

GRACE & FLAVOUR A.G.M. 2020

Date & Location:	Thursday 26th November 2020, 7.30pm via Zoom
Directors Present:	Ray Beard, Ashley Brown, Amanda de Haast, Nicki Douet, John Fluker, Rob Satow, Bob Spackman, Helena Stuart-Matthews, Rob Treble, Michael Trower & John Whitlock
Apologies:	Tom Suffolk, Frances King, Pamela Holt
Chairman	Amanda de Haast
Minute Taker:	Nicki Douet

Agenda Items

1. Welcome by Chairman: Amanda de Haast

Everyone was welcomed to the meeting.

2. Approval for Amanda de Haast to chair meeting

Proposer: Robin Satow. Seconder: Pat Robbins. Group vote by show of hands.

3. Approval of Minutes of previous AGM, Thursday 21st November 2019

These are available on the Grace + Flavour website.

Proposer: Mark Blowers. Seconder: Tony Millership. Group vote by show of hands

4. Resignations and election

Ray Beard, Michael Trower and Bob Spackman are standing down by rotation, and I am glad to report they have both offered to put themselves forward for re-election.

Proposer: Gerry Robbins. Seconder: Helena Stuart-Matthews. Group vote by show of hands.

5. Chairman's Report: Amanda de Haast

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This year we have to have been some of the luckiest people in the Horsleys and that is all due to Grace and Flavour. This haven has kept us physically active, mentally engaged and has provided us with (within the Covid-19 guidelines), a continuing sense of community and social well-being. We are quite blessed (though sometimes our back, knees and arms may say otherwise!).

On Saturday 29th June 2019 we had over a hundred people wandering around the garden for our 10th Birthday celebration. This year we would have had no more than 10 people. But because we opened up the garden and set up the Calendar online we have had many more people come down to work than any previous year.

In early April our Covid-19 Guidelines were sent out to everyone with regular updates as the situation changed. We started with a maximum of six people but as lockdown eased we increased to 10, and then 20, with frequent reminders on social distancing etc. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their part in making sure the guidelines were adhered to, thus enabling the committee to feel confident enough to keep the garden operating. I think we can all agree it has been a life-saver and the only casualty has been the social calendar as all events were cancelled.

The garden has bloomed and preened with all the attention it has had. The building team have beavered away making the majority of our brick walls secure and installed dip tanks which we sorely needed in that hot spell we experienced in late spring. John W masterminded the planting schedule and this year we had the pleasure of filling in the whiteboard outline as beds were filled. His online 'jobs for the week' kept us occupied and sometimes he had a job keeping up with everyone as they blitzed the list!

We have spent many hours updating the Risk Assessments, and examining the Rules and Regulations and Health & Safety requirements to make sure we are compliant with our insurer's terms and the government requirements. I would like to thank Ashley for all his work in overseeing that project. Nicki is finalising the updates to the Members Handbook and soon these, together with the other manuals, will be available for viewing in the Potting Shed.

After much discussion we continued with distribution of the Tithe. Enhanced procedures were put in place to protect both members and volunteers delivering the food parcels. Using compostable food bags was very successful and reassured everyone that we had tried to reduce as many contact points as possible. In the 11 weeks it operated we delivered 372 bags to 36 households in the village. Thanks go to John W for his planning, Helena and Nicki for overseeing the operation and everyone who supported them in getting the bags filled and ready to go. It was quite a slick operation come week 11. Some wonderful thank-you notes have been received – who knew gooseberries could get some people so excited!!

Helena has also been responsible for a continued supply of wonderful bunches of flowers throughout the year and should quite rightly be very proud of the 750+ bunches sold this year, raising over £1300 for the garden. She would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for the support you have shown in buying the flowers and the wonderful comments you have made. This also goes for the supply of home produce that seem to be constantly appearing and disappearing. Thank you to all who make sure the shelves are always stocked with jars of jams, chutneys and pickles.

We are very grateful to Gerry and Pat for stepping in when Eddie left the garden and for doing such a great job in looking after our wildlife. They were inspired to run a (stone) frog painting competition during the summer and I do hope you all have admired the very colourful winning design which sits on the edge of the pond. He's not hard to miss! Gerry and the Bodgers have renewed/replaced some of the bird boxes and he keeps us well informed on their occupancy rates. Over the next few months there will be a work party to help tame some of the wildlife area and pond so please look out for details.

