

## Grace + Flavour Annual General Meeting

<b>Date &amp; Location:</b>	<b>9th November 2023, West Horsley Village Hall</b>
<b>Directors Present:</b>	Ray Beard, Ashley Brown, Gerry Robbins, Robert Treble, Michael Trower, Carolyn Whitfield, John Whitlock and John Fluker.
<b>Apologies:</b>	Helena Stuart-Matthews and Vicky Rutherford.
<b>Chairman</b>	Gerry Robbins
<b>Minute Taker:</b>	John Fluker

### Agenda Items

#### 1. Welcome by the Chairman:

Everyone was welcomed to the meeting.

The first thing to be done is to ask for your approval for me to chair this meeting.

Proposer: Heather Spackman. Seconder: Bob Spackman. Group vote by show of hands.

**Minutes:** I also ask you to approve the minutes of the 2022 AGM.

Proposer: Mark Blowers. Seconder: Ray Beard. Group vote by show of hands.

**Resignations:** Ray Beard, Rob Treble and Michael Trower are standing down by rotation and have agreed to stand for re-election. The meeting agreed by show of hands to deal with the re-elections together.

Proposer: Patricia Robbins. Seconder: John Fluker. Group vote by show of hands.

*The following reports were accompanied by slides.*

#### 2. Chairman's Report:

What an eventful year it has been! A new vegetable bed to support local food banks, our first paved patio and our first open day with the NGS.

This is a brief look back. Please forgive me if I have missed anything you think important, particularly from February to June when I was unable to attend the garden due to health problems.

As most of you will know, Grace and Flavour is the Horsley Villages Community Kitchen Garden. We grow food and flowers for the benefit of its volunteers and we also sell produce to the public.

But it is more than that. Grace & Flavour is a community. It provides friendship, support, sharing of expertise and knowledge as well as gossip over tea and cake.

Whilst enjoying themselves, it is important that everyone keeps safe. So I am particularly grateful to Beverley Nash for guiding new members through a comprehensive induction. This is backed up by our revised and expanded Handbook, a major reference source on all things Grace & Flavour.

John Whitlock and the other directors are going to cover our main activities in more detail, so I will briefly summarise some of the key events of the year.

## 2.1 Events

Early last **December** we had our annual winter warmer baked potato lunch which was well attended and enjoyed by all.

In late **March** we hosted a seed sowing workshop for Horsley Garden Society, lead by Bob Spackman.

In **May** we had our Ordinary General Meeting in the Potting Shed. The issue of rainwater collection for crop irrigation was raised. This has been considered by the committee and deemed too expensive to be practical. However I will come back to this issue in my Wildlife report, later in the meeting.

In early **June**, Carolyn Whitfield and team ran a stall at Ripley Farmers' Market. This was very successful in attracting new volunteers and also publicising our main event this year.

8th **July**, we opened for the first time under the National Garden Scheme. The National Garden Scheme gives visitors unique access to over 3,500 gardens across the country and raises impressive amounts of money for nursing and health charities through admissions, teas and cake. Being our first year, there was a steep learning curve, everyone worked very hard to ensure a truly successful day. We had 207 visitors, raised £883 for the NGS and £910 for Cherry Trees local charity. All this even though it clashed with East Horsley's Big Day Out! After a period of reflection, and in spite of the considerable work involved, we are pleased to confirm that we will do it again again in 2024.

In early **August** around 36 sunk their teeth into our summer lunch. Yummy.

In mid August, we hosted a First Aid training day organised by Tony Millership. A most enjoyable and useful event. 18 attendees with £245 raised for St John's Ambulance charity.

In late **September** on two Saturdays, Ray Beard deployed his scrapper and apple press to make good use of this year's crop of apples.

On 14th **October** we had a Harvest celebration with a surprise visit from "Destiny", a beautiful a cappella choir from Kampala. A very memorable moment.

## 2.2 Future Events Dates for Your Diary

OGM Saturday 11th May

Open Day Sunday 4th August 1pm - 4pm

AGM Thursday 7th November

## 2.3 Publicity & New Blood

In the last 12 months we have focused on raising awareness of Grace & Flavour, partly because we feel we have a lot to offer but also to attract new members. Articles have been published in The West and East Horsley Parish Councils Newsletters, Vantagepoint, St Mary's Magazine, Horsley Countryside Preservation Society Magazine. Carolyn Whitfield has been instrumental in raising our profile in social media (Facebook, Instagram etc) and events like the Ripley Farmers Market and linking to local organisations such as Cherry Trees. As a result we have attracted a record breaking 24 new members this year and we have 61 active members. This is really encouraging for G&Fs future.

## 2.4 Challenges

Here are a few challenges to consider during the rest of the presentations. Weed management, vegetable pricing and stopping badgers eating our sweet corn!

