



## Winter update

### Chair's introduction

A belated Happy New Year and welcome to this Winter update from Southern Allotments Society.

Despite the cold and rainy Chorlton weather, our Facilities team have been very busy diligently fixing the blown pipes and taps as is common this time of year and the newly (expanded) society committee had it first meeting of the year on January 7th.

We have also been busy reconciling the Society fee memberships that started coming in from November - not the easiest task as not all payments have a plot number and, in some cases, were also paid by non-plot holders which meant quite a bit of detection work! Please bear with us – if you get a reminder and you've already paid, just let us know and we can update the site records accordingly.

It looks like the weather will be milder (during this week at least) so I hope that you manage to get down to your plots for a bit of late winter fruit tree pruning and tidying back to those kerbs! As always, please keep an eye on the society website for important updates and news.

Happy digging!

Craig Wilkinson  
Chair Southern Allotments Society

Updates:

### Plot rental fees (Manchester City Council)

MCC have told the society that all (Council generated) plot rental invoices have been sent out before Christmas but we are aware that some plot holders may still not have received their letters yet. If you have still not received a plot rental invoice from the council by the end of January, **please contact the council directly** via this email address: [allotments@manchester.gov.uk](mailto:allotments@manchester.gov.uk)

### **Change of home address?**

This is the primary method by which *Manchester City Council* will contact you and about your plot rental charge or with any warnings about the condition of your plot. If you have changed your home address since taking on a plot, **please contact the allotments team at Manchester City Council** directly to advise them of any changes in your address. The email address is [allotments@manchester.gov.uk](mailto:allotments@manchester.gov.uk)

### **Change of email address?**

This is the primary method by which the *society* will contact you and please let the society know if you are changing your email address. You can do this by using the website [contact form](#).

### **Nature reserve**

When the society originally made the nature reserve available for plot holders to deposit weeds and untreated wood into the reserve, this worked quite well and the space was respected. However, some plot holders have also dumped painted wood and plastic bags into the nature reserve rather than abiding with the guidelines so the facility has now been revoked while the Society remedies the situation.

There have also been instances of plot holders dumping weeds and rubbish over the fence of the nature reserve and which is completely unacceptable and if any plot holder is found doing this, they will be evicted from the site immediately and reported to the council for fly tipping. If you see any plot holder dumping waste into the nature reserve or anywhere on the site, please report this to the Society who will then take appropriate action. If you are unsure about how to compost weeds, please speak to a Plot Buddy/committee member who can advise you.

The nature reserve is now closed until further notice and two of our committee members, Ray O'Neill and Bruce Shillitoe will manage this area moving forward and until such time that it has been reset and can further accommodate the addition of weed and untreated wood.

### **Federation of Manchester Allotments (F.O.M.A)**

The Society is now part of the newly renamed Manchester-wide allotments group and representatives from the committee will attend each meeting.

FOMA has been set up to help Manchester allotments share important information and knowledge, helping societies like Southern to provide a great service to its members. A member of Manchester City Council allotments team also attends the meetings, so it is a great way to ensure that our voice is heard and hear/feedback about new developments that the Council share.

### **The site loo**

We mentioned that the site loo has now been emptied (mostly, bar a persistent 'mound' that needs some encouragement!) and the toilet unit has now been re-positioned to the

right of the loo cabin. The Society was advised by the contractor who emptied the loo that we shouldn't actually be using sawdust after each visit as this just adds to the 'mound' problem so please do not add anything to the loo after using it (Plastic bottles were also discovered during emptying and which cause big problems when emptying the loo so please refrain from using these near the loo!)

As always, there is no cleaner on site and we ask every user to give the loo at sweep/wash down if they use it regularly so that we can continue having this important facility :-)

### **Probationary plot holders**

Given the recent adverse weather, the committee agreed to extend the current probation period by 1 month until the end of February and when all probationary plots will be inspected prior to issuing a formal lease, subject to prescribed activity taking place.

