

Allotment News

Long term security for WAHGA? Protection against land sale? - Charity says, 'No'.

JUST months before the first Covid lockdown, WAHGA's Committee was within touching distance of securing what it had promised at the 2019 AGM. Plot-holders had headed off the proposed sale of *The Triangle* by Weybridge Land Charity (WLC) and our aim was to secure a long-term lease.

A lease would have safeguarded the entire site for at least 14-20 years. It would have prevented sales of all or parts of the Churchfields Allotments site for the same period. Our aim was to couple that with significantly enhanced autonomy for WAHGA.

WLC was totally supportive. WAHGA began the process of setting ourselves up as a CIO (Charitable Incorporated Organisation), a requirement of our taking on a lease.

We would manage the allotments, leaving WLC to focus on its charitable aims — as the Charity suggested it wished to do.

Then something happened. There were changes to the management and make-up of the WLC trustees. All of a sudden, the rhetoric was that the Charity couldn't offer a lease and that the 'permanent endowment' that WLC had inherited in relation to the site meant that they could not sell off any part of the site.

WAHGA's research established that neither claim was true. We spoke to Allotment Associations and Allotment umbrella groups across the country. Hundreds of Allotment Associations have long-term leases and there have been recent examples of charities with 'permanent endowments' being allowed by the Charity Commission to sell off land.

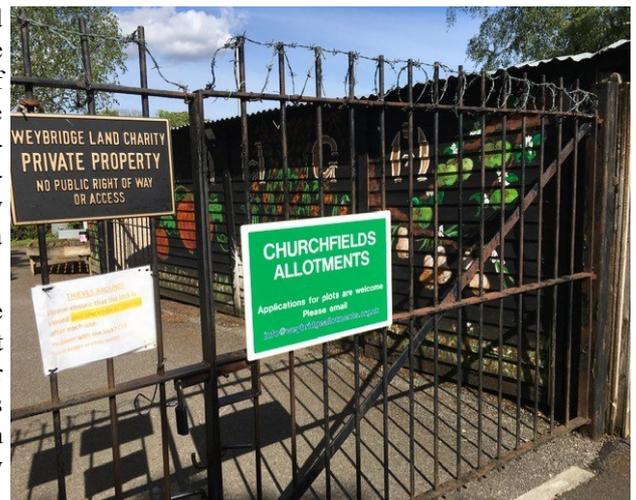
WLC will say that most long-term leases relate to local authority-owned allotments. However, our research suggests that the Charity Commission would be entirely open to WLC offering us a lease. In fact, WLC do not even need to inform the CC of any lease of less than 15 years. WAHGA has offered to help WLC pilot any lease proposal through the Charity Commission. The Charity has not picked up this offer.

Some WAHGA Committee members were tempted to walk away and to leave WLC to run the entire administration of the site. At present, they benefit from hundreds of hours of voluntary work from WAHGA members, free of charge each year. However, a majority of us are unwilling to walk away from our responsibilities towards plot-holders.

We have, therefore, agreed reluctantly to an arrangement whereby WAHGA will be in charge of all activities relating to plots. We will own the site plot-map, allocate plots to people on the waiting-list, ensure plots are maintained and continue to run the shop. WLC will manage issues beyond plots. However, without a lease, we can be given 12 months' notice by WLC at any time.

Acting WAHGA chair, Phil Murphy, said: "We have put to WLC two detailed proposals. The first was a 14-year lease. The second was a blueprint in which WAHGA would run all of the day-to-day management of the site without a lease. We haven't had formal responses to either — just verbal statements that neither proposal has won their support."

(See interview overleaf)



Inside this issue:

**The story behind WLC-
WAHGA discussions** 2
- interview

**Why I quit, why I am
quitting and why I'm
staying** 3
- three current and former
WAHGA Committee mem-
bers explain

**WLC — a statement
from the chair** 3

**Weybridge Land Charity
accounts explained** 3
- what do they do with
their money?

**What the Allotments
mean to me** 4

**Composting—a quick
guide** 5

WAHGA news items 6

CONTACT US

If you have something you would like to share in the next newsletter or want to give us feedback, please e-mail [here](#)

WAHGA Website [click here](#)

“We were within weeks of signing a long-term lease”

WAHGA’s acting chair, Phil Murphy, has been in all discussions with the Weybridge Land Charity since the Triangle sale was blocked. Here he tells our Chief Reporter how hopes of long-term security died.