## 2.5 Acknowledgements

- (1) I would like to thank WHPC and Horsley Farmers Market for their generous donations which have helped us keep G&F in good financial order.
- (2) I would like to thank my fellow directors for all their hard work and support to G&F through the last 12 months. I would like to make a particular mention of Carolyn, Nicky, Beverley and Michael who so brilliantly organised and managed the Open Day including on the day refreshments.
- (3) John Whitlock deserves our undying gratitude and love for his key role in managing the garden and ensuring production of an unending stream of produce. As you can see, breaking his arm does not seem to have slowed him down.
- (4) And last but not least, I must thank all the hardworking members who have contributed their time, their graft and cake.

## 3. Garden Manager's report: John Whitlock

2023, in spite of my concerns whether we could achieve the results of previous years, has been an excellent all round year.

We began experimenting with no dig gardening in 2011, when we set aside a number of beds which would be no dig. Now of course we are completely no dig. I note with interest that the RHS has for the first time devoted a section of their website extolling the virtues of no dig gardening. Also when I took over in 2012/2013 we became a peat free garden. I think since then we have shown how successful you can be with peat free compost. As I understand it from 2024 peat based compost will not be available to amateur gardeners. Of course, we do not use artificial fertilizers, herbicides or pesticides.

**3.1 Successes** The huge majority of crops have been very successful, but to pick out a few:

Dwarf Beans have probably cropped over the longest period and in the largest quantity ever. Calabrese has been available almost every week from June 10th until today 9th November. Tomatoes and Cucumbers were excellent throughout the summer with no issues. Ray Beard as ever has done a fantastic job all summer nurturing them. The potting shed is full of onions and squashes showing how good they have been.

### 3.2 New in 2023

We grew tenderstem broccoli for the first time. The crop was excellent, although I'm not sure that it cropped over the long period that other broccoli (calabrese) did. We grew sugar snap peas which were enjoyed and will be grown again. Perhaps we will increase the amount sown.

The food bank bed was established. Helena took a range of our surplus crops to a Cobham food bank during the summer.

We experimented with buying in some celeriac plants for the first time. They are difficult to germinate and grow with our limited space for tender plants. We have had the best crop ever, (although the relatively wet summer has helped).

We have grown squash very successfully through weed suppressant in the old fruit cage area.

**3.3 Flowers** Again this year Helena has produced beautiful flowers, with the help of Sue Whitfield and Penny Whitlock

**3.4 Fruit** We have had an outstanding year for plums, after many blank seasons because of frost killing the spring blossoms. The quinces and Bramley apples have been outstanding too.

**3.5 Soft Fruit** The blackberries carefully cultivated by Tim had the best season ever. The raspberries which have been full of weeds in the last couple of years have been kept almost weed free by Heather (helped by others).

**3.6 Wednesday Weeders** This group has grown in numbers this year. They have done a fantastic job not only weeding but thinning carrots.

### **3.7 Problems**

The greatest problem we have had is the badgers eating perhaps 80% of the sweetcorn. We tried to find how they entered the garden, but failed to do so. We have to make a decision whether it is worth growing sweetcorn in future years. We are aware of other sites that have abandoned growing sweetcorn because they were unable to defeat the badgers. At least they are not particularly demanding to grow.

The main crop potatoes were disappointing. We may grow more Charlotte and less main crop potatoes.

Blight affected the potatoes and tomatoes outside. Late autumn last year rats /mice caused an enormous amount of damage to our beetroot and carrot crop. We are looking at ways to store them rather than leaving them all in the ground.

### **3.8 2024**

We will clear the old rhubarb bed by the north wall and hopefully prepare it for growing some tender summer crops.

The food bank bed needs to be extended and more carefully planned.

As mentioned earlier we need to rethink the potato varieties that we grow.

Hopefully we will grow some more peppers next year including chillies

We need to decide whether we should grow some crops particularly for our shop sales. Although this would possibly mean we have to reduce the range of vegetables that we grow.

## **4. Finance Report: Ashley Brown**

Please see web site.

## **5. Allotments Report: Michael Trower**

The year seems to have produced some excellent crops which have flourished in the varied weather we have had. There is seldom a time during the day when there isn't someone at the allotments.

**5.1** However I have had much unnecessary work with several changes of tenancy and some very short ones where plots have been taken on and then interest soon lost and the plot left uncultivated, without the tenants having the decency to advise that they have given up. One tenant took a plot in 2022 but then it was noticed their house was on the market. Emails were not answered and an eviction notice was sent but eventually returned undelivered! One applicant viewed a half plot then asked if they could have a quarter plot, which was declined by me. Prospective tenants are now advised they need to commit a reasonable amount of time to the plot and provide proof of residency in Horsley.

**5.2** After continued non-adherence to the rules regarding dogs, these are no longer permitted in the allotments, and all plot holders were notified.

**5.3** Following a visit to the Cobham allotments it is proposed to put hinged covers on the dip tanks to prevent the water going green.

**5.4** The allotments received much interest on the NGS open day and visitors were impressed with the whole set up.

**5.5** As always **Thanks** are due to those on the mowing rota for keeping the grass tidy and those who strim around the margins – it is appreciated.

There are currently two vacant half plots, and it is intended to strim them and cover them with weed suppressant pending new tenants.

