

CHAIR'S REPORT 2015

This report reviews the activities of Over Allotments Association for the twelve months since last year's AGM, November 2014 to October 2015.

Security

It seems fitting to put security at the top of this report, as it's been on our minds so much this year.

On the very same night as last year's AGM, the plots were broken into. It turned out to be the first of four break-ins during the year:

- 30 October 2014 – sheds broken into
- 9 November 2014 – sheds and tea-shed broken into
- 4 February 2015 – sheds and tea-shed broken into
- 16 September 2015 – sheds, tea-shed, shop and storage container broken into

In each case, the break-in was reported to WTC and the police, and following the February incident we had high hopes of an arrest being made as the three intruders were caught on camera. Unfortunately, despite a youth being arrested and questioned, the photo evidence did not provide positive identification, and he was released without charge.

Shed break-ins are common to many allotment sites, and we have certainly experienced our share over the years. They are opportunistic, annoying, and soon forgotten.

The September break-in was of a very different nature, and can only be described as an "organised crime". For the first time, our two containers were targeted. Both were broken into and a considerable amount of Association property was stolen. The most disturbing aspects of this break-in were that access was gained by a gate key, and the intruder – or intruders – appear to have had good knowledge of what we had and where it was.

Police enquiries into this crime are continuing, and we expect that WTC will soon be changing the locks.

There is a limit to how secure an allotment site can be made. The Association will continue to work with WTC to improve the security of the site.

Our events

Now for a brief look at our events, which have continued to follow the pattern established over the last few years.

Our fourth annual town centre plant sale took place in May. It was our most successful to date in terms of volume of sales and, as highlighted in the Treasurer's Report, funds raised. We must have sold more than 1,000 plants, and almost doubled our previous best gross takings.

June saw the seventh annual Children's Open Day, when children and staff from eight Winsford and Whitegate primary schools were given guided tours around the plots, and in return they brought us a new crop of scarecrows.

Our ninth annual Public Open Day was held in July, and although visitor numbers were lower than in previous years, it's always good to invite the wider community to see "Winsford's Secret Garden".

Our annual vegetable competition was once again held in August, attracting our largest number of entries to date – a total of 193 individual exhibits were staged, which kept the judge and Show Secretary very busy. This year we had a new award to make in the flower section, generously sponsored by Winsford Co-Operative Funeralcare. And there were smiles all round when an improvised wooden spoon award was made for the new class of “bonsai vegetables”!

The Mikron Theatre Company returned in September for their fifth show promoted by the Association, and all who saw them perform “Raising Agents” had a night to remember. We gave them an audience of approximately 340 – the second largest of their entire season. It was particularly good to be able to introduce Mikron to WTC, who booked them to perform “One of Each” as part of this year’s Salt Fair.

Our partnerships

We have been supported by several businesses and organisations throughout the year:

- Cliff Dickenson & Son, Ford dealers, loaned a transit van to help move plants and tables at our Plant Sale;
- the Winsford branch of Co-operative Funeralcare sponsored a new trophy for our vegetable competition;
- Winsford Educational Partnership gave a £300 grant for Children’s Open Day;
- Mid-Cheshire Beekeepers’ Association continues to give advice to our bee team;
- Winsford Cross Shopping Centre allowed us to stage our Plant Sale on their premises, and displayed our Plant Sale and Open Day banners;
- Huws Gray, Winsford, donated timber for the Children’s Open Day scarecrows;
- ASDA, Winsford, donated a BBQ to replace the one stolen in the September break-in.

Our grateful thanks to them all for supporting the Association.

Our greatest thanks goes to Winsford Town Council, with whom our good relationship continues. The Association wishes to express its grateful thanks for ongoing support. This takes the form of loaned equipment, particularly gazebos, the provision of skips, sponsoring gardening tokens for schools at Children’s Open Day, and a considerable amount of photocopying.

Officers of the Association have attended the monthly WTC Allotments Committee meetings, and issues raised by Association members have been addressed.

Our communications, publicity and membership

The Association has continued to keep members informed through notices on the site noticeboards and by frequent personalised emails (about 40 have been issued this year).

In May, we began using a new email provider to deliver our emails to members, and with that came the opportunity to track emails. We send emails to approximately 80 individuals, and on average they are opened by 64% of recipients.

A few members do not have email addresses, and we have started posting and hand-delivering our communications to them.

We hope you feel we have kept you informed throughout the year.

The Association’s website has been regularly updated, and more is to come when a series of aerial photographs and archive video is added later this year.

Membership of the Association has remained high, and we are grateful that we had a high

rate of renewal in June.

Our finances

As you have heard in the Treasurer's Report, we end the year in the best financial position we have ever been in. Each of our three public events has made significant contributions to our balance sheet.

Funds have been used to purchase a number of items:

- x4 folding tables, bringing our total to 10
- patio furniture and parasols
- BBQ
- banners for Open Day and Plant Sale
- additional security camera

In addition, we have continued to purchase manure, soil improver, multi-purpose compost, gas and stock for the shop.

We have also made a donation to St Luke's Hospice of £870.11, from profits raised at this year's events.

And finally

This was the year when:

- Over Allotments was confirmed as the "Pride of Cheshire", when we were placed second in the Best North West allotment competition – the only site in Cheshire to have been placed;
- we found so much scrap metal lurking on two plots, we sold it for £100 to a local scrapman;
- a total of 10 plots changed hands to new tenants
- more than 460 bags of compost were sold by the shop.

We hope you feel the Committee has carried out its duties and obligations on behalf of the Association to the best of its ability during the year.

On behalf of this year's Committee, I wish to express sincere thanks to our members who have supported the Association.

On a personal note, I would like to thank my fellow committee members. We've achieved a lot this year, and it's to your credit. Thank you.

John Malam
Chair
Over Allotments Association

29th October 2015