

# WATA General Meeting 15/09/2025

## Meeting Minutes

### 1. Welcome from Wendy Wilkinson

Wendy welcomed everyone to the meeting and was pleased to see there were more tenants present than at the previous meeting.

### 2. A summary of work so far.

- The committee have tried to improve communication channels both between the committee and Woodley Town Council (WTC) to build a positive working relationship. The committee have tried to keep tenants informed regarding a variety of issues and information via email, regular postings on Facebook and the website. There are now 202 tenants from a pool of 368 plots on the committee mailing list which is fantastic as at the AGM in March 25 there were 0.
- Since the new committee was formed in March 25, we have provided bullet points of all committee meetings and the meetings we have with the council. This allows tenants to keep abreast of issues and themes under discussion such as security across the site, speeding and the issue of rubbish disposal. We are your committee and welcome any thoughts on solutions.
- We have welcomed a WTC councillor to our committee meetings in an advisory role. He provides an alternative stream into WTC than those available via our regular meetings with WTC representatives. He is not a plot holder so is impartial. Unfortunately, due to other commitments he has been unable to attend the last three meetings to date but does receive the minutes.
- The committee is keen to rebuild a sense of community amongst tenants. We've reintroduced the Competition for Best Plot after a break of 20+ years. We had 7 entries this year but hope for more next year. The award was presented at a community BBQ on the Memorial plot. Work has continued at the Memorial plot which is looking great and a pleasant place to take a rest or eat a packed lunch. The Memorial Plot was previously Scott Golding's plot, a previous committee chair who unfortunately has since passed.
- Woodley 5<sup>th</sup> Squirrels have visited the site and learned about what happens on an allotment site. This is something the committee is keen to encourage to help educate the next generation of the benefits of home grown produce.
- We are very close to a more robust solution to rubbish disposal across the site. There are the skips which come once a year, but only certain items are allowed to go in them. We're looking to increase the frequency of the skips. Rubble cannot go in the skips but can now be added to the pile left following last year's WTC road repair project to the left of the main gate in the extra parking area. We can now also take bricks, concrete, broken or unwanted paving slabs and stones

and add it to the main pile. This pile will eventually be crushed as and when and used to repair roads.

We have also been given permission by WTC to hold a managed communal bonfire on site to burn as much of the old / rotten wood across the site. Although the usual rules regarding bonfires will still apply to tenants this bonfire will take place on a weekday either morning or afternoon. Details and the first date to come. The idea is that tenants can bring their old wood to a specific place on site where it will be burned on mass.

We need to develop a mechanism for disposal of glass, metal and plastic on site. Some of this can go in the skips but there are items such as washing machines, basketball hoops and toilets on site that need removal.

Next year's inspections will come down even harder on rubbish on plots. We need to improve the site as much as possible before the lease is up for renewal in 2028 to make it very difficult for Reading Borough Council to entertain changing the designation of the site.

- WTC have asked the committee to mark an accurate boundary for all plots. The new site map will then be created. Each tenant will know where their plot ends, and encroachment should be a thing of the past. When the stakes appear please do not remove them. Each plot should have a minimum of 40cm between it and any neighbouring plots. It will take approximately a year to ensure borders are fully observed due to historical encroachment and subsequent reversal.
- The inspections this year included recording the number and type of trees across the site.

Your committee have worked very hard to improve communication, get actions going, be more responsive to tenants needs and wishes and improve the relationship with WTC so they understand what needs to be done and facilitate a move forward.

### **3. Plot viewings update.**

Plot viewings are carried out by Caroline and Debbie. They receive a list of vacant plots from WTC monthly. Once the list is received the plots can be assessed as to how likely a potential tenant is to take one. Unfortunately, many of the vacant plots are completely overgrown as they had not been worked for a while and by the time the tenant gives up the plot officially and hands their keys back the plot has gone wild.

Many potential tenants have high expectations regarding the state of the land and are disappointment when faced with the plots available. Even so 17 plots have been allocated since the new committee was formed. One of these new tenants entered the Best Allotment Competition and was runner up.

There are 72 people on the waiting list and only 13 plots available but 5 are in a terrible state which makes their job of selling the potential of a plot very difficult. Even if a way could be found to trim the worst and remove the rubbish it would help. Several plots always become available following the inspections as tenants decide to give up. If these can

be turned around quickly so the plot is still relatively well maintained, they should go very quickly.

#### **4. Finance update.**

Geoff was coerced onto the committee as treasurer following the AGM in March. Following the AGM Mike went through the financial records and then handed them over to Geoff to carry forward.

Since March WATA have brought in £1090. Of this £955 was raised by Launchpad which is a very strong revenue stream for us. We will be raising an invoice for a further £300 for September. This brings the total revenue since March to £1390. The total amount in the Lloyds bank account stands at £3928.58.

We will need to decide carefully how this money is to be spent for the benefit of tenants and the site.

Since March we have spent £329 on IT renewal for the website, email system and other administrative systems required to ensure the smooth running of the WATA.

