



NADCAA

Newton Abbot & District Co-Operative Allotment Association

Chairman's Reort

Your Secretary will cover the major items and I will cover the effect of the pandemic and a couple of other important items that affect the Association. As you are aware we issued Emergency Measures the week before the Prime Minister announced lockdown, physical committee meetings were suspended and Zoom has been used to enable most of the committee to maintain contact.

I forwarded those emergency measures to the NAS to see if there was anything we needed to add and was somewhat heartened when they adopted 90% of them into their own measures word for word. We wanted to do everything we possibly could to keep the fields open, but to say we were in uncharted waters would be an understatement. Some council run allotment sites took the view that the best thing to do was to shut all the sites. It was only thanks to the legal department of the NAS and Michael Gove of all people, that the majority of sites remained open.

Sadly events that were planned for this summer had to be cancelled. The trip to Wildside and The Garden House were both cancelled, as was the National Garden Scheme Open Day, the annual judging and the Annual Fruit and Veg. show. I want to thank Meryl who put in a huge amount of work over several months to arrange the open day and Christine and Julia who did the arrangements for the trips. I know they were both upset that after putting in so much work the events had to be cancelled.

Many members have been very kind and offered personal thanks to both, myself and members of the committee for keeping the sites open, trust me, it was you the members sticking rigidly to the emergency measures that kept us open. The Town Clerk lives near some of the sites and his daily exercise often took him past them. I received several emails informing me that he was impressed that members were all sticking to the rules. So it is thanks to you and your own self-discipline that we have been able to keep the gates open.

Your Committee is in my opinion, the strongest it has ever been, and I want to thank every single one of them for the massive amount of support over the past five months. We are not scientists or politicians, the daily briefings on the BBC became more and more questionable as time went by and all we could do was discuss what we felt was best for all of the members. Knowing how passionate we all are about crops and looking after them, the committee gave guidance and support to throughout, Steve and I made a point of meeting at least once a week to ensure there was nothing new that needed to be addressed. Special thanks must go to Simon our Health & Safety Officer whose advice during the past few months has been invaluable. He has been on the front line dealing with Health & Safety and Covid_19 throughout the last 5 months and his input was appreciated by all.

Despite insurmountable odds Ferai, Kevin and the shop volunteers managed to keep the shop running during lockdown. Initially we were going to close it to ensure everyone's safety, Ferai and Anna came up with a workaround which cut out face to face contact and it worked perfectly, so on behalf of everyone thanks to Ferai and his team for all their hard work.

In addition thank you to everyone who emailed in offering to help members who were shielding and in isolation, I know that your efforts were much appreciated.

As the year progresses I can do no more than to urge you all to carry on doing what you have been doing. This is no time for complacency, keep hand sanitising and maintaining social distancing. There is talk of the virus being around for as long as four years, so let's all keep on doing what we have been doing and hopefully none of us will be affected by the second spike that is constantly in the news at the moment.

Covid_19 aside, 2019 and 2020 more than any others during my Chairmanship over the past 21 years, saw the role of allotments change for all of us, no longer are our allotment fields just a place to grow organic food for ourselves and our families.

As we are all becoming increasingly aware, the problems caused by climate change, the catastrophic decline in wildlife, especially insects, during our lifetimes, and the habitat loss caused by the developments going on all around us, has given us as an association a whole new purpose. A purpose that I think you will all agree is a very important one, no insects means no food, a harsh statement but a true one, we as an Association must promote the protection of our pollinators.

I gave this statistic to a meeting in Yeovil before lockdown – there are 119,000 bee colonies in the UK. 300 bees per colony die per day due to insecticides. That is almost 36 million bees per day, and over 13 billion bees dying from pesticides per year in the UK.

Back in 2010 we gave permission for members to turn 25% of their plots over to biodiversity to counter this very decline. Little did we know back then how far ahead of the game we were, over the past couple of year's wildlife corridors have been created on several fields by volunteers willing to do their bit to create habitat for our wildlife. Thanks must go to Amanda & Steven, Jackie and her volunteers and Mike, Chris and Meryl. We are already seeing the benefits of their hard work.

In January we met with Harry Barton C.E.O. of the Devon Wildlife Trust to discuss ways that we can do more and areas where they might be able to help us. He was very impressed with the work we had already done and would like us to link up regarding publicising the decline in our insect population, something we are all aware of.

Importantly we are the first and only allotment association that has contacted a wildlife trust and taken the initiative to make this very important step towards wildlife conservation on the allotment fields. Something I think we should all be very proud of, sadly, shortly after that meeting, lockdown put a halt to all further contact, but Harry has been in touch recently and is very keen to push forward asap.

Something we have started to do and need to do more of is to record what wildlife we see and log it. There is an area on the website where you can report what you have seen. The more species we record the better our case if we have to protect our fields from the developers in the future.

A goal for all of us must be to stop using pesticides and herbicides. There is always an alternative to chemicals that destroy wildlife. Allotments need to be shining the light and leading the way for others to follow.

There are far more young people on the allotment fields today than there were five years ago. They know that we need to stop using pesticides and herbicides for the good of our wildlife and the environment, they realise that growing your own stops food being shipped around the world and helps cut their carbon footprint and they can see that with less food shipped from commercial producers there will be less plastic packaging.

Over half a million people applied for an allotment during lockdown. As an Association we have already asked for the local plan to be changed to include more allotments.

If you have read your Newsletters you will be aware that this has been a busy year. Before Lockdown Steve and I were invited to attend a meeting in Yeovil to discuss setting up the South West Branch of the NAS. It was well attended with people from as far apart as St Mawes in Cornwall, Bournemouth and Bristol. I was asked to speak at the meeting about what we have achieved here in Newton Abbot and what I thought were the important issues going forward. That speech was described as "inspiring" in the Allotment & Leisure Gardening Magazine and led to me being proposed as Chairman of the new South West branch of the NAS, a position I assumed at an inaugural meeting on the 4th August.

In addition many of you will know the name Neil Dixon the South West Rep for the NAS. He has attended our AGM's on many occasions. Neil has asked me to become Deputy South West Rep. for the NAS, something I had to think hard and long about before saying yes.

These developments have given me cause to re-consider my decision at the last AGM to step down as NADCAA Chairman after this AGM. I feel that there is far too much going on that needs to be addressed, if I can do something to bring about change for the South West Region as a whole then I am happy to stay on as your Chairman. I have talked to the Committee about this and they were happy providing it didn't become a chore for me.

With regards to the South West Branch it is too early to tell what it will achieve. It is my hope that there will be opportunities to work alongside the soon to be formed South West Wildlife Trust, that will bring together all of the Wildlife Trusts in the South West.

Be assured that which benefits the South West Branch will inevitably benefit NADCAA and every other Association in the South West.

One thing I know Steve is going to talk about is the need for more volunteers. We can't run without volunteers, if members don't come forward to take over vacant posts then eventually the Association would be unable to run. That would mean it being run by the Council. The rent for a half plot in Plymouth which is Council run has just gone up from £135.00 to £175.00. That is £149.00 more than you pay here in Newton Abbot, and the reason you pay £149.00 less is because of the volunteers that run it on your behalf. So please don't be backward in coming forward, if you have skills that you feel would be useful to the committee then come forward and remember - NADCAA needs you!