SO, THERE HAS BEEN MUCH TALK OF A NEW WAHGA/WLC RELATIONSHIP OVER THE PAST COUPLE OF YEARS. WHERE ARE WE NOW AND WHY?

Some of us stood for election for the WAHGA Committee in 2019, after the previous Committee had backed a Weybridge Land Charity plan to sell off *The Triangle* section of the Churchfields Allotments site. If you don’t know *The Triangle*, go and see it. It’s the area behind Curzon Road and Molyneaux Road and it is a haven of tranquility. Selling it off for development would have been an act of vandalism. Thankfully, those behind the sale plan exited quickly.

“Selling off *The Triangle* would have been an act of vandalism”

We’d been told in 1999 that sale of the Pine Grove section of the allotments would safeguard the site for good. Now we were being told we needed another sale of land to safeguard the site. It was nonsense. It was sheer bad management by WLC.

SO WHAT WAS YOUR PITCH TO WAHGA MEMBERS?

We said we would fight to win a long-term lease for WAHGA, ensure protection against land sales across the site, and argue for more autonomy for WAHGA. Weybridge Land Charity trustees at that time were really receptive. We had a meeting with all trustees that supported our blueprint. Trustees Tim Oliver, Glen Dearlove and Michael Freeman were particularly supportive in subsequent, more detailed meetings. WAHGA should have a lease and run day-to-day management of the site, they agreed.

SO WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

There were personnel changes among WLC trustees, admin was taken from the excellent, experienced, efficient Walton Charity and brought in-house. All of a sudden, the mood within our discussions changed. We began to be told that it was impossible for WLC to offer a lease. The fact that the site was a protected endowment meant that they couldn’t sell any part of the site, even if they wanted to, they claimed. They insisted they didn’t want to sell.

The problem was that their claims that they couldn’t offer a lease and that protected endowment status meant land couldn’t be sold were just wrong. We had to conclude that, despite their rhetoric, they just didn’t want to hand over any control. They claimed that they wanted to focus on their charitable donations. Instead they appear to want to micro-manage the site.

SO WHAT ARE YOUR CONCERNS ABOUT THIS?

Apart from Carlye Case, a long-term and much respected chairman of WAHGA and now a WLC trustee, the Charity has little practical understanding of what management of an allotment site requires. Their sole, hands-on trustee has an agricultural background. As we all know, big agriculture has been a cause of undermining biodiversity — not nurturing it. We have seen under the new regime: the felling of healthy trees; interruptions to bat sight-lines; plot-holders’ wild flower areas destroyed; blackberry bushes removed; and undergrowth vital for nesting birds and other wildlife cut back. I am really concerned that the WLC approach will undermine our biodiversity aims. Elmbridge Borough Council has awarded us £10,000 of funding to pursue wildlife projects that will boost pollination and help all plot-holders grow better produce. I’m not sure WLC understands the benefits of biodiversity and creating an environment for increased pollination.

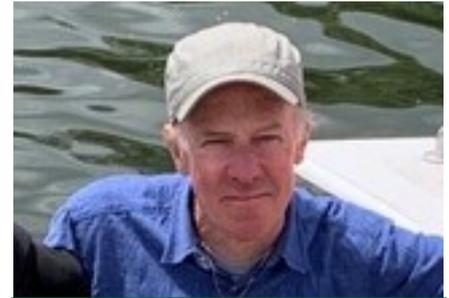
SO WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Well, some WAHGA Committee members were tempted to quit and let WLC pick up all of the costs of the voluntary efforts that we put in. But, to be honest, most of us were not prepared to abandon plot-holders to the Charity. If one particular trustee were to walk away or be removed for whatever reason, the Charity would be incapable of dealing with the day-to-day management responsibilities they have accrued. We need to be ready to step in. It would have been so much more sensible for the Charity to focus on its charitable aims and let WAHGA run the day-to-day management of the site.

