.

Secretaries, area reps., and others can help to keep the site vibrant and up to date with latest info., photos, news, and a host of other issues by getting in touch with the webmaster – Jim Lowery via the link on the homepage or at webmaster@newcastleallotments.co.uk

Secretaries – don’t forget, you can have as much info on your Allotment homepage on the site as you wish. If you are not sure how to do this contact Jim via the links above. He’ll be glad to help.

CONTRIBUTIONS WELCOME

Contributions to this newsletter are welcome, whether they are news items about site activities or personalities, ideas, opinions or criticisms.

Contact me on 0191 2665910 email michaelarmstrong07@btinternet.com

Or Mark Todd on 0191 2783094

The Allotments Working Group is made up of elected and co-opted representatives from across Newcastle and operates under the auspices of the City Council.