WATA GENERAL MEETING

MEETING MINUTES

Monday 19th October2026

Present:	M23, J23, E18, F12, K25a, L5, C15, F13, K17, H33a, L19, F16, H14

I. WELCOME FROM THE CHAIR

Mike welcomed all present to this talk about the life of bees on the allotment and started the evening by giving a brief update on committee activities.

Bonfires

The managed bonfires have started again with the first one last week. We had a little wood left over from last season's bonfires, but new wood has been left in the collection area. Someone has left a kitchen door, wardrobe unit complete with light fitting which shows some tenants are still using the scheme as a dumping opportunity. Having said that most of the new wood is from the allotment site.

They are planned weekly until the end of the year although the one planned for the 21st of October may be postponed due to the weather.

At the last meeting with WTC they informed us we need to apply to the environmental agency for a D7 waste disposal exemption certificate for the bonfires which we'll look into and get if necessary. This is only for the managed bonfires; fires tenants have on their own plot are fine.

Halloween social

We'll be holding a social event by the back gate on Halloween. There will be a bonfire with food available and soft drinks. There is also a scarecrow/guy competition which will be judged on the 31st and a small prize awarded to the winner.

The evening event will start at 4.30pm, aiming to eat at 5pm. It will probably wrap up at 6.30pm which will allow time for kids and grandkids to go trick or treating.

We were thinking of hiring lights, but it would cost too much for a couple of hours.

Community hub

The new doors are finished; the committee would like to thank Brian Grace for his help. The interior is almost decorated then we need to move the rubbish to the bonfire area and give the floor another coat of paint. We need to buy some shelving, sink unit and an electric urn for hot

water. We've spent half the money, and most of the remaining money will go on the solar power installation.

We have specifications for the solar power system which will run the lights, fridge, urn and charging station for power tools. We're in contact with a consultant who will check the specification from a safety point of view and advise on the installation. We will also need to pay for a suitably qualified professional to test the completed system and sign it off. If any tenant has contacts with experience of installing solar panel systems, then please email the committee if you think they would be interested in being involved as all the local suppliers aren't interested in our project as we're off grid.

Plot inspections

We will be getting more information from WTC shortly but provisionally we have 386 plots on site, 266 passed. Approximately 80 received advisory notices which could range from something as small as not having a plot number to being slightly below the required level of cultivation according to the tenancy agreement. Around 40 tenants failed their inspection and have or will shortly receive a letter or email from WTC. The are some plots on site which were exempt from the inspections due to long term illness or injury.

There are 37 on the waiting list and 13 vacant plots but we can only show 6 of them. The rest have issues that require intervention by WTC or RBC such as E13 which has been confirmed as having a shed with asbestos in the walls and roof. In this case there is a discussion as to which council would be responsible for removing the asbestos, RBC as the owner of the land or WTC if they held the lease when the shed was erected.

D31a has been an eyesore for years and we had a discussion with WTC today regarding how to get this plot taken back to the ground so it can be rented out.

F14 is in a poor state but the committee may be able to clear this plot. Jack the Scrap came last Friday and from this plot alone we removed a 4-door filing cabinet, 2 lawnmowers and a rotavator.

Jack will be returning before Christmas, nearer the time we'll ask tenants with metallic waste to move it next to one of the roads as on Friday it was unclear if metal near the edge of a plot was to be taken away and we erred on the side of caution.

Working parties

We'll be putting out some messages shortly asking if any tenant would be interested in joining a working party. This isn't for plot clearance but more to work on the communal areas like the area surrounding the notice board and the area round the community hub.