We have agreed reluctantly to a situation where we manage everything to do with plots and the Charity deals with everything beyond plots — fencing, border and big trees, ditches, water systems, mowing. They have suggested the establishment of a committee to deal with working issues with two representatives from each side. WAHGA nominally has the chairmanship of this committee but WLC retains a veto on any policy proposal.

SO HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT WHERE WE HAVE LANDED?

To be honest, I’m not just upset; I’m angry. Some of the older hands around the allotments suggest that the Charity-WAHGA relationship has been and always will be difficult. But my view is we were so close to a long-term lease, we had a critical mass behind the ideal arrangement — and then the goalposts were moved. I really don’t believe that this is the optimal outcome. But, plot-holders, please understand that we’ve done all we can to help and protect you. And we’ll continue to try to do so for as long as you want us to do so.



Phil Murphy took over chairmanship after previous chair, Tony Palmer, quit in frustration

All of a sudden, the mood within our discussions changed...

WLC-WAHGA fall-out

Three WAHGA Committee members explain their reaction

Why I quit

Former WAHGA chair, Tony Palmer who resigned in Nov 2020



I'M sorry that the momentum that members and the community showed after the earlier debacle over the threat to *The Triangle* which then grew into real, positive developments is now more acutely at risk. I was

delighted when the Charity agreed that WAHGA was the right partner to manage the allotments and so allow the Charity to focus more sharply on helping the poor of Weybridge. As we said at the March 2020 AGM, we were on track to create a solid long-term relationship but, when new Trustees joined the Charity, this all changed. I regret not being able to stay in WAHGA and as a plot-holder but the Charity is on a path with which I cannot agree.

Why I'm quitting

Guy Phillips, former Treasurer, now Membership Secretary, will quit at the AGM



I HAVE been an active participant in the lease negotiations. Over the past two years I strongly believed, and still do, that there was a win-win position with a lease, whereby WAHGA could have continued to improve and upgrade the condition and

facilities of Churchfields, whilst providing the Weybridge Charity with an increased income to distribute to poor and needy Weybridge residents (the Weybridge Charity's charitable objective). Unfortunately, the Charity was unwilling to relinquish direct control of the maintenance of the site and instead seeks to increase its income through maintenance cost-cutting. This leaves WAHGA to continue acting as the

"I strongly believed...there was a win-win position"

Charity's agent: collecting rents and managing plot-allocation and condition, for which, in exchange, WLC allows WAHGA to operate our shop. This has always felt to me like a very unequal arrangement, with a relatively small benefit for the very considerable effort that the WAHGA committee puts in to administer the allotments.

Although I would be happy to continue to volunteer my time to WAHGA if I thought my efforts were contributing to improving Churchfields, I have reached the conclusion my efforts are only going to help the Weybridge Charity, which, based on its current and recent past performance, is not a charity I can support – so it now feels like the right time to go. It has been both a rewarding (particularly the opportunity to meet so many plot-holders) and frustrating two years!

Why I'm staying

WAHGA Acting chair, Phil Murphy

SOME of us believe that plot-holders are best represented and managed by WAHGA members, elected annually and in a position to be voted out, if they don't deliver.

And, for the same reason, I am not comfortable about leaving plot-holders with no protection against decisions made by trustees that they cannot influence or remove.

So, I'll stay on and try to fight for the interests of plot-holders — even though WLC has chosen to leave WAHGA with little autonomy.

We have a brilliant WAHGA Committee with a wide range of skills. They put in many hours voluntarily — but we are all up for election at the Summer AGM, so you can keep us or remove us...unlike your trustees.



WLC — a statement

"Much has changed in the three years since a potential threat to the integrity of Churchfields allotments became public knowledge.

In this time, the trustees of the Charity reached a view that their responsibility for the allotment site would be best served by the Charity retaining its full landlord role and building a stronger working relationship with WAHGA. The Board is wholly committed to the integrity of the site to meet the objects of the Charity, which are to serve the needs of members of the community in hardship, need or distress and to provide allotments on the site.

Discussions between the Charity and WAHGA have resulted in a stronger basis for working in partnership to build a safer, stronger, better future for the allotment site and for cultivation on the site. By working together, we are ensuring Churchfields Allotments run effectively and the Charity's asset is managed effectively.

