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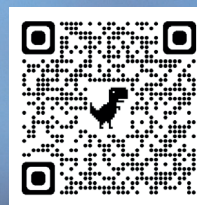
# *Guildford Environmental Forum* *newsletter*

March 2024 - June 2024

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*Flowering gorse,  
photographed by Raymond Smith*

# Litter Picking in North-West Guildford

by R.E.J. Seymour

WHILST ON walks, my wife and I have been litter picking in the Worplesdon Commons area for the last four years. We have several pertinent observations to make.

Plastic bottles and aluminium cans are easily flattened by passing vehicles and, as they are very light, they are blown onto grass verges and into hedges where they are more difficult to retrieve. Along roads where storm drains have been constructed, cans and bottles can be trapped, blocking the drains and causing localised flooding. This presents a hazard to pedestrians walking on pavements and to motorists.

Recently, there has been an increase in glass, including lager, beer and wine bottles which have been thrown out of passing vehicles. On occasions, these have been smashed on the road and pavements, causing further problems. Often, the contents of the can or bottle has not been fully consumed, which makes litter picking unpleasant as the bag in use can smell like a brewery!

Plastic litter is often blown by the wind and becomes trapped in trees or hedges, staying exposed for months. Dog walkers sometimes discard plastic dog waste bags in hedges or along pathways, hoping that someone else will pick them up! A very worrying consequence of discarded plastic bottles in local streams is that eventually they could be transported into rivers and then into the sea where they can be broken up forming microplastic particles. This in turn impacts negatively on the marine ecosystem.

There are significant wider issues associated with the problem of litter. National Highways,



Discarded drink can in front of a storm drain on the Aldershot Road

RSPCA and Keep Britain Tidy have launched a campaign urging road users to bin their litter, due to the link between roadside littering and wildlife fatalities. National Highway's Chief Executive Nick Harris said: "Littering is a dreadful social problem. It is not just unsightly - it can have deadly impacts on wildlife by turning verges into lethal roadside restaurants."

In addition, RSPCA Lead Wildlife Officer Geoff Edmond said: "Our rescuers deal with thousands of incidents every year where animals have been impacted by litter. Animals can ingest litter, become trapped in it or be attracted to old food on the roadside, putting them in danger of moving vehicles." Brightly coloured pieces of plastic can be irresistible to foraging birds, but in digestion it can block food passages, and eventually the birds starve to death.

All litter should be taken home and disposed of in household bins or in litter bins. Surrey Wildlife Trust say that litter pickers should not leave litter in bags along the roadside, it should be put in litter bins or taken home and disposed of with other waste. We all have an environmental responsibility, and by taking part in the Great British Spring Clean between 15th-31st March 2024, which is endorsed by Keep Britain Tidy, we will create a better environment for both people and wildlife.

**Learn more about the Great British Spring Clean & sign up to take part here: [keepbritaintidy.org](https://www.KeepBritainTidy.org)**



# Why should we bother with planning?

by Alastair Atkinson

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IF YOUR heart sinks when you hear the word “planning”, then you are not alone. It conjures up mental images of neighbour wars over home extensions, or expensive David-and-Goliath battles fought between well-endowed developers with deep pockets and gutsy but resource-strapped community campaign groups.

Planning also has a language and a set of procedures all of its own and it can seem intimidating. But like any language, once you learn a few key phrases and some sentence construction “rules”, you can quite quickly make yourself understood (even if your accent isn’t perfect).

The thing with planning is that it is one area in which citizens, residents, community groups, and those who just really care about their local built and natural environment can make a real difference, quickly. Things get built, or they don’t, or better things get built.

Where action on climate change, for example, seems distant, and the politicians completely resistant to influence from those who elected them (do they hear the hint of irony I wonder?), planning processes are designed to include non-planners. Local residents do have some power, and we should use it. We have a voice.

