

# The Newsletter

## Worcestershire Group



**Issue 61**  
**Spring 2025**



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### **HPS Worcestershire Group**

### **Committee contact details as of May2025**

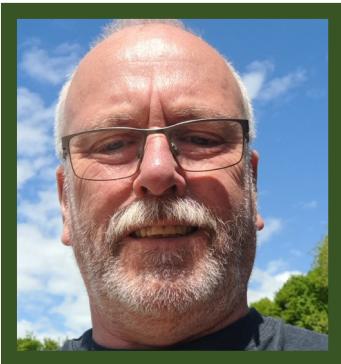
<b>General contact email:</b>	<b>hpsworcs@gmail.com</b>
<b>Chair: Rob Swallow</b>	<b>chair.hpsworcs@gmail.com</b>
<b>Secretary: Jo Simpson</b>	<b>sec.hpsworcs@gmail.com</b>
<b>Treasurer: Tracey Swallow</b>	<b>treasurer.hpsworcs@gmail.com</b>
<b>Publicity/Speaker Secretary:</b>	<b>vacant</b>
<b>Programme Secretary:</b>	<b>vacant</b>
<b>Newsletter Editor: Mike Bentley</b>	<b>editor.hpsworcs@gmail.com</b>
<b>Members Rep: Sue Fairman</b>	<b>members.hpsworcs@gmail.com</b>
<b>Membership Sec: Liz Demaison</b>	<b>membersec.hpsworcs@gmail.com</b>

### **Photos in this edition:**

Cover photo Abbotsbury Subtropical Gardens, Dorset (Mike Bentley)

Other photos by Mike Bentley, Claire Constantine, Jenny Constant.

Speakers' photos taken from their respective websites.



# From the Editor

Welcome to issue 61 (the third digital version) of the Worcestershire HPS Group's newsletter.

Thank you for your contributions to this newsletter and please keep them coming in. I am aiming to produce the next edition in October. As you may have noticed on the previous page, there have been a lot of changes to our Committee with a number of new people having taken up posts with effect from April 2025. We've also got new email addresses for all the committee members; you will also find these on page 2. I'd like to thank all the outgoing committee members for their support both in helping in my role as editor and in managing the change from paper to a digital version. We would like to get some feedback on the newsletter. A short questionnaire will be sent out as well as being distributed at a future meeting; please keep an eye out for this and take a few minutes to complete it!

Kathryn and I have been busy in our own garden and on the allotment. You may remember from my last editorial that in the spring of 2024 we had a huge problem with vine weevil; they completely wrecked some of our potted Hostas; we collected nearly 100 adults off just one plant over two evenings. Last autumn we tried a nematode treatment for the first time, adding the live nematodes to water as per instructions and treating all our pots as well as a raised bed, using a watering can. I'm pleased to report that this worked really well and I don't think I've seen one so far this year. However we have had a lot of lily beetles on a couple of large, potted lilies but have managed to keep these in check so far by picking them off by hand. The adult beetles have been fed to my *Sarracenia*s (pitcher plants) which have been thriving on this diet!

In other news, I was sad to find out yesterday that Pershore College is closing both its commercial trade nursery and garden centre, to concentrate its horticultural efforts on its teaching work. We wish Josh and his team all the best with the new venture.

**Mike Bentley**



Left: Helping at the RHS Malvern Spring Show, page 14.

Below: Claire's meadows, page 7



## **A message from our outgoing Chair, Lyn Maile**

I joined the Hardy Plant Society Worcestershire group in 2013 and became group Secretary in 2015, I then took over as Chair on the 14<sup>th</sup> March 2020. The first lock-down of the Pandemic was declared on 23<sup>rd</sup> March.

The group was 25 years old in 2020, we had organised a year of special events to celebrate. Sadly, I spent the first few months as Chair cancelling everything, except the outdoor meeting at Snettisham in September 2020, which some of you will remember.

We have been through some turbulent times together and I would like to thank those of you who have remained loyal to me personally and to my committee throughout. We have always done our best to maintain the high standards set by previous incumbents; seeking good quality speakers and providing a well - equipped and comfortable venue for members at our meetings.

We are now handing our responsibilities over to a new team led by Robert Swallow. I would ask you to support the new committee as they work to increase the membership and develop the activities of the group.

