

Minutes of the Grace + Flavour Annual General Meeting

Date and Location: Thursday 7th November 2024, West Horsley Village Hall.

Agenda Items:

1. The Chair was Gerry Robbins whose position was approved by the meeting. **Proposer:** Stephen Stuart-Matthews **Second:** John Whitlock

2. Apologies: (from directors) Carolyn Whitfield, John Fluker and Michael Trower.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting (November 2023) for Approval: These have been published on the G+F website for some time and were approved by the meeting.

4. Director resignations: Ashley Brown, Carolyn Whitfield and Vicky Rutherford have resigned and are not standing for re- election.

5. Directors for Re-election: John Fluker, Gerry Robbins and Helena Stuart-Matthews have retired by rotation but are happy to be re-elected. **Proposer:** Amanda De Haast. **Second:** Nicki Douet. A show of hands approved their re-election at the meeting.

6. New Appointments: Michael Trower as Company Secretary, Stephen Stuart- Matthews as Treasurer and Director, Mark Blowers as Webmaster.

7. Company Secretary's Report *(from Michael Trower, submitted in absentia)*

I am pleased to report it was a fairly easy transition into the role after taking over from Ashley. A handover of all the documents occurred and all the procedures were explained in detail. I now have a log on for our account at Companies House and the company address has been changed to my address and all the directors' details checked and updated where necessary. The main event of the company's year will be the filing of our annual report and accounts in the first half of next year. I should like to thank Ashley for explaining everything and it being a smooth handover, and to Beverley for some general company's house information.

8. Chairman's Report *(Gerry Robbins)*

8.1 Grace+ Flavour is not just about growing vegetables. Here is a brief list to remind you.

- Vegetables, fruits, herbs and flowers
- Collections of apples, pears and soft fruits
- The Potting Shed
- Conserved boundary walls
- Flower beds
- Lavender avenue
- Wildlife friendly features
- Duke of Edinburgh's Award students scheme
- Summer tithing scheme
- Food bank support
- Allotments - general maintenance and oversight
- Social events

- Support for local Farmers Markets
- Guided tours for other local interest groups
- Open to the public and raise money for local & national charities

8.2 This year the directors have produced a summary **code of conduct** in a few lines.

- Be safe
- Be considerate
- Be productive
- Be friendly

You will note that “be safe” is first on the list. This is a reminder of the importance of keeping yourself and other safe while working in the garden. There is extensive guidance in our handbook. If you see something you don’t like, please report it to a director.

8.3 Review of the year.

The year since the last AGM started in **November** with lots of muck spreading.

December is the month for our excellent “Baked Potato Lunch”.

Vicky Rutherford led a group of esteemed lady members in decorating a lovely G+F Christmas Tree for a festival at St Martin’s Church.

February’s cold weather provided an excuse to stay in doors to review and update the website. My thanks are due to Ashley in helping with this. Mark Blowers will tell us about future developments later.

In the same month we were visited by Bookham U3A gardening group.

Two of the directors were invited to the East Horsley Parish Council meeting to update councillors on our activities.

John Whitlock, our head gardener, was proposed by G+F for a West Horsley Community Engagement Award. It was no surprise when he walked away with the top, lifetime achievement award.

In June Ashley Brown decided to take a long break from his many and onerous duties for G+F.

These included acting as our Company Secretary, Treasurer, Membership Secretary, Public Relations officer and Webmaster, as well as chief fruit tree pruner, water rota mainstay, BBQ-er and AV Support for our AGM’s.

I would like to take this opportunity to minute our huge debt to Ashley for his tireless work, much of which occurred “in the background” and was not necessarily appreciated by the wider membership. There is a ‘Thank You’ card which can be signed after the meeting. We will be sending this, along with a liquid token of our appreciation, to Ashley and Claire.

Ashley’s main roles have been allocated as follows.

- Company Secretary to Michael Trower
- Treasurer to Stephen Stuart-Matthews
- Membership Secretary to Beverley Nash
- Public Relations to Gerry Robbins
- Webmaster to Mark Blowers

Thank you very much for stepping in and help us avoid a personnel crisis.

In June we won West Horsley in Bloom’s Iliff Community Award.

In July Tom Suffolk stepped into the breach and hosted a group from Fetcham U3A gardening group. The Wheel of Care weekly tithe started, with G+F providing vegetable and flower baskets for a total of around 300 WH and EH residents.

