

Gardener Consultation Event

16th February 2010

Hedges

The long established tenants on site will have seen the dramatic change in the hedges. The external hedges have now been reduced to manageable heights and many tenants have now brought their internal hedges down to around the 5 feet height (as in the tenancy agreement) , sometimes with the support of the STAA staff, and this makes the maintenance and regular cutting of them much easier. And yes there is quite a lot of chespaie fencing and hedge re-planting going on as well.

We now need to ensure that this hugely expensive restoration of the hedgerows is not wasted and hedge maintenance continues to ensure the site remains in a well maintained condition.

Many communications have gone out to tenants on this subject, it does need to be understood that the Council no longer has the responsibility for the maintenance of the site. Whilst the Capital Works contractors were on site (Crestra), the maintenance was their responsibility, but from April 2010 this will fall to STAA.

STAA does have a budget for hedge maintenance, but it is clear that it won't cover the 12 miles of hedgerows that run alongside either a footpath or an avenue. There are also lots of other things we have to look after, such as the new gates, the water system and the Borehole, which all need regular servicing and maintenance checks and take money out of the maintenance budget.

We really don't want to have to increase rent levels....and we certainly don't want the site to slip back into a neglected state.

So the only option is to get tenants to cut the hedges outside of their plots themselves!

At the STAA AGM in November 2009 we asked the gardeners who came what they thought of this.....

Generally it was thought this could happen – but provided that the main vehicle routes where the hedges are generally kept a bit higher, were cut with tractor and flail (there's only about 3 miles of vehicle routes on site!), also if the STAA staff helped out through the Garden Support programme where tenants were physically struggling to cut their hedge through age or infirmity. As tenants will have noticed, STAA has a chipper which will chip all the hedge cuttings into path mulch – this will help with the disposal of hedge cuttings.

We realise this is a big change so we'll have a further consultation event where gardeners can come along with any additional comments or suggestions.

This is something that is in the big Management and Maintenance Plan that was written as part of the bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund. As mentioned before, there will be a vote on this in the near future. So do come along to the consultation evening on 16th February.

And finally, as many gardeners already know, the regular cutting of a hedge makes it thicker and more secure! Then there is no need to put bits of metal and rubbish into the hedges!

Fly tipping on the site

We are concerned because there is a gradual return to tipping rubbish onto the site. This costs us money to clean up – this means less for other important things around site.

We must ask tenants to take pride and care in the site and not treat it as a dumping ground to get rid of unwanted rubbish – there are legal waste disposal sites and domestic refuse bins to use! There has been significant amounts of money spent on taking rubbish away from the site - as a tenant do you really want your rent level increasing in order to pay for rubbish removal? We do not want domestic waste, old carpets, electrical appliances, rubble and builders waste dumped on site – either in the public areas or in the gardens.

So please be vigilant and report any fly tipping. We do have the support of the new anti-fly-tipping team at the Council as well as that of the Police on the issue of illegal fly-tipping as this is a very anti-social behaviour! All incidents of tipping are now being monitored and investigated. Significant fines will be imposed through the legal system for anybody caught fly tipping. Any tenants caught fly tipping will be evicted. By reporting tipping, the tenants can be the solution, so please report the perpetrators before they cause an increase in your rent bill! We do have the option of locking *just* the vehicle gates overnight (i.e. not the pedestrian gates). This would reduce the likelihood of any fly tipping. Do you think that locking vehicle gates at night would help reduce fly-tipping? Tenants would still be able to access their plots on foot, but it would prevent vehicles driving onto site and dropping rubbish off.

We understand there are pros and cons on this – but your views need to count.

Cultivation standards on the gardens

This is a very hotly debated topic. You may be aware that on some allotment sites the sight of a weed brings a 'notice to cultivate'. On this site because of the slide into neglect over many years, combined with a lack of resources to manage and check on cultivation, there is no clearly defined standard for cultivation within the gardens.

The existing Tenancy document, which all tenants have signed does clearly say that internal hedges should be kept at 5 feet also that *"All allotments shall be at all times kept in a proper state of cultivation."****

*** NOTE

STAA does not expect all plots to be in pristine condition, totally weed free etc. But it does expect that tenants visit their plots on a regular basis, and that the majority of the plot is being worked, and vegetables, fruit, flowers etc are being cultivated. Reasonable measures for attracting beneficial wildlife are acceptable, but if a plot seems to be neglected, with little or no cultivation and weeds or brambles covering much of the surface, then the tenant will receive a warning letter requesting that there is a marked improvement in the level of cultivation within the next month. After the plot has been re-inspected, if there has been little or no improvement in the level of cultivation, and there seems to be no good reason why the plot isn't being cultivated (e.g. serious illness) a Notice to Quit will be issued, which gives the tenant a further month to remove any property etc before the plot is re-let to a new tenant.

So what is a 'proper state of cultivation'?

Again some debate by the Management Committee plus consultation at our AGM brought out the following points:

- What percentage should be cultivated – no clear consensus, but 50% considered to be a minimum.
- Divide plots into smaller units – not always practical due to access issues
- Need to bear in mind the layout of some plots with steep banks and trees.
- Need to see "continuing improvement"
- Need to define "cultivation" – the ground is dug? Lawned? Fruit bushes?
- There are "wildlife plots" already designated – is there a need for more "wild life" areas on individual tenanted plots? Maybe a set maximum percentage of a plot that can be left for "wild life". This needs to be managed not just left rough.

Different tenants have differing opinions, but we do need a consensus of opinion. If a garden is not properly managed and left to go wild, then it becomes difficult to re-let once the original tenant moves on. This is what has happened in the past and why we are now having to put a huge amount of work into clearing plots to get them back into a state fit for re-letting.

Please do come and have your say – this is your site, if you want it to work, you need to take part!