Minutes of the 2025 Grace & Flavour Annual General Meeting[1]

Date and Location: Thursday 13th November 2025, West Horsley Village Hall

Agenda Items

1. **Welcome and Fire Regulations:** Gerry Robbins welcomed everyone to the meeting and reminded the audience of fire exits and the assembly point.

2. **Approval to Chair the Meeting:** The meeting unanimously approved Gerry Robbins to chair the meeting.

3. **Approval of Minutes of 2024 AGM:** These were unanimously approved.

4. **Apologies from Directors:** None

5. **New Directors and Directors for Re-election.** The Chair announced Jane Hunt and Anne Butler as new directors in 2025.

   Beverley Nash and John Whitlock have completed their term of office but are happy to be re-elected. **Proposer:** Pat Robbins. **Seconder:** Heather Spackman. A show of hands approved their re-election.

6. **Company Secretary's Report** *(Michael Trower)*

   I have now had a full year in the position and have done all the necessary procedures once and it was all fairly straightforward. Proof that all is working must be the fact that I now receive occasional junk mail harvested from the online details.

   Our two new directors were successfully added to the account and the annual return was accepted by Companies House, as well as the accounts added by Stephen. Hopefully by the time of this report all the directors will have signed up to the OneGov account as this is now a necessary requirement for company directors. Another requirement henceforth is that we have to purchase software in order to file the company accounts *(see item 8 for details)*.

   Hopefully next year will run as smoothly.

7. **Chairman's Report** *(Gerry Robbins)*

   Dear Members and Friends,

   7.1. It is my pleasure to present this chairman's report for the year ending 2025. Let me begin by thanking all our members, volunteers, and supporters for another year of sowing, weeding, watering, harvesting, drinking and eating and the continued maintenance and improvements to our lovely community garden.

   Before presenting the main report, I would just like to take a few moments to record the passing of David Lush earlier in the year. David was a key figure in the local

[1] *Note that these minutes need final approval at the next AGM in November 2026*

community, particularly active in Horsley U3A and the Wheel of Care. In the latter role he was responsible for organising the rota of volunteers and delivery lists for the G+F vegetable boxes tithe. Thank you, David.

7.2. Activity and Events during the year
We have maintained our core volunteering workdays (Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday mornings and a high season Wednesday Weeders Group. We have around 60 active members at present. We continue to grow a wide range of vegetables, soft fruit, orchard fruits and herbs. Our cut-flower section continues to expand, and the wildlife-friendly features (pond, wildflower borders, nest boxes, bee hotel and slope) remain a strong part of the project.

We also supply produce to local residents with restricted access to fresh produce (c.30 households) through our tithe. We sell a limited range of produce to the public during the high season which helps our funding. In addition, we donate some produce to a local food bank in Cobham when a surplus is available.

This evening there will be presentations on our finances, the garden, the allotments, and the building activities. I will focus on a few highlights and other topics.

7.3. Recap of the Year's Events

February 15th The first vegetable seeds were sown. Several G+F members attended the Horsley's Climate Action Network Meeting entitled "Nature Recovery Spring into Action" organised by Catherine Young and colleagues.

March Dene Place Care Home ownership transferring from BUPA to Cardinal Health. We were anxious to confirm that this would not affect our planned use of their meadow as a temporary car park for our open day in July.

April Glorious spring! Very good weather and turn out by members with a head count of 26 at our morning break on 5th April.
On the 29th April John Whitlock gave a presentation on G+F at the WH PC annual meeting.

10th May was the day of our OGM, held on our patio in view of the warm weather with 22 attendees and presenters.

On **9th June** the West Horsley in Bloom Competition judges visited G+F and individual allotments. The WHIB awards ceremony held on 27th June.

- Grace & Flavour was awarded Best Non-residential Garden (Large)
- Grace & Flavour was awarded Gold for sustainability
- Tom Suffolk awarded Best Allotment at Grace & Flavour
- Walija Chew & Tom Suffolk Joint winners of the Roxburghe Cup

In **July** we held our relaxing summer social event on the patio.
A small team (Nicki, Alison and Sandy) ran a stall at Ripley Farmers Market which has been useful in publicising G+F to the local community and advertising the Open Day.
G+F was visited by a group of RAC members who were given a tour of the garden by John Whitlock and treated to tea with scrumptious homemade cakes. A generous donation was received as a thank you.

