

COMAS Chair's Report

Tuesday, 16th June 2020

Welcome to these unusual times for COMAS. We're a month later than usual with our Open Meeting, but now we've worked out how to use the Zoom app, we can turn the meeting into a video conference.

The past few months have seen the Committee energies spent in two ways: encouraging plot holders and members to grow food and fundraising.

Last year the emphasis was on plot holders doing 'something' with their plots: this year it's all about growing food. We constantly hear stories of food poverty and food banks, job losses and reduced wages. So, the idea has been: if you are worried about being near other people or self-isolating because of coronavirus, tell the Committee and we'll see what food we can grow on your plots. It's a crying shame not to grow as much as possible on the plots – especially when plot holders are often asked if there's a spare plot on site. At Elizabeth Yarwood Court COMAS has been looking after raised beds and encouraging others to use them. All the beds are now being used in this final year before the site is redeveloped.

Treasurer Gordon will give a review of the accounts, but the main project these last few months has been getting funding to provide electricity to the Portacabin at Hartfield Close and refurbishing it. There's so much potential for Hartfield Close with an electricity supply, including events where the whole community can participate. Funding bodies have responded to the coronavirus epidemic by fast-tracking any project which supplies people with food. This has meant that COMAS has had to wait longer than anticipated for grants to be awarded, but we are pleased to report that the funding sources have officially approved our applications.

COMAS has now implemented the agreement reached with Manchester City Council's grounds maintenance and is looking after one section of the Cray Walk green space (across the road from Gartside Gardens), separated from the plain grassed section by the diagonal tarmac path. We've got three raised beds, a composter, a wildflower area and have planted several bushes in this section. We've also gone halves with Friends of Gartside Gardens and Green Spaces to acquire a cordless strimmer to maintain the section.

There's not much to report with meeting and events as you can well imagine during this period of social distancing. One thing that has happened is the online webinars organised by *Growing Manchester* to replace their workshops which used to take place around the allotments of Manchester. Even our Committee meetings have happened with the Zoom video conferencing app. However, and at short notice, COMAS was informed of filming at Hartfield Close by *Onward*, to show what work was being done at the allotment and in the community. It was good to see Sharon of S4B 'in the flesh' after a few months of working from home, explaining what the filming was for.

Martin Toal