

CHAIR'S REPORT 2012

I would like to take this opportunity to review the activities of Over Allotments Association during the past year.

Our events

So much of what we do is dependent on the weather, and as this has been the wettest, coolest, duller year for a century or more, things could have turned out badly for our events programme. But, on the days when we needed dry weather, the rain stayed away.

In May we sold plants from a busy stand at Winsford Indoor Market – the first time the Association had ventured out into the wider community in this way.

June brought us Children's Open Day, and the words of one school say it all: "To our friends at Winsford Allotments, thank-you for sharing your beautiful allotment with us, we had great fun!"

July saw another successful Public Open Day. We were pleased to welcome the NHS Healthy Living team from Ellesmere Port to give cookery demonstrations, for which Cheshire West provided recipe ingredients free of charge to 100 visitors.

By August the difficulties of the growing season were plain to see but, undaunted, we were delighted that our vegetable competition attracted 73 individual exhibits. Moreover, we had tracked down lost trophies – one of which bears the Association's name – and were able to award them for the first time at this show.

September saw us do something completely different when we hosted the Mikron Theatre Company from Huddersfield who staged their play 'Losing the Plot' at Winsford Lifestyle Centre. It was a sell-out show and, as they say, a good time was had by all.

Our projects

One project has dominated this year – the completion of the Community Plot, now known as the Jubilee Communal Plot. It got off to a bumpy start with the failure of the first choice toilet, but every cloud has a silver lining, and the knowledge we gained proved essential in choosing an alternative unit.

This has been a demanding project that required much time, effort and good spirit to see it completed within budget and on time to be opened by the Town Mayor of Winsford at Public Open Day. We hope you agree the facilities on the Jubilee Communal Plot are a considerable improvement to the site.

December saw the relaunch of the Association website, completely redesigned and with many new sections. It has been constantly maintained and updated throughout the year.

Our partnerships

Community associations by their nature need good working partnerships with a range of bodies, and for us the good relationship with Winsford Town Council, built up over a number of years, has continued.

We are grateful to WTC for ongoing support for the allotments and the Association. In particular, we would like to record our sincere thanks to the Council for support and understanding with regard to the change of supplier for the toilet unit on the Jubilee Communal Plot.

We have also formed a new working relationship with the Winsford & Rural East Area Team, a department within Cheshire West, who provided the Association with roller banners and carrier bags branded with the Association identity, and also the recipe ingredients given out on Public Open Day.

Winsford Educational Partnership again funded the cost of materials given to schools that attended Children's Open Day.

Partnership is also about giving, and we chose St Luke's Cheshire Hospice as our charity partner for the year. A percentage of profits from the plant sale and Public Open Day was pledged and, as you have heard in the Treasurer's report, a donation has been made by the Association.

Our communications, publicity and membership

Members have been kept up-to-date with news by regular email newsletters. More than 40 separate emails have been sent out, each one personalised to individual members. A small number of members have received news by post, though the increased cost of postage has limited the number of postal mailings. We hope you have found the newsletters of value.

Through the year we successfully placed several editorial pieces in the Winsford Guardian, and have made an application to the BBC's 'Gardeners' Question Time', with Winsford E-Act Academy nominated as the venue. We are yet to hear if the application is successful, but as GQT is now based at Media City, Salford, our local address may be in our favour.

The Association gained an honourable mention in the Environmental Initiative of the Year category at the Town Mayor's 'Oscar's' in May, in front of an invited audience at Winsford Lifestyle Centre.

Membership of the Association has been consistently high, and at one point we had just over 100 members – the highest it has ever been.

Our finances

We have maintained members' subscriptions at the same level as they have been since 2006, the only exception being to bring the subscriptions of members who rent raised beds in line with Full Members.

Our events and shop sales have made significant contributions to Association funds, and as you have heard in the Treasurer's report, our finances are in a healthy state.

Our daily needs

For the allotments to function on a day-to-day basis, we have:

- Installed a gas bottle cage to give easy access to the gas supply;
- Installed a letter box inside the tea-shed;
- Fitted noticeboards on both gates;
- Maintained regular supplies of manure and compost;
- Kept the shop well stocked with essential supplies.

Our lowlights

Of course, not everything has been rosy in the garden. A planned visit to Ryton Gardens, near Coventry was called off, there was a break-in last November when sheds were targeted, and in recent weeks produce has been stolen from plots.

And finally ...

Every committee has a duty to you – our members – to maintain standards and consistency and, where possible, offer improvements. We hope you feel we have fulfilled these obligations.

Much has been achieved in the last twelve months and the committee wishes to express sincere thanks to the many members – known and unknown – who have supported the Association. Support takes many forms, from kind words to volunteering for events and projects.

The road to success is always under construction, and through your help we have taken one more step along the way. Thank you, it really has been appreciated.

John Young
Chair
Over Allotments Association

2nd November 2012