

Fairfield Allotment Holders Association

Newsletter 10

Are you online? If so, you can see that our Secretary John Lambert has too much spare time on his hands, because we - the Association - now have our very own **Website!** I'm not on broadband - I'm resisting - but I'm retired, so the download times don't worry me if they're not instant, & as it's got artistic photos of our very own plots, it does take a little time to appear. But it's well worth the wait. Take a look at the pictures - you may fail to recognise something from your own plot there, because it looks so much better than it does in real life. And you'll find the newsletter is now posted there, so you can refer back to past copies and discover my inconsistencies and the things I've forgotten I've said. And it'll also keep you up to date with news in-between newsletter editions, if there's anything you might need to know. The address to go to is: www.fairfield-allotments.co.uk.

Our neighbour organisation The Fairfield Association (the ones responsible for the Millennium Orchard and the Green, and the children's' playground)

<http://www.fairfieldassociation.org> is holding its Annual **Funday Fete on Saturday 1st July** starting at 12 noon until 5pm. As usual Fairfield Allotments will be having our own fundraising stall selling allotment produce, flowers, potted plants etc which have been donated by allotment holders. All donations to be given to John Weedy, 10 Sibsey Street or left at the allotment gate by the white cottage on the morning of the event or just bring whatever you have to the stall on the day - that way you don't have to get up early! It doesn't have to be veg, things like small bunches of sweet peas and other flowers sell really well. Also if you feel you can give an hour or even 30 minutes of your time on the day to help with the stall please contact John on 60131 or just turn up on the day.

In addition to the stall we are also organising a **Miniature Garden/Allotment Competition**, with small prizes, for any children (of whatever age). Also there's to be a **Vegetable Creature Competition** (creatures can be any combination of veg / fruit put together to resemble something creature-like). See last year pictures at <http://www.fairfieldassociation.org/index.php?page=4>. Miniature gardens/allotments should not exceed 30 x 40 cm and can be any shape you like.

All entries are £1 each (so you can enter more than one!) and are to be tabled, and paid for on the day, in the main tent by 11 am on the day for judging. You can fill in the entry form when you table your entry. If you've any questions about any of this please contact John Weedy on 60131: he's our contact with the Fairfield Association.

On the same weekend the Committee is holding its **Annual Allotment Competition**. So, you've got a few weeks left to tidy up the plot, get the weeds below ground level and buy some healthy-looking stock from the local garden centre to try to persuade the judge that you've been working hard on it for years (I just may have watched too many programmes from Chelsea). There'll be a **site inspection** at the same time, so you've been warned.

Some people are having a problem with unwanted **rodents**, & this could turn into a thorny problem for all of us. In fact it's got so bad for some that John Lambert has been making enquiries with the Council about the cost of extermination. I can see several reasons why this isn't a good idea, but we may be forced into it. The cost would depend on how much of a contribution to the problem we are making ourselves. Are compost bins rat-proof? Does anyone compost cooked food? Do people leave food or drink in their sheds? If the answers to questions like these go the wrong way, we veer towards the commercial end of the cost scale. The domestic charge is £20: the commercial rate is £55 per hour, and it would take a good while to go round the entire site - at least two hours. A pest control officer would need to come out and assess the site then give us a price. Basically if rats are nesting or feeding on the site, it means that allotmenters are contributing to the problem, and therefore have to pay the top price to have them cleared. Thanks for the support LCC! This may be a cost we will have to bear as rats do cause a significant health hazard. The following are some things we can do to try and keep the population down.

Tips for a rat free plot:

All sheds should be on a concrete base and ideally surrounded by a skirt of galvanised steel mesh (unrealistic especially for older sheds but good advice for new ones)

Shelves in the shed will help to keep stuff off the floor and limit nesting sites

Do not store things around the shed, as this will provide temporary cover

Cover water containers to limit access to drinking water

If storing potatoes in the shed, keep a galvanised bin with small holes drilled in it inside hessian sacks

Generally, do not store food/seeds unless well protected.

Place compost bins over galvanised steel mesh and ensure that the lid is tightly fitted.

If you are aware there are rats around you should also take some hygiene precautions as rats can carry Weil's disease/Leptospirosis that is associated with rat's urine. I think that the main message to get across would be that it is transmitted through cuts and abrasions or across the membranes of the mouth and nose. People should take care with hygiene and let doctors know that they work on an allotment if they develop flu-like symptoms and a severe headache.

Good personal hygiene is the most effective way of reducing your risk of catching Leptospirosis. This means washing hands after working in areas where rats are or may have been present especially before eating, drinking or smoking. You should clean and cover all cuts and grazes, no matter how minor they appear. You should also avoid rubbing your mouth, nose and eyes.

However, it strikes me that on a site like ours it's impossible to get rid of rats: we have to manage them. If the rats are cleared, more will move in from the fields & the drains as soon as the site becomes liveable-in for them again. So the best we can do is to maintain good hygiene and keep the numbers to the minimum. Poison is bad for other things beside rats: other wild mammals, birds, dogs and children could all be affected. So instead we all need to do what we can to make life hard for the rats. This means depriving them of places to nest - tidying and cleaning inside sheds, blocking up spaces under sheds, dealing with untended corners - and minimising their food supply by being careful about what is composted, and the temperature at which composting takes place. Turning your heap warms it up by increasing the air supply, & no rat wants to cook itself.

Maybe you've other ideas about what we could do that fall short of a double-barrelled shotgun; if so, let us know & we can try to put the best ones into effect.

Dogs: A number of members have reported to the secretary that they've discovered dog mess when they've been mowing and strimming. This is not only extremely unpleasant but potentially very hazardous. Please can members who do bring dogs onto the plots keep them leashed, on their own plots, at all times and also check that any mess has been cleared from adjacent paths and lanes.

Water: if anyone has the space to accessorise their greenhouse or shed with one of those enormous water containers you may have seen spreading around the plots, for a very small donation to the allotment coffers you can have one arrive at your plot. Get in touch with John Lambert. Not only will you have collected 1000 litres of rainwater when it's full, you will have contributed to reducing the allotment metered water bill.



Vandalism: John Lambert has written to the police about the problem and has met us with Martin Pearson the local community policeperson. John's letter is long and detailed (you can download it from the website), the reply rather briefer. This is the reply:

I am aware that as a result of your meeting with PS Martin Pearson a co-ordinated proactive visit to the area was undertaken, which resulted in approximately 60 youths being moved from the allotments with details of over 40 being taken. This will be followed up by visits to the homes of those youths to warn them regarding future conduct and advise them of the standards of behaviour which are expected from them.

Proactive policing will continue for the foreseeable future and action is already being taken with regard to underage sale and consumption of alcohol. The police are also working in partnership with other agencies to put in place some longer-term solutions.

PS Pearson will monitor levels of reported crime and anti-social behaviour at the allotment and will meet with you on a regular basis to discuss any subsequent issues.

If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed)

*Chief Superintendent Gary Stephenson
Divisional Commander.*

The clear message is still that if we want the police to do anything that everyone must report incidents no matter how small if they happen to them, which some members are still not doing...

(And by the way, Gary Stephenson is not so far as I know a relative of mine...)

John Lambert's contact details remain:

6 Carr House Lane, Lancaster LA1 1SW Tel: 01524 849371

email: john@jlambert.f9.co.uk

Comments & newsletter items to Roy Stephenson contact details 847617 or Jenroys@aol.com, or through the wonderful website.