

Friends of Windmill Allotments Annual Report 2009

This is our fourth Annual Report, another challenging year but with many good experiences and a certain knowledge that the Intergenerational Project is needed and greatly valued. The elderly allotment gardeners rejoice in the chance to learn new gardening tips or facts every week. They enjoy the volunteers who are becoming their friends. The volunteers have been resilient and loyal and miss the elderly whenever the weather, health or the winter interrupts the site visits. The Volunteers are the backbone of the Friends Group and we are pleased in 2009 to welcome new additions to our friendly group.



Welcome to Mo and Dan, Ian, Mirella, Lynda, Nicola, Sue, Rosemary, Rebecca, Jasmin and to the committee Irene, Ian, Sam, Helen and Sadie, and Sarah and not forgetting our regular volunteers who

have continued from last year and some like Fiona and Helen from the group's beginning. We say a farewell to Mbuyisa the dedicated care home allotment project worker and wish him well in his artistic career, we welcome his replacement Susan.

The aim of the Project is to encourage the allotment experience of gardening for all regardless of level of capacity. Being in a wheelchair is not the end of your life and our Project encourages people to reintroduce into their life now what they may have enjoyed in their prime, or to learn something new. One of our number had an allotment on Clapham Common in the war



²BACK TO THE FUTURE



In the 1970's many allotments lost their way. Some abandoned composting in favour of pesticides and weed killers, the soil suffered badly. On sites private gardening ideas took the place of shared social gardening. Losing the social service element, their relevance was lost. Why should the wider Community forgo new homes or a school to allow an out of touch clique control over precious land that could serve a wider community better. They became easy prey for developers.

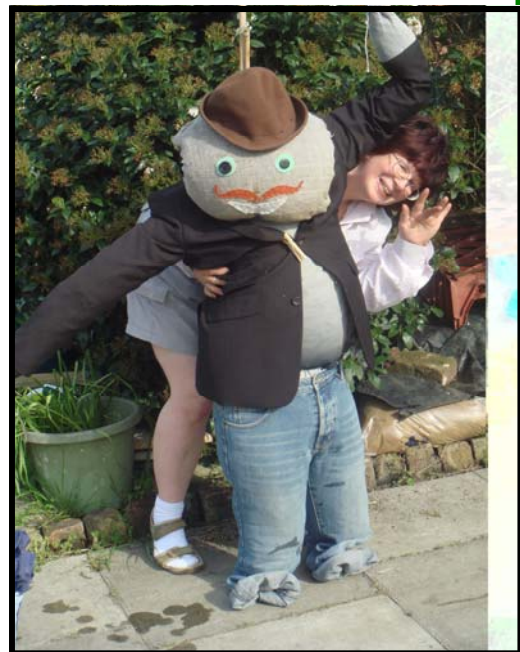
Today through our intergenerational project and the whole green movement we are turning back the clock to appreciate what allotments really can offer the whole community. Just by encouraging a bee keepers group a site restores fertility to local gardens and farm land - we need pollinating insects to grow all our food. By educating young people through outdoor lessons we bring the grown up world closer in a positive way and encourage healthy eating and lifestyles. Local volunteers and care home residents benefit through social and gardening skill sharing.

We hope Thames water will give its wholehearted support for these generations to mix and to find peace and contentment in a busy world The project reflects the main themes of Thames Water's corporate and social responsibility policy. Healthy living, education, elderly and environment.

OUTREACH : SCHOOLS

In each year we invite a school to join the project Telferscot was first, walking from Balham and they certainly made full use of the opportunity including creative writing and art as well as science through gardening. Sudbourne Primary school followed on. The children loved it and learned so much that they have created a playground garden on their own site.

Allotment gardening welcomes all ages. We hope it will stay with the children for life.



Photographs with thanks to all involved James, Ted , Emily, Joan, Moira ,Johnson, Patricia, Irwin ,Emily , Dan, Fiona , Mirella , Ada, Sam ,Irene, Helen and not forgetting Jasmine's Scarecrow

3 OUTREACH : Youth Club



Fiona helps Clapham Youth project in Lyham Road where a green fingers group has begun. They hope to gain some skills from Lambeth Youth Bank or similar to make a funding application and to plan and evaluate their project. The Youth Bank encourages young people to learn these skills, this enabling philosophy is very much in line with our thinking too.

