

Annual Report 2024-25

What we did since last year's AGM

Barn Events and Fundraising

We have continued to hold monthly discussion groups in the Barn from 12-1 on a Sunday. We regularly have 20 or so participants and with the help of Juliet's excellent facilitating, it's a great forum for knowledge sharing and exchange, with one Sunday in March billed as SHA's very own Gardener's Question Time! Discussions are followed by lunch, with homemade soup and bread on the winter menu, and salads and dips for the summer. Delicious cakes are served throughout the year. As well as raising funds for the Association (we regularly take over £100 at each lunch), these lunches are a popular social occasion for tenants, old and new, to meet and chat with each other; in the winter sitting cosily around the wood burning stove, and in the summer enjoying the outside space of Plot 15.

We have also continued to run monthly mid-week café at the Barn sessions. These are generally quieter, but much appreciated by those who come along, particularly in the cold winter months.

We have a WhatsApp group to coordinate help at lunches and café events, which has 20 or so members – thank you to all who have volunteered and made delicious soup and cakes, and helped with washing up! We have a policy of reimbursing volunteers £5 for each donation towards the costs of ingredients.

Other Barn events in the last year included regular Bridge afternoons (with excellent tuition from Garry Doyland – thank you Garry!), a summer BBQ, a pre-Edinburgh Festival 'fruit and veg' poetry reading by Professor Richard Pickings!, and a very popular winter wreath making workshop. Even on a cold winter's day in November we had a fantastic turn out for our annual Winter Warmer event and raised over £1,200, and in February we held the annual Potato Day.

In addition to fundraising for the Association, we continue to support and donate to the Harington Scheme. We also continue to collect produce during the summer months to donate to the Hornsey Food Bank.

The communal plot 15 has, with the help of volunteers continued to be a lovely space where people meet and chat and eat and play cards. Thank you to all the volunteers who put their name down for a particular month in the year and then as part of a team, organise themselves around watering, weeding, pruning etc. Also a big thank you to Annie, who has managed the volunteer team for the past few years and is now handing over to Fiona Godfrey. Our thanks to Fiona too.

We finished the year with a spectacular fundraising event, generously organised by Juliet Mann and Peter Till. Peter is a well-known cartoonist and illustrator and held an exhibition of some of his work at Hornsey library, donating a significant contribution to SHA.

We are always keen to hear suggestions for new activities/events at the Barn, and for offers of help (for example making soup or a cake, volunteering to join the Plot 15 maintenance rota, or helping to organise and run an event). If you can help please get in touch with the committee at info@shepherdhillallotments.co.uk

Maintenance

As ever, the last year has been a busy one for maintenance of the site.

The maintenance team cleared away all the ivy from the Queens Wood fence line. They had some welcomed help with this from a Re-Power Communities volunteer team (we had access to this help via the grant we received last year for the solar panels for the Barn). We then repaired this section of fence and strung up barbed wire along the perimeter. We also repaired the Queens Wood pedestrian gate and improved the fixing on the fence.

Alongside introducing a site-wide bonfire ban during the year, we have built a Green Waste Compost area on the disused plots 83/84 (formally the Bee plots). This is proving very popular with tenants, and now needs further thought and work to ensure that it is being used in the most effective and efficient way.

The maintenance team have regularly cleared drains to allow rain water run-off. We also fixed several taps and valves. And installed new locks on the old container behind the trading shed and on the new trading shed. There were also some repairs needed to the guttering on the front of the Barn.

Another key focus has been maintenance of the site's paths and tracks. We repaired the main track from Montenotte Rd gate to the car park using several tons of hardcore. We also repaired the track from the small Queens Wood car park up the hill to meet the main path using 30 small bags of hardcore, and repaired a section of the main path adjacent to plots 112/110a by clearing away the old plastic path which was very slippery in the wet and resurfaced it with hardcore. Our thanks to all those who join the regular maintenance working parties and help with these jobs.

We have cut down a number of trees around the site that were threatening to fall and were blocking light. We have also cut down two trees alongside the Barn as they were dying and in a poor state.

Five old wheelbarrows have been renovated with new wheels and we also invested in eight smart new wheelbarrows. The wheelbarrows have a new home in a parking bay by the woodchip bays. We also built some compost bays for Plot 15.

The big maintenance job of the year was the demolition of the old trading shed and the building of our smart new one. In July last year a large branch of a tree on the path the other side of our perimeter fence fell and damaged the trading shed roof. The committee took a decision to replace the old shed with a new metal one, part of which was paid for by an insurance claim

(see finance report). Our thanks to Ian who masterminded the whole project and did such a tremendous job.

Lettings and waiting List

There have been 15 lettings since the last AGM plus 5 probationers. We welcome all those new plot holders to the Association.

We continued our policy of opening the waiting list at the beginning of the year to allow roughly the same number of applicants onto the list as lettings made in the previous year. This meant that in January 2025 20 people were added to the list.

The waiting list stands at 89 currently. The careful management of the entry to the waiting list is now paying off with the waiting time standing at 2-3 years rather than 6-7 years that it was previously. The advantage of this is that we have more people accepting offers.

Trading Shed

Report by Liz Denver (plot 20) and Annie Griffiths (plot 53a), Trading Shed Co-Managers

It has been an eventful year again for the Trading Shed, with the destruction of the roof by a falling tree, leading to the closure of the shed for some weeks. However, we now have a shining new shed with brilliant double doors, enabling delivery drivers to wheel the palettes right inside the shed!

Liz has used Shaws and Thompsons for top ups of manure and compost but neither of these companies stock the other items, and so we continue to use KG Loach, based in Cheshire, for most of our goods. Recently we have been lucky that a new driver has delivered for KG Loach who has been willing to drive to the new shed and wheeled the palettes into the shed. We hope he'll continue to deliver for us. Otherwise we have to ferry the deliveries from the main gate to the Trading Shed. Liz has investigated alternative suppliers but there are none.

We continue to ask allotment holders to look through the Kings Seed catalogue or look on the website at <https://www.kingsseeds.com/home>. We also review which seeds are not sold, and hopefully this year's choice will be sold as we lose money when seeds are out of date and we have to reduce the price.

The Spring Potato and Onion order went ahead again this summer and we had a very successful Potato Day.

But our success depends to a very large extent on the volunteering of our Trading Shed staff to whom we owe our thanks, also to those who pitch up on delivery day and help with that.

The Trading shed is a much lovelier place to work and to shop. We seem to be increasing our stock turnover at a rapid rate. We are now, thanks to our volunteers, opening for one and a half

hours, from 11am- 12.30pm every Sunday from Potato Day in early February until the start of November when we will revert to the old times of 11-12 fortnightly.