We have been making improvements to Churchfields such as some boundary tidying, replacement of leaking water tanks and access to the gate close to the church. There is more we would like to do and, through WAHGA, are keen to hear your ideas and suggestions. We would also like to thank WAHGA members for the improvements they have been making. Thank you!"

Helen Lamb — WLC Chair (May 14, 2020)

The Charity's finances

Many plot-holders ask us how WLC spends its money.

The last accounts posted by our landlord, Weybridge Land Charity with the Charity Commission are from 2019.

At the end of 2018, the Charity had £1.88m in its investment fund. The original source of the majority of this was the sale of the Pine Grove allotment site for housing in 1999 for £1.18m. During 2019 the investment fund grew by £310k (16.5%) to £2.19m and generated an investment income of £52,404 (4.4%). This income was supplemented by £8,554 from charitable activities, the majority of which was allotment rent, to make a total income of £60,958. Of this income, £24,389 was spent in the year, with the balance re-invested.

The Charity's expenditure in 2019 was £13,153 on professional fees and administration, £6,127 on allotment maintenance, and £5,109 on emergency aid to residents of Weybridge. This means 8.4% of the Charity's income, which equates to 0.27% of its capital assets, was spent on the Charity's object of "the relief of persons resident in the area of benefit who are in need, hardship or distress". We believe WLC have spent more on their charitable objects in 2020 but, despite our asking for details several times, the Charity has not responded.

What Churchfields Allotments mean to me...

“Quite simply — a life-saver”

Many plot-holders will have come across the indefatigable, 82-year-old **Dorothy Johnson**, on plot No 14, near ‘The Crossroads’. Here, **Sophie Murphy** discovers how Churchfields helped her through the pandemic and hears her extraordinary back story.

“THE allotments have been my saviour. I live on my own - my choice - but the pandemic restricted life so much.”

Dorothy took on her plot in October 2019 - and, within months, COVID had struck. She is 82. She is known for spending the whole day on her plot, be it rain or shine. Often she wears a jaunty tweed cap.

Born in London, she was six months old and asleep in her pram, when her siblings came home from school and found the family home bombed out and their parents killed. All three girls were sent to a Children’s Home.

It’s shocking now to hear how: she was simply known as the ‘Home’s Girl’ at school; that she could never do the cookery class because she was never provided with the ingredients, so had to do the class washing-up; that she missed the chance to sit her 11-Plus exam, as she had a broken leg at the time and there was no-one available to take her into school.

Original Teddy Girl

Following a miserable time being fostered out in her early teens, Dorothy ran off to St John’s Wood in London, went to the Police and asked them to find her a place in a girls’ hostel.

She got work as a hairdressers apprentice and never looked back. “I was one of the original Teddy Girls too!” laughs Dorothy.

She stuck to a routine during the pandemic: “Getting up, maybe shopping, and then come to the allotment. Just the chance to wave a hand at someone in the distance.....it’s life, isn’t it?”

Dorothy had a plot on another site not a million miles away, but she says the community spirit here has been amazing.

She says it was hard to build up relationships with people at the other site because so many were short-termers and a lot of people came and went. Another issue for her was the watering.

I myself struggle with bad shoulders from lugging watering cans about and would love a hose. Dorothy cautions otherwise. Her experience was that there were about five hosepipes per standby tap. That meant taking turns in watering (sometimes waiting up to 20 minutes)



and she often found there was only a trickle left by the time she got to use her hosepipe.

When she first took over her site, Karleen, her neighbour opposite, let her keep her tools in her shed for a while. Cllr Harman (plot-holder and retiring WLC land trustee) helped her put up a shed. Now she lets others without a shed keep their tools there too.

Tony’s ‘magic’ spade

She did an incredible job digging and clearing her site. She says former WAHGA chair Tony Palmer provided her with a ‘magic spade’. What’s magical about it? Well, it has a pointy end, serrated edges and really did make a dif-

ference.

In the summer, Dorothy was carrying a very large marrow from the allotments surplus table in a thin plastic bag. The marrow was so heavy that the handles stretched and broke off. This caused her to trip up the kerb in the High Street, resulting in a bad fall and a broken wrist.