Ashley has done a brilliant job in sending out the newsletters and keeping the website up to date. But it will only be as good as the material posted, so if you have something to add, a small article or some photographs to share please send them through. Carolyn Whitfield has done a great job in increasing our social media profile by launching and maintaining our Instaaram account and she too would appreciate

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6. Presentation of Accounts and Treasurer's Report: Ashley Brown

September 2019 – September 2020

Current bank balance just over £9k including £4k contingency.

Due to Covid the committee decided not to spend as much as planned as we were unsure of what we would take in although comparing with previous years our income continues to be fairly stable at £7k - £8k per annum. We spend approximately £8k - £9k every year; a lot of that has been on the Potting Shed that has been recouped via various grants.

Plans for 2020/2021

The major expenditure will be more work on supporting the garden walls and allotment drainage.

Approval of the 2019/2020 Annual accounts:

Proposer: Justine Rego. Seconder: Tim Bennett. Group vote by show of hands.

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

Amanda expressed her thanks to Ashley for continuing to keep our accounts in such good order and also thanked him for maintaining the Grace + Flavour website and producing the email newsletters.

7. Garden Manager's report: John Whitlock

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Lockdown almost coincided with the start of the outdoor growing season. We had sown a variety of vegetables indoors for example cabbages, turnips, spinach peas. However, outdoors our only planting would have been onions and shallots in the week beginning March 14th.

We decided over the next few weeks to carry on with the garden as planned including growing for the tithe.

In the peak of our growing season in September we had 40 different vegetables available. In addition some of these had one or two varieties, e.g. purple and green kohlrabi, green and yellow courgettes, 4 varieties of potato and 7 types of squash.

The garden is still very productive with more vegetables to come such as Savoy and January King cabbages.

2020 Aims

Review our Potato varieties – we added Nicola to our range.

Grow some Chilli Peppers which was successful

Broad Beans grown in modules exclusively rather than direct. We have 13 trays sown in the polytunnel already with some looking as though they should be ready to plant soon.

Grow peas in the fruit cage – we had some excellent 6ft Alderman which were wonderful and more in the new cage.

Grow more Dwarf French Beans and we had an abundance.

Grow Edamame Beans which grew but were hardly cropped.

Grow Grapes and Kiwi on the pergola. Grapes are growing, but we are possibly changing our minds about growing kiwis.

Start new asparagus and globe artichoke new beds. Asparagus is thriving, but we need to develop the old artichoke bed.

Grow aubergines in bigger pots and outside. We grew some successful ones in the polytunnel border but the outdoor ones were not a success.

Fruit

We want to thank Dana Leigh and David Pile for all their hard work over the years looking after the fruit trees in our garden.

Also thanks to the new team for their hard work in keeping the trees in good condition.

Bob Spackman looks after the soft fruit with Tim caring for the blackberries. We had our best ever crop in 2020.

Composting & Weeds

The compost area continues to develop. Ray often ably supported by John Francis continues to produce excellent compost.

We have also introduced new weed bins to replace the weed bank which has developed between the lime trees.

We have also put the wormeries in the same area.

Problems

We have mealy cabbage aphid on Brussels Sprouts

Some sweet corn damage.

Sweet peppers were disappointing, few getting very big and hardly any turning red.

The dried bean support collapsed.

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8. Allotments Report: Michael Trower

At the start of the year all plots were occupied and under cultivation. The good weather in the spring gave everyone a good start to the season, which was especially fortunate as allotments were one of the permitted activities. Whatever time of day the site was visited seemed to reveal at least one plot being worked on and crops cultivated.

A new feature this year for the duration has been that the gate has been left open when anyone has been on site rather than each person closing it behind them. This seems to have worked well, and the local rabbit population did not seem to catch on to this. Unfortunately the padlock did not take to repeated baths in anti-bacterial gel and had to be replaced.

The lawn mowing rota again worked well and thanks are due to those who participated.

A couple of plots changed hands during the year, and due to the general increased interest in home grown vegetables four applications were received for plots, three in as many weeks! One was able to be accommodated so there are still three on the waiting list – the most for some time.

Recently John Whitlock organised the annual manure delivery and many holders participated in it. In response to requests a skip had been hired in, and has rapidly filled with material from both the allotments and the main garden.

The committee are aware of the ongoing drainage problems affecting the lower end of the site. The two existing parallel drains will be extended by 25 metres in early 2021. It is proposed to repeat a similar extension scheme in late 2021. This would have been attended to earlier but for the Building Gang being occupied for some considerable time on shoring up the main garden wall. To counteract some settlement in the water dip tanks new concrete mountings have been purchased and will be installed now the tanks have been drained for winter.

The allotments are managed by Grace & Flavour on behalf of the East and West Horsley Parish Councils and the Allotment Management Agreement is being renegotiated for the next three year period 2020 – 2022. This year more than ever the allotments have been an important leisure facility in the villages.