With a little bit of guidance from people who have trodden the boards before you, you can achieve a great deal. You can help protect our countryside, encourage development that sits alongside nature and you can help shape the built environment so it provides the sort of places in which we would want our children and grandchildren to spend time. It’s not just about objecting to anything that anyone wants to build. It’s about objecting to poorly designed schemes, and instead encouraging and promoting a higher bar, standards that the residents of Guildford, and the town itself, deserve (and should expect). It is about encouraging development that is sensitive to our amazing countryside and, where possible, enhances it. It’s about taking into account global shifts such as

climate change and the need to look after nature, but applying solutions locally, now.



Whether or not they know it, people really care about planning. When a local development is proposed that residents feel strongly about (usually because they think it shouldn’t go ahead), it is amazing how quickly a community can be mobilised. Letters are written, websites built, GoFundMe pages set up, and councillors lobbied. Lifelong friendships grow and neighbourly togetherness happens around planning-related campaigns. It’s one of the upsides of what can otherwise be quite a draining experience (objecting).

Objecting is such a necessary experience, and one best shared. If you use the opportunities provided by the planning system, including making persuasive written submissions (linked to policy) within the specified timescales and perhaps speaking at planning committee meetings, and if you can mobilise others who also care about their environment, you can stop bad developments and improve acceptable ones. It is largely an intellectual battle, and you don’t need to be a social media whizz or have a legal background. You don’t need to have a lot of money (unless you want to challenge a decision in the courts, and sometimes not even then).

Beware assuming, however, that the planning system works perfectly without citizen challenge. It doesn't. Just like GPs, the UK has an extreme shortage of qualified planners so the ones we do have are stretched to their limits. They are at the sharp end of everyone's criticism – from demanding developers, angry residents and frustrated elected members.

That's one reason why you leave the system unchecked and decisions unscrutinised at your peril. Planners don't always make decisions residents agree with, and neither do planning committees or planning inspectors. I would go so far as to suggest they don't always make good decisions. But I for one would rather know I had tried to make them better than not bothered at all, and all decisions made by public bodies can be challenged through the legal system if there are grounds to do so. This is not an undertaking anyone would make without thinking about it very carefully, but it is the ultimate check in the system. Nearly four years ago a neighbour who lived a few roads away dropped a printed flier through our letterbox. It showed a mocked-up photograph of bright floodlights shining over the treeline at the top of Merrow Downs. I was horrified. I knew nothing about the proposed development because only those living in the roads adjacent to the downs had been informed of the proposal. First lesson: don't assume anyone around you knows about planning applications that might have a huge impact on them, and about which they may care very deeply. It was during the Covid lockdown, so we couldn't meet for a while, but when we did there were several others who had had the same reaction to the development proposal, so we formed a little gang and started to unpick the plans, comparing them with both national planning policy (related to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) and local policies, including on sports provision and green belt protection. We wrote detailed submissions, we briefed our ward councillors, we talked to neighbours and visitors to the downs to alert them to the threat the development posed to the dark skies and local wildlife. We suggested alternatives. We spoke at the Planning Committee, which turned the scheme down unanimously, despite the case officer having recommended it be approved.

If only that had been the end of it. In fact, most people who knew about the scheme thought it was. But an appeal was lodged by the developer, and, to cut a long story short, the inspector overruled the planning committee and gave the development planning permission. Well, that's it, then, isn't it? Second lesson: develop a persuasive argument, based on clear planning policy, and build some political support.

The thing is, although some developers have healthy financial reserves and access to KCs, local residents who have voluntarily given up weeks of their time, learnt new skills, put themselves out a bit in their neighbourhood and really, really care about protecting the natural world they love, don't give up very easily.

So here we are, four years later. Still no development, one legal challenge won, and an in-depth knowledge about badgers and their protection that means I can talk with confidence to qualified ecologists about the subject! A new bunch of friends, a new job, neighbours I might otherwise never have met, and a fresh appreciation of the value in all its forms of the downs that so many of us cherish.

