

Spring 2024



NEWSLETTER

THE LATEST NEWS FROM YORK ALLOTMENTS



MEMBERS' DAY AND AGM

With this newsletter you'll find details of our Annual General Meeting and Members' Day to be held on Saturday 23rd March between 10 o'clock and midday. Once again we'll be at Clements Hall situated on Nunthorpe Road opposite Scarcroft School and a short walk from Blossom Street. Everyone who is a tenant of a YACIO allotment is a member and is welcome to attend.

The AGM part of the meeting usually takes no more than 30-45 minutes. This will be followed by a break for refreshments after which there'll be an open forum where any issues concerning the allotments can be raised and discussed by members. This year, with YACIO's lease of the allotments due for renewal, we'd particular like to hear how you think YACIO and the allotment sites it manages could be improved. It's possible the new lease will be for a far longer term, so this is an opportunity to look beyond small changes and think bigger on how allotments in York could be made better for everyone, both existing tenants and the hundreds of would be ploholders currently on the waiting list.

Best plot competition

Best plot • Best newcomer • Prizes!
Self nominated
Details coming soon!



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MAINTENANCE & DEVELOPMENT

As we approach the end of our seven-year lease, it is an excellent time to reflect on what we have managed to achieve in terms of site maintenance and development and also look at areas where we might have done better. The trustees are hopeful that we will be awarded with a new lease from November of this year and this reflective period offers us the exciting prospect of putting all of our learning and experience into the development of longer term strategies for;

- general access management - grass and hedge maintenance
- tree preservation and management - a five-year plan
- a review of neglected areas - returning them to lettable plots or putting them to good use in other ways
- disposal of green waste - avoidance of removal from sites encouraging recycling initiatives such as private or communal composting and dead hedging
- management of plot boundary hedges – sustaining a manageable height or managing without a hedge boundary
- retaining a good working relationship with our maintenance contractors

General Access Management

We have developed a clear understanding of what is required here with wide support for regular grass cutting and maintenance of boundary hedges to allow free access to get to our plots. It has also been encouraging to see many of you being supportive of the lowering of hedges for purposes of general management and site security. Our progress here will, of course, form a major part of the ongoing strategy.

Tree preservation and Management

Management of our trees (we have hundreds across the city) has presented a steep learning curve for us.

Of course, the main thrust of any good strategy is to see trees preserved both in the interests of their positive influence on the environment and to continue enjoying their aesthetic beauty. However, as trustees, we have to balance this against the need for light so that we can grow our crops and the need to protect tenants and their plots when trees present health and safety issues. In devising a five-year plan, it will be necessary to map all of the trees across our sites and provide an individual plan for each. A huge task. If there is anyone out there who would like to assist us with this whether that be on a single site basis or city wide, we would love to hear from you.

Review of neglected areas

Recent site inspections have revealed a huge number of neglected plots and areas that have become so overgrown, they are no longer suitable for letting. Bringing these areas back into useful spaces is another huge task and we would be very happy to hear from anyone who has ideas about how we can redevelop some of these areas. We would be even more happy to hear from anyone who is prepared to help us actually turn ideas into reality.

Disposal of Green Waste

The removal of green waste just seems wrong to me and I know the trustees share my view that we should be doing more to recycle our own green waste both as a matter of principle and to save a good deal of our rental fees being used to transport it to the tip. This is another area where we will be looking for initiatives in recycling. Back in the day, we would all have composted our own green waste but with the introduction of hedges we have increased the amount of green waste that is not so easy to compost down. So, we are looking for 'champions' of composting and recycling – hopefully at least one or two for each site. Education and idea sharing can be provided and facilitated by YACIO for anyone who is interested in helping us out.



Management of Plot Boundary Hedges

Again, back in the day, there were no hedge boundaries between plots but as time has passed, we seem to have become more territorial resulting in a huge web of hedges across many sites. Great for wildlife, I hear many say, but only if they are well managed I often reply. My own thoughts are that we have a plethora of places for wildlife to flourish, not least our site boundary hedges and the hundreds of trees mentioned above. I think we could remind ourselves that plots are principally for producing crops, but also for enjoying the benefits of being in the open and, hopefully, sharing our gardening experiences with our neighbours. There are a few sites in York where there are no hedge boundaries and information gathered from site inspections suggest they are some of the best kept sites. Food for thought, maybe.

