

November 2017

MAGA

MARTIN WAY ALLOTMENT SPECIAL EDITION

Self-management of Martin Way Allotments What does it mean to you?



At our last Committee Meeting there was an in-depth discussion about self-management and how it was or wasn't working. This was discussed because we are very close to signing the agreement with the London Borough of Merton (LBM) which would make it legally binding for 25 years.

Martin Way Allotments are, if you didn't already know, in effect already self-managed. This means that the Committee act as letting and management agents on behalf of LBM and we control our own budget. The agreement with LBM is still to be signed, but since it was put to the membership around 6 years ago and voted in, we have in effect been doing the job. The main selling point in the original proposal was that we are able to set our own level of rents, as at the time LBM were planning to charge considerably more for each allotment plot.

Self-management

Self-management meant that we could keep the rents lower than the LBM managed sites, but that we would have to do the day to day managing, i.e. **organise waste collections, get manure and woodchips, carry out plot inspections, lettings, manage the finances, ensure that plot holders keep to their tenancy agreements, organising the regular social events, etc, etc.** This is all done via a Committee which is elected at the AGM in April each year, who meet once a month but work continuously throughout the year dealing with disputes, disagreements and 'housekeeping'. All in all, it is a huge amount of work, but by volunteers doing the management we all benefit by having significantly lower rents and in my opinion have a very well-run allotment site.



Were you aware that LBM now charges £19.30 per rod for their managed allotments? We only pay £10.80 per rod and the payback for this is that all plot holders are supposed to get involved with keeping the allotment going. An average plot is 5 rods (125m²).

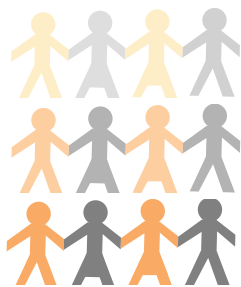
MAGA Martin Way Allotment News is produced 3-4 times per year by Committee members and volunteers.

The MAGA committee accept no liability for any errors or views expressed in this publication.

To provide a submission for the next issue, please email ivorstocker@sky.com

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Working parties, shop helpers, people with specialist skills, plumbers, builders or just muscle, etc are what our allotments rely on.



If we are to keep the rents low we need more people to step up and help. Vacant plots need tidying up and neglected paths need clearing - people have busy lives, but a couple of hours a few times a year would make a

huge difference to the costs, the state of the allotments and the workload on the Committee. At the moment we are using the accumulated bank savings to get some jobs done by employing people to do this work, but this is unsustainable.



We still pay a levy of 7.5% of the rental income to LBM for leasing the land, etc. Our water, other bills and insurance keep rising. We are privileged in having a small committed group of people who run the allotments, and a handful of volunteers we can rely on, but new and old members need to be aware that the bargain rents we pay now will need to rise if we would like the maintenance and improvements that we enjoy now to continue.

Please consider what you can do to contribute to the running of Martin Way Allotments. Our call out for volunteers to assist in working parties has been met with a stunning lack of support and it is unfair to expect the Committee members to do all the working party jobs as well as manage the allotments. Without help from many more plot holders we may need to consider going back

to being managed by LBM, and if anyone has looked around at LBM managed sites they will be aware that they have many more overgrown plots and waiting lists of 10 years or more.

The Committee is aware of criticisms that are made by some plot holders and, it must be said, that whilst it is not always easy to please everyone, it would be preferable to receive constructive comments rather than negative ones, to come with solutions rather than creating problems. At the end of the day, the Committee is working for everyone for the betterment of the allotment.

Here is how we help you (just a few of many things):



- Chasing IdVerde, on a weekly basis, to clear away the rubbish which they are currently failing to do. They are contracted to do this 6 times a year on both east and west sides
- Endlessly phoning round stables/suppliers in the area for manure deliveries. Thanks to the ingenuity of a Committee member, we're lucky we get any at all. Someone has to go out of their way to be on site to receive the delivery and pay for it
- Calls are regularly made to get woodchips delivered
- Calls are regularly made for more deliveries of carpet but these are dependent upon availability
- Carrying out plot inspections
- Carrying out plot viewings
- Receiving and responding to emails at all times of the day (including late at night)
- Handling of overgrown plots – these are monitored in the plot inspections and we try and find out why they are overgrown. Consideration is always given if we are aware of problems, maybe because the plot holder is elderly, sick etc.