I shall see you at monthly meetings, I wish you all well for the future.

Lyn

## **A message from our new Chair, Robert Swallow**

It has been a pleasure to become involved with the Hardy Plant Society Worcestershire Group and to step in to take the role of Chair, particularly during its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. For many years, both my wife and I have been very keen gardeners and have several links with the industry. We both look forward to getting to know as many of the members as possible.

Every year we propagate hundreds of plants from seed and cuttings including Camellias, as well as aiming to try something different. This year we chose *Meconopsis* - with varying success. During May, we usually sell our surplus plants to cover the costs of seed and compost and many visitors to our house often leave with plants in hand.

18 months ago we moved to a new home on a 1/3 of an acre plot. The previous owners were not gardeners and we have been planting and changing the layout. It means everything in the garden, other than hedging, is less than 2 years old. This is a very exciting project for us and we are looking forward to seeing it develop over the next few years. It will be great to see when people join us in the garden in August for afternoon tea to celebrate 30 years of HPS Worcestershire.

Over the next period our main aim is to increase the membership of the HPS and raise the profile of the group so we are more well known. This will assist us with membership fee changes and costs in general.

Rob

# Speakers and events, 2025

We have a good line-up of speakers for 2025. At the time of writing these include

Dr Timothy Walker, former director of the Oxford Botanical Garden and senior stipendiary lecturer in plant science at Somerville College, Oxford. Timothy will be talking to our July meeting about the science and art of the use of colour in garden design.

Our September speaker is Julie Ritchie from Hoo House nursery. Julie will be talking about cut-and-come-again perennials for your garden and floral displays.

The October meeting is our “celebrity lecture” and this year we have Jimi Blake, who will be talking about his own garden, Hunting Brook.

Helen Picton from Old Court Nurseries and Picton Garden is our November speaker. The title of the talk is “Daisy Days— the rise and fall of the Michaelmas daisy.” (Editor’s note: if you’ve never visited this local garden in Welland, it’s well worth doing so when it is open to the public in the autumn. The displays of Michaelmas daisies, amongst other plants, are stunning).

Details can be found on our Ticketsource site <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/hpsworcestershire>



**Timothy Walker**



**Jimi Blake**



**Julie Ritchie**



**At  
Picton  
Garden**



## Other events coming up

On June 14th we will be having our annual plant sale. If you are dividing plants of raising seeds and cuttings please try and save some for the plant sale! As well as members' plants several local nurseries have agreed to provide stalls. We also need volunteers to help out on the day.

Finally, this August sees the 30th anniversary of the Worcestershire HPS group. To celebrate this Rob and Tracey have offered to host an event in their Worcester garden. Details of this event will be emailed out soon.

### 'The Villa' Garden Roller

Longstanding members of this Group, writes Jenny Constant, might, recall the time when we sometimes had 'audience participation' sessions at meetings. The one I particularly remember was when we were asked to bring along our favourite old gardening tool and explain why we loved it.

My favourite was too heavy to bring, so I made a little display board with text and photos.

It was a garden roller made by John Edwards and embossed with the words 'The Villa', no doubt to appeal to upwardly mobile Edwardians!



It was originally lent to me by our friend Ken twenty years before when we had the garden landscaped. Over the years I kept trying to return it but eventually realised that he was glad to be rid of it, and so it became mine. Like him, we never use it! I don't know exactly how old it is, but I found out a bit about the local supplier whose name was also part of the casting.



John Edwards is recorded in the 1891 census in Shrewsbury as an Apprentice Ironmonger. By 1894 he was in Malvern and living over his shop in North Malvern Road. He is last recorded in the local Trade Directory in 1920. Thirteen years on from that meeting, Ken's roller is still enjoying its retirement in the garden, where it reminds us of a much loved friend, while Ken himself is enjoying eternal rest in Powick Churchyard.

Jenny Constant



## The Dream Continues: Claire Constantine updates us on the progress of her wildflower meadow

In my first article I described the three years I spent preparing the 1 ½ acres of Cherry Bank Field to be sown with native wildflower and grass mixes and now in the autumn of 2021 I was finally ready to finally get sowing!

