



LRRHAA Newsletter

Spring 2020

Coronavirus (The Co-chairs, Nick van Hear and Ian Matten)

We hope that everyone is bearing up under the current difficult conditions.

At the time of writing (24.3.2020), the allotment site is still open. According to a report of a government spokesman this morning, allotments are included as places for daily exercise. We are seeking official clarification of this. Common sense tells us that, as long as we take sensible precautions, allotments should stay open not only for exercise but for producing food. As we all know, the allotments are a good place for getting out of doors, for conversation at safe distance, and for our general well-being.

It is surely important that food is locally picked and grown at a time when dependence on supermarkets is growing. For those who are going to pick and plant, please be careful to keep a distance of at least two metres from everyone else, whether neighbours or those on the paths and at the entrance gate.

Coronavirus can apparently survive on metal surfaces. **Use gloves when opening and closing the gate.** Use an anti-bacterial wipe if you can. And, of course, follow the guidance on hand washing. Ideally wash your hands after entering the allotments and certainly when returning home. But please don't wash in the water butts next to the taps. Either use your own water or, when the taps go on again, collect water from them in a separate bucket. We should also be careful of infection from taps.

If we follow current guidelines, there is a strong case to keep the site open.

We have cancelled the working party for Sunday 29th March. Other meetings and working parties are under review given current conditions, but the list of those scheduled is included below.

We will do our best to update you on the latest developments as we learn them.

LRRHAA WhatsApp Group

Following Olga's suggestion at the AGM, we are setting up an LRRHAA WhatsApp group. This will help us share the highs (e.g. wildlife sightings, the perfect tomato) and lows (e.g. a maintenance worries, theft) of the LRRHAA experience.

For data protection reasons, we are not creating a link to the group. If you would like to join, please text your name and plot number (if you know it) to Lorin on 07714245351 or email lrrhaasecretary@gmail.com with your name, mobile and plot numbers. In doing so, you agree not to pass on another group member's telephone numbers to anyone outside the group.

Water (William Beinart)

Summary:

- Water usage has increased leading to higher bills and a rent increase
- There will be more frequent rent increases if we don't save mains water
- Please minimise water use from taps; watering cans only
- Water your plants carefully when they need it and ideally in the evening
- Do not leave taps running so that the butts overflow
- Increase water catchment on your plot. This is required in the rules.

The Problem

During the last two years, the issue of water usage from the taps has been discussed many times at Committee Meetings and at the AGM.

Water is essential for our activities. But it is also a valuable resource and has to be paid for. It represents the single highest item of expenditure in our budget. As a result of increased water usage in the relatively dry year of 2018, the Committee had to increase rentals by £2 a year in order to meet costs. Usage in 2019 was also above average. It is impossible to predict rainfall: even though there has been a wet February and March in 2020, it is likely that we will experience further dry periods during this and future summers.

Maybe the Association should be relaxed about water usage and accept further regular increases in rentals. However, the Committee has not taken this view and the opinions expressed at the AGM in 2019 also suggested that it is not a popular solution. Aside from the cost, there is a shared concern that we should be as economical as possible with water for environmental and social reasons. Heavy water usage tends to take place during the summer when there is sometimes an overall strain on city supplies. We should not waste water.

Another issue is differential water usage by plot holders. Undoubtedly some use more than others. Everyone is entitled to use water from the taps as long as they keep to the rules and practices of the Association.

Under Frequently Asked Questions on the Website the following answer is given for access to water:

'There is metered mains water on site and currently the cost of water is included in the rent. There are stand pipes and barrels around the site. No hose pipes allowed. Taps must be turned off when not in use. Water with care as the price is going up and up. All sheds must be fitted with water catchment facilities. See guidance on watering. [The latter is given under a separate head on the website]'

In practice this means that water can only be collected from the butts next to the taps in watering cans. Wheelbarrows with large receptacles, or hoses, are not allowed. Carrying water in cans plays some role in limiting the amount that is easily used and also results in more careful usage immediately around plants.

Solutions: how to use less water from the taps.

If all plot holders stick to the rules, use only water in watering cans and take care in the way that they water their plants, then overall usage is likely to stay within reasonable amounts. As described in the guidance, watering is most effective if carefully timed through the year. Especially in summer, watering has greater impact in the evening, rather than in the middle of a hot day so it is possible to minimise in this way too.

Care should also be taken to switch off taps before the butts spill over. Our temptation is to leave the taps running when making multiple trips to the water butt, so that they will be full when we return for the next plunge of the watering can. But plant lovers are easily distracted. We see a weed that needs pulling or strike up a chance conversation. On a number of occasions, taps have been left on and the water has overflowed. It is wisest to be patient and to avoid leaving taps on when not at the butt.

An important strategy in reducing water offtake from the mains is for every plot holder to ensure that they have their own supply. A majority of lessees have made such provision but there are a number who have not.

Under the Allotment Rules (on the web), the question of water is dealt with under the 'Allotment Charges' rubric:

'4.5 All structures must have an operational water collection system and the failure by a Member to provide this will render the Member liable for an annual levy which will be determined by the Committee.'

This is clear but it does not cover all contingencies. Firstly, many plots are let out as half or quarter plots and it is not always possible to erect a structure with a roof from which to collect water on these. The association has not resolved this issue and it may not be desirable to have a structure on every quarter plot.

