

Braunston Village Gardens Association Chairman's report December 2023

It was in 1955 that the Braunston Gardens Committee decided to change its name to the Braunston Village Gardens Association. However, we can trace our history back to the Braunston Allotment Association that ran village shows as early as 1920. The BVGA AGM minutes of 1969 state its purpose, 'to promote interest in gardening'. We continue to move forward adapting to changing times. I am writing this report at a time of great support for all we do from local residents, visitors to the village and, of course, members of the BVGA committee past and present.

During the year we have enjoyed our two regularly occurring activities that involve all members of the committee; Garden Community Shop and Friday morning community gardening and our four one off events that are headed up by one or two members of the committee; Plant Sale, Open Gardens, Gardens Competition and Show.

The year starts with the ordering and supply of composts, bark, fertilisers and canes for the Garden Community Shop. The team provide a valuable and flexible service to Braunston gardeners. We open the shop each Sunday, from March to May, and provide a collection and/or delivery service through the year. We are able to offer good quality peat free composts for seeds and general use, and so support the need for peat to stay in the ground to act as a carbon sink, maintain habitats and reduce flood risk.

With our nature led approach to gardening, growing perennials, native plants and naturalising species the Friday morning gardening group emerge from the warmth of the Wheatsheaf, our coffee spot, towards the start of February to review the plans for the three community garden spaces that we look after; the Village Hall gardens, Jetty Field Garden, Bottom Lock gardens. To start us off in January we visited the landscaped gardens of Compton Verney where the highlight was the carpet of aconites. Later in the year Hill Close Gardens enthralled us with the variety of plots, planting and passion of the volunteer gardeners.

Back at the Village Hall we added to the perennial flowering plants to encourage year long nectar sources for insects, and of course kept on top of the Jubilee Garden acorns. The herb garden is a popular place for people to gather a few ingredients for their cooking. We continue to resolve the issue of creating a sustainable, low cost, labelling system. Jetty Field Garden has had much attention. In the spring we planted native woodland species in the stream area and, working with the JF Association, identified the boundary limits for woodland sedge, cow parsley and brambles. In the summer weeding and edging the memorial and hedge beds made a significant visual impact. While in the autumn we added more plants to settle in over the winter. On occasions members of the BVGA team join the JF Saturday workdays. Regular weeding and plant sourcing at Bottom Lock Garden has led to many people comment about how attractive it is looking. Many enjoy sitting by the lock between the colourful array of flowers. The shrubs, underplanting and bulbs at the UCC garden extend this bottom lock welcome with both colour and a home for insects in this busy area of the canal system. The Friday meet ups, as well as contributing to Braunston's Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), continues to support our wellbeing. We would encourage anyone to join us for a few hours on a Friday, when they have the time. Light duties are always an option!

As the weather warmed in May the annual plant sale filled the VH car park with plenty of choice of plants. People are very generous with their donations of annual, perennial, shrub and vegetable plants. This year we needed to increase the number of table tops in the car park to take all the home-grown plants and second-hand gardening equipment. The gardening chats in the car park considered the impact of the harsh winter frosts on

previously hardy plants; hebes, agapanthus and echeverias. We shared tips about splitting, planting and caring as we encouraged each other and anticipated the summer to come.

June was a busy month. The Gardens Competition judging took place. Linda Palmer, from Clifton-Upon-Dunsmore Gardening Club, was delighted to return to Braunston, at a different time of year. She commented upon the interesting ideas, attractive planting schemes and the many pretty containers and hanging baskets. A special mention was given to the gardeners improving community spaces including, Braunston School, 2nd Braunston Brownies and Cub Scouts. The unusual weather conditions that we had all experienced was noted too.

Open Gardens was earlier this year, also taking place in June. Many had requested a June event to show off their roses and early summer flowering gardens. How fortunate that roses had really benefitted from last year's good growing season and the harsher winter conditions. Shortly before the day, there was an unusual storm, with intense hail from the north, which damaged a number of Braunston gardens. Then, with another reminder of the impact of climate change, on the day itself we had very high temperatures. Fortunately, visitors were not put off and we had a steady flow through the day enjoying all 18 gardens. As a result, a donation of all funds raised was presented to Macmillan Cancer Support.

The summer continued to challenge as a wet July had us all working hard to find exhibits for the Show in September. However, the hall was buzzing. Firstly, with all the BVGA Supporters who came along to set up the hall on the Friday evening and took on various roles on Saturday, the Show Day. In addition to the committee there were another 22 volunteers, enjoying helping at this village event. We were delighted to welcome new judges to the Home Produce, Handicrafts and Photographs sections, all of whom joined with our more seasoned judges in congratulating exhibitors on the quality of their exhibits. We are very grateful to Plumbase for sponsoring the judges lunches this year. We also used the new mugs, an idea initiated by the BVGA, for the Village Hall and again supported financially by Plumbase.

I would like to thank all the committee and supporters for all you do, it is very much appreciated. It is inevitable with an organisation that has existed in some form for 100 years that committee members will change from time to time. I am so pleased that as we go into 2024, we have a versatile committee with healthy numbers. Over the last year we have organised many shadowing opportunities to allow a smooth transition between roles. This means that a few of us are now able to stand down from the committee, and our roles that we have held for a number of years. Thank you to Janet for her 47, Kate, 25, Margaret, 16, Di, 14 and Jim also 14 years of commitment to encouraging and celebrating gardening in Braunston. These BVGA enthusiasts will still be around either purchasing from the Garden shop, taking part in the community gardening, opening their gardens, developing their gardens and floral displays for the gardens competition and entering classes in the Show. Some have already put their names down to be on the volunteer list at the 2024 events.

The BVGA continues to go from strength to strength providing opportunities for residents to get together and discover new plants and planting ideas and to promote an interest and, I hope, an understanding of how gardening can support our environment, community and our own wellbeing.

Kate Mawer
2023