



# Allotments Stockport

over 1,400 plotholders with a passion for Grow Your Own

*Working to keep allotments safe in plotholders' hands*

## Committee Work 2014-2015

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**Allotments Stockport**

Allotments Stockport was formed in 1945 as Stockport & District Allotment Society to campaign for allotment rights on behalf of its members

In early 2014, the Committee consulted with members to change the name to **Allotments Stockport**, created a new website to advertise events, model documents etc. and continues to keep the information up-to-date. Every allotment site has their own unique page. We won the NWCAA Media Award for this work.

We created a Facebook group to share your news, views, photos and pass on tips, swap/recycle plants & equipment, or just socialise online. It now has 121 members from throughout Stockport and beyond. We also designed and distributed our first leaflet to members, created an e-contact list of almost 200 members, and regularly send out information through our attractive Bulletins, designed to share information on site noticeboards.

We were commissioned to design the leaflet "Accessible Gardens for Allotments" for *Disability Stockport* which was launched at one of our meetings, we have lobbied for sites to be made "statutory", and we attend Stockport Greenspace Forum & NAS meetings.

During 2014, we visited every site and met with many plotholders, to consult about whether you want **Allotments Stockport** to take over responsibility from the Council for policies and finances of all Stockport allotments, meaning a substantial degree of self-rule and independence from the Council, and security for all sites for at least 25 years.

The majority of sites are in favour of a co-operative approach where strength in numbers can benefit all sites. So, if the Council proposes to change the lease to increase rents and possibly invite tenders to manage sites, **Allotments Stockport** intends to be ready to negotiate with the Council to directly manage sites if conditions can be agreed. We are in the process of drafting a constitution and researching legal entities suitable.

Our main aims will be to:

- \* Secure a long term lease for sites with security of tenure.
- \* Be responsible for setting reasonable rent charges and collect rents.
- \* Ensure all sites have a metered water supply and these costs and any outstanding debts are met by the Council before a new lease is signed.
- \* Fight against disposal of sites by the Council.
- \* Negotiate with the Council about responsibility and maintenance of boundaries and trees.
- \* Acknowledge that each site is different and enable site committees to manage their own affairs.
- \* Offer sites support and guidance with paperwork if needed.
- \* Share information and offer other educational opportunities.
- \* Offer to arbitrate in disputes.
- \* Promote the principles of the allotment movement.

We divided sites into 5 areas, and decided to appoint Allotment Advisers for each area to increase communication and offer help/share good practice. While we search for Advisers, AS Committee members have taken on this role.



**Allotments Stockport** display of different coloured fruit & vegetables easily grown by amateur gardeners, won Commended Show Feature Award at RHS Tatton Flower Show in July 2014.

The Adviser's role is to visit plottolders on sites in their area as often as possible, find out site news, problems, advice/information needed, and ensure that sites know about AS news and meetings, especially if they don't often attend. Advisers also keep an eye out for any developments that might affect allotments, such as planning applications or petitions, to help AS prepare for changes to come.

During 2015, we gathered information from all sites via a health checklist; and as a result, Advisers have been visiting sites to help with re-writing constitutions & rules, and share ideas from other sites. Many sites have gained useful information from these visits.



We recently made our own photographic display which we are using to hold stalls and encourage the public to add their names to waiting lists. We attended the *Health and Well-being* event at Stockport Town Hall on 5th October 2015 and made ourselves very visible.

We constantly monitor Stockport Council committees, and recently found out that allotment land may be needed for housing. We informed members about the "Greater Manchester Spatial Framework" report regarding economic growth anticipated for Greater Manchester - 16,000 new homes could be needed each year; some of these houses are likely to be built in Stockport. In order to identify suitable land, Stockport Council is appointing a consultant to audit open spaces including allotments, and produce an *Open Space Study* by April 2016.

The *Study* may include site visits, so it is vital that allotments are well managed - all plots are let, cultivation standards are good, and the site is well used by as many individuals & community groups as possible. We also need to get across to the general public the benefits of allotments to the neighbourhood and the environment. The last study in 2005 pointed out shortcomings in these areas, plus a lack of local information and advertising about allotments. Hopefully this has improved with **Allotments Stockport** website & Facebook and with more sites holding open days, but any advertising you can do and further community involvement would help.

We recommend that sites have long waiting lists, to reflect the high level of demand. No site should close their waiting list even if demand is high. We do not want any chance of the consultant considering there is a surplus of allotments!

In 2015, we arranged guest speakers at our meetings, which are every 2 months - '*Growing dahlias and crysanthus*', '*Turn bumper crops into booze*', '*Keeping bees on allotments*', and '*It's official! Allotment soil is richer and healthier than farm soil*' - all well received. At the next meeting on 10th January 2016, Marva Lashley from Debdale Eco Centre will talk about Companion Planting, Crop Rotation & Composting, with clever tips for everyone as well as a great introduction for new plottolders.

 A flyer for 'Allotments Stockport' featuring a header with a photo of a garden. The text includes:
 

- Next Meeting: 7pm Tuesday 14th July 2015 at Walthew House, 112 Shaw Heath, Stockport SK2 6QS.
- Topic: 'Turn bumper crops into booze' by Peter Fox from Stockport Brewing Supplies.
- Plus: Report back on site checklists, Around the sites - bring your notes, questions, events & announcements, Refreshments & chat at the end.
- Future Speakers: Tuesday 8th September at 7pm (Keeping bees on allotments - Graham Hoyle from Cheshire Beekeeper) and Tuesday 10th November at 7pm (Long Life Allotments... a people who work there! The Need and Value of Urban Allotment Gardens - Dr Wilma Heaton).
- Footer: Allotments Stockport is affiliated to the National Allotment Society, the National Vegetable Society & North West Counties Association.

Patricia, Ian, Bill, Roger, Mark, Amanda, Steve & Roy - November 2015