On the 27th July we opened the garden to the public under the auspices of the National Garden Scheme. We owe a very large thank you to Beverley Nash and everyone else involved in making it a big success again.
Organising and running the open day is a large task.

- As mentioned above, preparation started early in the year, ensuring a correct entry in the NGS handbook and online directory
- securing all the publicity materials and on-site signage for the big day
- engaging with the new owners of Dene Place
- enlisting Stephen Isaac's crew to prepare the meadow as a temporary car park
- engaging with Cherry Trees to take part in the open day
- getting the G+F site into an optimal state of cultivation with plenty of extra weeding and tidying up
- advertising the event in local media
- setting up publicity signs and extensive signage on the day
- encouraging and organising plant donations to be sold on the day
- managing the traffic, garden entry tickets, refreshments and cakes, point of sale devices and cash management
- tidy up after the event
- post event analysis and learning.
- submission of moneys to NGS and Cherry Trees

On the day we had good weather, 200 visitors, £1000 raised for NGS chosen charities and £1000 for Cherry trees. Excellent plant sales and refreshments. No complaints or incidents. This was our third year and we have decided to take a well-earned break next year but do not rule out future open days.

On the 18th October Rev. Phil Herrington, Rector of St Mary's led our annual Harvest Celebration followed by lunch in the Potting Shed.

7.4. Are you talking to me?

There are several ways we try to keep in touch with our members, supporters and the wider community.

- On site presence of the Head and Deputy Head Gardeners, John and Ray and other directors at most sessions.
- Tea break briefings and news snippets.
- Newsletters - 9 sent in the last 12 months
- Facebook & Instagram presence
- Our Website
- Articles in local press and for local organisations such as the PCs.

Have we got the balance right? How could we improve?
Would you like more briefings at the morning breaks e.g. about the directors' meetings?

7.5. Challenges and the Garden Path Ahead

7.5.1 Health and Safety

Working in G+F is an enjoyable, worthwhile experience. It should be as safe as possible too. To that end we have a continuing focus on your safety.

- We have a lead director for H&S and a written H&S policy.
- We brief new members on the key risks before they work in the garden.
- We remind members of the risks that come with working in G+F and everyone's duty of care.
- We keep a record of significant injuries & incidents and follow up on them.
- We try to minimise risks through continuous attention to site maintenance, removing hazards.
- We have first aid trained members, an on-site first aid kit and AED.
- Some examples of specific actions to reduce risk this year include the construction of a safe "short cut" between the allotment and communal areas, pruning of dead branches on large overhanging trees and levelling of paths in the allotment area, and a 'blitz' on trip hazards in the run up to our open day.

Do we get the balance between safety and our other activities right?
Are there any issues you would like to discuss now or outside this meeting?

7.5.2 Climate Change
No doubt John Whitlock will deal with the challenges posed by the weather this year and plans to improve our irrigation systems. He may even talk about growing sweet potatoes and figs!

7.5.3 Attracting New Blood
None of us are getting younger. For continuing success, we need a constant supply of fresh new recruits mainly attracted by word of mouth.
We had

- 61 member in 2023 (22 of whom were new that year)
- 56 in 2024 (15 new)
- 58 in 2025 (10 new)

(these are the figures at November each year)

7.6. Acknowledgements
Grace and Flavour is the sum of its parts and the most important parts are its people. Without your hard work it would be nothing.
My heartfelt thanks go to all our members, those that work in the garden and our friends such as such as the Parish Councils and the Horsley Community Fund who have provided moral and financial support, to our visitors, shoppers and to all of you homemade cake-makers who keep us in positive energy and happiness balance. You do a fantastic job and you can give yourselves some restrained English applause now.

This is my third and final meeting as chairman. The last three years have been stimulating, interesting if occasionally exacting. G+F has gone through considerable change in the last three years but in my biased opinion remains on course for a thriving future. It has been a privilege to be part of that change. Thank you.

8. Presentation of Accounts and Treasurer's Report *(Stephen Stuart Matthews)*

Accounts for the year Oct 2024 to End of Sept 2025 were agreed as proposed by Gerry Robbins and seconded by John Whitlock.

Current bank balance on 30th September 2024 was £8,315 and the deposit accounts balance was £9,046.

Grace and Flavour CIC spent a net £7,782 on a wide variety of costs, improvements and maintenance including pollarding five lime trees, six dip tanks covers for allotments, repairing sheds, east wall supports foundation, safe access improvements, fire extinguisher servicing, path pothole patching, carpark and main access maintenance and fruit tree posts and cable anchors.

