



Newsletter I – January 2026

Dear Members,

Welcome to 2026. As we write this, winter has finally appeared with a scattering of snow and a strong northerly wind from the artic. We have at least passed the winter equinox and the days are beginning to get longer. Roll on spring although the bulbs are already making an appearance with the autumn-planted garlic and onions looking healthy.

As co-chairs in preparation for the AGM, we thought we should share some recent committee updates with you. To reduce the considerable workload on Julie, Ian and Andy we have trialled and will be introducing a new online membership registration package, **Membermojo**. More details on its use will follow. This will support easier email interaction with you, the members, and will also aid the membership renewal process.

Following requests from members a few years ago, we introduced the afternoon winter talk series which has proved popular. These will continue in October/November/ January and February. However, we have noted a decline in numbers for the evening talks through the winter months so currently we have not booked an evening speaker for January 2027.

As a committee we have to review our costs carefully especially with the increases we have seen over 2025. Costs for hall hire, insurance, speakers, judges, etc have all increased significantly. As an example, the costs of a club night or afternoon activity is between £150-240 per event and with attendance of 30 – 50. To break even, we would have to charge, without any other income, £4 - 5 per person. Income from the Trading hut negates, in part, some of these costs and Beverley has managed this effectively to give you value in the products offered at prices below those found in local garden centres. However, this year the significant long-term roadworks has clearly impacted members' visits to the hut so the contribution to offset costs has been reduced. As a result, the committee have decided to increase membership fees to £10 with a guest fee of £5 per talk. This will apply to the afternoon talks as well as the evening ones and means it is far more cost effective for visitors to become members! We believe the membership fee still offers incredible value.

We also wish to thank the fantastic volunteers - you make this club what it is! We would like to record our thanks especially to Carole Hickman who has led the show team for several years culminating this year in more entries than we have seen for a long time at both the summer and autumn shows. She has updated the show schedules for this year and was supported by a strong team, but Carole is a very busy person and for personal reasons has decided to step down. We urgently need someone to step up and lead the show team for 2026. Without someone in place we will have no option but to consider cancelling shows. Hopefully, it will not come to this. Please contact us if you are able to help or would like to know more. chair@sandhurstgardeningclub.co.uk

Happy New Year and best wishes for a successful gardening year ahead.

Liz and David

CLUB NIGHT

Our first evening meeting of the year is on Wed 21st Jan at 7.15 pm when our own Graham and Helen Harding will be giving a talk on the Itchen Way, the long-distance footpath following the River Itchen from its source to Southampton Water, a super way to start the year! The last afternoon talk of the winter months will be on Tues 3rd Feb at 2.30 pm - 'Forage for bees' by Margaret Lennard. Remember, with the change in fees, guests at these talks will need to pay £5 even if they are the 'other half' of an existing member. Voluntary donations for members at the afternoon talks remains at £1.

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MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

The membership fee for this year is £10.00 per person. This is a small increase on last year, brought about because of increased charges to the club as referenced by David and Liz earlier in this newsletter. It is still considerably cheaper than the majority of local clubs and represents excellent value for money. The easiest way to do this (and avoid filling in a form again!) is by using **Membermojo**. An email came out earlier today with instructions how to do this – it's really very easy, just a case of following a couple of links and then remembering to transfer the money to the club's account:

Account name: Gardening Club of Sandhurst & District

Sort code 09-01-51

Account number 92029304

Please use SGCsub as your reference

Alternatively, you can complete a form (attached) and either take it in to the hut and pay by card machine or email it to the Treasurer Andy Bale:

andrew.bale4@ntlworld.com You will still need to pay online if you do this.

TRADING HUT

The Trading hut will re-open this year on Sunday 25th January at 9.00 am, all ready for you to come along and make your purchases. Orders have been placed, and members will see some increases in prices as to be expected; unfortunately, some products are no longer available so the closest possible replacements have been sourced. However, prices still provide very good value for money, especially as it does not involve costly journeys to neighbouring garden centres.