9. Building Team Report: Rob Treble

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West wall – It was noticed that a gate pillar was leaning so 3 props were put in as a temporary measure. With National Trust approval and funding concrete foundation pads were augured into the ground. Timber props were then put in place to stop the wall angling over or being blown over by easterly winds. Metal cables also tied in against westerly winds.

We also re-bedded all the coping stones (on the wall) and capping stones (on the pillars) on the west wall and rebuilt part of it and temporary ties fixed to the east wall and stabilisation work commenced. Additional dip tank installed outside polytunnel

In our spare time we have...

- Built some weed containers
- Spent many happy hours rodding and unbunging field drains
- Repaired the rabbit fencing
- Built additional tool station

Plans for 2021

- Tarmac path potholes
- Access route maintenance between Dene Place and the Potting Shed to make it more usable for visitors from Dene Place
- Allotment drainage during winter months

Amanda thanked Rob and the team for all the work they do.

10. Wildlife Report: Gerry & Pat Robbins

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In autumn 2019, we were asked to take a lead interest in wildlife at Grace and Flavour following the departure of Ed Woodhouse. Ed had done a huge amount for G&F to promote natural history and its appreciation. We would like to record our thanks for this and for the support and advice he has continued to supply remotely. The report is presented in approximate chronological order for the year.

February: Roger Beck, a local bird expert and RSPB organiser helped us carry out a survey of the nest boxes. These 14 boxes were noted on a map of the site for future reference. All these boxes were cleaned and where necessary repaired ready for the nesting season. Six new small nest boxes suitable for blue and great tits were made by a working party including Phil Vessey, Robin Satow and Bob Spackman. Thanks to all involved.

March: The wildlife pond was tidied up, cleaning out dead vegetation. Ben Siggery from Surrey Wildlife Trust was asked to give advice about site. In view of the recent COVID-19 lockdown this was undertaken as a virtual consultation based on a series of photographs and questions sent to him by us. He approved of the plan not to over tidy the part of the pond outside the garden wall. He also advised on management of the Buddlejias, refugia, log piles, bee hotel and water trough. At the end of March the first nest box census was undertaken. The results are shown in the table below after the third census in mid-May.

April: The second nest box census was done towards the end of this month. Effort was focussed on removing invasive tansy from the pond flower beds. A new bee hotel was made from old wood and fitted to the south facing wall adjacent to the pond. This has subsequently been used by several bees and other insects.

May: The wooden planks of the bridge over the pond were noticed to be slippery after rain. Nonslip netting was fitted. Logs were placed to cover bare pond liner and back filled with soil to the flower bed. Refugia sheets were moved from too overgrown scrub into more sunlit areas next to the main wall to improve solar warming. The third and final nest box census was carried out. This showed considerable nesting activity including in the new small boxes of which four out of six had successful broods. Wild honey bees had taken over the Little Owl nest box earlier in the year. Unfortunately this had to be removed in May because of safety concerns about the partial fallen lime tree it was attached to. Fortunately local beekeepers Ray Beard and David Reeve were able to capture two resulting swarms and give them new homes off site.

June: A frog statue painting competition was launched open to the children of Grace and Flavour members and friends. The winner was Axel Johnson with this design and a runner-up prize was awarded to Oliver Hursthouse.

July: Carolyn Whitfield launched the G&F Instagram account @gfcommunitygarden. This is used along with our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/GandF> to post pictures and snippets of natural history interest.

August: The garden was visited by Brian Austin and David Ross, local bird ringers. After touring the site they made several helpful observations about the location and types of bird boxes. They offered to ring fledglings from our nest boxes each spring. After due consideration this offer was declined by the G&F committee.

September: We were joined by Sue Reeve to help us collect, pack and post nest material to Cannel Tassin du Montaigu at Sussex University for analysis in a research study of pesticide residues in nests. A late nesting Stock Dove chick was found in box no. 18 (in ash tree close to the pond). Sadly the box was empty a short while after and a worrying pile of downy feathers found below the nest suggesting likely predation.

October: A substantial new Kestrel Box was sited 15ft up in a large conifer at the north end of the allotments. Our local kestrel flew by during the fix which we take as an auspicious sign. Thanks to Robin Satow for being our ground anchor and safety officer for this fix.

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11. Thanks and Close: Amanda de Haast

Thank you to the directors and members for their reports and to everyone for supporting Grace + Flavour throughout the year.

Let's hope for another great year, this time in slightly happier circumstances; we are so fortunate to have the garden. Good night.