

WANTAGE MARKET GARDEN

Autumn 2020

Welcome to our first, and probably very overdue, newsletter. This garden has been going since October 2013, and as we are now just starting our 8th year, we thought it would be a good time to remind everyone how the project started.



The garden is based in the grounds of the Wantage Community Support Services building (Charlton Day Centre as it was back then). The garden had previously been used to grow container plants for sale but had become unusable. About 1/3 acre in size, the site was difficult to manage by just one group and the day centre invited other groups to join in the management of the garden as a partnership project in order to bring the garden back into life. The groups who joined in the partnership with WCSS (Oxfordshire County Council) are Style Acre (an Oxfordshire based charity who work with adults with learning disabilities and autism) and Sustainable Wantage (an environmental community group). Initially, Style Acre provided funding and lots of volunteers to re-cover the poly tunnels, make raised beds and make the garden safe.



Sustainable Wantage brought in funding from VWHDC to pay for the compost toilet (and its shed) and other essential items, as well as lots of willing volunteers who worked at the garden on weekends (many of those first volunteers still attend). Since then, many grants, plant sales, open days, gardening from service users and their support workers and thousands of volunteer hours later, the garden has been turned into the beautiful, productive, safe, and healing environment it is now.

The ethos of the garden is to provide gardening opportunities for everyone, no matter their age or ability. During the week, people supported by Style Acre or WCSS use the garden for a range of therapeutic activities and gardening sessions. Gardening has so many benefits – it enables people we support to have ownership of projects to build self-esteem, develop their practical skills and be part of a wider team. Some people come to pick flowers, do crafts, or simply just wander and enjoy. At the weekends (mainly Sundays now), the garden is open to the community (with Covid restrictions in place at the moment), for local people to garden,

do DIY, socialise and de-stress. Some of those who come on Sundays are keen gardeners, happy to help and impart their wisdom, some are novice gardeners who want to learn more, and others who do not have a garden but appreciate the opportunity to enjoy the space and chat. Those who attend the garden either during the week or at weekends leave, not only with freshly picked produce, but more relaxed and with a sense of achievement.

With winter approaching, and while we are still under Covid threat, the garden will be as vital as ever. While there may not be much to do in the way of actual gardening, there will be bulb planting, Christmas crafts, bench painting, bug and bird box building among other things to look forwards to. Here's to a colourful and productive 2021.
From everyone at the Wantage Market Garden.

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