The committee recognises that it can be costly to erect a shed with a roof, attach the necessary guttering and purchase a water butt. It is, however, possible to erect a shelter without sides cheaply using a frame of wood and a roof of corrugated plastic. We can provide advice. Please contact william.beinart@sant.ox.ac.uk. If there is sufficient demand, we will try to do a bulk purchase of materials.

Secondly there are no rules concerning the amount of storage capacity that is recommended. Thirdly, while levies are mentioned for those without water storage, these have not been imposed, partly because they would fall most heavily on the holders with smaller plots.

Using rough figures, our water last year cost about £1.30 per cubic metre. We used 650,000 litres, costing about £850. There are over 100 plot holders. If 100 plots had two butts or barrels of about 220 litres each, which are emptied and then fill from rain an estimated three times a year, that would give 132,000 litres per year, or about 20 per cent of usage from the taps. Enhanced water storage from rainwater on the plots would make significant impact on keeping costs of water down. Some plots do have larger storage capacity.

We therefore encourage all plot holders to maximise the amount of stored water on their plots. The committee is looking into providing larger water butts to collect from the container and shed, which would be available for general use. Kier Construction company, who are building the Iffley Academy, have offered £300 towards water storage at our site and we will use this to enhance water storage. We are grateful for their generosity.

Alternatives: rent increases or a levy?

With all of these measures, it may be possible to keep water costs down. In the future, rentals will inevitably have to increase to meet overall inflation in the association's expenses. However, annual increases in water usage will result in more regular rent rises of about £2 a year.

Another way of approaching the issue is to charge a levy, for which there is provision in the rules, on all site-holders who do not have water collection facilities.

Rental charges are currently £30 for a full plot; £15 for half plot; and £7.50 for a quarter plot. An additional water levy of say £3 a year would fall largely on those who have half and quarter plots and would yield over £100 a year, which would contribute to keeping rentals more stable.

We welcome members' views on these water issues.

Wood chips and pruning (Catherine Gibb)

We get free wood chippings from a local tree surgeon. Wood chippings are good to use for paths, but need to rot for about six months if you want to use them on growing areas; then they will improve the texture and consistency of the soil. They don't add a lot of nutrients and they take a long time to break down completely. Add some to your compost heap, mixed with other green compost, if you are going to let this rot for some months and then mix in with the other green compost.

It is too late to prune apples and pears. Any time from November to early March is good, when the leaves are off the trees. Using sharp secateurs, cut out any diseased or broken branches, and branches that are crossing over other branches and cut all new growth back by about a half. You are aiming to have a cup-shaped tree, one that is open in the middle to let in sunlight and air. There are loads of videos on YouTube showing how to this. Don't be afraid and do some pruning every winter. Cherries and plums and other stone fruit, are pruned in the summer.

Allotment soup recipes (Helen Beinart)

It is great experimenting with different combinations of seasonal vegetables to make delicious allotment soups. There are some suggestions below but hope you have fun experimenting yourselves and share your favourite combinations in a future newsletter.

I usually start with a combination of onion, garlic, carrot and celery (optional) chopped and softened in a small amount of oil/butter. (This is a good way of using up onions and garlic that are not firm enough to store or overwinter). If you have leeks then this is also a good base for soup.

Fennel and courgette/marrow – this is a good way of using up fennel that has bolted and courgettes that have turned into marrows. Chop and soften with the veg mix above. You can also add potatoes if you want a thicker soup. Toasted fennel seed is a nice but not necessary addition. Add vegetable stock to cover the veg, season to taste and cook for about half an hour. You can leave in chunks or blend to a smooth soup – whatever you prefer.

Pumpkin/squash and chard – I find it easiest to roughly cut the squash into quarters or smaller and bake in the oven with whole unpeeled garlic and seasoning (cumin and coriander are good spices to use but you can add your favourites). Scoop the squash out of its skin. Squeeze the garlic out of the peel. Then add to the basic veg mix above, cover with vegetable stock, season to taste and cook for about half an hour. Towards the end add chard, parsley or any other green you would like to use up and cook for a further 5-10 mins. Again, you can blend if you prefer a smooth soup. Red lentils are also a good addition if you want to add some protein. These should be added at the same time as the squash and will make a thicker soup so you may need to add more stock.

Rules, Constitution, and Dates to Note

Our Rules and Constitution have been updated as of 1st January 2020, if you would like to read more, you can find the updated documents on the web site [members page](#).

Committee Meetings: 20 April, 15 June, 17 August, 12 October, 26 October, 30 November

Working Parties: 30 May (Sat), 28 June (Sun), 25 July (Sat), 23 Aug (Sun), 17 Oct (Sat), 15 Nov (Sun)

Hours: Saturdays 14:00 – 16.30; Sundays 10:00 – 12:30

Summer Party: Sunday, September 6th

Annual General Meeting: Tuesday, November 3rd

Shop and Container Openings

The shop and container will not be opening early next month as originally planned. We will keep you updated.

Under normal circumstances, the container would be open the first Saturday of the month from April 4th (14:00 – 16:30) and on Sundays (10:00 – 12:30); other weeks to mid-November.