

KFAG NEWSHEET

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VOLUNTARY MANAGEMENT Where do you stand on **THE BIG DEBATE?**

Could the direct and active management by plotholders, who know their site better than anyone else and care most about it, be the future for Kingston's remaining council run sites? Kingston Federation of Allotment Gardeners is 100% committed to VM

Addison Gardens Allotment Association

Back in 2006 when Maria, Karol and I invited everyone on the site to a tea party on plot no 42 we didn't know what would happen. We wanted everyone to meet and see where that went. At the 2nd tea party, after bemoaning the shortcomings in management of the site, someone passed round a scrap of paper to collect email addresses.

That led to the Addison Gardens Allotment Association (really trips off the tongue doesn't it) when we held our first meeting in a local hall - with the necessary homemade chocolate cake/fruit cake of course.

We made submissions to RBK on the Allotment Strategy and held various further events down on the site - a barbecue went very well.

The next step was spurred by numerous invoicing errors and subsequent bureaucratic errors to add to the lack of care of the site - people started talking about doing the job ourselves. KFAG were working on a standard lease with RBK and after various matters were sorted out to our satisfaction, we became voluntarily managed in early 2009 (at the same time as Dickerage Rd and Ladywood Road sites).

That's the background. Now what has happened since?

If you are in any doubt that voluntary Management (VM) is the most efficient way to manage an allotment site, then why not read the experiences of the 3 Kingston sites that took the plunge last year. Do they regret the move?

Not for a minute !



We now have 110 people working on the site (plot holders and their friends).

Thanks to our Secretary, Jeff we now have an attractive and informative website at www.agaa.org.uk

Plots have been cleared and let. The keen young workers in the photograph, Oliver and Thomas Noble, had their own raised bed last year and at a recent work party, once dad had ferried them to their plots, they helped drag cuttings down from an overgrown plot to the heap.

We have plans - possibly a gate to connect the two fields and we have already started work on the path; a compost loo and await discussion of these at our AGM.

Setting up an association and then becoming V M has been quite a lot of work for a few of us but we hope that many growers can enjoy the fruits of that effort for many years to come.

Joan McConn and Karol Smal,
Addison Gardens Allotments Association



Dickerage Road Allotment Association

There are always questions over whether voluntary management is worth bothering with. At Dickerage Road, the change was made in January 2009 and there are certainly no regrets. We have avoided a rent increase in 2010, collected rents efficiently and steered well clear of the current, somewhat bizarre, controversy over new Quadron tenancy agreements. In addition we have been able to manage the site and take action on seriously neglected plots (this just never happened in the previous decade under either Council or Quadron management). The surplus from 2009 rents was put to good use in improving site security, something which would just not have happened under the old regime.



So, in summary, at the cost of a little bit of effort at the start, we have reaped some good benefits for our allotment holders and the site is in better shape after just one year of voluntary management.

Martin Lammiman, Dickerage Road Allotment Association

LADYWOOD ROAD ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

Becoming 'Voluntary Managed' wasn't a matter taken lightly by the tenants of the Ladywood Allotment Site, the main question being asked, 'What will be the benefits?' To get an answer to this question we arranged a meeting with the Chairman and Secretary of K FAG. This was well attended and a success, the result being we formed an association that same evening with an agreement to begin the process of becoming 'Voluntary Managed'. It's just a year since we were granted our Lease by R.B.K. and registered with Land Registry. Have there been benefits in going 'Voluntary Managed'? We believe, 'yes!' Whilst having to take on some responsibilities, like insurance, maintenance of gates and paths, we are able to run the site, in the main, as we wish.

Our plots are now fully occupied and well maintained, which hadn't been the case for many years. With a good committee the site is well organised, we have regular plot inspections to ensure members conform to the associations constitution, but, with the enthusiasm that abounds, there's seldom need for criticism or to issue a warning



Notice is taken of members views, an example of this was the 85% attendance at our last A.G.M.: a percentage any association would be proud of. The Ladywood site is quite small, only having twenty-three plot holders, but it has a big advantage, it's a very harmonious group of members, everyone is known by their first name and the vast majority live adjacent to the site. We have a quarterly newsletter which contains interesting articles and to which members are encouraged to contribute. This year a social event is being organised for July and the idea of an Open Day is being mooted. Is it any wonder we have a waiting list of people eager to join us?

Roy Smith, Secretary, Ladywood Road Allotment Association.