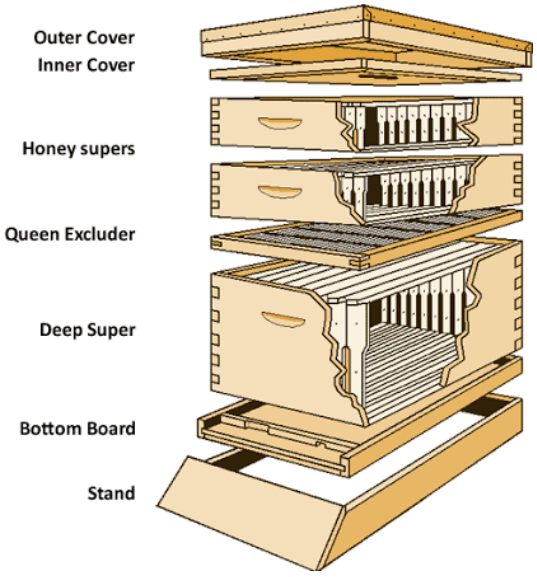
A bee's life on the allotments – Speaker is Steve Cook, one of our beekeepers

The bee enclosure on the allotment was built in 2020. It was a project driven by Scott Golding, the then Chair of the WATA committee. He collected the panels for the enclosure and the beekeepers, Scott and several volunteers built the enclosure as a secure area for the

beekeepers to tend to their hives. The enclosure also makes the bees fly vertically to go foraging to minimize disruption to nearby tenants.

There were 8 beekeepers originally, some were new to beekeeping and didn't appreciate how much work was involved so at present there are 5 experienced beekeepers and 18 hives. A beekeeper's life is full of highs and lows; you must manage the hive and hope it thrives.

The wide-open space on the site makes it ideal for keeping bees and there's an abundance of plums, damsons, blackberry bushes etc for them to forage not to mention the opportunities afforded by the tenants growing crops. Bees especially like the courgette flowers, raspberries, blackberries, strawberries, sunflowers and other vegetable flowers or blossom. The runner bean flower isn't an open flower so the bee must chew a hole on the side and burrow its way in. Bees also like the odd undermanaged plot as they love dandelion flowers. Dandelions, crocuses and bluebells flower in the Spring and it gives the bees a good strong start to the season. In return the bees pollinate the plants and flowers creating more produce for allotment holders. Bees can forage to a radius of 3 miles but the abundance of blossom and flowers available on site make this unecessary for the bees on the allotment.





At the bottom of a beehive is the base for it to stand on. The rest of the beehive is made up of a series of boxes. The bottom box is called the brood box or deep super. This is where the bees raise their brood. The eggs are laid and larvae hatch and will eventually metamorphosize into adult bees. They will also store honey and pollen in the brood box. A new hive will consist of the base, bottom board or entrance and the brood box. As the colony grows extra boxes called honey supers are added and this is where the honey is stored. A queen excluder is placed between the brood box and the rest of the hive to stop her roaming around the whole hive. She needs to stay in the brood box laying her eggs. The queen bee is approximately 1.5 times the size of the worker bees, so they can come and go but the queen won't fit though the bars of the queen excluder.

Each super will have about 10 frames in it to give the bees a starting point. Inside the frame is a bees wax foundation strengthened with wire. It has indentations in it which give the bees a guide when they build their comb and makes it easier for the beekeeper to inspect the hive by lifting out the frames. If the frame wasn't in the hive the bees would do their own thing.

The bees build the comb in a hexagonal shape, so they all fit together with no gaps to maximize the space available. Both side of the frame are used. Once the comb is built it can be used to receive an egg or to store honey. In the hive is one queen most of the time. She is the matriarch and lays all the eggs, beekeepers will often mark the queen with a spot of dye, so she is easy to find as she is the most important bee in the hive. She has a large abdomen so she can reach down into a cell to lay her egg. Most of the eggs she lays produce worker bees which are female. Occasionally, the bees will build a slightly larger cell, the queen comes along and will sense that the cell is larger than normal will lay an egg that will produce a drone, a male bee. Drones can account for 5% of the hive. If an egg is to become a worker and female the queen will fertilize the egg, an unfertilized egg will become a drone.

The hive is a female driven colony, the drones eat honey and mate with new queens, the females do everything else in and for the hive.

