

WEYBRIDGE ALLOTMENT HOLDERS' AND GARDENERS' ASSOCIATION (WAHGA)
CIO - Association. Registered Charity Number 1189633

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

THE OBJECTS OF THE CIO ARE:

1) TO PROVIDE OR ASSIST IN THE PROVISION OF FACILITIES FOR ALLOTMENTS IN WEYBRIDGE, SURREY IN THE INTERESTS OF SOCIAL WELFARE FOR RECREATION OR OTHER LEISURE TIME OCCUPATION FOR THE PUBLIC AT LARGE WITH THE OBJECT OF IMPROVING THEIR CONDITIONS OF LIFE

2) TO PROMOTE FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE PUBLIC THE CONSERVATION PROTECTION AND IMPROVEMENT OF THE PHYSICAL AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN, AND BORDERING, WEYBRIDGE ALLOTMENTS, SURREY IN PARTICULAR THROUGH THE CONSERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES, THE IMPROVEMENT OF WILDLIFE DIVERSITY AND PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING ABOUT SUSTAINABLE HORTICULTURE

How These Objects Were Achieved during this reporting period:

In 2023 WAHGA was able to continue to expand the ways in which it plays an important role in the support of fruit, vegetable and flower growers in Weybridge, in the interests of social welfare. These initiatives have been both practical and educational.

Allotment gardeners benefitted from loans of suitable equipment, shares in bulk purchase of manure, compost and seed potatoes, and practical advice from other WAHGA members who have gardening experience which they are keen to share. During 2023, social events, competitions, engagement with the broader community through local fayres, and the use of social media supported objectives to share knowledge and increase allotment gardeners' enjoyment of their life. WAHGA continues to look imaginatively at ways it can add to the mental health benefits that cultivation, exercise and fresh air can bring to allotment gardeners and members.

Membership, which is open to local gardeners and allotment holders, stood at 327 at the end of 2023

2023 ACTIVITIES AND INITIATIVES

PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING ABOUT SUSTAINABLE HORTICULTURE

Given the success and popularity of informative member email updates (in particular WAHGA's bespoke Jobs for the Month) newsletters, use of social media, the focus on these was increased in 2023.

The WAHGA website contains high quality, relevant articles and fact sheets which are readily available to members and the public. Horticultural tips and techniques as well as wildlife and sustainability information are focus areas. The WAHGA 'Jobs for the Month' are written specifically for the local environment and tailored each month to reflect the actual growing conditions at the time. Website and Facebook statistics as well as informal feedback shows they are very popular and helpful to growers.

The WAHGA administered Facebook group, which had increased membership to 195 members at the end of 2023, remained popular (305 posts were made during the year) and is administered to ensure the posts are relevant and educational, as well as enhancing community engagement. Members are encouraged to post their hints, tips and requests for advice.

Recycling and sharing activities continued to be a major focus area so that plastic items in particular are reused, and spare seedlings and produce are shared.

2023 AGM - 19th April 2023

The WAHGA AGM was attended by 59 members. After the formal part of the evening was closed, there was a fascinating, educational and very popular talk by the Managing Director of Franchi seeds, with informal networking to end the evening.

COMMUNITY QUIZ NIGHTS

In order to bring the WAHGA membership together to foster an allotment holders and gardening community and to raise funds for WAHGA, quiz nights were organised in 2023. 85 members and their friends came to the 18th March Quiz, and 82 came to the 25th November Quiz. These evening events contributed net funds of £1,391 to assist with WAHGA's running costs.

SUNFLOWER GROWING COMPETITIONS

In April, 55 members (including 32 under 12 years old) collected sunflower growing kits which included seeds, flower pots and compost. Sunflowers over 1.2 metres high were eligible for the finals, as well as those with large flower heads. Four winners were announced to the membership at the summer picnic. All of the junior members whose flowers made the finals received a certificate and an age appropriate educational nature book.

THE BROADER COMMUNITY

WAHGA combined with Oatlands Allotments to run a stall at the Weybridge Festival on 24th June. Many local residents came to ask about vegetable and fruit growing as well as our advice on allotment gardening. The exhibition showing the various ways of composting created a lot of interest and discussion.