Thanks were recorded to The Horsley Community Fund and Surrey County Council Community Fund for their grant of £700 respectively towards our bridge rebuilding which was successfully completed July this year.

Donations of £863 were received. Thanks were recorded to Jeremy Miles for a donation towards rent and to the RAC club who visited the garden this summer and made a generous donation. Members who gave lectures and donated fees or donated plants and raised money this year during the NGS open day were also thanked.

The accounts can be viewed on our website and will be available on the Companies House Website.

Stephen thanked Brian Manners for undertaking independent examination of Grace + Flavour accounts. Stephen proposed that Brian be re-appointed for next year. **Proposer:** Nicki Douet **Seconder:** Bob Spackman. This was agreed by a show of hands.

The working forecast and budget for Oct 2025 to Sep 2026 was presented for approval. **Proposer:** Tony Millership **Seconder:** Tim Bennett. It was supported by a show of hands.

Expenditure in the coming year is planned to include renewing battery and pads for the defibrillator, cutting laurels along east border to allotments, repairs to carpark entrance to remove ruts, a roll of blacking for suppressing weeds, two additional allotment dip tank covers, two new steel wheel barrows, watering equipment for polytunnels and other grounds and general maintenance activities.

Purchase of a third polytunnel is being considered as is possible grant funding.

Changes to the 2026 forecast from last year were highlighted, including the new requirement for all companies, including CICs to use commercial software when filing their HMRC tax returns online. Our forecast for 2026 expenditure includes and estimate of £180 for this item, which will be an annual expense.

Feedback from the floor:

- There was a request for the summary graphic of activity in 2025 to be put on the website.
- Richard Bayes queried whether there were funds for an additional dip tank in the allotments. This request will be considered at the next Directors' meeting.
- There was a discussion about dip tank lids being heavy and how the two-piece design was an improvement.

9. Report from Head Gardener *(John Whitlock)*

Sweet Potatoes – In a year with exceptionally good weather, Bob Spackman bought 3 sweet potato slips. The cost was £9.99. He had a crop weighing 1kg. This shows that they are not economically viable to grow, apart from fun!

2025 Developments/ Changes

- The herb bed was dug out and compost (the old woodchip from the paths around the terrace) used to mulch it. Squashes were very successfully grown through weed suppressant in the bed.
- All the woodchip paths in the garden were cleared and the woodchip renewed
- An extra bed of golden yellow raspberries was planted.
- A bed of globe artichokes grown from seed was planted and cropping has started.
- An electric fence was temporarily installed around the sweetcorn.
- Outdoor cucumbers were successfully grown at the end of the runner bean beds. We hope to extend this trial by building a separate structure to grow cucumbers up.
- One whole section of the garden had woodchipped paths. This proved a success and we hope to extend this over the whole garden.

Successes

- The fruit was outstanding this year. The great weather helped enormously but Beverley and her team should be congratulated on their success.
- Bob Spackman's plan to enclose the sweetcorn with an electric fence was a great success. The badgers did not penetrate the barrier. Unfortunately, rats had some impact.
- Leeks are excellent again after a poor year in 2024.
- Carrots have been brilliantly thinned by the Wednesday Weeders.
- Many crops have been excellent particularly the sun loving summer vegetables.

Challenges

- The drought caused a few issues particularly with summer brassicas such as calabrese.
- The main pest problem is cabbage whitefly which is impacting our kale and brussel sprouts.
- Oxalis is spreading in many parts of the garden. We need to remove as much as we can.

Future

- There is a possibility of adding an extra polytunnel.
- We are investigating the possibility of growing figs (and possibly apricots).
- If we can get sufficient good quality woodchip we will cover many of the paths in between the vegetables.
- We may reduce the volume of vegetables not popular among many members.
- Rob Harris, David and Peter have been investigating and experimenting with a drip hose irrigation system with some success. We hope to expand this next year.

Thankyou

- Firstly, to Ray for helping me so much in the garden. He is always a good sounding board and he takes responsibility for a vast amount in the garden.
- The watering team who ensures the polytunnels are a success. Thank you to David for joining the team.
- The Wednesday Weeders for their contribution, which is greatly appreciated.
- Helena for not just the flowers and herbs, but for helping keep the potting shed clean and tidy and for sorting the tithe. She is invaluable.
- Beverley for taking on the responsibility of the fruit trees so successfully.
- Everyone, both old and new, for helping make G+F a great success.

