

## GRACE & FLAVOUR A.G.M. 2021

<b>Date &amp; Location:</b>	<b>18th November 2021, West Horsley Village Hall</b>
<b>Directors Present:</b>	Ray Beard, Ashley Brown, Amanda de Haast, Nicki Douet, John Fluker, Gerry Robbins, Vicky Rutherford, Bob Spackman, Helena Stuart-Matthews, Rob Treble, Michael Trower & John Whitlock
<b>Apologies:</b>	Clive Downs, Jill Downs, Tricia MacDonald, Tom Suffolk, Heather Spackman and Frances Belamy
<b>Chairman</b>	Amanda de Haast
<b>Minute Taker:</b>	Nicki Douet

### Agenda Items

#### 1. Welcome by Chairman: Amanda de Haast

Everyone was welcomed to the meeting.

We have received a good luck & best wishes card from Robin Satow; he sends his regards. I hope you have read Robin's 'Departure Ditty' on the G+F website.

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

Proposer: Pat Robbins. Secunder: Bob Spackman. Group vote by show of hands.

**Minutes:** I also ask you to approve the minutes of the 2020 AGM.

Proposer: Mark Blowers. Secunder: Tim Bennett. Group vote by show of hands.

**Resignations:** I will now hand over to Bob Spackman for the next item of business as I am one of those standing down in rotation.

Ashley Brown, Amanda de Haast, Nicki Douet, John Fluker and Helen Stuart-Matthews are standing down by rotation, and I am glad to report they have all offered to put themselves forward for re-election.

Proposer: Ray Beard. Secunder: Bruno da Souza. Group vote by show of hands.

Amanda reported that Vicky Rutherford has come onto the committee and Carolyn Whitfield has agreed to join.

Proposer: Trevor Wykes. Secunder: Jane King. Group vote by show of hands.

Robin Satow has stood down and Bob Spackman has indicated his desire to stand down. Bob was a founding member of G+F and closely involved in negotiating the lease and squeezed considerable S106 funds from Guildford Borough Council. Fortunately, Bob will still be coming to the garden but we are very grateful for his considerable contribution. Presentation of gifts.

### **2. Chairman's Report:** Amanda de Haast

Having read through my report from the OGM in mid-May this year my first thought was how lucky you are – there is not much to say since then and so my report will be quite short. But then I looked again – sorry, you are not so lucky!

So, to remind you – in mid-May this year we were allowed to come together in a large group for the first time outside. This meant the popular communal tea break with cake, under the pergola, was back!

And since 21 June, we have been pretty much back to operating normally, though possibly with our own individual reservations. Our social calendar was reinstated, and we have enjoyed coming together for a variety of outdoor events, all involving food and drinks I note. The apple-pressing day became a farewell to Robin Satow who has returned permanently to Scotland. I am sure all of you here will know Robin has been on the G+F journey from the very beginning in his capacity as Rural Surveyor for the National Trust and since his retirement the garden became his second home. His hard work and enthusiasm for the garden is sorely missed and I hope he will visit us soon.

I was delighted that we were able to continue with the Tithe. The procedures we put in place last year were successfully replicated and in the end 342 food parcels were delivered to 32 households who have limited access to fresh produce. Our thanks again go to John Whitlock for masterminding the planting, Helena and Nicki for co-ordinating the picking and the West Horsley Wheel of Care for their assistance in delivering the bags – a job I know the volunteers are delighted to help with.

Helena, ably assisted by Penny, has surpassed herself this year in the number of bunches of flowers sold. Last year it was close to 750, this year it was 854. I believe she is looking for even more growing space to meet our desire for home-grown floral arrangements. Her success will mean we are all winners. And we must also thank Helena for taking some of our excess produce to a Cobham outreach centre that distribute fresh food - not as common a facility as you would expect.

We are very grateful to our local parish councils for the support they have shown us again. Not only do they financially support our management of the allotments, but our local West Horsley PC has also contributed to our wildlife programme. They are paying for more hedging to infill the wildlife corridor that runs between the community garden and allotments. We have been delighted with how well the planting they paid for last year has taken and look forward to seeing the benefits through greater biodiversity and increase in wildlife numbers in the years to come. Gerry, ably assisted by Pat, do an excellent job in overseeing this important element to our garden and in preparing the quarterly wildlife reports.