Once again, kindness shone through. Sally Quest, who has a plot on *The Triangle*, made sure that Dorothy’s plot was kept watered and tended for at least six weeks..

“Sally was always there when I broke my wrist” says Dorothy

Sally met up with Dorothy a few times in town to walk with her, as Dorothy felt a loss of confidence about walking after the accident. She also took Dorothy for her two COVID jabs.

Churchfields’ ‘amazing’ community spirit

There are several families with children near Dorothy’s plot and she enjoys watching them benefitting from being outdoors.

Does Dorothy get the inevitable aches and pains? She does. How does she deal with this?

“When I get home I stuff my face with a cup of tea and cake!” she says.

Gardening is not Dorothy’s only exercise. During normal times she goes to dance classes once a week, where she does Samba and the Cha-Cha. I can see she can’t wait to get back to this and to her ‘Thursday Club’ which has also been closed

Composting on the Allotment — a quick guide

By Diane Ewart

BAGS of composted manure are selling like hot cakes in the shop - and if you bought the recent batch it was definitely hot! But what about your allotment-made compost? This provides a nutrient-rich, free source of good quality organic matter.

If you have a compost bin on the allotment and the contents have been maturing for 9-12 months, empty it. Sieve out the larger pieces of un-decomposed matter with a garden riddle, and use the rest on your plot. It might sound like a huge task but it will take no more than an hour for an average-sized bin. Use the contents on fruit bushes, the courgette patch, for earthing up potatoes; it's suitable for any produce that benefits from a nutrient-rich soil.

Once the bin has been emptied, start taking more care about what you put in and, if you do nothing else, break or cut up the material into smaller pieces. A rhubarb leaf simply ripped into multiple pieces will compost much more quickly than a whole leaf.

It's not only compost bins that can be emptied. In recent weeks I've seen a number of plot holders tackle their guilty secret - the huge compost pile behind their shed. If it's been there for a few years, dig it up, sieve with a riddle if necessary, and use it directly on your plot.

The first week of May 2021 was Compost Awareness week and there is a lot of good, and not so good, advice online, so it is important to keep in mind that composting is a simple, easy, natural process that we are just helping to speed up.

What can you compost?

Organic waste from fruit and vegetables: shop-bought and allotment-grown
Shrub prunings, lawn mowings, leaves, annual weeds not in flower or seed
Newspaper, cardboard, white paper
Coffee grounds in moderation, tea leaves, compostable tea bags
Eggshells
Comfrey and nettle are 'activators' and speed up composting

What to avoid composting

Unless you have a rat- and fox-proof system, for obvious reasons, don't add meat, fish and cooked foods.

Aerobic composting

Most methods are aerobic: oxygen, water, food and warmth is needed. The goal is get the temperature up to 60C as seeds and pathogens are destroyed. The heap will then go through a cooling process.

Air - add twigs, prunings and wood chipping between the layers of green matter to provide air, turning the heap can also help add air.



Water - get the the balance right by using a variety of green materials, layer thinly and add shredded paper/cardboard if the compost heap appears wet

Food - simply the materials in the heap, use a range

Warmth - a compost heap will go through a cycle of: 1) warming up; 2) getting hot; 3) cooling down; and 4) maturation by worms.

Aerobic methods

Dalek type - the most basic and easy to obtain, a large plastic bin with a lid and no bottom

Pallet/wooden slat composter - try and create one a metre square as the large size helps create a hotter heap. By lining the sides and covering the top with plastic (try old compost bags) it will heat up, and so compost, more quickly,

Tumbler - the tumbler has a mechanism so that the contents can be rotated easily. This adds air and helps to speed up the composting process.

HotBin (trade name) - A specially made insulated container that has no contact to the soil; it needs regular feeding with organic material and makes usable compost in 30 - 90 days rather than the usual 9 - 12 months.

Wormery

This system relies on compost worms to digest the organic matter. The composting is done in trays and can be slow until the worm population has built up. I'd be interested to hear if anyone has a successful wormery on the allotment.

Anaerobic

The Bokashi system is well known anaerobic method and is based on airless fermentation but not suitable, as far as I'm aware, in an allotment setting. If anyone has one I'd be interested to learn more.