***Has it been worth it? You bet.***



***If you feel you could/would like to help with this planning challenge, please get in touch!***



# Plant of the Month

by Annelize Kidd

I JUST love how nature can help keep us healthy. I am very excited that we were given quite a few mullein (*Verbascum*) plants which have been planted around the Rosamund Garden last summer.

Mullein is a biennial (short-lived perennials that usually take two growing seasons to complete their life cycle) with large oval grey hairy leaves and tall flower spikes that terminate in a dense spike of pale yellow flowers; they bloom in summer for about 6 weeks. It is a traditional treatment to fight the bacteria that cause respiratory infections (make an infusion of boiled leaves), and also ear infections (using the flowers in an oil infusion). This handy plant is anti-inflammatory, antiseptic, antispasmodic, astringent, and expectorant. It might even be able to fight influenza and herpes

***Please note that the examples of mullein remedies given in this article do not constitute medical advice. Seek professional advice first for any medical concerns.***



It's easy to make your own mullein medicine. Pour a cup of boiling water over 1-2 teaspoons of chopped mullein leaves, and leave to steep for 10 minutes. Strain through some kitchen paper or a filter to remove the plant hairs (an irritant) and add a little bit of honey.

If it's an earache remedy you're after, then infuse mullein flowers in olive oil for about 3 days. Use as eardrops. This is used to treat the pain and inflammation associated with earache.



***This article was originally published in the Rosamund Community Garden newsletter. Head to [guildfordcommunitygarden.org.uk](http://guildfordcommunitygarden.org.uk) to learn more and subscribe.***

# Be Nice to Nettles

by Anna Williams

TO MOST, nettles remind us of childhood (or adulthood!) stings. In fact, these devious plants play an important role in the British ecosystem. The iconic green leaves start to appear in spring, and remain visible until autumn. During this time they provide habitat and cover for many species.

They also act as a food source and a place to reproduce for butterflies such as Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock, as well as the Burnished Brass moth. These insects go on to be important pollinators for a variety of other plants. In late summer, nettle seeds provide a valuable food source for many birds. Nettles help to keep British fauna populations robust.

Nettles also have many historic uses for humans, and while many have fallen out of fashion, there are new resurgences. Nettles were a popular textile



material in the 16th and 17th centuries. As we look for sustainable materials of the future, many are looking to the past and using nettles to make clothes once again.

Nettles were also a popular cooking ingredient, being made into tea, soup and even cakes. If you would like to pick nettles for this purpose, be sure to pick them away from polluted areas like roadsides.

The desire for more positive public opinion about nettles led to the creation of “Be Nice To Nettles Week”, celebrated in May every year. I hope this year you can use this week to learn more about the importance of this often overlooked plant.

## Garden News: An Update from Rosamund Community Garden

by Clare Millington

DESPITE THE enormous rainfall, which has filled our water-butts and pond, we’ve had a very busy month at the garden.

### Skillmill Project

The Skillmill Project has built 4 sturdy raised beds from larch and oak near the hub. This amazing project is in the old Norbury Sawmill and gives young people skills and qualifications to help them into employment. They very generously donated the beds to the garden, and we are providing a stocked food cupboard with recipes for the students to learn basic nutritious cookery skills at the mill.

Thank you very much. The raised beds will be a wonderful addition to the garden and will enable us to grow root crops such as carrots and beetroot that haven’t done well in the past.

### Ringway

The team at Ringway in Merrow are generously donating time and materials to create a wheelchair-friendly path from the entrance to the Hub. This will be made from a natural clay/stone mix and provide a framework for Annelize’s lovely planting plans of native woodland plants, shrubs and small trees. In return, Clare has been helping the depot team with their plans to re-green their outside space and grow pollinator-friendly plants, herbs and veggies. Andrew from the team will be up to use our poly 2 space for raising seedlings and cuttings for this exciting project.