On Saturday 22nd April WAHGA had a stand at the Oxshott Net Zero Village Day promoting the benefits of home composting and peat-free composts. A range of composting methods were demonstrated, with samples of the output. WAHGA

was involved in a similar event at the Green Elmbridge Sustainability Fair at the Riverhouse Barn in Walton-on-Thames on June 17th. There was surprise at the good quality of home composted material and the number of worms.

PLOT JUDGING

In order to ensure a greater focus on wildlife, biodiversity and sustainability the plot judging criteria introduced in 2022 were reviewed and updated. An Instructor at RHS Merrist Wood was engaged for the second year. The criteria were published well in advance of judging and plot-holders were invited to enter their plots. 18 members put their plots forward.

The judge was most impressed by plots with a large variety of vegetables and fruit, flowers and herbs which attract pollinators and plots with weeds under control, and which were well laid out. Plots were also checked for well-utilised compost bins, as well as water butts where sheds allowed for guttering to provide a supply of rain water.

To increase the opportunity for learning, all participants received a copy of the judge's scoring and comments sheet, with suggestions for the next growing season, as well as lots of positive and constructive feedback. The six category winners received vouchers for a local independent shop, and were awarded their prizes at the annual summer picnic.

WAHGA COMMUNITY PICNIC AND PRIZE-GIVING

The summer event was held on 13 August 2023, and was attended by 26 members who brought their friends and families. WAHGA took the opportunity to award prizes to winners of the plot-judging event, and gave a summary of plot-judging to encourage growers to improve the wildlife, diversity on their plots, and to learn more about sustainable horticulture.

CONTRIBUTING TO THE LOCAL FOOD BANK

Members support the Weybridge and Runnymede Food Bank Project with donations which are managed by WAHGA. The Food Bank's list of most useful items is changed regularly and is attached to the collection bin.

MEMBER DISCOUNTS. Discounts negotiated by WAHGA provide facilities by way of reduced price plug plants, seeds and equipment for members. WAHGA was able to negotiate a good discount at a local independent retailer for Franchi Seeds - which has proved very popular.

BULK PURCHASE

It is important that WAHGA supports the improvement of the physical and natural environment. Supporting growers to increase yields is also a priority and supports food security initiatives. Using its knowledge of high quality suppliers WAHGA managed the bulk purchase of key items, including high quality manure, peat free compost, and seed potatoes. 500 bags of manure and compost were bulk purchased at a discount, and distributed to 65 members in February, and 565 delivered to 62 members in September.

ENCOURAGEMENT AND RECORDING OF WILDLIFE AND BIODIVERSITY

WAHGA was able to make headway in the course of 2023 in the conservation, protection, and improvement of the physical and natural environment. Particular focus areas were improving soil condition, increasing yields, and a reduction in pests as a result of a healthy balanced ecosystem. Attraction of pollinators was and will remain a key objective.

Allotment holders were provided with nest boxes as well as reptile mats to provide protection in particular to the slow worm colony.

We continue to find 8 different species of native bats, a returning pair of rare peregrine falcons, stag beetles at multiple site locations, breeding hedgehogs and a thriving colony of slow worms, as well as a number of foxes who are well protected in the allotment environment and do not interfere with crop growing.

WAHGA continues to work in partnership with like minded local charities such as the Wildlife Aid Centre (where injured wildlife is taken) who helped rescue a distressed hedgehog from the site. Their services are promoted actively to members.

ASSOCIATION MANAGEMENT

WAHGA is managed by Trustees who may stand for re-election at the AGM. The charity trustees delegate some of their powers and functions to a committee, having determined the terms and conditions on which the delegation is made. The charity trustees may at any time alter those terms and conditions or revoke the delegation. Volunteers also support the trustees

Trustees:

WAHGA trustees for 2023:

Leila Brown, Caroline Freeman, Philippa Graeme, James Higgins

Declaration: The Trustees are satisfied that the association is being managed in accordance with its Objects and with due regard to the Charity Commission's public benefit requirement. Above all, it encourages participation in the cultivation of allotments and in the preservation or enhancement of wildlife and biodiversity both aspects improve the physical, mental and social well-being of members

- The Trustees are satisfied that the association's management committee continues to manage finances in a responsible manner, spending in line with its Objects.
- The Trustees are satisfied that the accounts are presented on an accruals basis, and include sufficient reserves to provide for unexpected costs.

WAHGA became a registered charity (CIO - Association) on 22nd May 2020.

END OF REPORT