

Willingham Action Group

Report for Annual Parish Meeting – April 2021

We have managed to carry on our work despite the pandemic.

We had a new volunteer, Alex, join us whose profession is concerned with environmental matters. As we are always looking for new worthwhile projects, Alex was the instigator of the new Sustainability sub-group which she chairs. We looked at all the possible issues that come under the umbrella of sustainability and our first plan was to start a Willingham Repair Café. We made some progress by joining the international movement based in the Netherlands, sourcing necessary information and having discussions with keen DIY experts. However, the operation of a Repair Café does not fit in with Covid-19 restrictions so that plan is on hold until June/July 2021 at the earliest.

During the first and last lockdowns WAG ran the emergency food bank in the village and our thanks go to all the kind residents who donated items, the volunteers who delivered the food, our Parish Council Chairperson, Parish Clerk, District Councillor and Katya and Stephi who organised all the logistics and ran the Willingham Love Hub which made our task easier and fed those in need.

During the summer we made two decisions. In consultation with our partner groups we abandoned any plans for the social activities of the 2020 Feast. We then decided to focus on different topics of sustainability throughout the latter part of 2020. You may have seen our efforts as recorded in the Willingham News. We are hoping to involve villagers in reducing the use of plastics, to eat less meat, to avoid buying food which has travelled from the other side of the world and to reduce food waste. We asked people to take the 'Plastics Pledge' and we are producing information on the above issues as well as the effect on climate change related to food production. We have had a good response so far but we hope more villagers will join us. At the moment our Sustainability sub-group is run by Alex, Kirsten, Marion, Michael and Paul. Our latest action will be to promote and be involved in achieving greater biodiversity; to that end we have liaised with the Parish Councillors with responsibility for Sustainability who are looking at planting wildflowers near the Ploughman Hall and flower tubs around Willingham. We are also ready to help with any developments to the Meadow Road site and Barton Field. In relation to waste disposal, members of our group had a Zoom meeting with Jonathan Crisp in February. Jonathan was Recycling Education Officer with Amey but now works for the City Council in the same role. The meeting was very informative and we learned a lot about ways forward in the quest to drastically reduce plastics use. In March, Michael took part in an online seminar organised by Cambridge Sustainable Food and SCDC about the need and ways to reduce household food waste. It is hoped that we can shortly set up an online chat group of the many like-minded individuals from villages in South Cambridgeshire. We have also taken part in an online forum run by Stephanie Hall, our local area Co-op stores Member Pioneer for Cottenham, Willingham, Longstanton and Northstowe. The forum was very informative about plastics reduction and we were able to get to know activists in nearby villages. We are also liaising with Cambridge Sustainable Food and will take part in their summer campaign to 'Eat less Meat.'

It has been heartening to see all these issues gaining greater coverage in the media. Information on our Sustainability work can be found on our website www.willinghamlife.org/sustainablewillingham/

During the year, perhaps due to the pandemic, the orchard was increasingly popular for families to visit, for dog walkers or those just wanting to wander, all of which prompted us to add two more picnic tables and a perimeter bench. The kestrel box was used for nesting and one owl box was used for roosting and feeding; maybe next year an owl will nest. Edward Gilbert of Queenholme Farm continues to undertake the grass cutting, for which we thank him. This year, to encourage the spread of the wild flowers, we restricted the summer cut to the perimeter and central drive-in used by the bee keepers; this generated some negative comments about long grass from some visitors. Our WAG members, Graham, Polly, Alan and Vanessa continue the general upkeep, checking labels and ties and posts and pruning where needed. The woodland area continues to show good growth and now provides the feeling of being in a wood with all the rewards of the autumn colours and fruits. The fruit yields continue to increase within natural fruiting cycles and frost effects. The fruit is being picked but some not early enough with many fallers noticed on early fruiting trees. We wonder if any attempt should be made to manage the fruit harvest or simply to leave it to those who want to pick, with wildlife being the eventual beneficiary. The willow patch is small but now well enough established to be cut. Attempts at filling in this year failed as there was a lack of rain after cuttings were taken and stuck in. We have a few names of those who work with willow but we need a few more people with an interest to form a group and collectively look after the patch.

On the QEII Field the earlier trees we planted are now forming a shaded picnic area which is very well used, as are the tables and benches provided. A few later-planted trees have been difficult to establish due to hot dry periods experienced in recent years but the fifty trees WAG planted are beginning to have an impact. We will continue to do maintenance on the three benches we provided there as soon as the weather improves.

You may know that WAG came into existence at the beginning of 2009 in order to implement those parts of the 2008 Parish Plan which fell outside the remit of Willingham Parish Council and to give support to WPC where we could. That plan was produced by the work of many volunteer residents and you may have noticed the December 2020 Willingham News held an advert for volunteers for the production of a new community-led plan. Two WAG Board members have joined that group, Alex and Paul, with Michael, the WAG Secretary and the chairperson for the 2008 plan, acting as an occasional advisor.

Finally we will soon be considering what, if any, events may be held for the Feast 2021.

Michael Tidball

Secretary – Willingham Action Group