**Grange Lane Allotment Association**

A Vision for the future

Situated on a hill with sweeping views over London and surrounded by ancient woodland, playing fields, an historic school and a renowned golf course, Grange Lane Allotments are an important resource for the local community. We, the current plotholders, are custodians of this resource and as well as enjoying it ourselves it is our responsibility to maintain it, develop it and pass it on to future generations in the best possible condition.

A vision for the future of an allotment site should not be something high flown and fanciful but down to earth and achievable. I hope that is what you will find in what follows.

Involving members

The success of every organisation; large or small, commercial or voluntary, new or established, depends first and foremost on the people in it. Grange Lane Allotment Association is no different and that’s why realising the vision will depend on increasing the involvement of members. We intend to do this by:

1. Improving communications:
   1. A new website with an improved look, more and better information and regular updates
   2. A quarterly newsletter sent by Email to all members with news about developments and items of interest.
   3. Polling members to obtain their views on certain topics, such as the recent poll on uses for a community building.
   4. Monthly onsite meetings for members to speak to committee members or line managers about problems or queries.
   5. An online forum for members to discuss, exchange information and solve problems.
2. Encouraging member participation
   1. Setting expectations for members to contribute to the improvement of the site by taking part in projects and working parties, e.g. to improve drainage, restore paths and manage communal areas .
   2. Holding social events so that members can meet and get to know each other.
   3. Setting up a mentoring scheme to pair new with more experienced members who can offer advice and guidance.
   4. Holding occasional talks and demonstrations by experts who can teach good gardening practices and techniques.

Improving management

Allotments are more than the sum of their individual plots. They have to be managed as a whole. Among other things this means liaising with our landlords, collecting subscriptions, arranging lettings and evictions, conducting plot inspections, maintaining communal areas and security, enforcing rules and regulations, paying bills and settling disputes. This can be a heavy load for the committee and so management has to be focussed and efficient whilst also sharing it as widely as possible. This means:

1. The committee will publish an annual business plan setting out what they will do in the year ahead and produce a report for AGMs on what was accomplished.
2. All members of the committee will have a job description setting out clear roles and responsibilities for which they will be accountable.
3. Line managers are central to the day to day running of the allotments and it will be an enduring priority to ensure all posts are filled and that they are fully supported in fulfilling their role.
4. All members need to know what contribution to the smooth running of the site is expected of them and a code of practice in the form of a list of ‘Dos and Don’ts’ will be published.

Improving site amenities

At present our site is very simple and basic compared to others nearby where can be found community buildings, on-site toilets, allotment shops, shared heavy tools and equipment and even cafes. Although some members say they want to keep things simple the character of the site can only be enhanced by making the following essential improvements:

1. Installing at least two toilets on the site.
2. Constructing a community building with space for meetings, refreshments, information sharing and somewhere for members to retreat to in bad weather.
3. Investigating options for the improvement of drainage so that plots do not become waterlogged and paths do not become impassable in winter and after periods of heavy rain.
4. Ensuring that paths remain usable all year round by installation of reinforcing material and reinstatement where they have been encroached upon.
5. Exploring the scope for shared initiatives with nearby allotment associations in respect of bulk buying, discounts, tool hire, etc.

Building community links

Our allotments should be a resource which the local community knows about, understands and appreciates. We want them to come to see what we do, to learn about the mysteries of growing things in the earth, to see the wildlife around us and just to enjoy the open space and the far reaching views. We can do this by:

1. Holding at least one open day each year at which we provide tours of the site, offer wildlife talks, give demonstrations and sell produce to raise funds.
2. Investigate the feasibility of organised visits to the site by school children to help them learn about how food is grown and to see wildlife.

Increasing resources

Realisation of the visions set out above will require more resources than are presently available to us. This means that we have to increase our resources, that is; our ability to do things. This increase can come in two forms: more voluntary time and effort put in by members or more money, so that we can pay others to put in time and effort. We believe that a combination of both is needed and we shall:

1. Continue to apply for grants to fund major projects like a community building. This is how we obtained the funds for the toilets and other applications in progress.
2. Review the level of member subscriptions with a view to increasing them. At present our subs are lower than any other allotment society in this area.
3. Consider placing an obligation on members to contribute at least two days a year to communal projects and working parties with an option to pay higher subs in lieu of participation.

Conclusion

This vision for the future of Grange Lane allotments is modest but achievable. It is not for once and all and will need to be revised in the light of changes and experience. It will be supplemented by a business plan which sets budgets and time scales for what is to be done.

19 May 2016

Committee of Grange Lane Allotment Association