STALLS

Every year we do outreach work to remind the public of the need for allotments. We sell plants and books but the basic idea is public relations it is a two way street we inform the public and they tell us about their interests, concerns and needs. It is a pleasure to see even quite shy volunteers gaining confidence in this way. In 2008 we did Brixton climate change, Abbeville Fete, and Streatham Festival. We plan a similar number in 2009.



INFRASTRUCTURE

We attended many courses facilitated by LVAC Lambeth voluntary action council and received 4 tailored guidance meetings to create safeguarding policies to protect our volunteers and users.

We hold our meetings in public and held ten this year. We appointed a funding sub committee. The charitable status aim now has a dedicated volunteer working to transform us. We were fortunate to be awarded a grant and our lead person Sarah is looking for recruits to form a newsletter team. We welcome the new members Sam for the Intergenerational Project, Ian for the Web site and Rosemary the charity work. We had 3 dedicated meetings this year with Windmill Lodge. We joined Clapham Park's Focus on health, attended CYP AGM, and LVAC's AGM and two meetings on the Sustainable Communities Act one by Environmental Law Foundation in November 2008 and in 2009 Lambeth Council brainstorming exercise.

Produced with the assistance of Capital Community Foundation and LVAC

4 TWPS offered a radical rethink on management making assurances of no more delays Nothing has happened for 10 months, they could have used staff supporting Honor Oak's reservoir based allotment site at Stuart road to cover staff sickness.

We met Thames water property services in September they wanted to identify site users. We reminded them of the intergenerational project and asked for their support. In 2005 we had flagged up the problems of delay and the manner of allocation TWps admitted then they had condoned subletting not realising the social results. We pointed out the need to garden the plot or it would be lost to others who use vacant plots. We said that delay in allocation or decisions such as dispute settlement caused the greatest difficulties on site.

We asked that the wasted space on site be brought back into use as allotments plots made up of smaller sizes to avoid plots being neglected. We later learned Thames Water were in discussions with Capital Growth the Mayor's initiative to hand over land for food production. Why the resistance to opening up the derelict plots here ?

We spoke of the need to move away from the old system of changing the locks and granting contracts to whoever was found on site and to move towards a transparent and ethical allocation system which would balance the site intake in gender, age, health and wealth also to take into account need , for example the lack of outdoor space. We asked that delays between lettings be ended as they are the root cause of a lot of on site problems.

Because some countries do not have an allotment tradition we suggested education about the shared and supportive aspects on allotments and some common ground rules like restricting air polluting practices. These could be formulated to help people adjust to allotment philosophy and away from a farming or private land culture, our education programme could help.

Thames water property said they would begin in 2008 before Christmas with changing the locks and putting up the prices in new contracts, we asked that some sliding scale be introduced as a man on £160,000 could easily pay any change whilst one on income support could not.

TWps disclosed that without any advertisement of the fact they had begun a new waiting list in June and by September it did not have 10 people on it, but the first was yet another male . We asked that a quota system be introduced - several waiting lists behind different headings -to help balance the site intake. They said they would think about it .

In February 2009 the public was asked to write to Thames water the parent company to flag up the value of the intergenerational project and ask it to be saved Now ,TWps say they will consider it when they have allocated all the other plots. They have tied their own hands by avoiding the wasted land solution saying that they will refer it to Operations later. **A petition has begun** and Patrick Holden Director of the Soil Association said get the public behind you, you need public pressure to resolve intractable problems like this.

CORPORATE HELP

Volunteers built the raised bed and the paving around it. With wheelchairs getting bigger we had to move a bed and repave. KPMG city workers were invited on as guests by the plot holders involved. They opened up the main path and cleared brambles on derelict areas and for the disabled plot holder. Suddenly they were pulled out someone on site told TWps and KPMG they were trespassing and made unjustified allegations about the ethics of helping a disabled person. **The public are asked to help Thames Water take a sensible approach to all these positive ideas. To resist prejudice and any sale of the land.**