The highlight of August, and the year, was our open day under the auspices of the National Garden Scheme. New features for this, our second year, included garden tours, plant sales and a marquee run by Cherry Trees. This was a highly successful day, with 210 visitors, £1002 raised for the NGS, £900 for Cherry Trees and an additional £250 raised by Cherry Trees itself. To avoid missing anyone out, I am just going to say a big thank you to everyone involved. You did a great job.

Next year's Open Day will be on Sunday 27th July, 12 noon-4pm. Please make a note in your diaries.

September saw John Whitlock hosting a visit by the Little Bookham WI and Ray Beard, as usual, provided his excellent apple press producing first class, tasty apple juice for us to take away.

We also revamped our newsletter design. We currently have around 395 subscribers with a 59% newsletter opening rate. We have streamlined and improved the joining process for new members. Thank you to Beverley for leading on this. We currently have around 55 active members with 15 new joiners in 2024.

The main event in **October** was our Harvest Celebration lead by the Reverend Ellie Lister, assistant curate at St Martin's followed by a tasty Squash Lunch.

8.4 Thank -yous

I would like to thank: -

This year's donors

- Horsley U3A
- Jeremy Miles
- Little Bookham WI
- Lloyds Bank
- Anonymous donors

Grant givers

- Horsley Community Fund
- East Horsley Parish Council
- Woodland Trust

All the directors for their hard work over many years and continuing support to me.

All the "topic leads"

Nicki Douet for organising this evenings refreshments.

And last, but not in any way, the least, **the members** who contribute their time and effort to turn 'muck into magic'. Thank you.

Grace+ Flavour is only viable because of the generosity of others. Please join me in showing your appreciation.

8.5 Conclusion

The last year has been eventful and challenging, but with your help, Grace+Flavour can look forward to another interesting and eventful year.

9. Presentation of Accounts and Treasurers Report (*Stephen Stuart-Matthews*)

9.1 Stephen recorded his thanks to Ashley Brown for his service as Treasurer for the previous ten years and his help in handing over the Treasurer role, accounts and records to Stephen in July this year. The bank balance on 30th September 2024 was £13,798 including £4036 contingency. It is now £14,981. Grace and Flavour CIC spent a net £4,745 on a wide variety of costs, improvements and maintenance including refurbished beds, sheds, defibrillator power pack and pads, patio area improvements, fire extinguisher servicing, path pothole patching, shed repairs, skip hire and fruit pruning tools.

Thanks were recorded to HCF, EHPC and Jeremy Miles for their grants of £300, £500 and £60 respectively towards raised beds, patio and rent.

The accounts for the year Oct 2023 to end of Sept 2024 were presented and agreed. Proposed by Gerry Robbins and seconded by John Whitlock. The accounts can be viewed on our website and should be available on the Companies House Website next Spring.

Stephen thanked Brian Manners for undertaking an independent examination of the Grace + Flavour accounts. **Stephen proposed that Brian Manners be re-appointed and this was agreed by a show of hands.**

9.2 Plans for 2024/2025

The forecast and budget for Oct 2024 to Sep 2025 was presented and agreed. Expenditure will include new mesh netting for vegetable beds, reducing the height of lime trees for shade reduction, cutting east border laurels to reduce shading and prevent ingress to allotments, repairs to carpark entrance to remove ruts, border fence repair, weed suppressant to protect west wall supports and to cover allotments during handover periods, allotment dip tank covers as well as two wheel barrows and some minor gardening equipment.

10. Report of the Head Gardener (John Whitlock)

10.1 Overall, I would suggest that we have had a very successful year. We planted and sowed about 180 different seeds, onions and potatoes, with a handful of failures.

10.2 At planting time this spring the weather conditions were wet and cool. We did lose quite a few calabrese, some courgettes and squash plants plus a few runner bean plants. Our early view that it would lead to a seriously challenging year was not actually realised. We had excellent crops in a challenging year. We managed to overcome the initial slug attacks. We are starting to see more snails than previously too. Blackfly wasn't a problem on the vegetables, although Helena's *Ammi majus* were covered, (a great sacrificial crop as far as I was concerned.) Organic gardeners use covers to stop many pests, but some of ours are getting old and will gradually need to be replaced. We need to ensure they are put on properly to prevent pests getting in but allowing room for the vegetables underneath them to grow.

10.3 We still haven't conquered the badgers which created even more damage this year to the sweet corn. We have had a little early damage from cutworms in the polytunnel but not outside. Also something, mouse, rat or squirrel has had a real feast of our recently sown broad beans in the polytunnel.

