

WATA GENERAL MEETING

MEETING MINUTES

Thursday 20th April



Present:	J23, F12, B17a, M11, M23, K25a, F13, J36a, K33, K17, F11, H14, M28
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I. WELCOME FROM THE CHAIR

Mike welcomed all present to the first of our General Meetings in 2026 and went on to update tenants on recent activities.

Recycling update

The large pile of hard and soft plastics by the main gate has been collected and taken off site. Approximately 80% of the plastics did seem to have come from plots which is good but the cost of removing proved too expensive for the committee however following discussions, WTC have funded the clearance. The cost of removal will come out of our skip budget. Instead of having two skips in Spring, late Summer and early Winter, it's likely the early Winter skips will be cancelled or reduced to one skip. There will be no more plastic recycling. Tenants will now have to remove plastic waste themselves.

The committee has paid to have the first ton bag of glass taken away at a cost of £120 + VAT. The glass bag is full again but please do not overfill the bag. Wait for it to be emptied or take the glass to the tip yourself if you can.

The metal recycling has been collected twice by Jack the Scrap at no cost, although only 75% looked to have come from plots.

There is still a lot of rubbish on plots across the site. The committee have pictures and now the camera on the front gate is working perfectly we should be able to identify the origin of any fly tipping. Should fly tipping occur all the photographic evidence will be passed onto WTC.

Managed Bonfires

These are continuing weekly. They started in January and we've just had our thirteenth. Most of the wood does seem to have come from plots although there has been some bedroom cabinets and kitchen units. They are due to end shortly with the last one on Wednesday 29th April. A couple of tenants are unable to transport the wood themselves and have contacted the committee who will collect it from their plots if it's piled up at the front.

Plot inspections

These are planned for the week beginning 11th May. They will be carried out using the standards laid out in WTC new inspections policy which has been sent out to all tenants and is also available on WTC allotments webpage.

CCTV poles.

WTC have now given permission for these to be placed, and the work will be carried out in the next couple of weeks. One will be to the left of the Reading Road toilet looking towards the community shed. The cesspit is to the right of the toilet, and the manhole has now been found and uncovered by Ken Demmen. The second will be by the fence at the junction of Victory Row and A/B row. Brian Grace will be helping to site the poles, and they will be fixed in concrete. WTC have agreed to the use of concrete for this task.

New WTC policies.

The Structures and Development policy and The Bonfire policy have now been ratified by the Leisure Services Committee and have been sent out to all tenants. They are also available on the WTC allotments webpage. Tenants will need to ask permission before erecting a greenhouse, polytunnel, shed or fruit cages. Structures must not exceed certain dimensions depending on the size of the plot. Permission must also be granted before placing any paving stones on a plot.

Wildlife Warden.

The committee is very keen to appoint a tenant into this role to improve biodiversity across the site and create areas for nesting birds and bats, wildflower meadows for bees, ponds for frogs and newts amongst other initiatives. Should anyone be interested please contact the committee on the usual email address of readingroadplots@woodley-allotments.org.uk.

II. GUEST SPEAKER - SUSTAINABLE GROWING BY KRISHNA NEUPANE

Mike introduced Krishna who is a member of the Integrated Research and Development Centre (IRDC) in Berkshire. They work in partnership with Reading University investigating how to grow produce sustainably. They evaluate plant variety performance in the real world rather than a laboratory or under specific conditions and understanding environmental interactions to get the best out of a crop in the field. They trial products and practices under natural variabilities such as rainfall, temperature, soil types, pests and farm management styles. Krishna is one of six Nepalese tenants on our site who grow a wide variety of produce. The work the IRDC do has been featured on the BBC and are a well-respected organisation known for the work that they do.

Krishna was born and raised in Nepal but entered the UK with his family via a migration scheme in 2005. Krishna had close ties with Reading University having worked with one of the professors

in Nepal for five years prior to emigrating here. Krishna's two children were raised here but have since moved to Australia.

Krishna's background is in agriculture. He has a BSc and MSc in agroforestry. He then worked with The Ridgeline Trust who help people with a variety of health conditions and disabilities to access the social and agricultural therapeutic benefits through gardening at their accessible garden in East Reading. Krishna realised that he had to do something to help underrepresented communities in Reading. Communities that had emigrated to Reading but were not fluent in English with cultural or socioeconomic issues which made them feel isolated and alone. Krishna came up with the idea of a multicultural gardening club. He took his idea to the communities who provided him with a space in which to work, publicised the club and provided tools. People started coming and shared ideas on what they could grow and gardening practices. They started growing crops developing the community element of the programme and registered as the IRDC and started their research as the other element of the organisation.

The research is carried out by the community in gardens, allotments and pots on patios. Traditional diets for Asian communities revolved around rice. One of the aims of the IRDC was to promote the growing and consumption of fruit to promote a healthier lifestyle. Reading university came into the communities and gave talks around diverse diets and the health benefits derived from a diet rich in fruit and home-grown seasonal vegetables.

The IRDC have 4 objectives.

1. Recycling and prudent use of environmental resources.
2. Education in the field of horticulture.
3. Social inclusion through group horticulture projects.
4. Raising awareness through training, local actions on global warming concerns.