These are just some of the things being done on your behalves.

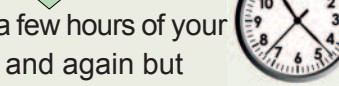
We have laid out the charges as LBM levy them, including water rates, so that it is clear the bargain we are getting. If you have more than a 5 rod plot these savings are even greater!

	LBM Council	Martin Way	Savings!
5 rods - full rate	£103.00	£64.00	£39.00
5 rods - concession	£74.00	£47.75	£26.25

If any plot holder feels they have more to contribute or feel they can offer better/improved management than is currently being done, then there is nothing preventing them from putting their name forward to joining the Committee at the next AGM. The more voices that can be heard, the better. This is welcomed.

We need your help, without it the management of the allotment will revert back to the LBM and we all know what that would entail.

How can you help?

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- By volunteering a few hours of your time every now and again but especially at annual events
 - By offering your skills
 - By contributing with positive ideas to the benefit of the allotment
 - By taking on some of the tasks otherwise destined for the Committee

Again, these are just a few suggestions.

At the working party called on the 30th September, only one person came to help, so while 2 Committee members spent the morning in the shop putting the rent invoices into envelopes for posting, 3 other Committee members together with only 1 other plot holder spent the morning clearing a path so that a vacant plot can be made ready to let.

However, there is a wonderful group of volunteers who open the shop at weekends but unfortunately sometimes forget to turn up for their turn, meaning that a Committee member may step in. One plot holder also very kindly volunteers to keep the toilets clean and has done so for a very long time.



Self-management

As far as we can ascertain self-management started being talked about around 2010 with a referendum in 2011 when the plot holders voted in favour of self-management. Since then, although we are acting as a self-managed site there has only been a draft self-management agreement in place with LBM. **This is now almost ready to be signed and it is timely that we reconsider what self-management means.**

The advantages of being self-managed are that the rent monies collected, less the 7.5% levy paid to LBM, can then be used exclusively for the benefit of the allotments and not go into the black hole of LBM finances. This means that there are limited funds each year for improvements or general maintenance to be carried out on the allotments. It should be noted that waste collections (6 a year for east and 6 a year for west side), the roads, fences and gates are still the responsibility of LBM.

Annual General Meetings

Each year there is an AGM where the Committee report to the members on what has been achieved in the previous year and what major works are proposed for the coming year. By attending the AGM we all have a say in how our allotments can be developed for the future. If we keep our allotments thriving we will have a much stronger case for keeping the allotments going if LBM ever come back and want to develop the land for housing.

If Martin Way allotments reverted back to LBM control we would be under a Council Department who now have few directly employed staff, as running the allotments has been sub-contracted to the private company IdVerde. If IdVerde 'run' our allotment considering how difficult it is to get a waste collection, imagine what would happen to the allotments in general? A long standing plot holder reported that when LBM ran the allotments no one came round to inspect the plots and many were overgrown and there was a huge

waiting list. If the site was left overgrown and underused then LBM could say that there is not a need for allotments and might decide to build on it, as housing is desperately needed in the area. We could lose the allotments altogether.

Self-management means just that

It was agreed that 'self-management' means just that - everyone has a responsibility to help with the running and upkeep of the allotments as a whole and not just their plot. All the work around the allotments cannot be left to a few Committee volunteers. For a standard 5 rod plot you are saving around £40 a year at full rate or over £26 a year on a concession rate and your allotments are well managed.

Your Committee work tirelessly in the background but would really appreciate more help at events and to assist in working parties when these are organised. If we had this the allotments would look even better.



We really enjoy being on the allotments, being part of the community and would feel very sad if we had to hand back control to LBM due to lack of support.

The information that went round in 2011 spoke of the thriving community pulling together and if this was to happen Martin Way Allotments would really be a model for other societies.

Volunteering your services

Please consider joining the Committee at the next AGM or volunteering your services if jobs need doing around the allotments. If we had more people to reliably call on, the load could be shared and the job would not be such a burden.

We look forward to your continued and renewed support.

