

RGS AGM 2020 Summary of reports to Members

Extracts from the committee reports.

Chair's Report

It is particularly a shame we are unable to have a real AGM as it would have been wonderful to welcome our new President, Fleur Anderson to our meeting. However, she has visited us on the day we were supposed to have the Autumn show. She made it clear that she would be willing to help us should we need support from her. Hopefully Fleur will be able to attend our AGM next year and meet us all.

At the AGM last year on examining the accounts it was apparent that the RGS had some funds that could be used for projects. A request came from the floor for some sort of tea hut and communal area on site 3. Subsequently, a sub-committee was formed from members of the main committee and various projects were identified and given a priority rating. The projects identified as high priority and therefore to be at least started within 2020 were the communal area on site 3, also one on site 2, and power on site 3. We also decided to have new doors installed on the store and to have a proper drainage system from the kitchen area in the store. Four gazebos have been purchased that can be tethered together on site 2 with the intention being for them to be used at our summer show on site 2. Hopefully we will be able to use them in 2021.

I am glad to say that we have made fantastic progress with these projects. The store doors work properly and look very attractive painted in a shade of green that seems to be the RGS signature colour. Also the drainage has been fixed so no more emptying of the bucket at the end of a store session. These projects were very capably managed primarily by Jackie Savage so many thanks to her.

The communal area on site 3 is rapidly taking shape largely due to the input again of Jackie but also Vivien Fowler and Greg Willcox. Bob Aveling gracefully agreed to reduce the size of his plot which made space for the communal area. Vivien was the designer and recommended a cabin with a veranda area attached which has been extensively used already. Having power installed is taking longer than it might because we were keen to explore the possibility of using off-grid renewable power. Patrick Crawford did a very thorough investigation of this option but the committee agreed it was not practical and therefore opted to be connected to the National Grid. The aspiration, however, is to have some solar power at some point in the future. Connecting to the National Grid is going ahead and we hope to have power on site 3 before Christmas.

The communal area on site 2 is also progressing well. We have some good solid hard standing installed and Paolo's shed moved on to it. It does need some repairing and prettying up. Carol Martinez has been managing this project and it is progressing very well. The shredder shed was on its last legs and having it demolished has created a horseshoe pathway around the back of the store. The plan is to have a picnic bench on the gravel area that gets the sun and to take power from the store into the shed to run a kettle; a proper Tea Hut for site 2.

Another major project undertaken this year has been the installation of a new water system on site 3 comprising 11 new metal tanks. Patrick Crawford has managed to negotiate funding from The Council for this project. One of the down sides to the Council commissioning this work was that we had limited control of when this change happened so it wasn't ideal to have our water supply compromised in the middle of a drought and heat wave.

Then there was Covid-19. Several good things have come out of this terrible virus. Many of us had rather more time for RGS so making progress with the projects has been faster than it would otherwise have been. Our ever resourceful committee members found ways around problems. During lockdown in March and April Jackie Savage with Richard Huntrods as bike courier and Charles Gillbe managing the account ran an online delivery service for seeds so plot holders could at least get on with starting plants.

When garden centres opened in May we also reopened the store. We decided we had to go cashless so Elaine Barnwell researched various possibilities and found a 3G card reader which we have been using with great success. The queues at the store on Sunday mornings were enormous so to help reduce this problem Jackie and Greg offered a 'click and collect' for site 3 plot holders.... Many thanks to you all.

We also have a wonderful resource in our wider membership. We needed a tedious job done picking up loads of loose stones off the main path on site 3. The Ditch Witch trench digger had unearthed numerous stones which would be a hazard when mowing the path. We had lots of volunteers to help out and had fun in the process.....

Waiting List Report

The RGS waiting lists continue to grow – as at end of October this year there were 260 names on the Primary List, of whom 20 are existing tenants waiting for more land. There are also 115 people on the Secondary List. New applications for a plot increased by 20% on the previous year. This surely must be attributed to the pandemic and promotion of the desirability to "grow your own" in the media.....