The community gardening schemes bring people together promoting community cohesiveness and providing a platform for educating communities in evidence-based knowledge. People learn skills much better by practical methods rather than reading a pamphlet or lectures. Parallel to working in the gardens, communities visited allotments and gardens where new skills were demonstrated and taken back for use growing their own crops. Gardening is not just for growing crops, it's about learning and sharing information, socialising with like-minded people and being part of a larger community as well as benefiting from working the soil which has been shown to improve mental health. The IRDC have a WhatsApp group where members can ask for advice or share tips on a range of subjects.

The British Science Association is a charity that wants to transform the diversity and inclusivity of science to reach underserved audiences to bring people and science together. In 2022 they were trying to find locations to set up organisations to help local communities. They only chose two sites, one in Reading and one in Slough. The Reading site became Reading Voluntary Action (RVA). The IRDC took part in a three-year pilot science-based research project with the RVA and Reading university which was funded by the UK Research and Innovation to improve gardening practices, composting management and food waste recycling. Phase one was securing community engagement.

The IRDC visited local communities to informally talk about the project and make sure local groups felt involved and could recognise the benefits to themselves and their community of

taking part. During discussions communities valued the benefits of healthy living and recycling highest.

The knowledge and information coming from the project had to be reached scientifically using reproducible experimentation methodology. The underrepresented communities taking part in the research would never normally have had access to the resources and knowledge made available to them during the project and so benefitted as a whole.

There were two streams of research in the project. That carried out by the communities using scientific methodology and that carried out by recent PHD graduates with theoretical knowledge but very little practical experience. The expected outcome of the community led research pilot was the bringing together of people's knowledge with research knowledge to gain a greater understanding and appreciation of effective and sustainable gardening practices. The scientists taking part in the pilot gained a greater understanding of the culture of the communities they were working with.

The title of the pilot was 'Responding to healthy living challenges through improved gardening and waste management among underrepresented communities in Reading.' It underpinned the main aims of the communities taking part, to live healthier lives and help the environment by recycling food waste into compost. Reading University taught the local communities about soil composition, pH levels and how this affected the health of the plants, temperature and humidity and provided equipment so monitoring could be carried out in the field. Twenty-two families took part in the project for a period of one year.

Based on their own cultural knowledge and research carried out at the library the communities developed their own compost using local food waste. Two types of compost were made one using an open system and the other a closed system. The food waste took eight months to decompose into compost. Reading University provided a laboratory, one scientist and a senior technician so the compost could be analysed scientifically. As well as the compost created as part of the project, compost bought from a variety of garden centres was also tested in a randomised trial. The results showed that the homemade compost was superior in quality and the mustard plant used in the trials had a healthier root system and larger greener leaves. Krishna will make a copy of the full report of the project available to Mike who can then forward it on to anyone who is interested in learning about this fascinating pilot.

The IRDC are now looking to carry on their research and spread the knowledge gained across other communities. They are looking for more locations to grow crops such as allotments and community gardens and are hoping to acquire access to their own research plot. They have developed a toolkit to help other communities grow crops in a sustainable way and recycle food waste into compost.

In 2025 the Royal Horticultural Society awarded the IRDC as outstanding for the work they have done.

This concluded May's meeting guest speaker talk.

Questions and answers

Six IRDC members have plots on our site where crops are grown according to the methodology developed as part of the pilot project. One tenant asked if other tenants would be able to visit these plots to learn about the crops and what they have achieved. Krishna had no problem with this.

Krishna asked if our tenants would be willing to fill in their questionnaire. This will be added to the other links Mike will post in the next week or so. Mike will also let tenants know the numbers of the IRDC plots.

One tenant asked if Krishna had a recipe for the compost produced. He has a recipe and will make it available to the committee to add to the upcoming post. Basically, a balance must be reached between brown matter that is high in carbon and green matter which is high in nitrogen. Too much carbon and the compost will be dry and poor quality, too much nitrogen and the compost will be mouldy. The temperature and moisture inside the compost bin must be maintained.

One tenant asked where the WTC policies could be found. All the policies have been emailed to tenants by WTC as they have an email address for all tenants whereas the committee only have email addresses for tenants who have opted into our mailing list. They are also on the WTC allotments webpage.

He also asked if the committee or garden centres were recycling plastic pots for reuse as during planting season they accumulate. The committee cannot recycle these items for tenants. They would need to be taken to the tip by tenants or Henry Steet Garden Centre in Arborfield. Possibly in the future they could be collected at the community hub for reuse along with seeds as part of a seed swap scheme.

One tenant asked if preexisting structures were exempt from the new restrictions. This was confirmed by the committee. Only new structures must conform to the requirements laid out in the structures policy. Previously permission from WTC still had to be granted but it was much more ad hoc, the new policy makes the process more formal but uniform depending on the size of the plot.

If a tenant feels they have a strong case for a structure exceeding the dimensions in the policy, then send an email to WTC explaining why a larger structure is required and see what they say.

One tenant felt the new policies were too restrictive with too many rules. WTC manage the site on behalf of Reading Borough Council and looking at other allotment sites ours is quite lenient on a lot of issues. WTC may also be preparing for the lease renewal in 2028.

One tenant asked if the upcoming plot inspections will include rubbish as there are a lot of plots still with piles of old wood on them. The presence of rubbish on plots will form part of the criteria for the plot inspection and tenants could fail if it's not removed before Monday 11th May. Mike has taken images of around 40 plots (not identifiable) with piles of rubbish on them which he's going to publish in the hope it will spur those tenants on to clear it up prior to the inspection.

This concluded our May monthly meeting. Details will be posted about our next meeting soon.