### **Plot Buddies**

To help probationary/new plot holders get started, the committee has now started the Plot Buddy scheme and where new members can call upon committee members when they need support or advice about growing or information about the site. More information will be provided on a dedicated website page very soon so please keep an eye out on the website.

### **Learning and Events**

Sue Powell, our new Learning and Events coordinator has been busy putting together a list of know-how articles that she'll start to publish on the society website .

Sue will also be scheduling a formative Fruit tree pruning session with Dan from the Manchester Fruit Tree Cooperative to support those plot holders new to growing and caring for fruit trees. (The weather this time around should be a little cooler than the last summer session when it was around 35' in the shade that day!) Sue has also been looking at bringing in external speakers to educate and inspire us.

More information will be published on the website very soon.

### **Rats**

During the winter months, our resident rat population will continue to hunker down in compost heaps, in/under sheds and greenhouses so it's worth checking those spaces for any guests. Regularly turning compost heaps and removing food sources such as windfall will help to keep rats at bay.

The Society has previously used rat baiting stations which used poison to reduce the rat population but due to the high risk of secondary poisoning with animals that eat rats, this approach was stopped a while back and the population has again increased.

Due to the high costs associated with positioning, baiting and maintaining boxes, the Society will be approaching Manchester City Council to fund a new form of rat control using high strength vitamin D. This method is less impactful on secondary wildlife

## **Reminders:**

### **25/26 Society fees**

Can the remaining plot holders please pay their annual Society fee membership (£10) – The membership fee applies to any plot holder, Associate plot holder (i.e. anyone who regularly attends your plot) and uses the site and insures that person against any legal action taken against them from another plot visitor if that person has an accident on your plot (this includes the Inspection team). The membership fee also helps the Society provide and maintain the site facilities as well as the learning & social events available to all plot holders. To give you an advance warning, Society fees will be increasing next year (26/27) to help the Society meet the increase in costs involved in providing the site services.

If you haven't already paid your Society membership fees, please visit [this webpage](#) for information on how to do this. (At the time of writing, there are 51 plot holders who have still not paid their society membership fee)

### **Gate padlock code change**

The new codes for both gates will be emailed out to paid up Society members **at the end of January.**

### **Kerb appeal**

Thanks to all the plot holders who have cut back their plot vegetation back to behind their plot boundary Kerbs and removed items to help clear up the site roads – the site is already looking much better but there are still quite a few plots where work still needs to be completed. Given the adverse weather, the Committee has agreed that an additional month extension will be given before the next kerb inspection takes place and so the remaining plot holders now have until the end of February to clear back their plots to behind their boundary kerb. A reminder that plots where this work still hasn't been completed by the inspection date in February, will automatically receive a grade 3 inspection score and a first warning letter from Manchester City Council.

### **Plot numbers**

In the last newsletter, the Society reminded plot holders that as part of their lease agreement, they must display their plot number on their plot.

This helps the inspection team report on the correct plots and also assists the ad-hoc Manchester City Council inspections so it's important that your plot is numbered clearly and doesn't get mixed up with another's (potentially messy) plot during inspection.

Anna Kushlick our wonderful Society Secretary has taken a few pictures of plots which already have numbers so the committee encourages you to be as creative as you like –

there might even be a prize incentive in it eventually....if you've not looked on the website recently, Have a look at [these ideas](#) and see what you can come up with.

## **Main entrance gates**

The Society would like to advise plot holders about how to use the main entrance gates safely and securely. These gates are provided and managed by Manchester City Council and **should not be operated by children under any circumstances.**

To avoid trapped fingers while closing the gate, close one gate at a time and release its drop bolt so that it is firmly positioned in the ground.

Once the first gate is secured, close the second gate and drop the bolt ensuring that both bolts are aligned and before (gently) sliding the locking bar across before adding the (scrambled) coded padlock. If the bar doesn't move easily, check alignment of the drop bolts and try again.

