

Chair's Report for the AGM of COMAS

Tuesday, 23rd November 2021

Progress made

This new COMAS year began with the great news that, after nearly two years, the Electricity Project was finally achieved with the use of mains electricity in the Portacabin. This allows for heat, light and hot refreshments. It is doubly comforting as the electricity supplier, *Octopus Energy*, is one of the larger companies which hasn't ceased trading! Also, the Portacabin has recently passed a review of its electrical fixture and fittings worthiness.

The pond has been an innovation this year. We've added some water plants to make it a habitat for insects, pollinators and other wildlife. We'll have to pay more public liability insurance for its addition next year, but it's definitely worth it!

The Portacabin saw a new door and window installed, as part of the plan to make it a haven for rain-soaked Plot Holders. With the news that funding has come through for a ramp, it will be accessible to all.

We started off the year with raised beds at the orchard for fruit bushes, followed by more beds at Cray Walk. It's been great to see neighbours picking fruit during the season as they passed by the orchard, and wonderful to see neighbours adding plants and caring for the extra raised beds at Cray Walk.

Thanks to the many Plot Holders who have put effort into growing at the allotments. It has made the site a spectacle for the neighbourhood and has increased social interaction and reduced the isolation that Covid has created – as well as growing their own tasty food.

COMAS has hosted some community events this year despite the upsets of Covid. It welcomed the Sunflower Project from *Forever Manchester*, and the activities day by the University research programme, *Clean Air for Brunswick*, with the presence of *Buzz*, the local health initiative of the NHS.

Also, this last month the Window Boxes project was completed. The event last weekend saw recycled plywood from the Extra Care Centre hoardings being recycled into window boxes for neighbours. Soil and bulbs were offered to bring colour to homes next Spring and encourage people to go green. Remaining boxes will be on offer this next Saturday.

Every Saturday (between 14:00hrs and 15:00hrs) and Thursday (during the Summer) have seen the allotments staffed by Committee members. Many thanks go to those who have made this commitment to offer help and support to Plot Holders and passers-by. These sessions have also allowed COMAS Committee member to volunteer their services to S4B's Tool Hire

Scheme, lending out grass cutters and other gardening equipment to the neighbourhood.

Future Plans

With the accessibility ramp at the allotments soon to be installed, the Portacabin can be tidied up and turned into a social meeting place. With this in place, a wooden pergola can be erected against the Portacabin to have plants trained up the verticals and across the horizontal beams. The Portacabin can then be topped off with a possible pollinators' wildflower roof.

COMAS hopes to develop more regular and practical volunteering in the next year. Committee members find their schedules filled with allotment work and would appreciate the help that regular or occasional practical help could allow them to achieve the aims and objectives of the COMAS Constitution. It would also help to develop the allotment forecourt as an outside community hub. With plenty of new-build in the area, there are untapped human resources out there. Already, some Plot Holders have been supportive and with the neighbouring Brunswick Village now fully occupied, support from its residents has been very much appreciated over the last few months.

Water conservation is also an issue during this Climate Change emergency. COMAS is looking to develop more rainwater retention for use at the allotments instead of mains water.

Committee members are seeking to increase the use of raised beds in the neighbourhood and encourage people to grow and cook their own food.

Credits Due

COMAS thanks the support of local groups and agencies over the last year. S4B have been continually supportive in our projects and given help and advice. The Council's Neighbourhood Team, Forever Manchester, Sow the City and Buzz have also contributed, and the Committee are very grateful. Brunswick Church has worked alongside us, and it has been fun to work together on shared aims and objectives. Ward Councillors have followed our progress, attended our meetings and shown their support.

Committee members and Plot Holders have built up the allotments and other green spaces in the neighbourhood, created a sense of community, and shared their experiences.

The Committee is also grateful to those on our mailing list who have shown interest in our society and attended events.

Finally, COMAS has welcomed the interest and participation of neighbours and passers-by who have popped in and made helpful comments and suggestions, asked for advice, and generally made the area a more pleasant place to live in.