I wanted to sow the mix in autumn 2021 as my precious yellow rattle needs a period of cold over the winter to germinate well- a process known as vernalisation. However, it was not to be as the tractor was churning up the wet ground too much; and so, we had to wait patiently until spring of 2022.

In the meantime, I spent that winter planting up gaps in the shelter belt hedges and putting in some large shrubs and trees all complete with their jackets to protect them from worst of the south-westerly winds which sweep across the field and the Muntjac deer who look so delicate but can reap devastation on young growth. These included a Walnut (*Juglans*) 'Broadview' which is self-fertile and is said to fruit at an early age, and two ornamental trees: *Liquidambar styraciflua* "Worplesdon" which has such amazing vibrant red autumn colour and a tulip tree *Liriodendron tulipifera* for its butter yellow autumn foliage. All are planted near the boundary, so they won't shade the meadow. I also planted a *Hoheria* which proved to be too optimistic as, despite the protection, I lost it in the winter of 2022/3. Friends come to help me prune the Russet and Discovery apple trees to keep the crowns low enough to pick fruit-(you may recognise them from our HPS meetings!).

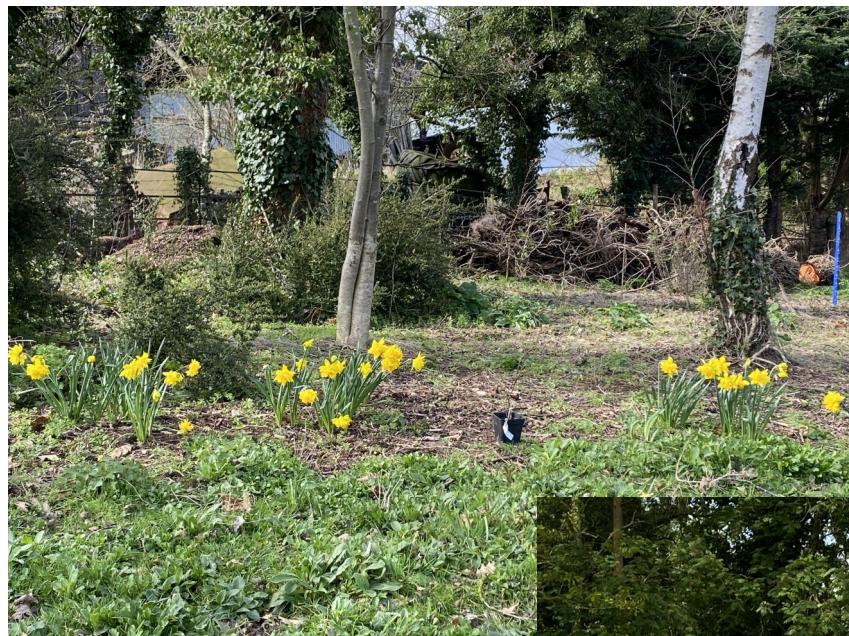
Finally, the seed mixes (meadow for clay, hedgerow and woodland) are broadcast mechanically at the beginning of a warm May 2022 into a fine tilth of damp clear earth: and we wait!



The weather stayed warm throughout that spring and green shoots were showing as a haze above the ground by day 20. By mid-June you can clearly see where the mix has taken and where there are gaps along the hedgerow and under the trees. I hope you can see the wide variety of species from a photo taken at 6 weeks- I was delighted! By July the weather turned hot and dry, pretty much arresting growth and come October it was still short enough to cut and remove using the sit-on mower and strimming and raking up around the dovecote. We lugged many full watering cans up the slope to keep the trees going but the hedge had to look after itself. Thistles had been a recurring problem which we dealt with by pulling up and a little spot weeding.

An arc of large shrubs went in around the dovecote in October 2022, including *Hydrangea 'Wim's Red'*, a *Cercis 'Shirobana'*, a *Cotinus 'Grace'* and two *Cornus*: 'Norman Hadden' and 'Satomi' and *Oxydendrum arboreum* the sorrel tree for its brilliant autumn colour. I could almost hear them breath sighs of relief as they were released from their pots. Many of them had been inspired by the shrubs I had seen on our HPS Hampshire Tour. In retrospect, this ground at the bottom of the field is probably too wet for cornus to thrive: I lost Norman that wet winter.

Winter revealed the log piles which the ever-multiplying rabbits had recolonised giving the dogs hours of fruitless pleasure!