£113 spent on buckets and chains which you will have seen appearing around the site and red paint for the stakes mentioned previously.

£50 was spent on the BBQ in July on the Memorial Plot.

We will be getting the finances audited before the next AGM, so tenants know the committee are managing the books correctly. The audit will cost £195 (including VAT).

At that AGM Geoff will present a fuller picture of the finances and the projected financial benefits Launchpad could bring to WATA.

#### **5. Memorial Plot.**

Peter was pleased to say the work on the Memorial Plot is progressing well. The new turf has been donated by a local landscape gardener and the committee is very grateful as it has improved the plot immensely. Peter thanked the rest of the committee for the work done on the site and opened it out to any tenant who would like to donate some time for general weeding.

Anyone is welcome to spend time relaxing or enjoy a picnic. There is seating and a table on the plot.

#### **6. Launchpad update.**

Many already know Teresa as she organises the fruit bush and seed orders (order books and forms are in the box by the notice board). She also organises Launchpad on behalf of the committee with help from Andy Anderson, Peter Wheat and Jim Reed and other members of the watering team. In a typical year the seeds and potatoes are ordered over the winter. The Launchpad team grow them and plant them. Over the Spring, Summer and Autumn

corporates come in as part of their company's community days and work on the plot. The companies provide the labour but also pay a fee to Launchpad. If there are no corporates Teresa and her team keep the plot going. The produce grown goes to the ReadFood Bank kitchens where food is cooked to feed the homeless in Reading. The food run takes place on Mondays so if any tenant has a glut of produce you can put any excess in the polytunnel at the Launchpad plot (L26) on a Sunday afternoon or early Monday morning.

This year Mike has taken 67 containers of produce to ReadFood Bank which is amazing. He also calls in at the Huntley and Palmer Allotments to pick up their donations on route as it's a project we do together.

Teresa then received a round of applause from all present in recognition of the work she does for Launchpad.

## **7. Work still to do.**

- Flooding is a perennial issue especially at the front gate. WTC are in discussion with Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) who have responsibility to tackle local flooding issues. Obviously, WBC have a huge area to cover but nothing has been fed back to the committee regarding a solution. The obvious would be to create a tunnel which fed into the drainage system along Reading Road, although this would be expensive. WTC have confirmed there is no gully in the corner by L row so there is no natural drainage system.

A short-term solution mentioned to WTC would be to set up a solar powered pump to empty the drainage ditches dug last year via a hose across the pavement into the drains outside the site. We have also suggested WTC raise the level of the road at the gate, so rainwater runs back into the road and down the drains there. They haven't endorsed any of these yet. We are trying to suggest various solutions and it is a subject often revisited with WTC.

Until then if we have another wet Winter always bring wellies to site – just in case.

- The committee are also looking at the community shed. A survey showed there is asbestos in the roof, although it is not damaged at present. WTC have many responsibilities on time and money, so the committee have sourced some quotes to make the shed usable again. The price varies from £2,500 to £5,000; this would include measures to ensure none of the dust escapes during the work. The committee is now looking to get funding from charitable organisations who help local projects designed to improve the local community.
- Plot numbers are a requirement of the tenancy agreement. Failure to disclose will result in a failure during the inspection process. The committee are looking at quotes to provide plot numbers for all plots. Once these are received, we'll send out a round robin email to determine tenants' feelings regarding this expenditure. Before placing any order there will be a vote at a future General Meeting.
- As part of the last round of inspections we recorded the number and type of trees on plots. The committee will now proceed to a tree survey to assess and tag each tree and single out trees requiring attention by the tree surgeon and those that are

protected. They will also look at whether the trees are encroaching on plot boundaries or affecting how well crops can be grown on the plot. Fruit trees will likely form part of future plot inspection criteria.

Apple trees have done well this year, and the committee were hoping to use the apple press but unfortunately it could not be found. It was returned to Launchpad last year by a tenant but has since disappeared. The committee are looking to hire a company to provide an apple press and pasteurize the juice next year.

This year's weather has meant walnut trees especially have increased their canopy size and root system way beyond the normal. Some plot owners with walnut trees have requested to move plots because they can no longer grow produce on the plot due to lack of sun and the quality of the soil.

- The more we can show how well the site is used as a community hub, record the diversity of wildlife both on the ground and nesting in the trees, ensure each plot has a defined boundary and clear plot number and is well cultivated the easier it would be to gather evidence to use in the defence of our allotment site against any future challenges.

The Henley Road Allotments in Caversham is due to close as the land is to be returned to its original purpose as a burial site.

- The committee would like to revisit working parties for large community projects. A Winter project to tidy up the front gate area as it could be improved and made more welcoming.

Another working party could clear the vacant plots which have gone wild. A focussed effort on strimming and bramble clearing would improve the look of the site as a whole and make vacant plots more desirable to potential tenants. Jim Reed (F17) already does a great job getting bramble root out using his big crowbar.

