

CHAIR'S REPORT 2017

This report reviews the activities of Over Allotments Association for the twelve months since last year's AGM, November 2016 to October 2017.

Finances

Although we ended the 2015/2016 year with over £1800 in funds, the insurance and other costs that had to be met: the expenditure on manure, soil improver and plug plants that took place before our first fundraiser of the year, the Plant Sale, meant that we were doing a Micawber; just about scraping by.

To ensure that we did not spend all of our existing funds, but still provide the usual benefits during the winter and spring, some of the Committee Members deferred reimbursement for payments they had personally made on behalf of the Association. I thank them for their dedication to the Association.

Security

It is good to be able to report another year in which we have had no known break-ins to the site. Last year, the Association was given a quantity of UV marker pens by Cheshire Police, suitable for marking personal property. There are still some left in the Plotters' Rest – please help yourselves.

Our events

The proposed coach trip to Gardener's World Live in June had to be cancelled at the last minute because we didn't have enough bookings to make it break-even. It had never been proposed to make money for the Association funds, but neither had we wanted to deplete those funds.

The annual town centre plant sale took place in May, and was so eagerly awaited that we were selling plants whilst putting the stalls together at 8:15. By 11 o'clock most of the bedding plants had gone, and by 1 o'clock we had sold two-thirds of all the plants. It was a brilliant reward for all the hard work that our members put in to staging the event. It takes a team of dedicated volunteers to grow and then transport well over 1000 plants and the tables into town, ready for an 8:30am start. We might need to grow even more plants for next year's event, so we will be asking for more volunteers to give a little space in their greenhouses and polytunnels.

June saw the ninth annual Children's Open Day, when children and staff from five Winsford primary schools visited the Allotments. With Hebden Green School having two groups attend, six groups were given guided tours around the plots by Members of the Association, and in return they brought us scarecrows on the theme of Star Wars. Hebden Green School enjoyed the experience of being on the allotments so much that they are planning on taking the tenancy of Raised Bed 2 for tending by those Post 16 students who are approaching the end of their time at the school.

The eleventh annual Public Open Day was held in July, with the Winsford Town Crier and several cars from the Potteries and South Cheshire MG Owners Club in attendance. Because we had so many helpers to get everything set up, we were ready with 45 minutes to go before the official start time. This is unlike previous years when we were usually putting the finishing touches to some stalls.

The precious jars of our second batch of Over Allotments' Honey were eagerly awaited and, again, sold very quickly.

Congratulations to those members whose plots were of such a high standard that they were presented with certificates or the Dempster Cup by Cllr Mike Kennedy, the town mayor.

The annual vegetable competition in August attracted a number of new entrants, myself included. I only intended to enter a rather large Savoy cabbage, but ended up entering six classes. Everyone who attended thoroughly enjoyed the day, whether there as entrants or just for the social occasion, which I am informed ended after darkness had fallen.

The Mikron Theatre Company returned in September for their seventh show promoted by the Association, and the audience of 300+ saw them perform "In At The Deep End" in tribute to the RNLI. In the audience was a young man who had set himself the task of raising £5000 for the RNLI and visiting every lifeboat station in the UK. John and Hilary Malam had visited the Moelfre Lifeboat Station on Anglesey, who, upon hearing that we were hosting the play, donated items for the raffle. On the night, the raffle and donations made by the audience came to £400, taking him to his target of £5000. He now only needs to complete visits to the rest of the UK's lifeboat stations!

One of the best things about all of these events is how many of the newer Members turned out to help and participate. Thank you to everyone who did so.

We also had evening visits by members of Eaton Gardening Group, near Tarporley, and Great Barrow Allotments. These followed a similar route to the Children's Open Day, with John Malam giving them a full history of the site, including where the bodies are buried! Both groups enjoyed their visit and made a donation to the Association's funds during tea, coffee, and biscuits in the Plotters' Rest.

Our partnerships

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

- Cliff Dickenson & Son and Contour Showers loaned vans to help move plants and tables at our Plant Sale;
- Winsford Educational Partnership gave a £300 grant for Children's Open Day;
- Huws Gray, Winsford, donated timber for the Children's Open Day scarecrows;
- 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 posters.

Our grateful thanks to them all for supporting the Association.

Our greatest thanks, as always, goes to Winsford Town Council, with whom our good relationship continues. We are extremely grateful for their support in the form of loaned equipment, particularly gazebos and the PA system (which failed to work at the appointed time, despite working when tested before and after it was required), and the provision of skips for the spring and autumn tidy-ups.

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

Our communications, publicity and membership

Through myself and John Malam, acting as “Publicity and Media Officer”, the Association has continued to keep members informed through newsletters, notices on the site notice boards and by frequent personalised emails.

The Association’s website has been regularly updated, and we have had write-ups in the Winsford Guardian.

John also arranges publicity for our events via posters, roadside signs, social media and email campaigns to a large list of subscribers who have signed up for information regarding our events. I hope you feel that John has done an excellent job.

Membership of the Association has remained high, with the usual high rate of renewals in June. While we have had several new members to Over Allotments Association this year, it was sad to learn of the passing of Gary Cooper in August. It was also sad to hear that our own Danny Weedall had an accident that severely affected his mobility. Following an operation he is slowly recovering, and made it to the Vegetable Competition and the Mikron Theatre production.

Charity partners

The charities chosen to receive equal shares of 20% of the profits from our fundraising events this year are St Luke’s Hospice and Changing Lives in Cheshire. That 20% is £793.85; so they will each receive a donation of £396.93.

Projects for 2018

At last year’s AGM, I said that I would like to build a pergola sunshade on the front of the Plotters’ Rest. During the year I did not think that we would have enough funds to carry this out and still have sufficient to see us through this winter. Going into next year we should have enough. With all of the raised beds now having tenants, we should go ahead with this, and with building the wheelchair ramp to let them get inside the Plotters’ Rest if they wish. This is especially important for group tenants like Meadowbank Lodge and Hebden Green School. Just like the rest of us, they need somewhere to get out of the sun or rain during their visits.

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. If not: volunteer and show us how it should be done.

On behalf of this year’s Committee, I wish to express sincere thanks to those members who have supported the Association by helping with many of our events and activities and by attending those events.

On a personal note, I would like to thank my fellow committee members, who’ve given me great support in this, my first year as Chair. The good year we have had is to your credit as members of this group, and of the Winsford community. Thank you.

Mike Allen
Chair
Over Allotments & Leisure Gardeners’ Association

17th October 2017