### Fruit-cage

We had a fantastic turnout for our "Big Job Sunday" to extend the fruit-cage. Thanks to a lot of hard work, we now have an impressive cage over all our fruit and had a lot of fun erecting it. We met some new people and made some lovely connections. The next job is to stretch the new netting over the top of the frame, so watch out for a call out for help in the next few weeks.

### Funding Applications

Helen has been busy putting together a funding application to SCC YourFund community funding. After a members poll to see what people wanted most at the garden, the wishlist will include: metal edging for the front beds; new garden furniture; a woodburner for the hub; and a solar pump and watering system to complete the rainwater harvesting.

### ZERO Donation

Ben at ZERO Carbon Guildford has kindly donated some funding to the garden to buy new potting equipment for poly 2. So we should be getting that soon to provide much-needed space for us and other projects who use the space.



### DofE

Our lovely DofE students have been busy building our new shed and making gorgeous signs around the garden. We now have 4 students signed up and we are very excited to give them a designated project to work on.

We've wanted a dye bed at the garden for a long time and we're hoping to inspire the students to create something really beautiful, ending with running a dyeing workshop to showcase the different plants they grow.



### GEF

Last but not least, GEF have donated a very generous sum for us to complete the hub project! This will mean at last we can have a beautiful dry space to use for workshops, meetings and Fudge will be back to complete the roof in the next 2 months and we can start up with the cobbing days this month as the weather improves.



# The Serene Emerald Calmness of Moss vs Grass

by Annalize Kidd

THE JAPANESE revere moss, and create moss gardens with a special sense of calm and stillness. There are lots of famous moss gardens in Japan where more than a dozen named cultivars of moss form the basis of an ancient tradition of moss gardens. In the UK the only thing you can buy in a garden centre with the word "moss" on it seems to be moss killer. Most UK gardeners have an ongoing chemical battle trying to eradicate moss. But, actually, it might be something you want to cultivate instead of kill.



Moss gardens are becoming more wide-spread in the UK. Thompson & Morgan even sells moss seeds for gardeners wishing to create a serene emerald space. There are various species of moss, and these simple plants grow almost anywhere, particularly in damp and shady places where most other plants struggle to grow. Moss obtains its nutrients from the atmosphere and cleanses the air of pollutants. In the UK, there are acres and acres of short-clipped chemically treated lawn offering very little to benefit wildlife or the environment. If only a small portion of this could be converted into mossy spaces, the environmental benefits would be huge.

The ancestors of today's moss are known as first land plants, and they evolved from marine algae. These first plants not only absorbed CO<sub>2</sub>, they also produced all the oxygen in our atmosphere. They started to spread on land 470 million years ago, ultimately resulting in cooling and the formation of the ice caps on the poles.

Moss is an adaptable species that will happily grow on dry land, in sun or shade and also underwater. A moss garden is the easy, eco-friendly alternative to having grass – and it's almost maintenance-free. It also needs far less water than grass. Moss will change colour when it becomes dry, but it won't die, just a little bit of rain will instantly turn it beautifully green again.

Moss absorbs huge quantities of water, so play a crucial role in mitigating flooding during periods of intense rainfall. Sphagnum moss in particular can absorb up to 20 times its weight in water, and is instrumental in slowing the flow of rainwater from the hills and moors and reducing the risk of flooding in downstream towns and cities.

Moss also acts as an important home for other creatures. These are mainly invertebrates and include species like woodlice, but it is also home to a host of microscopic invertebrates such as rotifers, tardigrades and nematodes. A healthy mossy environment will attract frogs, toads, newts and birds,



who feed on the invertebrates hiding underneath moss.

Moss naturally occur on the stem and trunk of trees and shrubs, hard surfaces, borders and the top of compost in containers. Contrary to believe, they do not damage what they are growing on as they do not have roots.