- Mike welcomed Hanna Varley-Thompson who has agreed to be our new newsletter editor and will join the committee as part of her new role.
- The committee is looking to bulk buy compost and mulch. We're looking at various companies moving forward who can provide a variety of good quality products in bulk which can then be sold onto tenants.

Apsley Farms are running a group discount scheme where if you buy up to 16 bags of mulch in 1 shipment the price comes down from £75 per bag to £65. There is a limit on the amount ordered but that may change in the future. The shipment arrives in 2 deliveries on the same working day (8 bags per delivery). The truck has a mini crane on the back so the bags can be delivered as close as possible to the plot. Mike currently has orders amounting to 14 bags and will organise a delivery date soon, probably a Friday in early October.

All deliveries will be made by vans suitable to our roads.

- The WTC tenants survey has now closed. There were 145 responses from tenants. The committee haven't been given a breakdown of the results formally but just over 50% of respondents were in favour of plot deposits. This would go some way to help clear plots of rubbish once a tenant leaves. 5½ years ago WTC incurred a fee of £2,500 to clear 3 plots when a tenant left plots in a disgraceful condition. It took 5

skips to remove the rubbish. Which brings us back to a robust system for rubbish disposal on site.

Next year the committee will be looking to continue work across all the items raised tonight as well as holding more community events such as the Best Allotment Competition and more BBQs.

Mike then thanked each member of the committee for the work they do for the benefit of the site.

## **8. Questions.**

One tenant questioned where all the rubbish comes from. The committee explained that some tenants bring it on site to dump rather than take it to the tip. It is clear in the tenancy agreement that this behaviour is unacceptable. Mike explained that not all tenants read the agreement. Moving forward WTC are looking to update the renewal system to include a digital signature from tenants agreeing to abide by the conditions in the tenancy agreement. For tenants who don't have access or don't like using technology a paper signature may be required.

This led to a further discussion around strengthening the relationship between WATA and WTC to make the latter move on able bodied tenants who consistently don't look after their plots. Sometimes a tenant is unable to look after their plot due to infirmity but would still like to remain as part of the community. The committee are looking at ideas to create retirement plots which such tenants would be encouraged to take up.

Another tenant mentioned that the plot next to theirs had a new tenant but that he hasn't been seen since and in the meantime the plot has become more and more overgrown. This is an issue.

One tenant explained that several plots on E-row were taken up by a couple of builders who were brothers and brought mini diggers on site to bury rubbish from their building business. He himself took on a plot on D-row and when he started digging came across windowpanes buried in the ground. The plot is now designated an orchard plot, so the buried rubbish is not disturbed. He said that previously when this was reported to WTC they didn't want to know, because they didn't want confrontation. Mike said one of the committee's tasks was to force WTC to be more responsible and remove all these large items, some of which have been on site for years.

One tenant asked if we have overgrown plots that are proving difficult to move could they be offered to people further down the list who would effectively queue jump but take responsibility for getting the plot in a useable condition. Mike explained this has been suggested by WTC, but the committee are against it. We feel it is the duty of WTC or us via a working party to clear the plots. He went on to explain that 2 tenants took on poor plots in return for no fee or a significantly reduced rate and in return they had to either remove the rubbish or get the plot into a useable condition. Neither tenant have completed their side of the bargain as proven by the photographs Mike takes 4 times a year.

One tenant suggested we hire a professional to clear the plots rather than a working party as he recognises each committee member already has several duties, and many tenants have work/family commitments. Mike felt if the tenants agreed this would be a good use of our money. Alternative suggestions would be to buy weed suppressant membrane which could be used for vacant plots or plots where tenants have long term illness. All agreed a clear and cover policy would be the way to go.

One tenant thought we have a tractor with an attachment for turning over soil. Teresa confirmed WTC had a tractor, but it broke down and wasn't considered viable to repair. There was a general discussion around buying a rotavator for site use. Mike had concerns due to pernicious weeds. A rotavator would cut through the roots creating more of a problem unless such weeds (mares' tail is one) were dug out prior to use of the rotavator.

Huntley and Palmer allotments get regular deliveries of chippings from Earley Town Council and asked why a similar arrangement isn't forthcoming from WTC. Teresa explained that that WTC keep their chippings at Maiden Erlegh Lake and Nature reserve and Dinton Pastures. Tenants could take sacks and fill them from the piles but this year it's full of berries so maybe not a good idea. WTC used to deliver wood chippings by the back gate some arrived a few weeks back and was taken to Teresa's plot for distribution. Mike has sent emails to local tree surgeons as they will often leave it on site for free. One tenant had a tree surgeon contact and agreed to pass the information to Wendy.

## 9. Next Meetings

Monday 13<sup>th</sup> October at 7.00pm.

Carnival Hall in The Oakwood Centre

Life in the Soil by Jonny Furze. Compost Scaling Engineer from Soil Ecology Laboratory/Soil Smiths.

**Please bring a soil/compost sample.**

Monday 10<sup>th</sup> November at 7.45pm.

Beekeeping and Asian Hornet Update.

Monday 15<sup>th</sup> December at 7.45pm.

No Dig Allotments.