

Welcome – What a Topsy-Turvy start to 2019's weather. Following last year's 'Beast from the East' we had almost mid-summer weather early this year. Still as I've said many times – We Gardeners can cope with whatever is thrown at us!

Wind Damage – During March we have suffered with very high winds and some damage has been caused. Shed rooves have been blown away, as have poly-tunnels. Please make sure your plot is as wind proof as possible, and ensure that following windy conditions you visit your plot to inspect for any damage. We also had a large tree branch blown down from an adjoining garden which fell onto one of our plots. This did cause minor damage, and the particular resident has been informed of the situation, and has assured us action has been taken to avoid any further problems.

Ruxley in Bloom – This competition has been running for two years since it replaced the old 'Bexley in Bloom'. I'm pleased to say that we have won 'Best Allotment Site' both years. This is very pleasing as the competition now includes sites from Bromley and Dartford and isn't restricted to Bexley Borough as before. Winning this competition doesn't just happen, a few people work very hard to ensure the site looks at its best for the judging. The judging will take place in July, but now is the time to start thinking about what every plotholder can do. Why not think about some floral displays at the end of your plot? And what about thinking now how you can tidy-up the areas around your plot as part of a Spring Clean so they will be easy to maintain coming up to the judging. If anyone needs advice on what to do please see me or any committee member.

Water – The site water supply is now turned on. We are informed that there is already a water shortage in our area, so firstly, use water wisely and secondly make sure that you capture any that falls from the sky! Our water bill last year was over £2,000 – I know it was an exceptional year, but if we believe the climatologists this is what we can expect in future. See me or a committee member if you need advice on saving water by fixing gutters to your sheds with water butts. We do have gutter and fittings available.

Security – It's important that we ensure the security of the site, so please keep the gates closed and locked at all times except Sunday mornings, when the stores are open so non-plotholders can come and take advantage of the bargains on offer.

Machinery – As I'm sure you are all aware we have machinery available for plotholders to use. We have Strimmers, Mowers and Cultivators – small medium and large. We have recently replaced the medium sized cultivator which has had excellent reviews from the plotholders who have used it. The machinery is available from Key Holding Committee members (John Hollands, Eddy Haydon, Del Martin, Adrian Hawthorne, Roy Seymour and Ray Mitchell). Please be aware that if you require to use any of the machinery it's best to ask in advance. The key holders do need to go home – and you may be disappointed if you ask as they are preparing to leave. We ask that you place a donation in the 'Honesty Box' to cover the cost of the fuel used.

Site Improvements – I'm sure you will all have appreciated the new entrance drive. This was completed last autumn and has proved invaluable during the wet winter months. The large machinery shed has been undergoing a refurbishment and this is nearly complete. It now has a work bench where repairs can be undertaken, and a stock of various items including screws and nails. These are available to ploholders by asking key holding Committee members. Still outstanding is the new wood-chip bay at the west end of the lower car park.

Website – Our Website is now well established and is a prime source of information regarding our allotments. I'd encourage all ploholders to view the site regularly to see what's going on. If you have any photos or snippets of information do let me have them so we can add them to the site. It's also a source of potential ploholders, so if you know of anyone who would like information about the site or are thinking of taking an allotment, please get them to log on: www.alersroadallotments.org where they can use the 'Contact' page to send an enquiry.

Bexleyheath and District Horticultural Society – This is our sister society that operates the on-site shop, organises the annual show and the outing each year. This year's outing is on Sunday 8th September to visit the RHS Garden at Wisley on the weekend of their Flower Show. At the time of writing there are two tickets left at £10 each and available from the stores.

Toilet – As I've said many times before, this is an excellent asset to our site and is the envy of other sites in the borough. Please treat it with respect! A team of dedicated volunteers keep it clean, and ensure supplies are always available. I'm sorry to sound like a broken record, but please, please, please don't put blue towel or anti-bac wipes in the toilet – they MUST go into the red bin. There are the three 'Ps' that can go into the toilet – '**Pee, Poo and Toilet Paper**' If you see anything that needs attention please let me know so it can be rectified.

Disposal of Rubbish – In the past we have had issues with the disposal of allotment rubbish at Bexley's Reuse and Recycling Centres (i.e. The Tip). I've had discussions with the Council and although they are not legally obliged to accept allotment waste, we have been granted permission to do so. This is dependent on the facility not being abused and attached is a statement explaining the situation and what you need to do to deposit allotment waste.

Gardening Books – I've had a sort out and have found lots of gardening books that I no longer want. I've put them in the stores so anyone can help themselves. Maybe if anyone else has similar books that are no longer required, please bring them along so others could benefit.

Finally – We've had a couple of visits from both Council Officers and Councillors recently, and they are very impressed with our site and facilities we offer. Your Committee does its best to run the site for the benefit of you ploholders. Remember that we have an 'Open Access' session at all Committee meetings if you want to address the Committee on any topic.

Very Best Regards - *John*