

Chair's AGM report 2011

A year ago the message from the AGM was that Ambleside Allotment Association now formally existed. We had a constitution, we had a lot of people offering us a lot of goodwill, we had enthusiasm and we had a website. We had over 50 people on a waiting list - though we didn't have any land. And as we are about getting land for people to grow on, that was what we had to look for. We also had a new committee of enthusiastic people to do the work of looking for land. I was optimistic, but prepared for things to go slowly.

During the last year the committee- and the members of the committee individually- have done a lot of work and things have moved perhaps more quickly than I was expecting. At times the search for land has been rather dispiriting: following up leads; trying to deal with (or even find) officials for whom our search for land is just an irrelevant distraction whilst public services are going through a time of unimagined difficulty; looking at well meaning offers of land that are just completely impractical or sometimes possibly downright mischievous. All of this whilst doing our day jobs. But the members of the committee have remained enthusiastic and there has been some very good news amongst the dead ends.

In Grasmere, a hotel owner was amenable to our approach and there are now 8 plots where people are growing food in the centre of the village. Thank you to Ian Garside and thank you to the bodies who, through the Grasmere crucible project, came up with the offer of funding for fencing and other necessities. And thank you Melissa for all your hard work.

In Ambleside we have a garden share up and running thanks to the very kind offer of a plot of land- fairly central- that had been cultivated for many years by the owner who now wanted to take a break. Thank you Mr Quarmby. Things were a bit slow getting off the ground, but by the second part of the summer there were plants in the ground, in Ambleside!

Most exciting of all, in the last couple of months we have finally signed the agreement we were talking about last year with the Kelsick Trust for a field up on Stock Ghyll Lane which should provide us with the land for 15 or more plots. It's 150 metres above sea level, its rough pasture, it's damp and it will require a huge amount of fundraising for fencing and so on and then work to bring it into cultivation, but it is land that we should be able to use to provide a lot of people with somewhere to grow on.

We've also got some other irons in the fire, or we think we have: we're talking to the university and other landowners. But we have managed to get- in part- what we wanted a year ago.

It's important now I think to stress that AAA is going to change, to have to do a variety of jobs. Not only do we have to look for land, but we have to find the funds to bring land into a state where people can cultivate it, we have to manage the administration of these plots and we have to do the gardening itself.

Instead of getting people to express an interest and maybe join, we now both need to do that and get people to renew their membership and pay plot fees. Instead of talking about how to obtain potential plot sites we need to talk about managing actual plots sites as well as getting those potential plot sites: it was great hearing about beans and spuds being harvested from Grasmere for the first time. We need to offer growing advice. We need to make funding applications. We need to

raise more money from more events than we did from the climate change talk given by Ashley Cooper this summer. We need to organise and undertake practical work in the outdoors. Now that's exciting, though someone will still have to do the boring administration: keeping minutes and financial records and chairing meetings and writing newsletters. And it's also a little frightening as we move into the unknown future. To do all these different things we are going to need to call upon the skills of more people than have been involved so far. Different people on the committee this year- all of whom I must thank for their contribution- have different skills, and have already helped in different ways in the way that good teams manage to work together to do different jobs, even if they don't always agree. But that is going to have to happen even more. If you're reading this and think you can help- please let us know! Some of the officers and Committee members will be retiring this year- though I think they will all remain involved in some way with the work of the association and will I hope all be gardening within the next year. We could do with more people to replace them- please join us.

So to conclude: we have come a long way in the last year- we now have three sites and have had over 40 paid up members (nine of whom are actually gardening on sites that we run). A year ago I was optimistic that we would get land, if not immediately, in the longer term. We've got part of the way there. Now we have to do some different work- as well as carry on with what we have been doing. But my optimism has moved on: I have started researching blueberry varieties to grow on that hillside.

Pete Martin

Chair

Ambleside Allotment Association