Spring came in with a rush in 2023 with some relocated daffodils, snowdrops and hellebores giving way to the fresh green of the meadow. A close-up of the growth at the damper bottom of the field shows lots of wild flowers and grasses but also field buttercup which is competing too successfully! The nettles, although much weakened by previous glyphosate, were still cropping up and so these were spot treated with Grazon which did get the upper hand but is an ongoing battle.

By mid-May growth was knee high, and swathes of red and white campion surrounded you as you walked along the mown winding paths. Then came the foxgloves, ragged robin, bird vetch, burdock, cow and hedge parsley, bugle and many others alive with the drone of bees and flitting of butterflies. Above everything was a glorious, shimmering field of pure white daisies nearly as high as my shoulder! Now anyone who knows about meadows will tell you that this is not what you want to see-lush growth of daisies indicating just how fertile my clay soil is. Undaunted, as we could still see lots of other species flowering underneath, we topped the field in September, removing the growth to form a huge pile in the far corner; prepared to repeat this year after year in order to remove nutrients and eventually impoverish the soil enough to see a balance of species.

And so, with the bare bones of the field showing again and winter on its way, ended another season in the slowly evolving life of this land.



**“Wherever we move to, I must be able to see a tree”** I said when we moved from our last house, a four-storey Victorian town House and a much-loved garden with a mature’ Worcester Pear- main’ apple (right) a pear tree and the colossal *Liquidambar styraciflua* that had been a 5-foot- high stick our cats used as a scratching post.

Despite our new sandstone- slabbed back garden I think we will be able to work some magic here.

I haven't seen any pandas in it so doubt anyone would object if we decide to remove the huge, bamboo screening hedge.

We have relocated our collection of tubs, and the lilies have never flowered so well.



In our new place there is room near the back fence for a *Pieris* in an old tin bath, as well as an unidentified pine which I grew from seed (it was supposed to be a bonsai tree but is now much too big for that) and multiple plastic pots, The pots and containers require revision, upgrading, and new compost. Many like our elderly ‘Buff Beauty’ rose will be rehomed into rich clay in the front garden.

From my recliner in the lounge I can now enjoy looking onto the massive hollow oak tree opposite; it has a girth of 15 foot 8 inches, and yes, I have seen people climbing it, not just the squawking magpies and crows. Slightly further away, across the nature reserve where our dog loved to walk are cherries and numerous crab apples, younger trees and smaller natives like rowan which provide colour, food, and interest and even a If I stretch forward in the *Sequoiadendron giganteum*, far from its California home.

My first experience of a free-growing tree was a gangly old silver birch, self-seeded in a piece of no-mans-land which my parents eventually bought to add to their house and plot in Plumstead, near the old Woolwich Arsenal. When clearing their final family home many years later I found legal papers to do with the patch, which Dad turned into a mix of garden, allotment, and Mum's home-made nature play garden with tadpoles in an old sink. I returned the papers to the house address and the current house owner did me the courtesy of sending a "thank you" letter, saying how it was that allotment area that persuaded her to buy the house, and how happy she is she owns it, and how well the mixed fruit tree orchard she planted is doing.

My parents and I left London for the Hampshire/Berkshire borders, to a 1950's Government-built estate which housed the staff of the atomic weapons plant at Aldermaston, scene of many Easter protest marches. Amongst the neighbours veg growing to competition standard was a joy; I was Dad's helper. Occasional loud-speaker announcements from a car touring the estate warned us of "incidents" at the plant that meant home veg growers must wash their produce before eating it. Hmm. The sycamore street tree outside my window was like a colour calendar, telling me what season we were in, working through from bare stalks to breaking buds, then Dad moaning about his windscreen becoming sticky from greenfly dribble on the windscreen as the weather warmed up, and then to dreading frost and iced-up windows once the firecracker display of leaf colour ebbed away....

