

WATA GENERAL MEETING

MEETING MINUTES

Monday 24th August



Present:	E18, K25A, C15, F12, M23, K25A, K33, F13, D27, D16, K17, F16, H14
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I. WELCOME FROM THE CHAIR

Mike welcomed all present to this update on committee activities over the last five months. Any questions can be asked at the end of the presentation.

Update – Recycling/Bonfires

The committee has been focusing on recycling in the hope of removing some of the rubbish that's accumulated across the site over the years. We started with metal which was collected in bays by the main gate on Reading Road. Then we expanded the scheme to include hard and soft plastic and glass.

We also had several managed bonfires to remove some of the old, rotten or unwanted wood from the site.

Jack the Scrap came on site three times to remove the metal from the bays.

The glass was removed by Collards in six bags (one ton compost bags) at a cost of £250. The huge pile of hard and soft plastics proved too expensive for the committee to remove so WTC very kindly arranged the removal via one of their contractors at a cost of nearly £800.

Bonfires ran weekly from the beginning of January to the end of April, we only missed a few weeks due to the weather (either too wet or windy) and managed 13 bonfires in all. There is still more wood to burn, and the bonfires will start again at the beginning of October.

In a related theme WTC have given permission for tenants to have a Halloween bonfire and guy competition, we also may be providing food and drink for the event. More information to come.

The committee feels the site is tidier and hope the tenants agree but there is more work to be done.

Update – Plot inspections/Vacant plots/Viewings

The last round of inspections was completed in May. Over 100 tenants received a red (approximately 30 tenants) or amber flag. A red flag is a failure and those with an amber flag

require improvement before the next round of inspections. Improvement could take the form of displaying a plot number to inadequate level of cultivation.

Reinspections of the red plots took place in June, ten plots were still red, and the others had all improved to either amber or green. The ten plots that failed the second round all received termination notices and have given up their tenancies.

The next round of inspections will take place at the end of September (week beginning 28th) and the focus will be to show improvement since the May inspections. Is it cultivated and well cared for?

One of the complaints the committee received from tenants who had received a red or amber notice was that the couple of bad frosts in May had decimated their crops. Next year the inspections will take place at the end of May when the risk of frost should have passed.

At least fifty plots have changed hands this year. Some have retired due to ill health or due to a termination notice from WTC because of the inspections. This left the committee with a lot of plots, many of which were unsuitable for viewing without a significant amount of clearance work. The committee purchased approximately six rolls of weed suppressant and after a plot had been stirmed it was covered. We covered about 12 plots, so when they were viewed, they were more likely to be taken up as they weren't waist high with weeds. Thanks to Sylwester from C10 for all his stirming work across about 25 plots, many of which were stirmed twice.

Another hidden issue that came to light during the inspections was that several tenants were ill with serious long-term conditions but hadn't informed WTC or the committee so they initially failed their inspection.

Can we remind tenants that long-term illness that prevent tenants from working their plot for a while should be reported to WTC or the committee as it meets the exemption criteria for any upcoming inspections.

It's difficult to drill down into why tenants don't work their plots. The shortest rental of a plot was three months; the tenant took on a plot in April and gave it up in July.

There are currently around 14 vacant plots available for viewings which will start today.

In total there are around 24 vacant plots, but some cannot be shown as they are full of rubbish from previous tenants or waist high with weeds and grass.

There are 42 people on the waiting list.

WTC have given permission for C37 to be turned into 10-15 small starter or retirement plots (average 2m x 3m). Some volunteer groups have been to visit the plot and are willing to return and help develop the area.

Best plot competition

Last year we had four entries, this year there were seven, so hopefully next year we'll have fourteen. The mayor of Woodley came along to award the prizes. 1st prize went to Ruth Wilson on B24 for the second year running.

Unfortunately, we couldn't have a BBQ due to the ban during the hot weather, but we had a lovely cold buffet under our newly donated 6m x 3m marquee which formally belonged to the Woodley Horticultural Society. It's now stored in the community hub until the next event.

Update – Waste disposal

Onsite recycling has stopped and may not restart. However, we have been in discussion with WTC about being better at collecting waste and disposing of it using WTC facilities. One of these is the skips, two of which will be on site for Saturday, Sunday and Monday over the August Bank Holiday. Opening times are 10am-12pm and 2pm -4pm each day. One skip will be for green waste and the other for certain general waste materials. This time they'll be located by the back gate rather than the usual area by the community hub to bring a bit of fairness to accessibility. Outside of the opening hours the skips will be locked and covered by CCTV. We are hoping to get more skips in October, for green waste but this will be dependent on WTC budgets.

Rubble can still be taken to the large pile by the main gate. WTC had planned to hire a crusher and use this rubble to line the roads across the site, however the committee have stated we do not want a repeat of the road on A/B row, so we are unsure what they will use this mound of rubble for. They could crush it and use this to fix the potholes.

We have no plans to restart the recycling schemes but we are discussing with the council whether we could have more skips on site and go round in a van collecting rubbish from plots which could then be disposed of in the skips. There has been no agreement yet.