Communicating and spread the word about the garden is 'key' to our continuing survival and this year Carolyn Whitfield has done an excellent job in keeping our Instagram account current and full of great photos. If you have any 'gems' that warrant sharing please forward them onto her or to Michael Trower who oversees our Facebook page. Carolyn also worked tirelessly at our two 'Show and Tell' events in September – Horsley Big Day Out and Farmers Market. Both days went very well, and we have recruited several new members since then. They are also quite hard work and two in one month put quite a strain on volunteers and the garden, particularly when we members are competing along with the Tithe and the stall organiser for produce. Our stand at the Farmers Market was particularly well supported and we had some excellent feedback.

Another means of increasing our profile is through published articles and in the past year there have been articles in Surrey Life, Horsley Directory, West Horsley Parish Council Newsletter and the HCPS's Around and About Magazine. A couple of Zoom G+F talks were given, and we won Silver Gilt in the West Horsley in Bloom competition.

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You will be relieved to know that in October four members undertook a basic first aid course which was tailor-made to our specific needs, our first aid box was updated, and the defibrillator was given a thorough check. Ashley continues to make sure our governance, insurance and safety procedures are compliant. With that in mind we would be grateful if you could make sure we have your contact details for a next of kin or someone of a similar role for the *just in case* scenario. Further details will follow shortly.

Finally, I would like to extend a big thank you to all the Directors. We all work hard in the garden, but they also take it home with them, to make sure the right seeds, plants, stock, provisions and materials are in the right place when needed, and that we have the funds to pay for it all. All this ensures, in part, to the continuing success of the garden but the vast majority is down to each member and their contribution large and small. Please help spread the word – more hands make for more time at tea breaks!

And what can we look forward to next year – well, there is discussion about moving the fruit cage, putting paving under the pergola after we almost lost a member to a hidden mole tunnel, possibly more drainage to the allotments and definitely a Big Spring Clearout in the Potting Shed – of which details to follow and the clue will be in the presence of a skip. So, nothing major but all positive items to help make life more pleasant and enjoyable down in the garden.

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

**I would like to start by saying that Amanda de Haast should have stood down and Robin replaced her as chairman but that obviously didn't happen, and Amanda has agreed to continue for another year for which we are very grateful.**

My beautiful photos have been provided by Carolyn Whitfield.

In this time of concern about the environment and climate change I just wanted to highlight that we are doing our bit and to emphasise that we are

- No Dig Garden
- Peat Free
- Use no pesticides / herbicides or inorganic fertilizers
- Planted many trees and hedges
- Plus all the wildlife areas

Our only weakness is the manure would not pass Soil Association standards of organic.

I think, as I will highlight later, that in many respects 2021 has been our most challenging year. However, the garden has produced a huge range of great crops and is still providing us with a great range of vegetable.

The huge majority of crops have been excellent, for example

- All the brassicas including cauliflowers
- Beans & peas including dried beans
- Cucumbers were the best ever
- Soft fruit including blackberries

Helena had a massive success with glorious flowers all spring, summer and autumn.

But a few issues that haven't happened before made it difficult at times

- Blight on both the tomatoes and potatoes had a significant impact on these crops
- Onions didn't grow very big and many of the went rotten
- Poor growing on of late sown seeds. From the end of June many seeds germinated but then failed to grow on
- Aubergines were few and far between. Perhaps pollination was an issue
- Late frost on the plums meant there were very few
- Sweetcorn was very good overall, but we had 2 visits from, we presume, a badger

Future plans include

- Add an additional asparagus bed; the new beds look very promising
- Add more rhubarb crowns and move them to the south end of the garden
- Move the fruit area, which is a big challenge, mainly due to the prevalence of bindweed. This may happen this year or next.
- Reduce the potato planting (unless we get more members)
- Unfortunately use more weed suppressant although I would prefer not to use in the quantity we do.

I would like to thank

- The gardening team who have as always been so supportive. Both Robin and Justine stood down this year
- All of you for working so hard in the garden including some new members – it's lovely to see new members at the garden

### Questions

Pat Robbins – Is the weed suppressant we use made from recycled materials?

John Whitlock said he didn't know but some more is about to be purchased so we will look at the options within our cost capabilities.

