



# LRRHAA Newsletter

## Spring 2019

**Dear Members,**

*A message from co-chair Nick:*

After muddling through last year without a chair, your committee is now hopefully in better shape. We now have two folks as co-chairs: Jon Piggott and myself, Nick Van Hear. Over the year we will be trying to address some of the issues and challenges that have come up, as we try to run the Association effectively while retaining its (we hope) relaxed approach. If we don't get everything right, or if things take some time to get sorted, please have patience – all of the committee are volunteers giving up their time to keep the association in reasonable order.

Some of the challenges that we need to tackle were aired at the Annual meeting in November, including:

**Data protection legislation** which came into force in May 2018 presented us with a headache because it was not entirely clear how we should interpret the new law. This adversely affected our means of communication with members over the year. We think we have sorted out the data protection issues (thanks largely to our treasurer Arnold Harpin) and are in process of streamlining the ways we communicate with members.

**Water** makes up our biggest item of expenditure and the hot, dry summer last year exacerbated usage. It also has to be said that consumption was raised by some folks needlessly watering their plots, and/or doing so in the heat of the day, when almost all the water used evaporates. We are looking at ways to address this issue.

**Working parties:** Most have had a good turnout of 12 to 20+ participants. Giving four hours per year to the association's collective activities (mainly maintenance of the site) is an obligation of membership. You can do this in many ways, not just by attending working parties. For example, some people beaver away in the background, mending wheel barrows, cutting the grass of the common areas, clearing up rubbish and so on. We need to keep up the momentum of attracting more people to undertake the collective work, and not just leave it to the usual suspects.

These gripes apart, we have a good association and community here, which despite the occasional hiccup, mostly runs smoothly. Still, we're always on the look-out for ways to improve and welcome suggestions you may have.

*O&FDAA news from co-chair Jon:*

Most of you will know that the Allotment Association belongs to "The Oxford and District Federation of Allotment Associations" – the O&FDAA. The O&FDAA represents 35 allotment associations across Oxford and does a number of things but most importantly they discuss issues with and negotiate on our behalf with Oxford City Council.

In this last year there have been two main areas of interest for the O&DFAA:

- The Centenary of Allotments in Oxford – a booklet is in preparation (also to be available on line @<https://www.odfaa.com/>) made up largely of page long descriptions submitted by each of the sites together with some historical detail from their own archives and the Oxford newspapers.
- Negotiations with the City Council over new leases for each of the Allotment Sites - At present there is a great deal of variation between sites in terms of responsibilities, costs and so on and the Council is determined to have a single set of leases from 2020. Under the new leases it is intended that all associations should be charged on the same basis – area covered by the site. That the Association should be in complete charge and have responsibility and liability for all matters relating to the site (except in some circumstances trees) and that the role of the Council should be restricted to ensuring that its rules are kept.

There are still some unknowns in relation to the new leases and how this will affect us at Lenthall Road but at the moment, although costs will rise and responsibilities increase, the changes look to be not too severe.

#### *Monthly notes from Cathy:*

**March:** Plant early potatoes, shallots, onion sets and garlic. Sow perpetual spinach and broad beans. Mulch raspberries. Start seeds in warmth for later planting: early lettuce and other salads, peas, beans, parsley, tomatoes, aubergines, peppers, chillies and celeriac. Sow seeds for winter crops, such as broccoli and cabbages.

**April:** Keep weeding. Put up climbing bean and pea supports. Finish planting early, second early and maincrop potatoes. Earth up potatoes planted in March. Sow directly: swiss chard, parsley, spinach, turnips, hardy peas, carrots, kohlrabi, celeriac, scorzonera, spring onions, summer cabbages, beetroot, calabrese, pak choi, lettuces and other salads, leeks, and more main crop broad beans. Sow more tender seeds on a window sill or under cover for planting out in May/June.

**REMEMBER!! Bonfires are permitted Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays only.**

#### **2019 LRRHAA Calendar**

**Committee Meetings:** Feb 4, Apr 1, Jun 3, Aug 5, Sept 23, Oct 28, Nov 4, Dec 2

**Working Parties:** Mar 17, Apr 14, Jun 16, Aug 18, Sep 15, Oct 20, Nov 17

**AGM:** Tuesday 12 November 2019

**Summer Party:** To be decided at April 1<sup>st</sup> Committee Meeting

**The shop and container will be open on Sunday mornings from March 17<sup>th</sup>**

**FEATURE:** *Helen and William Beinart have several years' experience in 'no dig' cultivation at LRRHAA. They share here an abridged description of their methods and results. If you are interested in more detail, their complete article can be found on [www.lrrhaa.org](http://www.lrrhaa.org) under "Committee/newsletters:"*

## **No-dig Experiments at Lenthall Road**

Over the last few years, since taking on a full plot, we have experimented with 'no-dig' practices. There are many models; Charles Dowding's website is useful. We hesitate to call what we do a system, because it is a bit haphazard and experimental. These ideas seemed attractive because we read reports about high yields with limited labour! They also seemed valuable because much of the plot was covered in grass and weed, and the soil was a heavy clay that was difficult to dig. The availability of large quantities of manure from Paul has been essential.

First, we put down a layer of cardboard that suppresses the weeds, to some extent. This is covered with a mound of manure, compost and soil across the width of the allotment, with paths in between. Cattle manure from Paul probably accounts for over 60 per cent of the content; most of the rest is compost, which we make ourselves. We also use soil from neighbouring mounds, purchased compost and recycled council. The mounds are roughly convex, about a metre wide and about 50 cm at their peak. We covered the pathways in between with cardboard and woodchip.

Planting is done above ground in the mounds. Potatoes, pumpkins, squashes and courgettes, as well as beans and salads (lettuces, rocket and endive) seem to do well in the first planting. We have planted potatoes in different ways but the most effective has been to push them lightly into the soil and then to cover them with a thick layer (6 inches/15 cm) of straw – also bought from Paul – and a layer of fleece that allows early planting (mid-March), protected against frost. There is the danger of some going green through exposure, so we have to ensure that the straw is supplemented. Slugs can be a problem so need to include pellets. Yields have been large and the potatoes come out 'clean'.

The mounds can sustain two or three plantings. New potatoes can be harvested by early July, when the mound has subsided somewhat and the cardboard has largely disappeared. A wide range of plants can go in - squash, pumpkins, spinach and chard, salads of all kinds, winter greens, brassicas and root crops. Except for the latter, we start most of these in trays/pots so the late planting is less of a problem. Some will be ready by late summer/autumn although some stay in for winter. Then in October/ November or in the next March, broad beans and alliums can be planted without digging or adding to the mound. Weeding is of course needed. The cycle then starts again, with variations, because we try a very wide variety of plants and different timings are needed. We have been delighted with the yields and the length of the season.