There are around 20,000 species of mosses distributed throughout the world, even in Antarctica, except in salt water. They are commonly found in moist shady places. There are over 600 species of moss in the UK, best known for those that carpet woodland and forest floors. Mosses may form large, coarse, loose, green or yellowish-green tufts, densely matted tufts, or compact green cushions. They are typically very short, though some species are much larger, such as Dawsonia, the tallest moss in the world that can grow to 50 cm (20 in) in height. More information on the varieties of moss in the UK can be found on The Woodland Trust website: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2018/07/types-of-moss-in-the-uk/>



The 2023 television program *The Magical World of Moss*, visits beautiful moss-covered landscapes in Japan, Iceland, France, and Denmark and speaks with scientists and professionals who are examining moss's astounding capabilities and potential.

Pre-industrial societies made use of the mosses growing in their areas and used moss for bedding. Moss has also been used as insulation both for dwellings and in clothing. Traditionally, dried moss was used in some Nordic countries and Russia as an insulator between logs in log cabins. Alpine peoples used mosses for insulation in boots and mittens; Otzi the Iceman had moss-packed boots.

The capacity of dried mosses to absorb fluids has made their use practical in both medical and culinary uses. North American tribal people used mosses for nappies, wound dressing, and menstrual fluid absorption.

We should cherish our beautiful mosses – they provide an easy alternative to lawns, absorb high amounts of CO<sub>2</sub>, produce lots of oxygen, and does an amazing job cleansing the air of pollutants. Since they have no roots, they do not damage roof tiles, and provide good additional insulation. In addition, some mosses can help prevent flooding due to their ability to absorb so much water; moss helps wildlife by harbouring invertebrates, providing food for a range of small animals and birds.



## Are moss lawns better than grass?

If you think you need to get rid of moss on a lawn, think again. It's time to ask yourself whether the moss really needs to go because leaving it is no longer considered a lawn care mistake. We may have been conditioned to believe that a perfectly-manicured lawn is the only way to achieve garden perfection, but the rewilding movement has changed many of our preconceived garden trends and ideas of late.

If you have a shady lawn with acidic soil, then you would be likely to find that moss serves you better than grass by a long shot. That's without factoring in how often you have to mow your lawn and how long you water a lawn normally. Moss is far less maintenance.



At a basic evolutionary level, moss is quite simply much better adapted than grass to less than ideal growing conditions, such as poor drainage, shady conditions, or soil that is low in nutrients where grass species will struggle to get a foothold, so it grows more strongly and simply outcompetes the grass. So, if the grass won't grow and you remove the moss, then you will be likely to wind up with the soil showing in summer and mud in winter. At least moss is green and gives the impression of a healthy lawn from a distance, so it's pleasant enough to look at, and it's certainly soft and comfortable to walk on. It is also important to note that even a small moss lawn can absorb more carbon than 275 mature trees, produce a ton of oxygen, and absorb air pollutants, according to The Oxygen Project. A moss lawn thrives in any climate, and won't require much watering beyond annual rainfall, but gardeners should collect rainwater and use it to hydrate their mossy lawns during dry spells. Another big plus is that they require zero mowing, which should go a small way towards saving the planet, too!

## ***Volunteer your team for a day at Rosamund Community Garden!***

Rosamund Garden is nestled within 19 acres of privately owned chalk Downland, offering wonderful views over Guildford. Serving as a delightful nature reserve, a haven for wildlife, and a tranquil wellbeing space, it stands as a cherished community retreat.

### **Exciting activities!**

Immerse your team in a range of activities for the day! Participate in completing our new Hub project by assisting with wattle and daubing the walls. Alternatively, explore other exciting options such as crafting natural edges and borders for our beds, constructing wildlife habitat teepees, building a bread oven, or creating a fire circle.

### **Supervision**

A dedicated member of our Community Garden will be available to oversee your group's activities throughout the day. We aim for you to leave with a sense of satisfaction, knowing you've made a meaningful contribution to a genuine community project.