Bob Spackman – West Horsley Parish Council are putting together information packs for the residents of the new development. I thought it would be useful to include a G+F flyer. This was agreed.

Pam Holt suggested we could consider using mineralised straw known as strulch. Ken MacIntyre said he uses it on his allotment – it retains the moisture, deters slugs and protects against frost.

John Whitlock said that the weed suppressant used at G+F is laid temporarily; it is taken up and re-used elsewhere. It could possibly be used in limited areas such as the fruit cage. Cost needs to be considered.

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

#### **September 2020 – September 2021**

Current bank balance is £10,776 including £4k contingency.

We spent £5649 on a wide variety of improvements and maintenance including allotment drainage, notice boards, skip hire, a new polytunnel cover, a new hedge, wall improvement/safety and garden equipment such as hoses & sprinklers.

The Accounts for the year Oct 2020 to End of Sept 2021 were presented and agreed.

Ashley thanked Brian Manners who audits the Grace + Flavour accounts. They can be viewed on our website – [graceandflavour.org/Events/AGM](http://graceandflavour.org/Events/AGM). Ashley proposed that Brian be re-appointed and this was agreed by a show of hands.

#### **Plans for 2021/2022**

Expenditure will include fruit for cage move, greenhouse and polytunnel staging, rhubarb crowns, asparagus plants, materials for propping of the east wall and allotment drainage.

### Question

Beverley Nash asked if we have a measure of how many members we have?

We have approximately 40 active members and about 350 receive the email updates.

**5. Allotments:** Michael Trower

The year has been another one where the allotments have provided a useful sanctuary during the current pandemic. There was only one change of plot holders at renewal and there is currently a waiting list of two.

There seem to have been less problems with wildlife this year but the moles are fighting a rear-guard action in the lawns at times.

Thanks are due to the building team for extending the drains along the two main pathways earlier in the year. Some impressive machinery was hired in for the job.

Thanks are also due to those who kept the grass mown over the course of the year. There are a couple of vacancies on the mowing rota for 2022 so any volunteers will be gratefully appreciated.

The management agreements between the parish councils and G+F were renewed last year with an annual review and we are grateful for their continuing support.

Some questions have been received from an allotment holder and these are as follows with answers:

**Q1** Please could you ascertain if there is a bonfire site.

**A1** *As per the allotment agreements and out of consideration for our neighbours' bonfires are not permitted on the allotments.*

**Q2** Is G+F planning any climate change initiatives? We have planted a hedge (well Robin did). One idea is to plant a load of hazel – in particular in the northeast corner of the allotments and quite possibly behind the garden wall in various places. In this way G+F could have their own bean poles as well as supporting wildlife. New trees take up more carbon and by coppicing we would be doing good things for carbon reduction.

**A2** *Our original Ecological Management plan and Sustainable Development plan are on the website, plus an update on progress and further things we are doing. Both will be updated soon.*

<http://www.graceandflavour.org/volunteers.php>

*There is a modest hazel coppice at the northwest corner outside the wall and we will continue to consider other practical opportunities to infill native trees and hedging elsewhere. The NE corner of the allotments by Ripley Lane is not practical as the recently installed land drains all lead into that corner. Hazel coppices take about 10 years to become fully productive.*

**Q3** I assume peat use is banned everywhere on the site?

**A3** *We do not use peat in the main garden and additionally we have our own composting operation. We cannot monitor what allotment holders use but we would hope, as responsible citizens and gardeners, they too would have transferred to becoming peat free.*

Question

Richard Bayes asked if the allotment holders could use the compost bins. John Whitlock said that there were concerns that some allotment holders may not be as organic as the community garden.

Richard Bayes asked if a compost bin on the allotment side could be considered again; he said he and others would be happy to manage it.

Rob Treble proposed that Richard join the garden sub committee for a meeting so the issue could be properly discussed.

**6. Building Report:** Tony Millership

Completed projects include:

- Wood on the Potting Shed treated
- Pergola needed some maintenance
- Fruit cage strengthened
- Allotment drainage extended
- Weeds bins and staging built

Plans for 2022:

- Further 25m of allotment drainage
- Raising workbench in polytunnel
- Treating all wooden wall supports with preservative
- Protective paving under east wall supports

And a special mention for Mark Blowers. Mark is not a regular builder but often assists the building team. He also cleans and empties toilet every week and washes floors and has recently, researched, procured and installed improved solar panel and switching for the toilet. For all this he is the builders' nomination for Man of the Match Award.