Retaining a good working relationship with our contractors

Another steep learning curve for me. You will be aware that we have struggled to secure a reliable contractor over the past few years. I think (fingers crossed) that we are finally developing a great working relationship with Aspects Horticultural Services. They are a little more expensive but, I guess, you get what you pay for. They have made a brilliant job of clearing the backlog of uncut boundary hedges during their first year and I am looking forward to working with them during 2024. So far we have had two single year contracts with them but, a new lease would offer us the opportunity to enter into a longer term contract with them with the added benefits of continuity and development.

Dave and his assistant, Phil, have not only become a hugely important asset to YACIO but are also widely admired by tenants for their rapid response time, friendly demeanour and attention to detail. They carry out, often unpleasant and arduous work, with a smile and willingness that would be difficult to replace. Long may this relationship continue.



I am also pleased to announce a new working relationship with Arborestech, tree surgeon services. James has been accommodating some of our urgent tree work both with the sense of urgency we require but also with an efficiency that is very encouraging. We look forward to developing this relationship over the coming year and beyond.

My experience, being responsible for site maintenance over the past six years, has seen many struggles as we have developed our understanding of the many issues facing us, but it has also been incredibly rewarding. Thanks to everyone for your support.

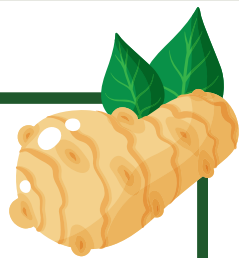
Just a final note. As rewarding as this job is, it would still be great to share the responsibility with someone else. As many of you may know, YACIO is looking for another trustee. If anyone out there is thinking they might be interested in joining the team, joining me in looking after the allotment sites may be a good place to start. If this appeals, do contact me: colin.smith@yorkallotments.org

BECOME A TRUSTEE

Can you give some of your time and energy to help maintain and improve York's allotments? If you are interested in joining our committed and friendly board, please get in touch. contact@yorkallotments.org

"One of the greatest pleasures of belonging to this trustee group is that, despite sometimes having different points of view, everyone's opinion is valued and trustees are very supportive of one another."

JERUSALEM ARTICHOKES



It's surprising Jerusalem artichokes aren't more widely grown as they're one of the easiest crops. If you want to give them a try March is the time to get started.

You may be able to get some tubers from a neighbour (they're started a bit like potatoes rather than from seed) but if not garden centres sell them. Plant tubers without delay, they start to shrivel if out of the ground for more than a week. Bury about 5-8cm deep and space 40-50cm apart. If there's a shoot visible on the tuber make sure it's pointing upwards.

Green shoots should appear in about three weeks. These are vulnerable to slugs at first in wet conditions but grow quickly. As the plants get taller it's best to either earth them at the base or erect some form of post and rope structure to keep them stable. By September plants can easily be two metres tall and are vulnerable to toppling in strong wind.

Tubers should be big enough to eat from October. There's no need to lift them all at once, they're fully hardy and will survive any frost. Do keep an eye out for rodent nibbling though, rats are especially partial to this crop.

At the end of winter save a few tubers for a new crop. It's always best to plant these in a different place. Although some growers leave tubers undug in the same spot to regrow year after year this leads to congested plants. These tend to have small and disappointingly knobbly tubers that are fiddly to prepare in the kitchen.

One word of caution. Jerusalem artichokes contain a high amount of inulin, a starch substance that some people find indigestible. Not without reason is the letter 'f' sometimes put in front of the 'a' in artichoke.

**Do you have
an event or piece
of allotment news
you'd like to share? Let
us know and we'll
publicise it here.**



ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATIONS

An allotment Association is a group of plot holders who work together to benefit their site, and the plot holders allotmenting on the site. Associations on York sites undertake a whole range of activities: arranging delivery and distribution of manure, bulk buying of seed, arranging socials, running collective green waste composting, undertaking site improvements, skill sharing, creating and maintaining community orchards, gardens and shops. Three Associations run quite extensive shops (on Hempland, Scarcroft and Low Moor). The possibilities are endless!

If your site has an Association we encourage you to join them, the stronger the membership the more effective they are, and the more representative of all plot holders they are. You get the chance to influence developments on your site for the benefit of all.

If your site has not got an Association then consider starting one up, the social benefits, the site benefits and the practical benefits of working together are many and various.

YACIO supports and encourages the development of new Associations, so if you do not have an Association on your site, get in touch with Adam Myers one of the trustees and he will support you in taking those first important steps. adam.myers@yorkallotments.org

CONTACTING US

 contact@yorkallotments.org

 0808 281 2642 (answering service)

York Allotments, Popeshead Court Offices,
Peter Lane, York, YO1 8SU

 @yorkallotments

 York_Allotments

Charity registration: 1174306