Update - Launchpad

So far this year we've welcomed twelve groups of corporates to Launchpad which equates to £1,200 in revenue for the WATA account. There are another five days booked in September and October.

Teresa thanked her watering team who have laboured in the hot weather to water seven days a week over the Summer.

She also thanked the committee for their help on corporate days and Peter Wheat got a special mention for all his ideas and help throughout the years on Launchpad. Thanks went to Andrew who made new plot numbers for the Launchpad plots.

Launchpad has a new polytunnel, the doors will be fitted once the weather cools down. The frame was from Tony Carter's old plot on D row, and the new cover was funded by Launchpad.

We've grown garlic over the Winter for the first time, and it was very successful with a good crop.

Teresa reminded tenants that extra produce can be left in the polytunnel on Sundays as Mike takes all the produce to the ReadiBank on Monday morning.

Fruit Bushes and Fruit Trees

Order forms are available from the box by the notice board at the main gate and from the website. If tenants would like to order something that's not on the list Teesa's number is on the form. Contact her and she may be able to get it for you. The fruit bush order will go in at the end of September and then the seed order forms will be going out between October and November.

All profits from fruit bush, fruit tree and seed orders go into the WATA account for use on recycling, CCTV, social events and other improvements across the site.

Update - Finance

Unfortunately, Geoff couldn't make the meeting tonight, but the WATA bank account is still looking healthy. There is £6,466.22 in the account but just under £5,000 of that is earmarked for the community hub and was provided by the community lottery fund.

A full finance report will be provided at the 2027 AGM, but the accounts have been audited this year, and we've been given a clean bill of health.

Update – WATA community hub (the old shed)

The community hub was previously an old shed unused since the days when the Woodley Horticultural Society used it around 50 or so years ago. It couldn't be used because there was asbestos in the roof. We managed to get a grant of £10,000 from the lottery community fund and approached twelve companies of which seven replied and five quoted for the work. Of the five only two were willing to come on site. We chose our preferred supplier, and the roof was replaced within one day. The team did a fantastic job on a sweltering day. We've still to install guttering which will be used to collect water in three IBCs as an extra shared water resource during hot weather.

The floor has been sealed and painted, and the walls are in the process of being redecorated. The previous 4 doors have been replaced with double doors and Plexiglas windows. Brian Grace has been leading this part of the project.

There are still some internal fixtures need doing including a sink, cupboards and shelving. We've still to organise the solar panel installation, Mike is still waiting on quotes from two companies. Regular solar panel installation companies aren't interested in our little project as we're off grid. We've approached companies that using install solar panel systems on river or canal barges or camper vans. Removing the use of an electric kettle and coffee maker will reduce the cost of the battery and inverter system by over £1,200 so we'll be buying a camping stove and fitting a hood and extractor fan to remove any fumes.

We're trying to make the £10,00 stretch as far as possible and once the project is finished the community hub will be used for meetings, presentations and workshops. The back will be levelled, and we'll have some chairs and tables to turn it into a real community hub.

Water Survey Results

96 tenants responded to the questionnaire and Mike received a further 16 emails with suggestions and comments. 2026 has been a tough year for growing vegetables due to the drought that seems to have gone on all summer. Many crops have been affected and either died or the produce has been smaller than normal although just as tasty. One big push for the committee over the winter is to be better resourced ready for next year which is why the committee is trying to get the views and ideas from tenants via the questionnaire. The full results of the questionnaire can be found on the website and via email if tenants are on the mailing list.

60% of responders felt there was adequate water available near their plot.

56% of responders felt there should be more water tanks on site which surprised the committee as it means 44% of responders felt there was enough water tanks available. Installing more tanks has been brought up with WTC on multiple occasions, and their reply is always that more tanks would reduce the overall pressure and make all tanks slower to fill. The committee feel there must be a way around this barrier.

96% of responders use watering cans but there have been reports of tenants using wheelie bins and even a large cooking cauldron. Some crops require more water than others and this may be something to factor into the future as if a tenant is emptying three tanks to keep one crop going this isn't fair on the surrounding tenants.

Most tenants water in the evening between 6pm and 9pm. This was more of an interest question but shows that if tenants can water at off peak times, it would reduce water issues for those who have no choice.

31% of responders felt that installing rainfall capture tanks based on IBCs around the site would be the best solution to prepare for 2027. This was closely followed by installing more water tanks and relacing the existing water tanks with larger water tanks. Before installing more tanks, we would need to understand how this would affect the pressure and take steps to mitigate this. The current tanks cost £250 and there is 50 of them on site so if each tank was replaced with one twice the size that would be a cost of £500 each. WTC don't have the budget for this and are unlikely to ever commit to this type of spend. Allotment site in the North of England in particular capture rainfall and store it in IBCs but then they do have more rainfall on average.

Each IBC would cost around £100 to set up but would provide around 1,000 litres of extra water which would refill every time it rains. Tenants can also use water butts which fill from shed or green house rainwater run-off.