“Composting is a simple, easy, natural process that we are just helping to speed up.”

Churchfields' 'bee-man' deals with two onsite swarms



"Don't panic when bees move home," says Martin

CHURCHFIELDS' resident bee-keeper, Martin Major, was called into action twice in early May, as separate swarms descended on our site within days. Martin, who has been keeping honey bees on our site for around 10 years now, explains: "A cluster of bees

send scouts out to search the surrounding area for a potential new home and if left undisturbed, they will eventually move on. Whilst they remain in a cluster, a bee-keeper can collect a swarm and house it in a prepared hive.

"There are a few ways a swarm can be collected, but the method I generally use is to lay a sheet on the ground beneath or near to the swarm. I then try to get as many of the bees into a skep (pictured left).

"If the bees are on a branch I put the skep beneath the branch and shake the branch, collecting the bees in the skep below. If they are on the side of a shed I put the skep beneath them and gently brush the bees into the skep. I then place the skep on the ground on top of the sheet, propping it up at one side with a stone so the bees can enter and leave.

"At this stage you are hoping that the queen is among the bees in your skep. If she is, then the bees will settle in the skep. Some bees at the entrance to the skep will start to emit a pheromone, which they fan with their wings. This sends a message to bees that were not caught in the skep, that the queen is here and to join them.

"Later that day, in the evening, when the bees have stopped flying, I return to the skep, pull up the corners of the sheet around the skep so the bees are trapped, and I take them to a prepared hive, into which I shake the bees, into their new home.

If you are lucky enough to see a swarm emerging from a hive don't panic. It is a fantastic sight with as many as 10,000 bees swirling around in the air and the noise is considerable. If you find yourself in this situation, walk slowly and calmly away from the immediate area. Don't flap your arms or try to swat them away. They will quickly settle down in a cluster and it is this cluster of bees that are most frequently seen. A swarm of bees are usually docile but it is prudent to keep away from them."

Martin explains that swarming is a natural and essential phenomenon — the means by which a honey bee colony reproduces and multiplies. When a colony decides to swarm, they can be found in a cluster, often on trees, but sheds, chairs, almost anything will do.

If you are interested in finding out more, do look out Martin on Plot 22A. He says: "If you are thinking about keeping bees, contact your local beekeeping club - Weybridge Beekeepers. Beekeeping does require training to understand the life-cycle of bees and practical handling. Weybridge Beekeepers run a theory training course consisting of one evening per week over eight weeks (usually starting January) and a practical course of about six sessions during the early summer. It could be the best present you ever bought yourself!"



ODDS & SODS

If you have any views or questions you would like to contribute to a letters section, do send them to: info@weybridgeallotments.org.uk

Your letter will need to be concise, given our space constraints but we look to receiving your thoughts.

Plot monitoring — next round starts

WAHGA Committee members, with the help of other volunteers will be carrying out the first of the year's plot-inspections during the week May 17th — 23rd.

As we reported in our last edition, we now have a long waiting-list so it is essential that no plots are neglected.

We will be colour-coding plots and we will contact you if we see no evidence of plots being worked or we feel part of a plot is out of control.

If there are extenuating circumstances which have prevented you from getting down to your plot recently, please let us know. Similarly, if you have

decided that you would prefer to downsize your plot to something more manageable (or to relinquish your plot altogether), please let us know as soon as possible so that we can offer space to those on our growing waiting-list. This will then allow any new plot holders to take advantage of the main growing season.

Obviously, if you are a new plot holder and have just taken over your plot this season that is taken into consideration.

Unwinding CIO status

For reasons we outline on pages 1-3 of this edition of *Allotment News*, we have begun the process of unwinding our Charitable Incorporated Organisation status. This was required in the event of our taking on a lease

but, without that possibility, it means unnecessary administration.

Interested parties have three months to express their views to the Charity Commission, should they feel this is the wrong move.

We did not unpick our previous status so we can resume our position as an association. However, we will need a new Agency Agreement with WLC.

AGM

Our request to plot-holders to allow us to delay our AGM until we can meet indoors in person was supported virtually without opposition. Given the uncertainty around the June 21 full opening, we will wait a little longer before setting a date.