10. Report from Allotments Liaison *(Michael Trower)*

The hot & dry weather for the greater part of the summer has been a mixed blessing for the allotments. Some crops have done well, others not so and water usage has increased dramatically from last year. This is probably likely to continue with climate change. The sites current water supply is becoming a limiting factor and will have to be monitored in future to see if any measures need to be implemented to counteract climate change.

This September has seen quite a changeover with five new plotholders after several were relinquished during the year, and one invited to do so. There is currently only one person on the waiting list.

The fruit trees in the allotments were pruned early in the year, and with the hotter weather produced a bumper crop, especially the quince. Hopefully they will also benefit from some winter pruning too.

The silver birch has continued to be monitored as we have been concerned over its health. A tree surgeon has inspected it and advised it is in terminal decline. This has been passed on to the NT who are responsible for it and a crown reduction has been effected. The tree will continue to be monitored to see how it fares.

The dry weather and the resident moles have caused some problems with ruts and bumps and I am grateful to the Builders for spreading some surplus earth over the depressions. They have also attended to the almost defunct mulberry tree and some self-seeded bushes and saplings.

There were many visitors to the allotments during the NGS Open day who are always impressed with the set up.

Those on the mowing rota make a big difference to the appearance of the allotments and as always, I am most grateful to them.

11. Report from the Estate Management Team *(Tony Millership)*

The change in name from “Building Team” to “Estate Management Team” reflects the role that we undertake.

Referring to our plans for 2025 from the 2024 AGM there are only a few items outstanding.

Achieved:

- Clear weed etc around wall props and treat timbers
- Install paving along east wall props
- Paint Amanda's shed roof
- Complete paving behind sheds
- Replace rotten Des Hollier Avenue fruit posts.

Outstanding:

- Complete 'cuprinoling' of wall supports
- Prune laurel on verge and in car park and elsewhere
- Clean potting shed windows/roof

There is a list of fifteen notable jobs we have done, excluding the minor jobs (see slide for details). As well as the planned items above, major work included construction of the bridge over the pond, installation of handrails and making of dip tank covers for the allotments.

There were no injuries sustained.

Thanks are due to Rob who is the brains behind the team, planning at home and picking up supplies.

Plans for 2026:

- Complete 'cuprinoling' of wall supports
- Prune laurel on verge and in car park and elsewhere???
- Clean potting shed windows/roof
- Paint wood preservative on all timber wall props
- Hedge cutting to southern (Dene Place) and potting shed hedges
- Pot hole repairs to the main footpaths
- Drink tea and eat cake!

12. Report on Website (Mark Blowers)

The website is up and running and will be updated as and when required. I am happy to take feedback and constructive comments.

When someone applies to join via the website, the request is forwarded to Beverley as Membership Secretary.

13. Report on Wildlife (and Trees) *(Gerry Robbins)*

Impact of the unusual weather.
Nationally we had the warmest spring and summer since 1884. In Surrey the summer temperature reached 32.C. Of more concern was the prolonged drought with very little rain in spring and summer.
Extreme weather stresses wildlife and may adversely affect trees, particularly those already suffering from pathogens or poor soil conditions such as compaction including our limes.
The drought has also adversely affected the pond. The water level has been at its lowest. Few newts and dragonflies have been seen this year. The pond had to be topped up with mains water on numerous occasions. But in spite of allowing the water to stand before being added to the pond, it has resulted in brown algal

overgrowth which has been skimmed off where possible. The water level is now back up to a healthy level following autumn rain.

Our Trees
Although the National Trust is generally responsible for managing our trees, we do monitor them for safety, overgrowth and encroachment on the cultivated beds.

Tree Work This Year
(1) Rotational pollarding of the row of lime trees on the west boundary of the site. Five were done in January this year by Rob Grist's team. This is a significant expense for G+F. It is hoped that the frequency of pollarding can now be reduced to maybe once every ten years in future.

(2) Major pruning of the large silver birch in the allotment area to remove unsafe / dead / diseased branches affected by Birch polypore (Fometopsis betulina) sporophores. This was done in October.
Incidentally Birch polypore has been used for

- medicinal purposes, such as a styptic for wounds, with possible antiseptic, anti-inflammatory, antifungal, antiviral, and antiparasitic properties.
- making tea for its immune-boosting properties
- tinder to make fire
- for sharpening knives and razors

(3) Pruning of the dead branches of the venerable mulberry tree in the allotment area.