**5.6** A three year agreement for the allotment management fees has been agreed with both Parish Councils.

## **6. Building Report:** Tony Millership

The patio has been completed using lots of cement.

Ramps have been created by the entrances to the polytunnels....lots more cement!

The team helped move the fruit cage to its new position.

More weed bins have been built.

The team have carried out lots of ground clearance and made a few bonfires.

There is now a requirement for weed suppressant along the outside of the west wall so that maintenance of the wall props can take place.

Also next year the team will carry out patch repair work on all the main paths in the Garden

## **7. Wildlife Report:** Gerry Robbins

You have heard plenty from me already so I will try to be brief and just look at a few important topics which have emerged over the last 12 months.

**7.1 Trees.** These might be considered more under the heading of 'estates' but in my defence my comments do refer to native species! Our major trees were inspected in January by Rob Grist, our tree surgeon. He removed the severely angled part of the fallen lime tree at north end of the row. In addition five trees were pollarded. Why do we pollard the lime trees?

Traditionally this was done to allow cattle to move easily through woodland and provide them with fresh leaves at head height. In public areas it more commonly done to allow humans to walk underneath. However our main aim is to reduce shadow on our vegetable beds.

Back to our lime trees. Rob Grist considered that one of our limes (No.8 ) might be affected by a serious fungal pathogen, *Kretzschmaria duetza* which if confirmed would require removal and burning in situ of the whole tree. He has asked us to monitor the tree and report any changes.

Rob and Sue Streeter, the Hatchlands Outdoors Estates Manager, also advised no more materials such as weeds to be dumped on top of tree roots as this might reduce respiration and weaken the trees. For this reason we have a new weed management strategy!

Sadly the first poplar tree by car park entrance was clearly in distress by high summer and had to be completely removed.

**7.2 The Pond.** Last winter's freeze took us down to - 8.C. One issue that often arises is the need break the ice or not? It is probably not necessary unless lots of larger fish are present. There has been a progressive overgrowth of pond over several years in spite of regular tidying. This has lead to very low water levels during summer and concern about the need to top up with mains water.

This year we have focussed on clearing of floating pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*) which, although attractive, is non-native and invasive. Reed mace has also been reduced as it tends to dominate if ignored.

This has been a poor year for dragonflies and damselflies. This is probably not connected to above observations. Certainly scoop samples of the pond mud show a very rich environment with many newts and dragon fly and damsel fly larvae.

In future drought periods, we are hopeful that rainwater top-ups can be siphoned from the rainwater barrel adjacent to the north polytunnel. This should reduce the amount of mains water used, if not avoiding its use altogether.

**7.3 Nestbox Survey.** Our nest boxes were cleared out as usual last winter before I became ill and was unable to undertake any nest surveys this year. Sorry!

**7.4 Our NGS Open Day.** A highlight for me was accompanying two visiting entomologists, Graham Collins and Jovita Kaunang who spent a couple of hours poring over our wild plants. Lot's to find! Graham hoped to send me a list of species found. (Graham, if you are listening, I would still love to have it.)

In absence of a full list can I mention a few stars:-

Bonking Hogweed Beetles (*Rhagonycha fulva*), Hollyhock Weevils, Bryony Ladybird (*Henosepilachna argus*) larva and a rarity, this snipefly (*Chrysopilus laetus*) spotted amongst the lime trees.

**7.5 Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) Community Engagement.** Helena Stuart-Matthews and I were invited to represent G&F at this new awards and networking event which was held at West Horsley Place on 3rd August. It was remarkable and encouraging to see how many wildlife enabling projects are underway locally. Claire Harris, the community engagement manager for Surrey Wildlife Trust subsequently visited G + F in September. We are following up on her suggestions.

## **7.6 Miscellaneous Department**

**Who ate 'all' the sweetcorn?** Answer *Meles meles* (badger) and *Phasianus colchicus* (common pheasant), both caught on wildlife camera. Approximately 80% of our crop was lost! Please let us know if you have a practical suggestion for dealing with badgers.

**Asian Hornets.** These are a major threat to wasps and honey bees and devastated French crops, reducing the yield of crops that need insect pollination by about 50%. Asian hornets may have been seen very locally. For this reason we have been asked to be alert and house a lure monitored for the presence of AH. Fortunately it is now approaching the end of the active season for this invader but we will need to resume our vigilance early next spring. Sightings should be reported to me or Ray Beard for onward reporting to the Surrey Beekeepers Association (SBKA).

## **8. Questions / Comments from the Audience**

8.1 Tony Millership proposed a vote of thanks to Mark Blowers for his continuing excellent care of the Potting Shed Bathroom facilities.

8.2 The future of the Tithe following the merger of the Wheel of Care to cover both East & West Horsley was discussed by several contributors. It was clear that G + F could not increase the weekly number of parcels to cover East Horsley as well. Various options were discussed but no immediate changes proposed. This will be kept under review.

## **9. Thanks and Close: Chairman**

Gerry Robbins asked for a motion of thanks for all those involved with the tithe and then thanked everyone for attending the AGM and Nicki Douet and her team for providing the excellent refreshments.

The meeting was closed at 9.00pm.