

Chair's Report for AGM November 2020

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 Nation 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 it's 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. Patrick is continuing to chase the contractors to get the new water system connected up to Thames Water.

All of the above would only have happened through the fantastic team the RGS has in its committee. The amount of time and commitment that has been given to these projects is enormous and is a reflection of how fortunate we are having such resourceful people to make things happen. We have spent a lot of money but all major projects were competitively awarded to the best and most reliable available contractors. Quotes were checked and evaluated by Mike Cooper and Graham Scott both of whom have expertise in these areas.

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. Now site 3 plot holders can buy directly from the sheds as we have bought an additional card reader for site 3. We have about 14 volunteers who keep the store going both on site on site 2 and the mini store on site 3. They have adapted to the new Covid conditions and make sure we are all kept safe. 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. Heather Harrison has used the choicest pebbles to make a very attractive bed beside the path outside the back gate. She also tends all the beds next to the paths on both sides of the site 3 Huntingfield Road gate so we all owe Heather a big thank you.

We have a few changes with the committee. Liz Smart has decided to stand down. She has been on the committee for many years and served as Treasurer for about 4 of them. She also was site secretary on site 2 along with Mariangela Renshaw. Elaine Barnwell is standing down; she has been on the committee for 3 years and been Treasurer for the last year. She has done a huge amount improving the RGS accounting system, reorganising our email as well as investigating other IT issues, and being a general helpful person getting things done. Many thanks to both of you for all you have done. A small token of the RGS's appreciation has been given to both.

Fortunately Dorcas Johnson has agreed to take on being Treasurer. She has a strong background in IT and has taken to being an allotmenteer with great enthusiasm. Emma Blackwell has also agreed to join the committee and will ensure site 2 has good representation. She is great at getting things done so will be kept busy. A huge welcome to you both for joining our happy, constructive RGS committee.

Another positive event during this awful pandemic for me personally was being awarded The Banksian Medal. I was so very touched that the committee decided to give this to me specially as the committee members all deserve a medal for their continued altruistic donation of time, skill and resourcefulness. I consider it a great privilege to be Chair of the committee and of the RGS wider membership.

Although Covid-19 has not suppressed activity for the members of RGS - plots have never looked so good - I sincerely hope we can have a real meeting next year and enjoy some food and wine together.

Helen Finch
Chair
November 2020