

EALING DEAN ALLOTMENTS SOCIETY

Minutes December 14 2022, 7.30pm, 67 Mattock Lane

Present: Penny Wark (chair), Jane Morris, Dominic Small, Jon Wilkins

Apologies: Richard Ashcroft, Claire Bates

Minutes of the Last Meeting

These were approved.

Co-option of New Committee Members

It was agreed that Clare Harrington and Martin Newhouse be co-opted onto the committee.

Plots rented/available.

- the site is fully rented
- 350 on the waiting list
- gardening club plots will be rented out in time for the growing season

Maintenance Morning (7 January)

- 228 ivy removal
- woodchip southern paths
- move gazebo
- relocate halloween leftovers to halloween shed and rationalise storage there (see below)
- prepare GC240A
- trim site perimeter
- trimming privet
- work in support on 175B
- repairs to maintenance plot metal shed roof
- remove dead tree overhanging hedgerow back of 197

Plot Marking

RA/DS to mark 191, 156A, 168A.

Post Halloween Removals

- some material in 178A shed to go in next skip
- halloween material needs to be stored in appropriate shed – maintenance plot metal shed is for maintenance equipment

SSSI

Martin Newhouse suggested looking into our allotments becoming a SSSI. To be discussed at future meeting.

Tenancy and Cultivation Guidelines

Pathways still to approve suggested revisions.

Halloween Report

- a report on the halloween event was approved and is appended to these minutes.
- approximately £7.5K funds are available for development of the communal plot, the priority being putting down hard standing
- **JW** to bring final figures to January committee meeting

Communal Plot Development

Estimates are being obtained **RA** to bring to January meeting

Website Development

CB and JW continuing to finalise website update.

Mailchimp Contents

Invitation to January maintenance morning.

Date of next meeting **11 January** - venue to be advised.

Halloween Pumpkin Trail 2022

Background

In 2016 the Northfields Allotments site was threatened with development. A campaign was launched to save the site, and a Halloween Pumpkin Trail was organised to engage the local community and raise funds. The event was a roaring success and has been held a further five times. Local people love it.

In 2021 it was massively over-subscribed, to a point where the communal areas of the site could not safely accommodate the visitors, estimated at 8,000. The volume of people could have led to crushing; visitors had no choice but to leave the path and walk across plots. Simultaneously visitors queued on the pavement on Northfield Avenue, which was unsafe. Fortunately there were no accidents.

In 2022 the committee responded to this experience by prioritising health and safety. It was also essential to meet the conditions of our public liability insurance which advise a cap of 1500 visitors on the site at any time. Four thousand timed tickets were sold for a nominal £1 plus booking fee in an attempt to limit the numbers (children under three were admitted free) and it was hoped that this would enable visitors to move around freely and safely. The committee provided a St John Ambulance crew and four portable toilets.

We estimate that there were up to 5000 people on site during the five hours of the event - ticket holders, small children and some un-ticketed entrants. While there was no potential crush, a slow moving queue spread from the Anderson shelter on the northern path, through communal plot 194, down Northfield Avenue and half way along Occupation Road.

The potential for an accident on Northfield Avenue was extremely worrying throughout the event: at times people stood or walked in the road as traffic passed. The committee feels strongly that this situation should never happen again.

Positively, the standard of decoration across the site this year was exceptional, the catering worked well, and visitors enjoyed the event. (There were grumbles about queuing to enter the event.)

Successful initiatives

Focus on safety was appropriate.

St John Ambulance

Portaloos

Ticketing - a modest charge was not an issue for visitors, Ticket Tailor worked well.

Promotion almost entirely through social media (FB); posters and leaflets not needed.

Sunday clear-up team effective.

Issues to be addressed

Unsafe queue on Northfield Avenue (reaching half way along Occupation Road).

Multiple photo opps/interactive exhibits contributed to this queue which filed south from northern part of site.

Congestion on 194 - partly because this was entry and exit, some visitors able to spend several hours on site.

198 plus activities on 196 and 199 were too close together and close to 194 communal area. This created a bottleneck.

Some volunteers unclear about their role.

Not all visitors' tickets scanned.

Recommendations

3000 tickets only and to include all children.

Route:

Single entry point by Model Cottages (would need to address problem of slow entry because of single gate). Queue up Radbourne Walk. Single exit at Mattock Lane. A buggy park could be created on the path between the Model Cottages entrance and the Forester gate; buggies to be collected via the Forester gate only.

OR close Occupation Road for queue (using hired fencing to create queuing lanes) and buggy park.

Single exit at Mattock Lane.

Open at 2pm, no entry after 5pm, close at 6pm. (The first tickets to sell out were 3pm, the least popular were timed at 6pm.)

Volunteers:

Social media/customer service volunteer needed to sell tickets and respond to heavy volume of ticket inquiries.

Volunteers should do at least two hours, and preferably the whole event.

Try to match skills to tasks when recruiting volunteers.

Train volunteers face to face.

Plan/coordinate decoration ahead of time so it's spread across the site and avoids bottlenecks. Deadline for plotters to commit to decoration.

No other activities/photo opps around 198.

Entry gate:

Gate team leader needed.

More ticket readers.

Power packs to recharge phones.

Exit gate:

Click out visitors.

The Pumpkin Trail should be along the main path. Ideally decorations would not encourage deviation into plots.

Conclusion

As everyone knows, we are victims of our own success. Our Halloween Pumpkin Trail has evolved into a large scale event that can not easily be accommodated on an allotment site with a fixed infrastructure. The format used successfully during the first few years no longer works. This is entirely because the event is so good that it is wildly popular.

The original purpose - to secure support in the face of proposed development - does not currently apply. Should the site face development in future, the goodwill from the local community is there, and the Summer Open Day is both an apt celebration of the allotments and a relatively easy way to engage local people.

Should the Halloween Pumpkin Trail go ahead in future, it should be radically restructured and involve a more detailed approach to planning. Health and safety must remain the key priority. There is no obligation for it to be an annual event.