

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

ANNUAL REPORT 2022

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 2022 WAHGA was able to expand the ways in which it continues to play 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, work-party support and practical advice from other WAHGA members who have gardening experience which they are keen to share. During 2022, social events, competitions 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 330 at the end of 2022

2022 ACTIVITIES AND INITIATIVES

PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING ABOUT SUSTAINABLE HORTICULTURE

Given the success and popularity of informative member newsletters, use of social media, one-on-one and group learning activities, the focus on these was increased in 2022.

The WAHGA website now 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 166 members at the end of 2022, remained popular (405 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.

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 2022. These social events had been suspended during the covid period. 67 members and their friends came to the 5th March Quiz, and 77 to the 12th November Quiz. These evening events contributed a profit of £711 after a £200 donation was made to DEC's appeal for Ukraine.

SUNFLOWER AND PUMPKIN GROWING COMPETITIONS

In April, 67 members (including 34 under 12 years old) collected sunflower growing kits which included seeds, flower pots and compost. Sunday 7th August was set as the target date for measuring. Sunflowers over 1.2 metres high were eligible for the finals, as well as those with large flower heads. 4 adults and 9 junior members qualified for the finals and the winners were announced to the membership. All of the junior members whose flowers made the finals received a certificate and an age appropriate educational nature book. Adult winners received a voucher from either a local bookshop or garden centre.

In a similar fashion 50 members (including 29 under 12s) were given pumpkin seeds and the largest pumpkins were weighed, with prizes awarded at the end of October.

PARTNERSHIP WITH LOCAL GARDENING GROUP

WAHGA joined forces to assist Weybridge in Bloom (WiB) with their annual sunflower growing competition for children which was launched at the Oatlands Fayre on 14th May. The aim was to promote horticultural activities and cultivation for children. WAHGA members assisted at the WiB stall and talked to many children and their parents to explain how to grow sunflowers. WAHGA provided the kits (sunflower seeds and pots filled with compost) which were very popular. WAHGA also offered packets of flower and vegetable seeds free of charge to children and others interested in learning about cultivation or developing their gardens or allotment plots.

PLOT JUDGING

In order to ensure a greater focus on wildlife, biodiversity and sustainability there was a substantial revamp to the annual plot-judging event. Julie Jacob (an Instructor at RHS Merrist Wood) was engaged and the judging criteria were substantially revamped, whilst not losing sight of the primary focus of growing delicious fruit and vegetables, as well as flowers. The criteria were published well in advance of judging and plot-holders were invited to enter their plots. 24 members came 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 seven category winners received garden centre vouchers.

WAHGA COMMUNITY PICNIC AND PRIZE-GIVING

The summer event was held on 21 August, and was attended by many members. 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. Wildflower seedlings grown by one of the members were also distributed to attendees.

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.

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 manure, compost, and most popular seeds. 1090 bags of manure/compost were bulk purchased and distributed in 2022.

ENCOURAGEMENT AND RECORDING OF WILDLIFE AND BIODIVERSITY

WAHGA was able to make headway in the course of 2022 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.

More progress was made in preparing and managing a community hazel coppice area/orchard on a plot in the shadow of St James' Church's steeple. It was planned that within a year the hazels would produce their first edible crop, staggered cutting (coppicing) would begin to provide locally sourced pea sticks and bean poles for plot holders. More flowers and native bulbs were planted to help increase the diversity of pollinators. A shed was added for the storage of tools for plot maintenance and cultivation. Toward the end of 2022 the land owner informed WAHGA that the project running since 2019 and funded through a Greenspaces Grant made by Elmbridge Borough Council would be terminated.

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

Multiple sightings of rare and interesting flora and fauna were recorded with the Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre (SBIC), with a view to conserving the area's existing protected habitat and enhancing biodiversity.

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.

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.

CLOSURE OF THE WAHGA TRADING HUT AND COMPOUND

The WAHGA Trading Hut and compound provided members with allotment tested seeds and a range of other gardening products at discounted prices. Equipment which members were able to borrow was stored in the compound. The trading hut also served as an allotment 'community hub' where members would visit on Saturday and Sunday mornings for a chat or to ask for gardening tips and advice. The trading hut and compound were built by WAHGA in 1968 and were run entirely by volunteers. It had been WAHGA's central revenue stream.

In 2021, Weybridge Land Charity (WLC) instructed WAHGA to close the trading hut. WAHGA did not accept the reasons for closure and made every attempt to persuade WLC to allow the shop to remain open - including an offer of £500 as an annual contribution towards WLC funds. WAHGA were strongly encouraged by many of the allotment community to resist the closure of the trading hut, including 97 members who signed a petition which was delivered to the Chair of WLC in November 2021. Once all other avenues had been explored members encouraged WAHGA to challenge the closure via a legal route. This was seen as essential to ensure continuity of WAHGA's main revenue stream as well as retaining the weekend community hub, and to continue the provision of high quality,

competitively priced seeds and other gardening products. After initial legal expenditure it was decided that it would not be right to run down reserves further and WAHGA made a decision to halt legal proceedings. In early May 2022 WAHGA held a closing down sale to ensure stock was cleared and that funds were recovered. The shop was then closed and the compound taken over by WLC.

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 2022: Philip Murphy, Philippa Graeme, James Higgins, Leila Brown.

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