

Chair's Report for 2023

Introduction

It is a great pleasure to be able to welcome everyone to our AGM.

The fourth Garden Lecture will take the form of a discussion around the concept of a 'no dig' approach to gardening and will be preceded by some video clips featuring Charles Dowding the guru of no dig.

We continue to be members of The National Society for Allotments and Leisure Gardens (NSALG) and Barnet Allotment Federation (BAF). We are affiliated members of the RHS and obtain buildings and public liability insurance from Liberty through the RHS.

I would like to say a personal thank you to all General and Gordon Road Allotment Committee members who have been such a great team this year and on whose support I am totally dependent. I would like to thank Sylvia Berente in particular for all her work in updating Gordon Road's membership list and waiting list over the last few years. Sylvia is stepping down as Gordon Road Allotment Secretary leaving the system in great shape. Rosa Tormo has kindly volunteered to take her place. My thanks are due to Penny Igoe and Elain Wright, secretaries at Nethercourt Avenue and Brent Way.

1. Committees

The General Committee met regularly throughout the year. Membership of the committee consisted of The Chair (Jo Cuttell), Treasurer (Chris Ouseley), Membership Secretary (Christine Williams), Allotment Secretaries (Sylvia Berente, Elain Wright and Penny Igoe), Security Officer (Tony Ingram), Website Manager (Marcos Scriven), Newsletter Editor (Elena Cook) and Judy Woollett, who organises the outings and does everything else.

The Gordon Road Allotments Committee met every other month during 2023. Committee members were Rosa Baden-Powell, Philip Cuttell (Chair), John Hale, Sophie Dave, Eric Hess and Felicity Nock.

The Committee run a one to one induction session for new members to the Gordon Road site as do the Allotment Secretaries at Brent Way and Nethercourt Avenue.

2. Completed Projects

a) The Charity Veggie Box Scheme was a huge success again and this year our donations went to Food Bank Aid, a local organisation. Thanks to Judy Woollett for organising this. Food Bank Aid supports North London Food Banks and operates as a central donation and distribution hub, sourcing, collecting and sorting donations of food, toiletries and essential household goods and distributing them to the food banks across North London where there is most need.

They are a community-led charity which supports all denominations and demographics. Our members grew extra food and donated surplus fruit and vegetables so that every week we donated two or three boxes to the scheme.

b) The Gordon Road Committee finished clearing the overgrown area by the fence towards the brook. It was then covered with cardboard and woodchip to suppress the weeds - a Charles Dowding method. This has been very effective and in the autumn of 2023 a group of volunteers planted 6 fruit trees thanks to a grant of almost £500

from the Tree Council, facilitated by Philip Cuttell and Felicity Nock. We also had a generous donation from Helen Skelton. Eric Hess and Felicity Nock are sorting out a drip feed watering system for the trees, which is essential until they establish.

c) The new Piggery canopy was built in the Spring and was ready in time to serve teas at the May Plant Sale. Two more beech hedges were added and rainwater collection installed. Catherine is gradually planting the adjacent communal bed.

d) A group of volunteers has got together to organise the Plant Sale. It will be a smaller affair than in previous years but they hope to keep it going

e) Electrical safety checks have been carried out at Gordon Road and the requisite certificates have been issued. A fire safety risk assessment was also carried out and we were advised that all three sites have a very small risk of injury to members.

f) A group of volunteers topped up the raised beds with the soil from the Piggery which had been removed to put in the paving slabs for the seating area underneath the canopy

g) Philip Cuttell collected and installed some more 'dalek' compost bins by the log cabin donated by a kind friend of Eric Hess.

h) The no bonfire policy has proved successful and we will continue to have 2 skips a year

3. Future Projects under consideration

- Review of the Plant Sale organisation to make it a sustainable event
- Tenancy Agreements - to be reissued and signed agreements issued to plot holders when we have had further advice from BAF
- Use of the log cabin for summer meetings and art activities subject to H&S requirements
- Replacement of the BBQ storage shed which is collapsing
- Establishing a wildflower meadow environment around the new fruit tree area
- Refurbishing the sliding metal cold frame by the main poly tunnel

4. Accounts

Thanks to Chris Ouseley for producing the accounts for independent examination. We thank Jane Healy for examining the accounts and she has agreed to examine them again next year.

5. Invoicing

Thanks to Cliff Abelman for sending out all the invoices to plot holders so efficiently and to the Allotment Secretaries who ensure the details are correct.

6. Membership and Benefits for Members

We had 139 members in 2023 and 106 were plot holders.

We continue to have a concessionary 10% discount on plants at Finchley Nurseries for all FHS members. Suttons seeds give 50% discount on seeds and 15% discount on other items when ordered with the unique FHS code. Through The National Society for Allotments and Leisure Gardens (NSALG) members can buy discounted seeds from Kings.

