

DAHA - Chairman's Report 2020

- **Chairman, Matt Peskett**

It goes without saying that 2020 has been a very difficult year with the onset of COVID restrictions affecting our daily lives in all areas. In terms of allotments and Dorking Allotment Holders' Association (DAHA) there has been something of a mixed impact.

Positive outcomes

Health - Allotments have provided an outlet for physical exercise within the constraints of any restrictions. Arguably healthier people are at less risk from viruses.

Happiness - Allotmenters have also been less isolated even when distancing from plot to plot. This has also no doubt benefitted the mental health of all concerned.

Site Standards - For those on furlough, additional time has been spent at allotments with the majority of sites reporting that they have never looked better or been better cultivated.

Interest in GYO - Waiting lists have risen dramatically as people have sought a means of using their lockdown time to grow their own food.

Compost availability - when garden centres were closed DAHA was still able to offer a limited 'collection only' system for manure, compost and sundries. Our treasurer did a fantastic job of handling and processing a steady and increasing stream of orders.

Negative outcomes

Social gatherings - the suspension of social gatherings has limited DAHA's ability to provide a core role - organising speakers, BBQs, the pumpkin show, school interaction and trips (Wisley). Our decision to cancel Spring into Action in advance of the delayed government lockdown now looks a wise one but we are of course sad to have to revert to a digital AGM format 5 months later.

Site standards - Some members were not furloughed and instead saw an increase in workload or change in circumstances. Others had children at home due to school closures or may have been shielding and unable to attend. These changes in lifestyle may have conversely reduced allotment attendance. Personally I found myself in this bracket, working harder with reduced leisure time, children home schooling, I was unable to take too many risks due to shielding in-laws. Thankfully fellow plot holders kindly mowed and strimmed my outrageously overgrown plots. MVDC suspended plot inspections, at the very least this prevented the DAHA Chairman from being evicted!

Next Year

We look towards 2021 with hope, but in all likelihood it will see more of the same. We do at least know what to expect. Allotments will not at any point be 'locked down' and we can plan accordingly for the growing season. DAHA can consider options for virtual speakers (if there is demand from members), we are also looking at outdoor social events with potential investment in a Bake Off style marquee to accommodate them.