The main entrance gates are Very heavy and you should never let them swing freely, instead ensuring that you keep hold of the gate until the drop bolt has secured the gate in the open or closed position.

We remind plot holders that should it be needed, there is a first aid box available in the toilet cabin.

## **You asked, we did**

We have had some site-related requests sent in via the [online form](#) since the last update and we have now:

1. Re-evaluated how we will approach cutting back the overgrown (council) hedging alongside the Princess Parkway fence perimeter to minimise exposure to very high budget cost (Circa £1300). This is in response to a somewhat disappointing response from MCC arbour team who have refused to cut back the hedging, despite it coming under their remit.
2. Provided further guidance on how to use the main entrance gates safely and securely. The society is in dialogue with MCC about additional functionality being added to the gate, subject to MCC budget and an eventual survey.

**Thank you**

Thank you to Ray O'Neill & Bruce Shillitoe for battling the weather and fixing the blown pipes and taps!



Also thank you to Bruce (& Huner) for replacing some of the rotten tap posts that have increased the risk of leaks (I managed to grab a picture of the happy workers today in action!)

Thank you to Huner, Frances & Anna (and our volunteer plot holders) for removing the tremendous amount of rubbish and overgrown vegetation/trees left on the plot by the previous plot holder around the communal Polytunnel. Everyone's hard work means that three new quarter plots have been created and the Society membership has grown once more!

### The Society is currently working on:

- Defibrillator – connecting and planning training sessions – was deferred until the new site & facilities officer had been appointed and quotes for an additional charging cabinet could be obtained.
- The underground water leak – MCC have responded to our requests and the Society is in continual dialogue with them but as the price is currently coming in around £6k, MCC are struggling to allocate a budget. The Society will be approaching councillors for further assistance with this.
- 25/26 Budget/Site sinking fund – Treasurer and Chair will present this to the committee in February once site asset appraisal has been completed and lifespan data can be included in budgets along with final reconciliation of incoming membership fees (still going on....)
- Independent financial review – still planned for Feb 2025 once old bank account is closed off and incoming (late) society fees are reconciled
- Sustainable nature reserve management for 25/26 - Bruce & Ray to project manage this moving forward
- Plot grade, boundary and society fee indication on the website – still a work in progress but now aiming for early Spring. Emails have gone out to those plots where Kerbs are not visible.
- Repairs to the cabin roof upper fascia – a more permanent plastic replacement which will be more cost-effective and required less maintenance. This work may also include siting water butts to collect rainwater from the cabin roof.
- Overhanging hedging at rear of site (Princess Parkway) - The society has been in communication with MCC about this as the hedging is the responsibility of the harbour team at MCC and have indicated that is not a priority for them. The

Society has obtained two indicative quotes (Circa £1100- £1300) and is exploring some other option before allocating this spend from the 25/26 budget.

- Full site asset audit enabling more accurate planning of replacements, scheduled repairs and budgeting – in progress
- Replacement of broken and rotten communal tap posts across the site

### The Society is currently exploring:

- A new accessible community plot by the main entrance gate that will enable better access and working for new and existing plot holders who can no longer manage the commitment of a whole plot, but who still want to grow.
- A new yearly learning & events calendar - coming soon!
- An extension of the current covered Cabin outside area - nothing planned until budget finalised/grants secured
- Standardised Plot numbering (Society fixed markers) to help with plot inspections – on hold to accommodate plot holder (own) plot number creations
- Row competitions to encourage better grade scores and accessible roads – likely Springtime
- Grant applications to help the Society fund some of the larger projects

## Dates for your diary

The gate padlock codes will now be changed at the end of **January and the change day will be announced on the website**. Please keep an eye out for the email which will contain the new codes.

Thanks for taking the time to read this Winter update and we hope that you manage to get as much plot activity in as you can during this dormant period.

We will send a Spring update later in the year and as always, plot holders can use the [web contact form](#) to report a problem, provide feedback or offer their time.

Best regards,

Southern Allotments Society