10.4 I will highlight a couple of successes. We grew more dwarf French beans than in previous year which produced a massive crop over a long cropping period. We have sown 5 beds of carrots this year. The thinning (mainly completed by the Wednesday Weeders) has been much better this year, with a resulting increase in crop. We have had the usual high-quality brassicas, peas, broad bean, runner beans, onions, courgettes, squash, salads and many more. Tomatoes and cucumbers were excellent too. Although we have had issues with green potatoes and, latterly, rotting ones, we feel we will grow the same varieties next year. We reduced the amount of first earlies that we planted. The main crop potato, Desiree has produced excellent potatoes for roasting, mashing and baking.

10.5 We created a new narrow bed across the path from where we have grown daffodils. This has been a huge success notably this year for dahlias but the newly planted irises look well established for next year. Helena reports that the flowers did very well this year and numbers sold were pretty much the same as usual. Numbers of bunches were Daffodils 181, Iris 49, Peonies 63, and Mixed 530 (containing a lot of sweet peas and dahlias)

10.6 The new soft fruit cage had a great crop for its first year. Raspberries nurtured particularly by Heather were abundant. The blackberries which Tim so ably manages were very good. The fruit trees were variable in their production, but gave us lots of apples, pears and Victoria plums. Thanks to

Beverly who had to suddenly take the responsibility of managing the summer pruning and cropping without notice when Ashley resigned.

10.7 The issues we have had this year have mainly been small but significant. Our outdoor garlic was an almost total disaster. The heads were tiny and many were soft. In contrast, the garlic planted in the polytunnel, exactly the same variety and our own saved heads, were superb. We are still waiting to see the outcome of the parsnips and the leeks we sowed. The parsnips cropped so far have been good. I'm not sure we have enough as a result of poor germination in the spring. The leeks similarly are growing well but whether they will get sufficiently big enough in time for cropping we shall see. We had too many green potatoes (particularly the main crop Pink Fir) and too many have subsequently gone rotten. We need to plant them deeper and ensure we get them dry before storing. The late sown (August) seeds did poorly. They germinated but very few grew on in their modular cells. Perhaps the most significant failure were the autumn spinach plants. Obviously, the sweetcorn was a total disaster.

10.8 New in 2024 / 2025

We are experimenting with using woodchip on some of the paths. Bob is investigating the use of an electric fence to deter and hopefully stop the badgers eating all our crop. Our autumn raspberries have been such a success I am hoping to plant another bed alongside them but using golden raspberries. They are quite sweet, delicious and generally have a good crop. I have always intended to grow good globe artichokes at the garden. I have found a good variety to grow from seed next year. I am expecting them to be as popular as our radicchio, pak choi and chard!!! We may experiment with a different type of commercial peat free, organic growing medium. We will only use a few bags next year. We aim to grow some outdoor cucumbers of a more traditional variety to hopefully extend the season. We aim to clear the old herb bed. Quite a number of the old herbs have already been transplanted to a couple of sites in the garden. I imagine we will not cultivate the old herb bed next year but aim to kill off as many of the weeds as possible. We hope to achieve this by excluding light either with black plastic or black weed suppressant. Finally, we aim to clear part of the herbaceous border and temporarily move some plants to a space within the main garden.

I would like to thank our gardening team, watering team, Wednesday weeders and all the members who have worked hard to make this garden as successful as it is.

11. Report from Allotments Liaison *(from Michael Trower, submitted in absentia)*

The year has been a fairly uneventful one in the allotments. Much like the main garden, the weather affected some crops, giving a poor yield on some, and a bumper yield on others. There have been a couple of changes of tenancy over the year including sadly David & Dana-Leigh relinquishing their plot due to David's illness before his untimely passing. I can foresee some plots being given up in the years to come due to advancing age. However there have been a couple of new plot holders who don't qualify for bus passes so there is hope for the future. There were many visitors who viewed the allotments during the NGS Open Day and made complimentary comments.

I am grateful to those who assist with the mowing rota and also those who do some strimming to keep the allotments looking tidy and well kempt – it is much appreciated.

12. Report from the Building Team (*Tony Millership for Rob Treble*)

12.1 It was a year of several small projects. A heavy-duty rough cutter was used for mowing and ground clearance under the lime trees. The timber treatment for the supports on the east and north wall started. The east wall paving is a work in progress which will be completed next year. The team completed many repairs to the paths in garden and replaced some of the broken gully tops. Some of the rotten uprights that help support the fruit trees were replaced, and some of the deer fencing was extended.