(4) Removal of the multi-stemmed suckering poplar, close to the car park.

The Bee Slope for Ground Nesting Bees
This was a new installation for 2025, located next to the entrance to the south polytunnel. The site was chosen to provide a clear, south facing, warm, well drained slope close to nectar plants. Ground nesting bees are small, docile, and do not pose a threat to us. Some bee interest caught on video was shown in early part of the year. The soil composition has been adjusted to make it even more attractive next year.

Wildlife observations over the year: Stripes and Stars
Here are a few other photographic snippets for your interest.

Our native hornets seem to have enjoyed the hot weather this year and have been much in evidence. Their behaviour is fascinating. I have spotted fights between hornets, predation of wasps and flies by hornets, apparent head to head communication between hornets and finally (although admittedly not at G+F) mating! No Asian (yellow legged) hornets have been spotted at G+F so far.

Two notable wasp nests were found this year, one under the sliver birch. This had been dug out probably by a badger who was feeling hungry from lack of sweetcorn. The other was inconveniently located in the car park. Wasp nests are quite safe provided they are not disturbed. We put up warning signs to keep you safe without the need to destroy the nest.

A few other interesting insects for you to identify:-

When is a wasp not a wasp? When its a wasp beetle. An excellent example of Batesian mimicry.
Other types of mimicry include Mullerian (two harmful species which look very similar), Wasmannian (mimicry to fool a host in a nest) and aggressive where a predator mimics the prey of another predator.

Brimstone moth not to be confused with Brimstone Butterfly.
Mullein moth caterpillar, an impressive sized caterpillar found on or near mullein plants.

THE MYSTERY OF BOX 18
Grace+Flavour has approximately 25 nest boxes on site. These are surveyed regularly during the nesting season with minimal disturbance. The boxes are mainly small boxes used by great and blue tits and larger boxes used by stock doves. Approximately 45% of the boxes are used each year.

Box 18
This is a large dove-sized box located around 3 metres high in the ash tree outside our northern wall near the pond.
It was checked in mid April. A stock dove flew out and the box was found to contain sparse twigs, typical of a stock dove nest in the making.
Ownership Dispute
During a second check in mid May a female mallard flew out and the nest was found to contain 4 mallard eggs and one stock dove egg. A hybrid nest!
So what is going on here? Did the stock dove lay an egg but then abandon it or has it been forced out by the mallard who has subsequently taken it over. Are they co-nesting! Mallard clutches are normally 11-14 eggs so more activity was expected. A wildlife camera was set up but only showed crows and grey squirrels close to the nest
The Big Surprise!
The box was checked again at the beginning of July, timed to coincide with hatching time of mallard eggs. Much to my surprise the box contains two healthy happy looking stock dove chicks (squabs). No mallard eggs or egg shells was apparent.
The Stock Dove Strikes Back?
It looks like the stock dove reclaimed the nest, possibly smashed and removed the mallard eggs and started a new clutch of its own. Or did a squirrel intervene? Any other ideas?

Thanks and Conclusion
Thank you to Tim Bennett for helping with the annual clean up and repair of nest boxes and to David Payne who donned the waders and got to grips with pond plants recently.

As ever if you have any suggestions for ways we can encourage more wildlife at G+F without interfering with our core business, please let me know. I encourage you to be on the lookout for wildlife in action, and let me know what you find. It's always good to share.

14. Questions from the floor

- Pat Robbins requested that highlights from a directors' meeting be fed back to active members at coffee time.
- Lucy Moodie suggested that there could be an opportunity for G+F to link with young people through working with the Youth Council in West Horsley Parish Council. She noted there was no allocation in the budget around safeguarding and suggested that there should be one person on the committee responsible

for youth liaison and safeguarding. John Whitlock explained that children need to be supervised 1-1 and that G+F hosts a limited number of DoE students from local schools. He noted that the best time for a DoE student to start is February or March.

- Gerry Robbins explained how he intended to have more reflective prices for vegetables, given they are for sale only in season. He is working with John Whitlock to use the vegetable price at peak season as the reference price. This will result in some slight adjustments to prices.

15. Closing Comments

Gerry was thanked by John Whitlock and Beverley Nash for his 3 years of service and presented with a bottle of wine and an exclusive G&F coffee mug. He handed the gavel to Beverley Nash in recognition of her becoming our new Chair.

Gerry thanked Lyn, Heather and Anne for the cakes and drinks.

Beverley closed the meeting at 9.20pm