

Allotment report to Parish Council Annual Meeting – 24th April 2023

The allotments continue to develop and we have had another successful growing season, despite the very dry, lovely, weather last year. This of course was followed but the very wet winter which made things a bit soggy for getting the ground ready for the spring.

We now have 20 members of the Allotment Association and have just welcomed two new members who have taken over plots which became spare.

The plots vary in size, the largest being 10mx10m. Others are half size and even some quarter size. The annual charges for the plots are £25 for the largest and proportionate amounts for the smaller ones. The charges include membership for each person of the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners. This includes insurance cover for everyone. It is worth noting that in some areas, charges for allotments are likely to rise significantly. There are about 330,000 allotment plots in the uk. Some are facing rent increases of up to 400% a year. It has been pointed out that this might put the renting allotments too much for some people, just at a time that food costs, especially for vegetables, have been rising massively. We will be keeping our charges to the current level.

All our members have had very good crops in the past year, despite the assault by pigeons, undermining by moles, the normal slug and snail damage and the nibblings of deer which seem to have been particularly fond of sweet pea flowers! There is always a sharing of information, ideas, plants and seeds and produce between plot holders, with occasional distribution of produce to passers-by.

Water is laid on to two water troughs. It is on a metered spur from the Rec Supply and billed twice yearly from them. Plenty of water was used during the very dry summer last year.

Over the past year we have been very grateful for the grant of £772 from the Parish Council, used to purchase a picnic bench and hedging on the south side of the allotments. We were also successful in getting a grant of £3500 from the Halecombe Quarry Community Fund for the new cabin which will provide storage space and somewhere to dash to for shelter from any downpours we get. We were indebted for the help from some other villagers, not members of the allotments association, who helped getting the prefabricated cabin in place.

While the idea of having a communal composting area is attractive, ours – like many other schemes - tended to be more of a dumping area for material that members could not compost on their own plots. As a result, the ever increasing pile of unsightly stuff which was not in a condition to rot down properly became rather unsightly. In autumn we got rid of the old heap and the area will eventually be used to create a further half size plot. Each plot holder is now responsible for their own composting – or taking stuff off-site.

Other work in the pipeline is to kit out the cabin with shelving and other storage space and to tidy up the area adjacent to and behind the cabin. As well as completing the clearing of the old composting area for the new plot, we want to install the IBC tank for harvesting rain water from the cabin roof and fix in the two benches kindly made by Frank Higgins. We are looking forward to holding social events in and around the cabin for allotment holders during the year.

We are also planning to be involved in the Village Day and having the allotments open for closer viewing at the Church's Open Garden event, with allotment holders staffing on a rota.

The Leigh on Mendip Allotments continue to be a valuable resource for the village. As well as the obvious benefits of growing own's own food, the allotments are a good way of getting the exercise recommended and of providing more social contact with people. We often have welcome interruptions to slaving away on our plots to chat to people walking past further increasing the community feeling of the village.