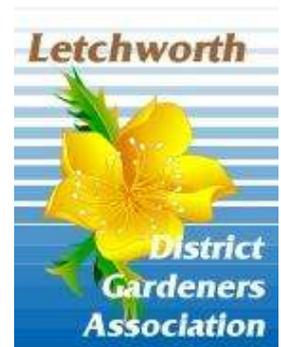


Letchworth District Gardeners Association

Affiliated to the BFS, NDS, NSPS, NVS, RHS
President: Mr Graham Tapp

Annual Report 2016



Chairman's Report

It has been another interesting year for the Association with its ups and downs. The Green Shoots project has really taken off which is fantastic. You will recall that this is a project that we are involved in with Graham, our president, to provide facilities for less able young adults to benefit from horticulture. The breakthrough happened when employees from Tesco came to help prepare the ground and create some shallow raised beds to grow salad and other crops in. Soon after, I visited the garden and was thrilled to see the students really enjoying their experience of planting and growing lettuce etc. Our thanks must go to Graham who has spearheaded this project and put so much into it. I am delighted to say that in recognition of his hard work and determination he has been given a Civic award.

We were delighted to welcome, Meena to the team as publicity officer and editor of the Compost Heap. She made some impressive changes but then unfortunately because of the pressure of work she decided at the end of the year that she could no longer continue. Consequently, Andrew Dear has now taken over as the editor but this does mean that we have a vacancy for our schools liaison position. If you or one of your friends might be interested in this role then please do get in touch and we can explain what is involved.

The position of publicity officer is one that we are desperate to fill for obvious reasons when you read below about the fall in membership, the drop in members attending the monthly meetings and the reduction in trade. With all the hard work that people put in to the various meetings, events, fantastic offers at the trading store etc. we really do need to get out there and let people know about all that we have to offer.

As I reported last year we are still wanting someone to take over from Peter at the Trading Store. With the great team of volunteers that we now have to look after the day to day running of the store we do still need someone to look after the ordering of new stock. With the change in structure this does mean that this position isn't as onerous as it used to be. We do now have some tough competition out in the market place as far as prices are concerned. However we must remember that the Trading Store does subsidise the monthly meetings and the shows so we do need to keep the sales up so that other areas of the Association don't suffer.

We now have to spend more money to maintain the structure of the Trading Store, not only the floors and the electrics but work needs to be done on the walls this coming year. We are fortunate that despite the reduction in sales during 2016 we still have the reserves to pay for this work.

Our monthly coffee mornings on the first Wednesday of the month, 10.00am at Tapps Garden Centre seem to go from strength to strength which is great news.

Our outing to Wisley in 2016, organised by Myra Smith was a great success and we are most grateful to Myra for arranging it.

In conclusion I would like to thank the committee and all members for your continuing support.

M. Hessa

Monthly Meetings - Thelma Colman

I believe that 2016 was one of the best years for the quality and variety of speakers. Unfortunately, attendance was down on 2015.

This year, I trust that you will agree that, the speakers are even better. As you will appreciate inviting speakers of a high quality inevitable involves additional costs.

Hence please do your utmost to encourage all your colleagues and friends to join us at the monthly meetings. The greater the attendance the more monies we have available to spend on inviting high grade speakers.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all of our regular attendees who have supported us and helped to make the monthly meetings successful and informative.

Show Report - Paul Heydon

Our last shows, as usual, were excellent. I must apologize to those who had trouble locating me but I was in the middle of moving. Now all sorted.

The Summer show had a cooking demonstration which was well received. As to exhibits, these were brilliant and filled all available space. We had introduced art but it didn't attract much interest. We have amended relevant classes hoping this will encourage more exhibitors.

The Autumn show had a floral art demonstration for the first time, which I hope was enjoyed by all. Although missing a couple of regular exhibitors in the Autumn show we still had about the same number of exhibits.

The standard in both shows was fantastic and I am proud to be part of the show.

We are now getting several schools entering the relevant classes and also bringing exhibits from numerous pupils. Hopefully they will carry on showing when changing schools.

A big thank you to Roz and Myra and to those that helped set up and clear away the shows as without their help I could not run the show

Trading Report – Peter Faulkner

The variability mentioned last year has continued. Potato sales continue to disappoint – the order for 2017 will be only 39 sacks, a reduction of 16 on 2016. Most of this is in main crop varieties.

Spring onion sets also disappointed and both Sturon and Red Barron will be cut back for next year as will Red Sun shallots. Autumn sown sets, radar and Shakespeare were also slow to go so the order for 2017 will be lowered again.

Compost and fertilisers again proved popular with Jack's Magic and SHL All Purpose selling out. The peat free compost also sold well. The repercussions of the Sinclair collapse and immediate take-over by Westlands continues. SHL composts (All Purpose, Container and Potting) are still available but other items are being sourced elsewhere. In 2017 most fertilisers will be our wholesaler's 'own brand' and the course sand/grit will be supplied by Vitax.

Changes are always being made and Roundup GC is being replaced by Roundup Ultima – same material but much stronger. Provado Ultimate Bug Killer now has a new active ingredient and comes in much a smaller container. Vine Weevil is no longer available. Lawn treatments, including weedkillers, have however continued to sell reasonably well.

Vegetable seeds sold well and some new varieties have been ordered for 2017. Some changes are intended to improve our range but others are because a few of the 'good old standard' varieties are no longer listed. Whilst we are not returning to a comprehensive stock of flower

seeds, we have added a second variety of Sweet Pea and a marigold called defender for use in companion planting. A variety of sunflower called Giraffe is also listed and if it lives up to its name some of our younger members should have fun!

This time last year I was expecting to hand the reins to another driver. This, as you will realise because I am writing the report, didn't happen. More members, mainly from existing helpers, have come forward and the pressure has been reduced.

I am as ever, extremely grateful to everyone who helps at the store because we would, quite literally, be sunk without them. More help would still be appreciated, the more people we have the less any one individual has to do.

Membership Secretary's Report - Jo Schurch

Last year's membership stood at 375 which was significantly less than 2015.

50% of the non joiners were recent members who had joined since 2010 or later. This means we are not retaining the newer members for more than a year or two. I have sent out a note to the leavers asking why but have received no replies yet. This year we have so far received 185 renewals and more are coming in every day. If you know someone that hasn't renewed their subscription then please do remind them that it is now due.

Treasurer's Report – Amanda Collinson

Sales fell by 5% since last year and coupled with increasing costs of maintenance of the store has contributed to a trading loss of £804 this year (surplus of £1,003 in 2015). Memberships also fell by nearly 10% so that despite a reduction in general expenditure our overall loss this year is £2,106. The impact of this has been to reduce our cash balance, currently standing at just over £49k. This does not include £500 held on behalf of the Green Shoots project as at 30th November 2016.