### **Easy to arrange**

Get in touch for more information - we're happy to meet you at the garden to discuss your needs and tailor an away day that suits you perfectly.



# GEF Subscriptions Reminder

by Janice Bennett

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THIS IS a reminder (only for those GEF members who have not joined in the last 3 years via membermojo) that your subscriptions for the year commencing April 1st 2024 are due.

For all members, the subscription rate is being maintained again (now for over 13 years in succession) at the rate of £10pa (£15pa for a household at one address).

For all those who have completed standing order mandates and gift aid declarations, there is



nothing more that you need to do to renew your membership, and we thank you very much indeed for completing both returns in the past. Your standing order will be processed on April 11th as usual.

A reminder will be automatically generated for those members who have not renewed their subscription by the end of March 2024. For those few members who have not given us an email address and who do not pay by standing order, you will be posted a subscription reminder shortly. We would be most grateful if your remittance could be returned to me

as soon as possible. I can be contacted with any queries about payment on [janiceharnett@live.co.uk](mailto:janiceharnett@live.co.uk) or by phone on 07760 273419.

Finally, if you know of anyone in the Guildford area who would like to become a member of GEF, then please encourage them to apply for membership. This is the very best way in which you can help GEF grow in the future. We hope you are getting very good value for your membership of GEF, and we thank you for renewing.

## THREE GOOD REASONS FOR RENEWING YOUR GEF MEMBERSHIP

- 1** The Rosamund Hub is almost complete and the garden is full of activity.
- 2** An established group of volunteers are restoring the chalk habitat on the Mount and have recieved grants to enable the work to continue.
- 3** GEF issues a monthly email bulletin of environmental news and a quarterly newsletter of opinion and think pieces. We also organise a range of events and volunteering opportunities.

***More details of the last year will be available at our AGM, the date for which will be announced via email shortly. We hope to see you there!***

# EVENTS

*All the forum's events are open to the public!*

## **THURSDAY 18TH APRIL 7:30-9PM** **The Asian Hornet & A Taste of Honey**

Come and enjoy a pair of fun and educational talks on a new threat to our biodiversity and the surprisingly complex world of honey. Hosted by local beekeeper and writer Peter Smith, at Zero Carbon Guildford.

**168 High Street, Guildford, GU1 3HW**



## **SATURDAY 20TH APRIL 2-6PM** **Resilient Gardening**

Join us with Andre Tranquilini to learn how to introduce climate-friendly solutions into your garden. Enjoy a VR headset experience and try out bug hotel making!

**168 High Street, Guildford, GU1 3HW**

## **SATURDAY 20TH APRIL** **Planet Earth Day at Zero**

Come and join us for a whole day of talks, workshops and events as we celebrate this important day in the calendar! The day's activities will be held at the new Zero Carbon Guildford Hub. Look out for further information from GEF and check on Zero Carbon Guildford's website ([zerocarbonguildford.org](http://zerocarbonguildford.org)) for a full schedule at the day approaches.

**168 High Street, Guildford, GU1 3HW**

*A correction from last quarter's edition: in paragraph 1 of the article titled "GEF Biodiversity Project Update: the Mount Volunteers" on Page 7, it mentions financial help from Councillors Angela Richardson and Colin Cross. The first name listed should have been Angela Goodwin, who made the contribution from the SCC Members Community Allocation. MP Angela Richardson did not provide any funds. We apologise for this error!*

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Guildford Environmental Forum aims to improve the environment in and around Guildford for wildlife and for people and to build a sustainable future. Join us in our work around the town and have this newsletter posted or emailed to you four times a year. Forum membership is only £10 per year or £15 for a couple, while for age 21-25 it's £5 and for under 21s it's free. New members are warmly welcomed! Please contact Janice Bennett with any queries.



Please send all newsletter submissions for our summer edition (articles or photographs) to Isabel Davies by June 1st at the latest!