Once an egg is laid it will take 3 days for the larva to hatch. The bees feed the larvae for 5 days and then seal the cell with wax. It will take 2 weeks for the larvae sheds its skin 3 times and transforms into a bee, so from egg to bee takes approximately 3 weeks. This all takes place in the brood box.

As the season progresses the frames in the honey super is used to store the honey. When a cell is full it is capped with wax so it can be stored. Most of the frames will hold 2 lbs of honey. When a worker bee emerges from the cell she works in the hive for 3 weeks, building the comb, feeding the queen and larvae, storing the honey and cleaning, maintaining and protecting the hive. She will then leave the hive and forage until her death approximately 3 weeks later. Foraging bees collect one of 4 things.

- Bees collect the sweet nectar from flowers/blossom. The nectar is taken into the bee's body, mixed with enzymes and distilled down until it's ready to be put into the cells as honey.
- While collecting nectar bees will also collect pollen. As they fly from flower to flower some of the pollen dislodges and will pollinate the plant which will go on to produce crops. Pollen is high in protein. Some of the pollen is taken back to the hive, and it's mixed with honey and used to feed the larvae. The bees also eat the mixture.
- Bees use water to dilute the honey if it becomes thick. Any bees seen near the water tanks on site are collecting water to take back to the hive. Bees also use water to cool the hive. In the summer they'll collect water and stay at the entrance of the hive and flap their wings to send the water into the hive thus cooling it. Bees keep the hive at a constant temperature of 30-35 degrees all year round. In the winter the bees will cluster into a small group and flap their wings to produce heat.
- They also collect propolis which acts as a glue. It's collected from the buds or sap of trees. Bees will use this to fill any gaps in the hive. Beekeepers use a tool like a crowbar to part frames or other structures that have been stuck together using propolis. It has also

been used for medicinal purposes. Some beekeepers also harvest propolis to sell to pharmacies.

Normally the bees will specialize in collecting one item during their 3 weeks of foraging, what that is depends on what the hive requires. Most of the foraging bees will collect nectar.

The queen can lay up to 1,500 eggs per day during the height of summer. At the start of the year there could be 10-15,000 bees in the hive. During the summer there could be 60-70,000 bees in each hive. Hive numbers will reach this number by peak season of June and remain there during the summer. The queen will start to reduce the number of eggs laid per day as the summer progresses. June, July and August will still see 60,000 bees in a hive. September and October - the queen will only lay a few eggs, and the numbers will drop off so that over the winter there'll be 10-15,000 bees in the hive. Bees born in September and October have a much longer lifespan than those born earlier in the year and can live for about 6 months. They keep the hive going over the winter, they have a slightly different metabolism as they don't go out foraging. They'll stay in the hive and eat the honey stored over the summer. Once spring comes the queen will start to lay more eggs and the system starts all over again.

The queen can live for 5 years but the norm in Steve's experience is 1-2 years when the queen will be replaced. The hive will notice the queen is not laying as many eggs and decide she needs to be superseded. The workers will build a queen's cell; the queen will lay an egg in it. The larva will be feed on royal jelly which is highly nutritious and it is the royal jelly that will turn the larva into a queen rather than a worker bee. When the new queen emerges from the cell she may live alongside the old queen for a while or she may kill the old queen. The new queen will then take over the hive.

The colony will also make new queens in the height of the summer ready to swarm. If the colony is running out of space, they will create a new queen and divide the colony. Before the new queen hatches out the old queen will take half the colony and leave the hive in a swarm to form a new colony elsewhere. Beekeepers try and avoid this as they don't want to lose half the hive. Beekeepers regularly inspect the hive looking for evidence of a swarm, if space is becoming an issue, they'll add a honey super. Should a swarm happen, the beekeepers can collect the swarm and place it in a new hive where hopefully it will become established so if you see one report it to the beekeeper's association and a local beekeeper will come and take care of it. After a swarm the new queen will hatch out and at this stage is a virgin queen. After a few days she will leave the hive on a mating flight.

