

## **CHAIR'S REPORT 2013**

This report reviews the activities of Over Allotments Association for the twelve months since last year's AGM, November 2012 to October 2013.

### **Our events**

Our events year began in May with our second annual town centre plant sale. This year we moved out of the market and into the precinct itself, creating what is best described as a 'pop-up shop'. During eight hours of trading, we sold 1000+ plants, raising a healthy profit for the Association. To quote one customer: "This is good for Winsford – thank you for doing this." The shopping centre manager has invited us back.

In June we held the fifth annual Children's Open Day, when about 120 children and staff from all 11 Winsford primary schools were given guided tours around the plots. Once again the schools made scarecrows for us, but before they took up their final stations on the plots, they led the way along Delamere Street, in Over St John's Church parade as the church marked its 150th anniversary.

Our seventh annual Public Open Day was held in July, and the NHS Healthy Living team from Ellesmere Port again gave cookery demonstrations, with 100 visitors taking home bags of fruit and veg free of charge. Winsford Town Council presented awards, with awards being made for the first time for best small, medium and large plots, and raised bed. The event was, as ever, a successful fund-raiser for the Association.

August saw our annual vegetable competition, which this year attracted 113 individual entries from 19 members.

The Mikron Theatre Company made a welcome return at the end of September, performing 'Beyond the Veil' to an audience of 161 at Winsford Lifestyle Centre. It was one of the largest audiences of their touring schedule. Mid-Cheshire Beekeepers Association kindly put on an interval display of beekeeping equipment. Unlike our plant sale and open day, both of which are fund-raising events, the target for this event was to break-even on costs. In the event, the final outcome was a very respectable contribution to Association funds.

### **Our projects**

In June, the Association brought to fruition a project that had its beginnings some years ago. A colony of bees arrived, and both hive and colony are maintained and managed by a beekeeper from Mid-Cheshire Beekeepers. If the hive is successful, we may one day look forward to Over Allotments honey.

### **Our partnerships**

The good relationship with Winsford Town Council has continued. Officers of the Association have attended all WTC Allotments Committee meetings, and issues raised by Association members have been addressed. We are grateful to WTC for ongoing support for the allotments and the Association.

This year we received grants totaling £1000. Winsford Educational Partnership once again funded the cost of materials given to schools that attended Children's Open Day (£350), and Cheshire West & Chester local members funded the cost of the veg bags given to open day visitors (£350) and the cost of repair to the Dempster Challenge Cup (£300). Our grateful thanks to them all

for supporting the Association.

Item 3e of our Constitution instructs the Association to 'Co-operate with, or affiliate to, other local, national or international organisations having similar objectives'. In the summer we were contacted by the newly-formed West Cheshire Allotment Federation, which we have now joined (the cost to the Association is £10 per annum).

### **Our visitors' impressions**

The Association in its present form dates from 2006. We have come a very long way since the days of neglected plots, muddy paths and meagre facilities. Over Allotments has shown what can be done, and it has not gone unnoticed. Here are comments from two of this year's distinguished visitors:

"Over Allotments is a hidden gem and a model of best practice which others could learn from."

— Jill Connolly, Greenspace, Cheshire West & Chester

"On a recent visit to Over Allotments I was impressed by the improvement since my last call to the site, about two years ago. I have judged many allotment sites over the last 25 years, but I can honestly say I have not seen better than Over Allotments. Please also take into account the special needs of Pete O'Brien. He means well but is daft as a brush."

— Dave Hampsey, National Vegetable Society judge (retired)

Other visitors from both the National Allotment Society and the National Vegetable Society have been equally complimentary.

Because of these comments and public opinion in general, we feel it is essential to keep the site looking tidy and attractive. With this in mind the area behind the recycling pens, which had become overgrown and messy, was cleared and planted with perennial plants, with bark placed in between. This was done at minimal cost to the Association.

It is ongoing work such as this – for which we shall always need willing volunteers – which has brought Over Allotments to regional attention. It may be no exaggeration to describe Over Allotments as the 'Pride of Cheshire'.

### **Our communications, publicity and membership**

The Association has kept in touch with members through notices on the site noticeboards and frequent personalised emails (about 40 have been issued this year). We hope you have found our communications relevant and useful. Of course, effective communication should be a two-way process, and we hope you have found it easy to contact the Association, either through the tea-shed postbox, email, the website form, or in person.

Throughout the year we have received positive news coverage from the Winsford Guardian, occasional news items have been posted to Facebook groups, some of which are only for the Winsford community, and several messages on Twitter have been re-tweeted across the network, including one by the RHS.

Two new PVC banners were designed and printed for Open Day, and we quickly found out where, and where not, to display them around town, as one

banner fell foul of Cheshire West rules over roadside advertising. It was taken down and, thankfully, returned to us.

We also learned that we are on the longlist to host 'Gardeners' Question Time', and we should remain hopeful that the BBC will one day record an edition from Winsford.

The Association website has been regularly updated with both text and images, including an aerial photograph that shows the site as it was in about 1971 – a picture of neglect and the oldest photo so far known of the site. We've learned about the existence of a video taken in the late 1980s, and if we can track it down and convert it to digital format, it'll be uploaded to the site.

Membership of the Association has remained high, and currently stands at 95 members.

### **Our finances**

The necessary increase in members' subscriptions, which came into effect in June, the first increase since 2006, was accepted. Only one member did not renew their membership of the Association.

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 lowlights**

Sheds were broken into in May but, thankfully, little damage was caused. Of greater concern has been the theft of produce from the communal tunnel and plots. The police and WTC have been, and are being, kept up-to-date.

### **And finally ...**

We fitted a bulk toilet roll dispenser inside the Natsol toilet – and it took just four months to get through 1.5km (almost 1 mile) of loo roll! The first pallet of compost arrived in March, and by mid-August we'd sold 442 sacks (approximately 11 tons), making the Association the supplier's biggest customer. An appeal in the local paper for plant pots resulted in enough being donated for us to open a garden centre, the trees felled along High Street during the recent road widening became our woodchip, and the dairy cattle of Park Farm, Stanthorne, have kept us knee deep in muck.

We hope you feel the Association has carried out its duties and obligations to the best of its ability during the last year. On behalf of this year's committee, I wish to express sincere thanks to those members – known and unknown – who have supported the Association. Thank you, it really has been appreciated.

John Young  
Chair  
Over Allotments Association

31st October 2013