Bulletin and Shows

Shows

Unfortunately, due to the pandemic we have been unable to hold our popular Summer and Autumn Shows this year. This has been a big disappointment to many members as they are both an opportunity to see fabulous produce grown on our plots and a chance to spend social time with fellow plot holders over a cup of tea and home-made cake. However, instead of both shows we asked members to send in photographs of their flowers, fruits and vegetables which were shown in the bulletin.

Bulletins

I have produced the bulletin now for 2 years. There never seems to be a shortage of things to report and members are keen to share stories and things they have seen on the plots, such as wildlife. Our regular items: The chair's report and store report keep members up to date with what is going on over both sites and what is available in the store on a seasonal basis. We welcome new members in every bulletin. The bulletins came to the rescue when we had to cancel the shows and became the place to show off great specimens of produce which could not be put in the shows....

Site 2 Report

Plot maintenance

It has been my great pleasure to observe the beauty and creativity of many of the allotments which I hesitate to describe as plots, preferring to picture them more accurately as vegetable gardens.

Herb garden

I have noted that the herb garden which has been lovingly created and maintained by members of site 2 is thriving. It is very satisfying to see that many plot holders are taking advantage of the many herbs available in the garden to add a little extra fresh interest to their culinary creations.

Social hut

I am also very pleased to report that the new social hut is well underway. Plot holders should not now have too long to wait before being able to sit in comfort out of the rain and cold with a warm comforting brew while exchanging gardening tips and know-how with their fellow allotmenters.....

Site 3 Report

Inner Area, Plots 100 – 127

Covid19

What an extraordinary year we have had, who would have imagined we would live through a pandemic! A huge thank you to our chairman Helen Finch she has worked tirelessly to ensure the plots remained open and consequently a huge asset to the

community. Several measures were taken to make the Sites Covid secure and plot holders complied with them on the whole.

Two plots had to be re-let owing to locking down in Europe and safeguarding issues.

Lettings

During the year 8 plots have changed hands last year it was 14 plots.

Improvements and repairs

Everyone is aware of the new water system which was installed in the summer. In spite of the temporary inconvenience it means that there are now 11 tanks and we hope it will be easier for everyone to access a tap closer to their plot.

Security

We are always grateful to plot holders for reporting any incidents concerning security, we always try to find a reasonable solution to these issues. The number of keys 'at large' grows and we always request that keys are returned when a plot holder no longer requires them.

Plot maintenance and inspections

The standard of cultivation has been very high this year. Inspections take place 3 times a year. Spring when we look to see if a plot is ready for cultivation, summer when we hope to see lots of produce and an absence of weeds and autumn when the plot should be tidied ready for the winter.

Paths

Paths in the Inner Area have often been hazardous especially when wet! This year the standard of maintenance has improved greatly.

Thank you

A huge thank you to everyone who helps to keep Site 3 a pleasant and safe environment. The allotments keep going due to the generosity of many plot holders who give their time, knowledge and skill to the allotment community. In particular Greg Willcox who takes deliveries and has done a huge amount of work on the new pavilion. Raj Patel is always incredibly helpful especially with new plot holders giving advice and encouragement.....

Outer Area: Plots 50A-100B

The year generally

All was going well virus arrived in March. We were very fortunate in being able to work on our plots from the outset and as a result most plots were cultivated to an extremely high standard over the Spring and Summer.

Others who had to isolate or shield were not so lucky and some plots were left untended.

However, great kindness was shown by many plot holders who helped maintain plots where this had happened.

Lettings

Over the year 7 plots have been let (one twice). Plot 68 was reduced in area to create space for the new tea hut.

Improvements and repairs

The new tea hut has been installed, and hopefully the electrics and landscaping will be complete before the end of 2020.

The council repaired the fence which abuts our Dover House Road entrance.

Rubbish left by DH Road residents outside our entrance, then scattered by foxes, was a problem but now seems to be under control.

Wood chip supplies have been good. Manure deliveries were disrupted due to the virus and new supplies are being sought from stables in Clapham.

Security

Sadly thefts of produce have been reported. It is a difficult problem to monitor and prevent though.

