**Chairman’s Report 2015**

We are here again in the Tennis Club Clubhouse at Brent Way by kind permission of the Tennis Club Committee.

All three sites have had a successful 2015.

Barnet Council have completed the majority of tasks that they were under contractual obligation to complete before October 2014 Non-return valves were fitted to the water supply at all three sites. And the broken fence posts have been replaced and repair to the cement by the gate at Gordon Road has been carried out. The asbestos report for Gordon Road has been received and is now correct. Management and inspection of the buildings on any of our sites that are thought to contain asbestos will need to be organised on a regular basis.

Tree works should also have been completed along the Dollis Road boundary but as yet are still outstanding and we currently do not have a timescale for this work. The Council had an obligation to carry out all the agreed work within two years of the beginning of the lease. This time has now elapsed; we will be contacting the Council in the near future to complete these works.

We continue to reinforce the banks of the Dollis Brook to help prevent further erosion. We will monitor the Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam and treat it if required.

The Allotments Committee has been reinstated very successfully and has met several times, once also with the General Committee as a large Joint Committee. It is early days but as a result of great organisation by members of this Committee we have a new palisade fence enclosing the bottom of Gordon Road Allotments and a new tea hut on the Piggery. This has been fully equipped with a new kitchen and should be ready in time for the plant sale in May. The addition of the new Tea Hut on the Piggery is thanks to a kind donation by our neighbours the Brookes who live on Gordon Road. A team of our men removed it from their garden and reassembled it on the Piggery once the base had been made. In appreciation for this, the team of volunteers moved a very large Wendy House to a new location in the Brookes garden. The palisade fencing has been extended along the Dollis Brook boundary, replacing the rotten chestnut paling fence that was provided by the Council. This should afford us much greater security at Gordon Road. Our plan is to extend this along Dollis Road and around the corner of Gordon Road when our funds permit and, if this does not contravene any of our lease entailments. Special thanks to Felicity Nock, Phil Cuttell and Chris Ouseley for organising all of these works and all the volunteers who helped moving the huts.

Thanks to Liz who has again produced the accounts for audit by Michael Case. Her work as Treasurer this year has been invaluable and we are most grateful to her for all of her hard work and sound advice. We thank Michael Case for auditing the accounts again.

There were very few vacant plots this year on any of the three sites. There are currently about 20 people on the combined waiting list. At present there are a few vacant plots at Gordon Road that will be taken up by the people on the waiting lists but none at Brent Way or Nethercourt Avenue.

We won several prizes this year in the 2015 Barnet Allotment Site Competition. We were awarded the Ted Green prize for Outstanding Community Initiative by an Allotment Society in the Past 12 Months for participation in the NGS Charity. Gordon Road won best large allotment site in Barnet, Nethercourt Avenue won the second best small site and Brent Way came third in this category. Fursby Avenue won best small site this year. We also had fourth best plot which was awarded to Mrs Fung Wan.

The beekeepers at Gordon Road had a good year and produced about 325 lbs of honey 10% of which is given to the Society for sale in lieu of rent. Louis Zweig continues as Apiary Manager.

We continue to have deliveries of compost and woodchip to Gordon Road and this can be collected from Gordon Road by the plot holders at Nethercourt Avenue and Brent Way.

The FHS is not only for the plot holders at our three sites but also for members who do not have plots. We continue to have a concessionary 10% discount off plants at Finchley Nurseries for all FHS members. Thanks to Jo Cuttell for continuing to edit the Society Newsletter, The Grapevine, which goes from strength to strength, giving us very enjoyable quarterly read. Copies are available in the Green Room at Gordon Road; the hard copy of these was produced by Winkworth Estate Agents, who continue to support us and all of our events. Thanks to Judy Woollett who continues to manage the website.

As part of the raised beds project we continue to have Southover Partnership School and Moss Hall Infant School tending the school beds.

We had a very successful, well attended visit to Wisley, coinciding with their Autumn Flower Show in September. We are hoping to do the same again this year and hope that those who came will wish to repeat the visit as Wisley is always a great day out. Over the years the numbers of people going on visits has diminished but we are trying to join forces with other local horticultural societies to boost our numbers and also to join them for some of their events. In particular we are in contact with the Hampstead Garden Suburb Horticultural Society which has approached us directly. We are advertising each others’ events on our respective websites so please do check regularly on our website for interesting meetings and outings. Some members joined the HGSHS for a visit to Wisley this spring. We would like to have more suggestions from our members which gardens they think would be nice to visit and any other events they would like us to put on. All garden visits will be announced as and when they have been organised on the website, by email on the notice board in the Green Room in the Newsletter and by email. None has yet been finalised but will be announced as soon as they are available. Some of us attended Gardeners’ Question Time at the New North London Synagogue at the end of November. This was a very enjoyable evening with refreshments provided by the ladies guild.

The Plant Sale on May Bank Holiday and the NGS Open Garden in September were both very well attended; there were more than 140 visitors at the NGS Open Garden. This was the second time that we have opened for the NGS and we made a substantial amount for the Charities and for ourselves. We donated £700 to the NGS charities from the proceeds of the entrance fee, raffle and produce. Unfortunately there were no entries for the miniature garden competition and we will probably not organise a competition for this year. We will open again for the NGS on Sunday 6th September this year. A big vote of thanks to all who helped make both of these events so successful.

We had, three social events open to all FHS members in 2015. The barbeque in the summer was organised by June Brookes; a bonfire party in November was organised by Tony Ingram and a Christmas Social was again organised by June Brookes. Thanks to those who organised these and all who attended helping to make these events a great success.

The wild life plot has been successfully tended by Ray Clarke again this year

Catherine Schmitt has kindly agreed to remain as President of the FHS for the coming year. She continues to be a stalwart in organisation and giving advice in horticulture in general but perennials, in particular.

A big thank you to everyone who works so hard to keep the allotment sites in good order and doing all the behind the scenes jobs that go unnoticed until they are not done! This will certainly be as important in the coming year as we have the honour of being in the NGS Yellow Book yet again for 2016. This will be a very big event in our calendar for 2016. We are currently preparing for the Plant Sale taking place on the Sunday 22nd May and Sunday 29th May Bank Holiday weekend.

The FHS was founded in 1940 to help with Dig for Victory and feeding the nation when every spare inch of land was cultivated to produce food. This year therefore marked the 75th anniversary of the FHS. Although Catherine had suggested we contact Ivor Kitchener regarding this, it did not happen as the tea party we planned to celebrate this event did not take place.

This is a plea to all members of this Society. If you wish that the Society and the Allotment Sites can continue, it is essential that people come forward to take over from the “Old Guard”. We would like more people to volunteer for the Committees and to help with the day to day running of our Society to keep it vibrant and fresh.

We are entering our 76th year of gardening in Finchley and we hope that we can attract more non- plot holder members but for this we need more activities outside of the allotment sphere. Alliances with other horticultural societies may well be the way forward.