The drones leave the hive every day and gather with other drones in an area in the hope of seeing a virgin queen on her mating flight. If no new queen appears they will return to the hive and return the next day but if a new queen does fly past the drones will try and mate with her, all on the wing. Only the strongest, fastest drones will be successful. Unfortunately, if they do manage to mate, they die straight after. The new queen will mate with a dozen drones on her mating flight, and the sperm is stored in her body for life. When winter comes the colony has no use for drones and they will be banished from the hive to die.

All bees have a different temperament. The temperament of the hive comes from the queen. Beekeepers try to encourage a calm colony that's not trying to sting them and be too aggressive. You can get a rogue colony that becomes very defensive, this happened a few

years ago on the allotment when a couple of colonies became quite aggressive. The only way to reverse this is to kill the queen and either let them produce a new queen or introduce a new queen who will hopefully be of a nicer temperament. This process will take about 6 weeks to complete. As beekeepers you can buy a new nucleus colony, or queen and the beekeeper suppliers will send it to you in the post. There are also specialist queen bee suppliers who will supply queens of a particular breed such as the Buckfast Bee developed by Brother Adam at Buckfast Abbey and known for its tranquil nature.

The beekeeping enclosure on the allotments has been very successful.

Steve had brought along a jar of honey and some spoons for everyone to taste.

Questions

How do they make the wax?
They have a gland in their stomach. They use the sugars from nectar to create energy which the wax gland uses to create discs of wax.

How do the bees get out of the cell?
The bee will eat its way out of the cell. Once it's left worker bees will come in and remove any left-over wax and leave it clean ready for the next egg.

How do you know when the colony is running out of space?
Beekeepers work on the ¾ full system. If the super looks to be ¾ full the beekeeper will add another super with 10 frames thus creating more space. If Steve needs to add another super, he will but he'll also harvest the honey.

It's the same with the brood box. If the colony is very strong you can add another broad box with the queen excluder over the top one. It's called a double brood.
When harvesting the honey, the frame is removed from the hive and de-capped. The frame is then put in a centrifuge to remove the honey which falls into a container. It is then strained and put in jars.

How do you judge the temperament of the hive?
Generally by how often you get stung. In the summer the hives are inspected on a weekly basis. A noisy hive is a sign they're not happy. They don't like rainy or windy weather.
When a frame is removed calm bees will carry on doing their business and not be too bothered. Aggressive bees will fly off the frame and start to attack the beekeeper looking for weaknesses or gaps in the protective suit. Some beekeepers don't wear the protective suit which seems like madness as even with the nicest bees you'll still get sung occasionally. If you do get stung it hurts for 3 days. There are beekeepers who are allergic to bee stings and always have an EpiPen to counteract anaphylaxis.

Bees are a bit less happy in the winter. They don't tend to leave the hive so when the beekeeper comes along to inspect it, they will often show their displeasure.

How has the temperature affected the hives this year?
They use their air conditioning system using water. In open areas it would be worth covering the hive to shield it from the heat. They'll look after themselves. In extreme weather they'll stay away

from the hive for longer. In the height of the summer, they may stay on the outside of the hive at night. If a swarm happens in summer, they can stay out in the open for a few days, but if temperatures drop at night, they will die.

How do you know how much honey to leave so they survive the winter?
At the end of the summer the hive needs 40 lbs of honey to survive the winter. Beekeepers keep a track of how much they have during the summer. Each frame in the supers hold 20 lbs of honey. There is also honey stored in the brood box. If they do need extra food in summer beekeepers can use a mixture of sugar syrup as a honey substitute. In the winter it's too runny so beekeepers will use a block of fondant to subsidise their diet.

Supermarket honey is cheap because it usually hasn't been near a hive. It can be tinted sugar syrup or produced from bees forced to feed on sugar syrup. Supermarket honey will stay runny whereas real honey will thicken up due to the sugars in it.

Mike thanked everyone for coming and the meeting was closed.