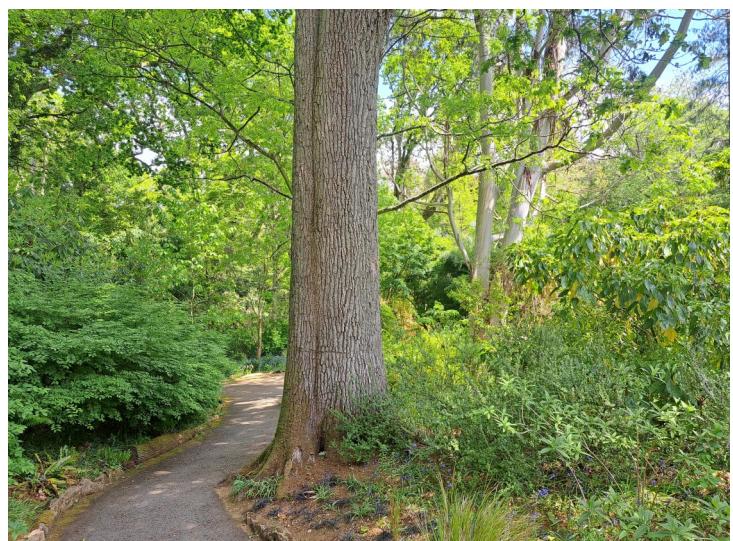
### **To be continued**



# Mike and Kathryn Bentley visit Abbotsbury

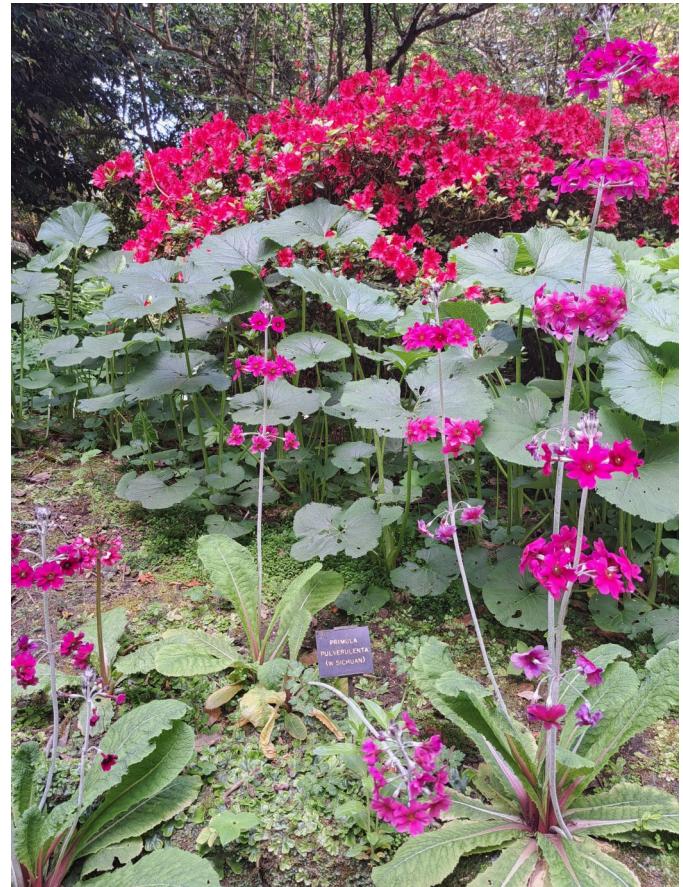
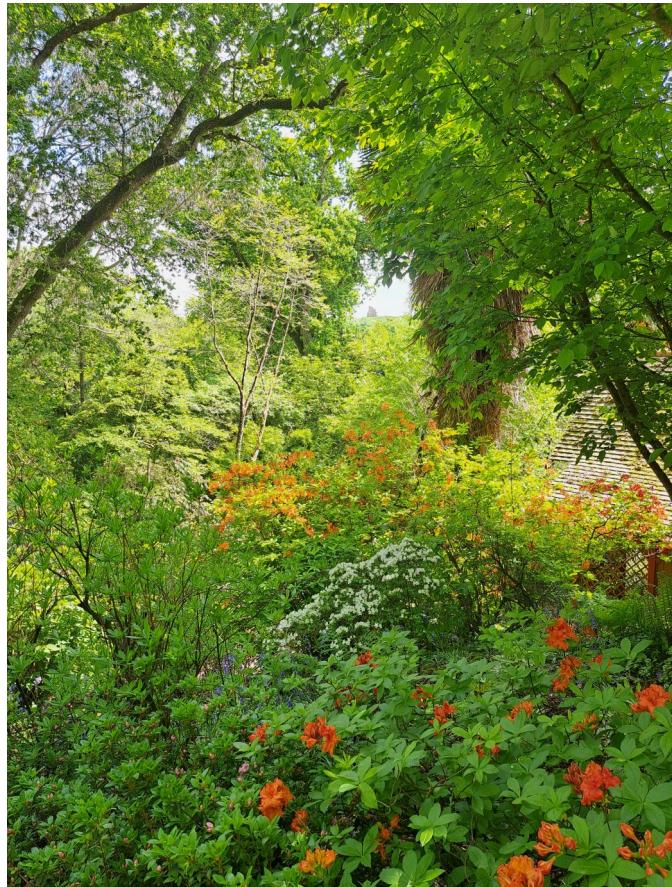
Abbotsbury sub-tropical gardens are set in a wooded valley just inland from Chesil Beach in Dorset. At just over thirty acres, these gardens are protected from cold winds by hills and shelter belts and warmed by the sea, creating a micro-climate where many species of plants thrive.

