



## **CHAIR'S REPORT 2019**

This report reviews the activities of Over Allotments Association for the twelve months since last year's AGM, November 2018 to October 2019.

### **Finances**

We ended 2018/2019 with £3,898.66. After the winter period, we approached the first of our fundraisers, the Plant Sale, at the end of May with £2,113.88 in the bank. This year, there have been no major items calling on our funds, and we will have an even better bank balance going in to the winter period.

### **Security**

There has been only one known break-in to the site this year; resulting in a few reported instances of theft from plots.

### **Our events**

The annual town centre Plant Sale took place in May. Once again, we had use of an empty shop in the town centre. This allowed us to get all of the tables and staging equipment stored overnight; and only have to transport the plants on the day. By splitting the volunteers, we managed to get some tables in place before the plants arrived; and the rest in place as they were needed. Sales were brisk. Even with 60 hanging baskets, we sold them all. A few plants had to be brought back to site at the end; but not that many when compared with what was taken to sell. 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 7am start to transport well over 1000 plants, ready for that 8:30am start in town.

June saw the eleventh annual Children's Open Day, when children and staff from seven Winsford primary schools visited the allotments. 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 Space.

The thirteenth annual Public Open Day was held in July. As for the last two years, we had so many helpers to get everything set up, we were ready before the official start time. The weather in the week before the event had been very wet; and the forecast for the day was not good. This may have been the reason that numbers attending were down. Unfortunately, this year we had no Over Allotments' Honey to sell. The weather had not been good for bees throughout the whole of the UK; warm before many flowers were available, and cold and wet when they were. The bees had, therefore, eaten most of the honey in order to survive.

Takings were down on last year; but we still came away with a good profit; and everyone seemed to have enjoyed themselves. Thanks to Jon and Sue Wrigglesworth for running the BBQ, and thank you to all of the volunteers: willing beforehand or conscripted in the run-up and on the day.

I would also like to congratulate those members whose plots were of such a high standard that they were presented with certificates or the Dempster Cup by the Winsford Town Mayor: Councillor Ailsa Gaskill-Jones. A special mention here to Jim Kettle; who, having taken a rest from organising the Open Day for so many years, finally found the time to improve his plot that tiny bit more, and get his name on the Dempster Cup and the Honours Board in the Plotters' Rest. Most of us know how much that means to him.

The annual vegetable competition in August attracted 221 entries in the 43 classes. Last year was wet and windy. This year it was hot and sunny. However, everyone who attended, put up with the weather and thoroughly enjoyed the day. As usual, I left whilst the social occasion was continuing into the

evening. I know that I thanked them on the day; but I will do so again. Thanks to Jim Kettle for letting me organise the event. Thanks to George Cornes, a qualified competition judge, for being our judge. Thanks to Hilary Malam for writing all of the certificates. Thanks to Rob McLeod for running the BBQ. And, thanks to everyone who took part, provided food, or came for the social aspect of the event.

The Mikron Theatre Company returned in September for their ninth show promoted by the Association, and a capacity audience of 326 saw them perform "Redcoats": about Butlins seaside holiday camps.

One of the best things about all of these events is that 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 again loaned a van 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 (mind you, we still have to pay a small fee);
- Cheshire West & Chester gave permission for Association banners to be fixed to town centre noticeboards in advance of Plant Sale and Open Day;
- The NeuroMuscular Centre Design and Print Team, Winsford, who print all of our fliers and notices, often at short notice and at reasonable cost to the Association.

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 and autumn tidy-ups. They even put up with my emails requesting things from them, and giving "reasons" why I think some of the plots mentioned after their inspections should be shown some leniency.

Officers of the Association have attended all WTC Allotments Committee meetings. As the Town Clerk likes to point out "we can't vote"; but we can have an opinion and join in discussions on the matters raised. And I like to think that that often makes a difference.

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

In his role as "Publicity and Media Officer", John Malam edits, contributes articles, and distributes the newsletters sent to Members.

John also arranges publicity for our events via write-ups in the Winsford and Middlewich 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 except the performance itself. This annual event raises about 40% of the total raised by fundraising events each year.

In fact, John is so involved in things going on within the local community that he has just been made an Honorary Freeman of the Borough of Cheshire West and Chester. Keep an eye out for his sheep on his plot next year; as he'll need somewhere to keep them when he's not exercising his right to drive them down the High Street on his way to Winsford Town Park!

Membership of the Association has remained high at 104; with the usual high rate of renewals in June.

### **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 Foodbank. That 20% is approximately £1,000; so they will each receive a donation of around £500.

### **Projects for 2020**

At the General Meeting following the 2018 AGM, you gave permission to spend Association funds on a 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 decking would be especially useful to group tenants like Meadowbank Lodge. Just like the rest of us, they need somewhere to get out of rain showers during their visits; and this would allow them access to the building. I thought that the cost for this decking in composite material would be in the region of £2,000. A proper job with the necessary fencing to avoid people falling off will probably be £3,000.

The project was not undertaken for two reasons:

1. Firstly, Winsford Town Council were successful in bidding for National Lottery Awards for All Funding to improve the road and all of the paths within the boundary fences. By the time the funds had come through, the growing season was upon us, and having the work done at that time might have caused major problems for Members getting access to the allotments and to their plots. I, therefore, asked the Council to defer the work until later in the year. I want to work with the contractors, to ensure a smooth transition onto the decking from the new concrete road that will run from the Over Recreation Ground gates to the Accessible Parking Area.
2. The second reason was that I did not want to leave the Association unable to give to our charity partners, nor with potentially low funds to cover the winter period before our next fundraiser.

As always, I hope you feel that the Committee has not done too bad a job in carrying out its duties and obligations on behalf of the Association during the year. At this point, I always say "if not: volunteer and show us how it should be done". Well this year someone has taken me up on it. We have four Members nominated for the Committee who haven't been on it before.

On behalf of this year's Committee I, again, 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. The good year we have had is down to you.

On a personal note, I would like to thank my fellow Committee members, who've continued to support me in my third year as Chair. Thank you.

Mike Allen  
Chair  
Over Allotments & Leisure Gardeners' Association

24th October 2019