12.2 The main raised bed by the entrance was refurbished. The patio furniture was painted and the wooden table refurbished for Open Day. Amanda's shed was painted and a flash band put on the base weatherboard. The team also helped Ray with the Apple pressing,

12.3 Work to be completed in the next year includes: Completing the 'cuprining' of the wall supports. Completing the paving behind sheds. Pruning the laurel hedges on the verge and in the car park and elsewhere. Cleaning the potting shed windows and roof. Replacing the rotten Des Collier Avenue fruit posts.

13. Report on Website Developments (*Mark Blowers*)

Ashley Brown (previous webmaster) wrote the whole website in html. However, Mark is not fluent in this coding language. At present he is managing the current website by cutting and pasting a limited amount of code. This is not a good solution for future updating of major developments.

To address this, he is building a new version of the website using a content management system. This will be easier to manage and if someone else needs to take it over, the transition would be much simpler.

He has so far mainly added text to the new website. He now needs to add images and optimise the layout. He is aiming to have the new website finished by January or February 2025.

14. Report on Wildlife (*Gerry Robbins*)

The natural world is in big trouble. More than 80% of wild mammal biomass has been lost since human civilisation started [Bar-On et al. 2018]. Wild animals (vertebrates) declined by 73% from 1970-2020 (WWF report 2024). Farmed animals now greatly outweigh wild ones. Insects have declined by 50% since 1970 (Goulson D SWT report). The British Big Butterfly Count 2024, recorded its worst year ever.

14.1 How can Grace+Flavour help? We recognise our small role in helping local wildlife, although not a core activity. We avoid herbicides, pesticides, and artificial fertilisers. Our 'No Dig' technique helps the soil ecosystem. We provide a number wildlife habitat opportunities such as:-

- A large variety of flowering plants, hedges and trees
- Compost bins
- Wildlife friendly pond
- Wild scrub area outside the walled garden
- Nest boxes, bee hotel, hedgehog cabin, log piles, and refugia sheets
- Not being excessively tidy!

14.2 Can We Do More? This year we have added to our wildlife hedging in the east wall.

We need to encourage interest in, and engagement with, wildlife conservation. We will continue to promote interest at our open day and site visits. We will particularly emphasise our wildlife features to younger visitors and members. We are planning to replace our rotten and unsafe bridge over the pond. This should encourage more exploration. We are trying to find a suitable site for a bee slope. G+F members encouraged to support local tree planting schemes such as the Surrey County Council's 1.2 million tree planting project.

14.3. Wildlife observations over the year

Trees: G+F has several mature trees on site including the row of 16 large lime trees outside the west wall. Unfortunately, one has developed weeping canker lesions on its trunk and is weakened. It has been inspected by our tree surgeon, Rob Grist. Further investigation is planned, possibly leading to soil treatment.

Insects: Although insect numbers have clearly declined, we have seen some interesting visitors this year. Identification has been greatly aided using the inbuilt 'intelligence' in modern smart phones. Here are some lovely examples: - alder leaf bug, wasp beetle, robber flies, southern oak bush cricket, sloe shield bug and a striking Jersey tiger moth. All of these have very particular features and behaviours which are fascinating. Sadly, very few dragonflies have been seen this year.

Birds: I'm going to limit my comments about birds. We have 24 nest boxes on site, of which around 50% were used this year by the usual mix of blue tits, great tits and stock doves. One robin was seen using one of our two robin boxes, but not further investigated as they are prone to abandonment if disturbed. One of the large owl boxes (actually used by stock doves most years) required considerable repair work to make it safe and easier to clean out. Thank you to Ray Beard for his help with this. Sue Reeve has kindly agreed to help me clean out our nest boxes over the coming winter. Thank you, Sue. We were lucky enough to have a pair of kestrels raise a family close by, and see them doing aerial displays on frequent occasions.

Mammals: This has been a good year for the cute and not so cute furry animals. The following have been seen during daylight, or caught on a wildlife camera: -

Woodmice, four in number, nesting in one of the nest boxes over winter.

Fox, caught on camera, on several occasions.

Roe deer, both on camera and a well-preserved skull found by Ray Beard on his allotment.

Hedgehog in the hand!

And finally the villain of the year award goes to the possibly single **badger** that ate virtually all of our sweetcorn.

14.4 Conclusion if you have any suggestions for ways we can encourage more wildlife at G+F without interfering with our core business, please let me know. As always, I encourage you to be on the lookout for wildlife in action, and let me know what you find. It is always good to share.

15. End of Meeting

The chairman thanked everyone for attending the meeting and closed it at 9.05pm.