We will be using the responses from this questionnaire to produce a more detailed one where tenants can choose multiple answers and leave comments and suggestions.

Coming Soon

We'll continue to work on the community hub and buy a suitable camera to keep an eye on it as we'll have spent a lot of money on it by the end of the project.

The Spring and Summer newsletter were very well received, and Hannah is working hard on the Autumn edition. She has asked for any articles tenants would be interested in seeing. Any suggestion can be directed to the readingroadplots@woodley-allotments.org.uk or to Hannah direct at hannah.varley-thompson@woodley-allotments.org.uk.

We've made headway with marking plot boundaries, but the work has had to stop as WTC has no budget left to provide any more stakes and the committee have none left.

WTC have bought a couple of speed bumps to trial on the site to see if it reduces speeding, but the installation is on hold due to staffing and equipment issues within WTC.

We have some ideas to improve the site prior to the 2028 lease renewal to ensure it goes ahead. One is wildflower areas, small ponds, bat and bird boxes. Craig Parker (H13) is our wildlife warden and will be working with Wendy to diversify the wildlife on site. Craig has also found a new algae living at the bottom of a tank and is working to ensure its survival. He's checked and it's harmless to humans and plants.

We're going to remove the lower branches of the large oak trees across the site, cover the ground with woodchip and put in some seating areas for tenants to rest out of the sun.

We're in talks with WTC to set aside an area of the plot for an accessibility plot. It would make us more inclusive which is always a worthy aim. Teresa and Mike met with Kirsti from Launchpad who has a lot of experience and has given some sound pointers as to how this could be achieved. It would consist of raised beds at a height suitable for wheelchair users. The ground would be flattened and covered so wheelchairs could move easily from bed to bed. It's in the very early stages of development now as there would be a cost implication and other legal requirements to consider which would all need to be available before going live. It's something we would like to have in place in the next year or two.

Mike then thanked the committee for all their hard work over the last 6 months.

Questions and answers

One tenant asked what IBC stands for. It is an intermediate bulk container for the transportation and storage of liquids, fluids and chemicals. We would be using them for water storage. A reconditioned one would cost around £100 plus VAT, and we would need to investigate what had been stored in it previously.

One tenant thought the number of tenants who had their tenancy terminated because of the May inspections should go in the newsletter so tenants are aware that this could happen as many tenants are unaware of the potential for losing their plots. He also thought we should mention that help clearing plots prior to being relet would be appreciated as he had no idea of the level of work that went into this and didn't think it should be left to the committee. He remembered the days when a WTC pick-up truck used to go round the site on a Saturday morning picking up any bulky rubbish. Tenants with cars or trailers would collect the smaller items and then the pickup truck and the tenants would drive to the nearest skip and dispose of it. It worked very well and perhaps WTC would be willing to revive it.

This is a similar proposition to what the committee is in discussion with WTC. He also suggested tenants should be encouraged to mulch their plots to keep moisture in the ground.

He asked about lighting in the community hub and was reassured the hub would have electricity and lighting provided through the solar panels.

One tenant is also part of another allotment group and one individual there came up with a few thoughts on water management. Perhaps tanks should be covered to reduce evaporation. Perhaps WTC could be persuaded to bulk buy water butts which could then be sold on to tenants. The committee felt WTC wouldn't have the money to do this. He had also heard that straw mulch would be the best form of mulch to trap moisture in the soil. Any irrigation process would have to be gravity fed although a solar panel pump from your own water butt would be possible.

One tenant asked about the origins of the abusive behaviour policy. Mike replied that WTC admin manager has been directed by the councillors to revise any existing policies and create ones that the councillors felt were necessary. The abusive behaviour policy came about because some tenants and committee members have been the target of verbal and physical abuse from a minority of tenants. The biggest culprit has since moved out of area and no longer has a plot.

He said he had his allotment for forty years and had never had a cross word with any other tenant and didn't feel a policy was necessary as if he was in that situation he would call the police. The committee feel that a policy is necessary to protect the small minority from abuse and direct tenants how to report an episode of abuse and the consequences that may fall on the abuser.

One tenant agreed that the policy was necessary to let tenants know their tenancy is under threat if their behaviour is deemed as abusive.

Another tenant thought a policy wasn't necessary but in the current social environment he could understand why WTC felt it was necessary to have an abusive behaviour policy.

Mike explained that many tenants do find the policies informative especially the inspections policy as it lays out exactly which is required to pass an inspection. One tenant asked how these policies were communicated to tenants. Via email, Facebook and the website. The committee currently has 202 people on the mailing list and WTC has contact details for all tenants as not everyone is on email or Facebook. Interestingly the tenants not on Facebook, email or have access to the website tend to be older individuals who've had their plots for years and don't fail inspections because they know what they're doing.

One tenant said it was fine to put up bat boxes but if you ever wanted to open it for maintenance or cleaning it must be done by a licensed handler. This will be passed onto our wildlife warden.

Mike thanked everyone for coming and the meeting was closed.