May 2025 was our first visit to Aconbury and we loved these gardens. The first thing that hit us as we made our way into the garden was the honeyed scent of *Euphorbia mellifera* (the Canary or Honey spurge, top right photo) in full bloom near the gate; paths led off in several directions but we decided to follow the designated “accessible” route around the gardens before stopping for tea and cake at the tea-rooms. We were very impressed by these gardens and will definitely visit again. Meanwhile we’ll let the pictures speak for themselves....





## At Abbotsbury sub-tropical gardens



# On the other side of the counter: your editor spends a day at the RHS Malvern Spring Show with succulent grower Lee Norbury

Earlier in the the year, writes Mike, I saw a post on a horticulturists' Facebook group asking for help in running a nursery display at the RHS Malvern Spring Show. As the HPS had decided not to have a stand this year I offered my assistance, managing to get back from my holiday in time to help out on a very warm May Sunday.

The display was put on by grower Lee Norbury, assisted by his partner Sarah. Lee, based in Derbyshire, got into horticulture through his landscaping business and has helped with Chelsea Show builds.

Lee doesn't do much landscaping now ("I love laying slabs but my knees aren't up to it") but in addition to a number of regular garden maintenance contracts has set up a mail-order succulents nursery, Plants Let's Grow.

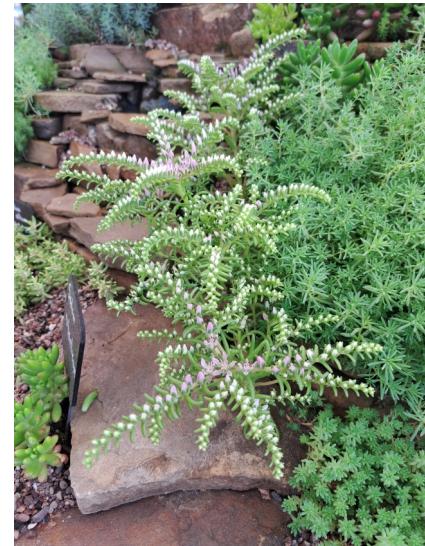
He now stocks 80-odd cultivars of *Sedum*, *Sempervivum* and *Hylotelephium* as well as seeds and herbs, and hopes to expand this into a National Collection.



Lee is hugely enthusiastic about his new venture. He'd set up a great display in the floral marquee (sadly, I didn't spot the display on the Gardeners' World coverage, despite it getting a well-deserved Silver Gilt medal). The show stand featured a small cliff and a waterfall, both built by Lee himself, with range of stunning succulents, a few of which you can see below. Lee's nursery isn't open to the public but you can see more and order plants at [www.plantsletsgrow.online](http://www.plantsletsgrow.online). MB



Right: *Sedum pulchellum* 'Sea Star'



**HARDY PLANT SOCIETY WORCESTERSHIRE – MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING held on Saturday 8th March 2025 at St Peter's Baptist Church Worcester, WR5 3TZ.**

The meeting commenced at 15.45 with 24 members present.