FHS holds a 50% discount card for RHS Gardens for use by up to two members at a time. Any member can borrow these tickets from Jo Cuttell. They can be used for an unlimited number of visits. Please take advantage of it.

7. Allotment Sites

Vacancies and waiting lists

There were very few plots that became vacant this year at any of the three sites. There is a waiting list for all three sites.

Prizes 2023

In the Barnet Allotment Competition, Gordon Road gained 'very highly recommended'. We were placed in the category "very large, large and medium"; these categories were combined into one group as there were so few entries this year. Unfortunately, because of an administrative error by BAF, Brent Way and Nethercourt Avenue were not entered into the competition.

Deliveries

Thanks to Eric Hess for organising deliveries of wood chip to Gordon Road. Members from Brent Way and Nethercourt can collect wood chip from this site.

Thanks to Chris Ouseley for organising deliveries of manure and straw to Gordon Road. Chris is stepping down from both these roles after 16 years of volunteering but we have members who are willing to take these jobs on. Members from Brent Way and Nethercourt can book and collect from this site. Brent Way organises its own manure delivery - thanks to Elain Wright.

8. Security

We had no break-ins this year. Long may this last.

9. General Data Protection Regulation

FHS is compliant with current GDPR regulations which require us to contact our members annually and ensure that the data we hold on everyone is up to date. We do this using our invoices for rent, which ask members to check the details are correct and to inform the Allotment Secretary or the Membership Secretary if they need to be changed.

10. Trading Hut

The Trading Hut was open from March to September 2023 and many volunteers kindly served in the shop each Sunday. Erika Mansnerus has taken over the running of the Trading Hut for which we are very grateful. A big thank you to Tuuli Taylor who ran it previously and streamlined its operation. Its financial success in 2023 is testament to the value of this asset to the membership.

11. Wildlife Plot

The wildlife plot continues to support the bee populations of the Gordon Road Site. As ever there were plenty of blossoms on both the apple trees and the brambles.

The ponds continue to be problematic. They provide a good source of flying insect larvae which are great for swifts. However the very invasive pond weed is a problem as it creates a thick blanket over the pond surface and reduces water oxygenation and is hard to eradicate. Initial removal has not proved to be successful and Helen welcomes any ideas on its eradication.

12. Bees

We are fortunate to have apiaries on the Gordon Road site, which promote a healthy ecosystem and enable us to sell honey with no food miles.

13. FHS Newsletter, Website and Social Media

The Grapevine continues to be published four times a year and is full of advice and interesting articles. Copies are sent to all members via Mailchimp. Thanks to Winkworth Estate Agents who print a few copies for those members who do not have a computer and who continue to support us and all our events. Thanks to Elena Cook, the editor, for producing the Grapevine and also to Toby Cook who supports Elena with the design.

Many thanks to Marcos Scriven for managing the website for this year. And helping with a great variety of technical issues. We had 2 200 visits to our website in 2023 by 726 people. Felicity Nock and Judy Woollett manage the Facebook account. Grateful thanks to them. The development of our social media presence is part of our effort to be more outward facing and a part of the local community.

14. Outings

A group of 39 FHS members and friends visited the wonderful gardens at Sissinghurst and Hole Park in June. Thanks to Judy Woollett for organising this trip. Everyone enjoyed it.

15. Events

The FHS held three social events in 2023 - a summer BBQ with live music thanks to Jennie Abelman, the Pumpkin Soup Night and a Christmas lunch. Thanks to Tony Ingram, Rowena Bridge, Erol Mandirali and Young Mi Oh for organising these events, which were hugely well attended.

The Plant Sale raised over £3 300 and members and local residents were delighted to have the opportunity to buy vegetables and flowers as well as enjoying a cup of tea and home made cakes in the Piggery garden. We experimented with an earlier date in May than usual and we decided to hold it in the afternoon; the experiment was a success and we'll repeat the formula for 2024. Thanks to Christine Williams and Catherine Schmitt for organising this wonderful event and to Elain Wright for the refreshments. Thanks also to the many volunteers who helped with sowing, potting on, labelling and watering

The FHS organised two pruning workshops this year to support members. Lesley Wertheimer from the London Orchard Project gave a group of plot holders from all three of our sites valuable advice during the Apple and Pear Tree Pruning Workshop run on 5 February 2023. A report of this workshop is in the Spring 2023 edition of the Grapevine. Back by popular demand Eric Hess ran his composting workshop again in September; it was very well attended.

16. Our President

Catherine Schmitt has kindly agreed to remain as President of the FHS for the coming year. She has an unprecedented knowledge of plants and horticulture which she is always happy to share.

17. Conclusion

A big thank you to everyone who works so hard to keep all three allotment sites in good order and who do all the behind the scenes jobs that go unnoticed until they are not done! We will continue to promote our Society and hope that we will again be able to publicise our events and activities to the people of Finchley and contribute to the community promoting our ethos of friendliness, care of the environment and community spirit.