

S.H.A.G.S. SUMMER NEWSLETTER

More than half way through 2022 already and our allotments are doing really well this year and we are at nearly 100% occupancy and still a long waiting list for our site at Harpenden Rise. After the upheaval of the pandemic over the last two years we are getting back to near normal and next month we are due to get the annual inspection by Harpenden Town Council on August 17th. Please make an extra effort to show off our sites with neatly trimmed edges and mowed pathways. The current hot weather has slowed down slug activity so now all we have to contend with is the onslaught of pigeons, followed by Muntjac deer eating our sweetcorn ! A suggested deterrent for deer is to cover your cobs with old socks – so at last a use for those orphaned socks, but what will the plots look like with multi coloured odd hosiery items ?

The judging team have made their inspections earlier this month and the prizewinners list will be published shortly. The Awards evening will be held on October 14th at Park Hall and our Mayor will be distributing the prizes.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING:

A reminder that you will have received recently the notice of the AGM, due to be held on 10th August, 7:30 pm in the Ted Allen room. We will be looking for a new Secretary to take over from Gill Hicks who has kept us on the right path for nearly two years. She has a new role with Harpenden Trust, which is taking more of her valuable time. Thanks for all her help over these recent hard times and good luck with the new task. The Society is in a sound financial state under the guidance of our Treasurer Carole Pamphlett, who is recovering slowly after her accident last December. At one stage she was unsure whether she could continue as Treasurer and Trustee but with help from her two sons and some planned home improvements, slowly things are getting back to normal.

SITE IMPROVEMENTS:

The big project we have funded this year has been a new shed at Harpenden Rise with many volunteers getting the base laid in preparation for the shed delivery, then the erection and fitting out. The final paving work is due to be completed shortly. Our thanks to all the volunteers and Marcia and Roger for the coordination work, especially as the site was disrupted with the improvement works going on in the childrens' playground area behind the Old Bell in May and June.

NEW MACHINERY:

Some of our older equipment has been due for replacement over the last 18 months and this summer we have introduced the first battery machines for members' use. At Oakley Road there is now a Stiga battery strimmer in regular use which most ploholders have found easier to operate, without the starting problems experienced with the two stroke petrol strimmers. There is also a battery mower, currently at Piggottshill but available for other sites to try and at Aldwickbury there is a big mower for site reps' use, which with twin batteries, is powerful enough to cut all the headland pathways on one charge. Our problem is that only our PH site has mains electricity for recharging the batteries. Spare batteries are expensive, so at the moment site reps are charging batteries at home, Roger at AB and Rod at OR. Rich Waight (PH) has looked into the technical possibilities of solar power for charging at our other sites, but the security of the equipment is paramount and recent criminal activity against narrowboat owners and caravan owners has increased enormously. It is not only the loss of the panels, charging equipment and the storage batteries but the damage caused, with caravans and boats having the roof destroyed, the thieves using petrol or battery angle grinders to cut out the roof.

We also have had delivered new Stiga mulching mowers for use at CF, SA and TW after a successful trial with one at PH since 2021. The mowers are light to use, with front wheel drive and the mulching facility means that the grass is cut so finely there is no need for a grass box and very little in the way of grass cuttings to clear afterwards. A timely reminder then please, especially when the new machines are being used.

- First familiarise yourself with the operation of any equipment and if in any doubt speak to your site rep
- Check the oil level and check there is fuel
- Check the area to be cut and remove any stones, obstacles, tools, wire, string, stakes, loose netting before mowing
- Clean down the machine after use especially under the deck and the blade area with a brush and scraper. If turning a machine on its side the air filter must be up to stop engine oil entering the carburettor and filter
- Top up with fuel using the filter funnel

If you use the last fuel in the can, please refill, with E5 petrol only and reclaim the money from the allotment shop on Sunday mornings.

If there is a fault with any of the machines please inform your site rep quickly so repairs can be made.

ALLOTMENT SHOP:

It is now two years since Roger Gillet the shop manager had his catastrophic stroke and subsequently died in 2021. The Sunday volunteers have kept the shop operating, but it has been a struggle at times. Last year there was an ultimatum that unless a new manager was found we may have to consider closing the shop down. James Gallagher valiantly stepped in through last summer and autumn, but with his work commitments every other weekend and then at our shop on alternate Sundays he had no weekends free for his social life or working on his plot. Despite recent appeals for help no one person has come forward to take over, so we are now considering a joint position to take over the stock control, ordering new supplies, paying the bills, managing the shop bank account. The shop runs itself on Sundays with the volunteers, so attendance every week is not essential, but you would need to see what stock is selling quickly and needs replenishing. Please call down on a Sunday and see how it operates and chat with the team ... Just recently we have been in contact with Redbourn Allotment Society who do not run a shop, but have been buying supplies amongst themselves and they are seeking ways to cooperate to all our mutual advantage. It may be that we can supply their members with perhaps a volunteer from Redbourn to run our shop ?

- August Sale time ... we still have a selection of dahlia and begonias available which can be stored for next year, last few at £1 per packet
- Fresh Eggs from St Lukes School, Redbourn £1 per half dozen. It was an experiment last week and they sold out within an hour
- Please note we can no longer accept cheque payments. Our card reader system works very well and is seamless in operation. Our bank now charges 45p to process a cheque paid in and last time the queue in Barclays took over an hour to be served, paying in just 2 cheques. We still await a card to use the machine facilities within the bank

CARPENTERS FRIENDS & FAMILY DISCOUNT CARDS:

We had a good initial response for the discount cards and over 100 members have applied so far. The first batch of cards have been distributed already, with more to come soon. You will get an email when your card is available for collection. Apologies for the missing cards on the first Sunday. Many thanks to Alex Davies who coordinated setting up the scheme.

WARNING:

Recently some of our ploholders have used outside contractors, landscape gardeners etc., to help with tasks on their plots. There has been a recent incident where an unskilled and ill-equipped team turned up to help ploholders clear overgrown plots but there was a dispute over the charges and scope of the work, borrowed tools and equipment were not returned, material was left on site, pathways were littered with stones and a final load of grass and weeds were dumped in the hedge. If you are using outside help it is your responsibility for anyone coming onto our site. If you are using a contractor you should check their previous experience, obtain a fixed written price for any work and see that they have their own public liability insurance. Please note that outside contractors **MUST NOT** use the society equipment such as lawnmowers and strimmers.

BEST WISHES FOR A BOUNTIFUL HARVEST !