Richard Bayes said that the work carried out on the allotment drainage is much appreciated.

### 7. Wildlife Report: Gerry Robbins

This is my second AGM report.

At the beginning of the year, it was agreed to introduce quarterly wildlife updates.

Those issued in April, July and October can be found on the G+F website.

What follows is a quick skim through the year, if you want more detail please refer to those quarterly reports.

Wildlife is greatly affected by climate and weather. The contrast between the hot sunny weather of 2020 and the cool, wet weather of 2021 is clearly reflected in plant, insect and other wildlife activity. We started with a covering of snow in February, which fortunately did not last long. Soil temperatures were high enough later in the same month for Robin Satow and I to plant the new wildlife hedge along the northern boundary. Nest boxes were cleaned out and repaired and a couple of new boxes, one for kestrel and one for robin were added.

#### **Nest Boxes**

Our 20 nest boxes were surveyed three times, once in late April and twice in May. These showed a similar rate of occupancy to 2020 (approximately 50%) but with marked reduction in clutch size. This was particularly true for great tits with only 4 chicks compared to 34 in 2020. Blue tits accounted for the vast majority. Stock dove nesting seemed largely unaffected by the weather.

#### **The Pond**

Luxuriant, excessive growth, particularly reedmace was helped by the cool weather. The pond greatly benefitted from the clean-up undertaken by Rob Treble and his building team.

The cool wet weather also encouraged weed growth which was carefully controlled around the new hedge plantings.

#### **Insect Decline**

Sadly insect activity appears down this year. We do not undertake surveys at G+F but looking at the national picture, BUGLIFE report that over a third of bumblebee species have declined by 70%, 56 moth species have become extinct in the UK since 1914, 76% of butterfly species have declined since 1970 and every square kilometre has lost an average of 11 species of bee and hoverfly since 1980.

It is a very depressing picture but we did eventually see a few damselflies in late summer and some dragonfly activity in October and early November.

#### **Wildlife Spots**

As is traditional, I have picked out a few wildlife interactions caught on camera this year to illustrate the variety we encounter at G+F.

- (1) A dunnoek trapped in vegetable bed netting. It was safely retrieved and released.
- (2) A striking caterpillar of an Elephant Hawk Moth seen strolling across our main path.
- (3) Dog vomit slime mould! A curious single celled organism, related to amoeba, found in wood chip dressing on a path. It grew to several inches in diameter and then involuted.
- (4) A juvenile grass snake (deceased) found on the main path next to the potting shed.
- (5) The beautiful sloughed skin of an adult grass snake found by Ray Beard in the composting area.
- (6) Common Darter and Southern Hawker dragonflies, the latter seen laying eggs down by the pond.

### **Future Wildlife Work**

The cool weather has probably benefitted the new hedge, avoiding summer drought and allowing it to grow well with very few individual losses so far. We will continue to keep the weeds down until the saplings are large enough to fend for themselves.

Some in-fill planting of native species (maple, hawthorn, blackthorn and wild rose) is planned for the gaps in the east wall. This will be undertaken in late winter to early spring.

The nest boxes will be cleaned out and repaired before the spring cycle starts again.

### **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to Rob Treble, the Building Team and Ashley Brown for their various pond clearing activities. Thank you to Helena Stuart-Matthews for her continuing advice on plant choices and to Ray Beard and others for their drip-feeds of wildlife observations in and around Grace & Flavour. Please keep them coming

May I also record my great thanks to Robin Satow for his guidance and enthusiasm for the wildlife section.

### Questions

Pam Holt – Any sightings of frogs or toads?

We did have frog spawn a few years ago but none since. The occasional toad has been seen and some newts.

### **8. Thanks and Close:** Amanda de Haast

Thank you to the Directors who prepared reports, to Nicki Douet for collating the PowerPoint presentation and for taking the minutes and to those who provided cake.

Thanks also to the Garden sub-committee and especially to John Whitlock and, of course, a big thank you to all of you – keep spreading the word.

The meeting concluded at 9pm.