

Over Allotments & Leisure Gardeners' Association

CHAIR'S REPORT 2018

This report reviews the activities of Over Allotments Association for the twelve months since last year's AGM, November 2017 to October 2018.

Finances

Although we ended the 2016/2017 year with over £1800 in funds, the insurance and other costs that had to be met, the expenditure on manure, soil improver and Plant Sale costs, meant that we were just about scraping by.

As has been done before, to ensure that we did not spend all of our existing funds, but still provided the usual benefits during the winter and spring, some of the Committee Members again deferred re-imburement for payments they had personally made on behalf of the Association until after the Plant Sale had replenished our funds. I thank them again for their dedication to the Association.

This year we have a good bank balance going in to the winter period, and should not need to employ such tactics.

Security

It is good to be able to report another year in which we have had no known break-ins to the site, although there were isolated reported instances of thefts from plots.

Our events

The annual town centre plant sale took place in May, and was so eagerly awaited that, once again, we were selling plants to the shopkeepers and their staff before we officially opened at 8:30. With the Royal Wedding and the FA Cup Final taking place the same day, everyone seemed to be out early, and within a couple of hours most of the bedding plants had gone. By lunchtime we had started pulling our tables in to reduce the floor-space occupied, and by 3:30 we started to pack up as we had little left and the customers were no longer there.

It was another 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 the plants. We then face a 7 o'clock start to transport well over 1000 plants and the tables into town, ready for that 8:30am start.

June saw the tenth annual Children's Open Day, when children and staff from eight Winsford primary schools visited the Allotments, with Hebden Green School having two groups attend. The groups were given guided tours around the plots by members of the Association, and in return they brought us scarecrows on the theme of Suffragettes.

The twelfth annual Public Open Day was held in July, with the Winsford Town Crier, Ageless Ukes performing songs, and a face painter from Winsford Academy's Camp Kenya Team. As last year, we had so many helpers to get everything set up, we were ready before the official start time. This year saw our third batch of Over Allotments' Honey being sold. There were 145 jars eagerly awaited and, again, they sold very quickly.

Congratulations to those members whose plots were of such a high standard that they were presented with certificates or the Dempster Challenge Cup by Cllr Gina Lewis, Town Mayor of Winsford.

The annual vegetable competition in August attracted a growing number of entrants. Despite the wet weather, everyone who attended thoroughly enjoyed the day, whether there as entrants or just for the social occasion. I know that I thanked them on the day, but I will do so again. Thanks to Jim Kettle for organising the event. Thanks to George Cornes, a qualified competition judge, for being our judge. Thanks to Hilary Malam for writing all of the certificates in trying conditions with so many people also in the Plotters' Rest sheltering from the weather. Thanks to Jon and Sue Wrigglesworth for running the BBQ. And, thanks to everyone who took part or came for the social aspect of the event.

The Mikron Theatre Company returned in September for their eighth show promoted by the Association, and the capacity audience of almost 360 saw them perform "Revolting Women", about the suffragette movement.

One of the best things about all of these events, is that newer members turn out to help and participate. Thank you to everyone who did so.

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

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 and the provision of two skips for the Spring tidy-up.

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

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 and notices on the site notice boards.

John also arranges publicity for our events via write-ups in the Winsford Guardian, posters, roadside signs, social media and email campaigns to a large list of subscribers who have signed up for information regarding our events. He also does almost everything associated with the annual Mikron Theatre visits. He books the Mikron show, and the Winsford Academy. He arranges publicity, mail shots, social media campaigns, ticket sales, refreshments, raffle prizes, and volunteers to help on the night. He does everything except the part that Mikron Theatre play in the event. This annual event raises about 40% of the total raised by fundraising events each year.

I hope you feel that John has done an excellent job. The Committee certainly did, and I “ambushed” him at the end of the show to present him with some vouchers for Morreys Nursery with which to buy some trees and shrubs.

Membership of the Association has remained high at 105, with the usual high rate of renewals in June.

Awards

At the Mayor’s “Oscars” in April, the Association won The Fords of Winsford Club or Organisation of the Year, and also the Walk of Contribution award for all of the community based activities that we undertake: from donations to our charity partners, through our Plant Sale, Children’s and Public Open Days, to our commitment to making it possible for those less able-bodied to feel welcome to look after a plot or raised bed at Over Allotments.

The Walk of Contribution can be seen outside the Lifestyle Centre, where an engraved stone plaque has been set into a special pathway.

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 Mid-Cheshire Mind. That 20% is approximately £1,000; so they will each receive a donation of around £500.

Projects for 2019

At the 2016 AGM, I said that I would like to build a pergola sunshade on the front of the Plotters’ Rest. During 2017 we did not have enough funds to carry this out and still have sufficient to see us through the winter of 2017/2018. With this year’s heatwave it became a vital requirement, particularly for those tenants from Meadowbank Lodge and Hebden Green School. Luckily, Argos had discounted their sliding canopy pergola, and we purchased two for £400.

With so many tenants with mobility difficulties we have considered how they will get inside the Plotters’ Rest, if they wish to do so. Also, during wet weather, the concrete apron in front of the Plotters’ Rest has extensive puddles. I would like to see raised decking from the roadway to the Plotters’ Rest, making it simply a matter of a couple of inches to negotiate at the doorway. 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 rain showers during their visits. The cost for this decking in composite material would be in the region of £2,000.

Winsford Town Council have submitted a National Lottery Funding request to improve the road and all of the paths within the boundary fences. If this is approved, the work should commence in late February next year. If I can work with the contractors, I can ensure that the new concrete road from the Recreation Ground gates to the Accessible Parking Area will allow a smooth transition from the road to the decking.

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 continued to give me great support in my second 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

25th October 2018