Plot Inspections

We carried out three inspections over the year. The Spring inspection was very informal, the main purpose being to check that plot holders were coping with lockdown and isolating, and if they needed help. Only one Stage Two letter was sent out and the plot holder has now vacated the plot.

Thank you

To all those kind people who have helped others less fortunate over the last few months. Especial thanks to Helen Finch for her advice and wisdom on dealing with the virus and keeping us safe.

Trading Secretary's report

This has been a challenging year. The Store closed at the beginning of the first lockdown in March. However we introduced an online seed purchase and delivery service at this crucial time for seed sowing. Seeds were dispatched either by post or delivered to home addresses. We thank Jackie Savage, Charles Gillbe and Richard Huntrods for making this happen.

We reopened the Store on 17 May but within the Covid guidelines. We shut down the cafe and introduced social distancing measures. We also introduced cashless pay and a 'Click and Collect' service for Site 3 to reduce the number of members visiting the Store on Site 2. I would like to thank Jackie Savage, Greg Willcox, Vivien Fowler, Elaine Barnwell and Helen Finch for the enormous amount of work they put in to make all this happen.

It has not been easy ordering stock for the Store. Many manufacturers and suppliers were short staffed and often stopped production of certain items or closed down for periods of time. We never really knew what would arrive with an order, certainly often not in the quantities requested.

We also introduced ready packed or bottled fertilisers so that these could be sold through the Click and Collect service on Site 3 and to reduce manual handling and time for the helpers in the Store.

When the peat based compost we sold became out of stock, we took the decision to stop selling it. It was popular and well priced but conflicted with our policy of being environmentally responsible.....

Thankfully we can continue to operate during this second lockdown. I would like to thank everyone who stepped up to help this year.....

Seeds

We continue to have an excellent relationship with Kings Seeds from whom we buy our seeds for the store on a "Sale or Return" basis. We buy them in at 50% of the packet price and sell them to our members at packet price minus 10% discount. Over the years we have learnt to stock favourites as well as offering new varieties. There are usually 250 different vegetable seeds on the racks and a selection of green manures and flowers. We welcome suggestions from members as a lot of your recommendations go on to be very popular.

In the year Sept 2019 – Oct 2020 we sold approximately 1700 packets of seed (whereas the previous year was more like 900). I can only put this down to the increase in sales in lockdown when we had a "click and deliver" service. Let's hope that once our members appreciated the quality of Kings Seeds and enjoyed using them, they will be back for more next year.

Many thanks to all those who helped with the seeds, especially Georgina O'Reilly and Richard Huntrods.

Treasurer's report (Financial year 1st October 2019- 30th September 2020)

Highlights

1. In addition to the main bank account, a generous legacy from Sonia Sawyer was held with Scottish Widows.
2. Monies in the Scottish Widows account was moved into a Fixed term account with Lloyds earning 1.05% -which will mature in February 2021.
3. The main income was from plot rentals and the store, which could not be open all year. It was not possible to have the usual shows.
4. Enable (on behalf of WBC) takes 80% of the RGS rental income. Enable invoices for this at the start of October to cover the period to 30th September the following year. Therefore, RGS is actually paying 6 months' rent advance, as at the time RGS has only collected rent to end of March. RGS retains the remaining 20% to go towards allotment maintenance.
5. RGS costs for Allotment maintenance, were £584.20 over the 20% amount remaining after the Enable payment. Thus, RGS had to use its own funds for maintenance.

6. Committee members were previously using their own personal debit/credit cards for purchases. This has been resolved by obtaining two RGS Lloyds debit cards for purchases throughout the year.
7. All utility accounts have been switched to online accounts to reduce the amount of paper used and all now on direct debit monthly payments.
8. The finance system was implemented using WAVE –a free online application. The Treasurer having full access and two other committee members have View Only access.
9. Two card readers, from SUMUP, were purchased for use in the site2 store and for site3 purchases.
10. Following last year's AGM a series of special projects were undertaken this year:
 - a. Four Gazebos for summer show
 - b. Store doors replaced and gable painted
 - c. Soakaway from site2 store sink and overflow from water butts
 - d. Site3 –Sonia Sawyer cabin (sink/electric to be completed)
 - e. Electricity to site 3