**1) The Chairperson welcomed members to the meeting**

**2) Apologies for absence were received from:** Claire Constantine, Wendy Richards

**3) To receive and adopt the Minutes of the AGM held on Saturday 9th March 2024, previously circulated by email**

**Proposed by** Selwyn Lane. **Seconded by** Marilyn Wrightson. **Passed by a vote of members**

**4) Matters Arising. None**

**5) Chairperson's Report.**

**The Chairperson's report, previously circulated by email, was received and adopted- a copy is filed with these Minutes.**

**6) To receive and adopt the Annual Statement of Accounts for the financial year ending 31st December 2024.** The Treasurer read her report. A copy of the balance sheet and income and expenditure account had previously been circulated by email. A copy of the report and the Annual Statement of Accounts are filed with these Minutes.

The Treasurer stated that the group finances were in good order, as confirmed by the Independent Examiner. The annual plant sale and the monthly plant table sales accounted for over £1655 of the income received. Thanks were expressed again to the three members who managed the plant table so well. The key deficits in the year were the Mark Gregory event, the subsidy of the Spetchley Park Garden tours and the cost of the Wildside film. Key on-going costs which were rising were speaker fees and venue hire. Despite these challenges, £7287 was carried forward into the current year. Work on a publicly accessible website for the Worcestershire group had commenced when the ability to add and change information on the HPS Worcestershire group page was proving difficult. This had actually now improved, though it had still to be done centrally. The new committee would be reviewing this and other forms of communication and interaction with members and potential members.

**Adoption of the Annual Statement of Accounts. Proposed by** Mike Bentley **Seconded by** Jackie Davies. **Passed by a vote of members**

**7) To transact any other business of which 21 days' notice had been given – none received**

**8) Election of Officers-** the following offered to serve on the Committee for the next twelve months

**Chairperson** Robert Swallow offered himself for election as **Chairperson**  
**Proposed by** Lyn Maile; **Seconded** Liz Demaison. **Passed by a vote of members**

**Treasurer** Tracey Swallow offered herself for election as **Treasurer**  
**Proposed by** Angela Burnet. **Seconded by** Jenny Constant.  
**Passed by a vote of members**

**Group Secretary** Jo Simpson offered herself for election as **Group Secretary**  
**Proposed by** Ruth Jenkinson. **Seconded by** Stella Sullivan  
**Passed by a vote of members**

**9) Election of the Committee**

**Speaker Secretary** – Vacant role  
**Programme Secretary** – Vacant role  
**Publicity Secretary** – Vacant role

**Newsletter Editor** Mike Bentley having served for three years offered himself for re-election as **Newsletter Editor**

**Proposed by** Ruth Jenkinson. **Seconded by** Liz Demaison  
**Passed by a vote of members**

**Membership Secretary** Liz Demaison offered herself for election as **Membership Secretary**

**Proposed by** Ruth Jenkinson. **Seconded by** Judith Gurney  
**Passed by a vote of members**

**Members' Representative** Sue Fairman offered herself for election as **Members' Representative**

**Proposed by** Ruth Jenkinson. **Seconded by** Selwyn Lane

**Passed by a vote of members**

**10) Election of an independent Examiner of Accounts-** Jonathan Davies

**Proposed by** Angela Burnet. **Seconded by** Ann Sheppard

**Passed by a vote of members**

**11) Signatories for banking purposes:** Tracey Swallow, Jo Simpson, Mike Bentley

**Proposed** Ange Burnet. **Seconded** Marilyn Wrightson

**Passed by a vote of members**

**12) Introduction of new Chairperson**

Robert Swallow outlined his interest in gardening, family background in agriculture and his current and previous roles as a senior manager in a large multinational firm based in the Netherlands, as a lawyer, and as a retired minister. He had also been involved with several community groups and had led charities, including chairing a group which built schools in India. He wanted to bring some of his experience of change processes and corporate management to the group and to use the Cloud more for information sharing, as well as social media. He and the new officers wanted to get to know current members and also to focus on recruitment, as this was vital for the future of the group. He had recently attended an event in Stourport and 19 people visiting the stand had agreed to receive further information regarding the group. There would be some challenges ahead, such as the potential increase in the national HPS subscription rate. He thanked members in advance for their support for the new committee.

Thanks were expressed by the meeting to those committee members who were standing down, especially to those who had dedicated many years of devoted service to the group.

**13) The next AGM will be held on Saturday 14th March 2026**

The meeting concluded at 16.15