The Trading Hut team

BIRD FOOD

There has been a temporary difficulty with the supply of berry suet pellets so we've been unable to order any. To ensure there are some suet pellets in stock, we've ordered something slightly different - nutty suet pellets and sunflower heart suet pellets. They are on order and we hope they arrive before the hut reopens. We think the birds will like them and they are very fond of both nuts and sunflower hearts!

Helen and Graham

A reminder to everyone that cheques and cash cannot be accepted at the hut – if you are on hut duty, please firmly decline such payments. By the same token, please do not request that you leave an IOU – these are difficult to track and unnecessary as the requirement to pay by card has been in place for a long time now. The only exception would be if the card reader stops working; in this case we would ask you to pay by bank transfer as soon as you get home.

MEMBERMOJO – WHAT IS IT?

As mentioned in the introduction, we have started to use an online package called Membermojo. It is '*an easy-to-use, online membership management software for small UK clubs, charities, and associations, automating tasks like sign-ups, renewals, payments, and communication, allowing members to manage their own details while ensuring GDPR compliance for organisations.*'

It is the intention that in future the vast majority of communication (this will be mainly the newsletters) will come via Membermojo. An email has already been sent out (13.1.26) advising members of this. As well as communication with members, we are hoping that this year members renewing will also be able to check their details without needing to complete a membership form again, although that will be an option for members if they wish. Payment will still be paid either by bank transfer (preferable) or by card

at the hut. Further information will come out about this shortly, with details of your options and what needs to be done.

ELECTRIC GATE BARRIER TO THE TRADING HUT

Following a slightly turbulent few months with football folk wanting entry through the gate on a Sunday morning, I'm pleased to say that it has now been agreed that NO football folk will be allowed to use the gates unless they have a fob themselves. This includes home teams, coaches etc. This has been communicated to all the football club, but if anyone should request entry, politely decline and ask them to get in touch with the football club.

HUT DUTY

Lesley is currently putting together the volunteers for hut duty; however, it would help her enormously if you could be proactive and contact her direct to offer her the dates you can do:

johnwilliams288@hotmail.com

AGM

Next month is the club's AGM. As usual a separate email will come out shortly with details of the AGM, the agenda and last year's minutes.

As you will be aware, the club needs more of its members (you!) to step up and volunteer to do something to help with the running of the club. At the moment, it does not look as if we will have any shows this year, as no-one has stepped up as show co-ordinator. Looking to the future, we'd also really like some new people on the committee with fresh ideas.

- Do you have any skills or experience which you think could benefit the club?
- One area we really want to improve is our presence on social media as this will help expand our membership. Is this something you have experience of and could support??

Do have a think – without new blood and new ideas, the club cannot continue to be the success it is! If you want to know more of what is involved, ask any committee member (past or present) or just drop an email to anyone listed in the contacts below. Alternatively, grab one of them on a club night.

If you would like to stand for the committee, please let me know by Monday 2nd February at the latest, as papers have to go out shortly after that. secretary@sandhurstgardeningclub.co.uk

Thank you,

Julie Sheppard

PROUD TABLE

There was no theme for November's Proud table; however members were clearly inspired by the subject of the talk that month and a number of cacti and succulents featured on the table. Congratulations to Gareth Evans for winning with a fine exhibit. The December Proud table is mentioned below. There is no theme for this month, so do please bring along anything for the table you are proud of and have grown or nurtured from your garden/ allotment/house.



SHOW SECRETARY/IES STILL NEEDED

As mentioned several times in this newsletter (and previous ones) we are still looking for someone/ some people to volunteer as the show co-ordinator. Carole Hickman has updated the crib sheets for the show, making it very comprehensive and easy to follow.

So, if we are to continue having shows, we need some of you to step forward. No volunteers = no shows (most immediately, the spring/daffodil show, due to be held in March).

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The show schedule is just being finalised and will be sent out to members as soon as it's ready; hopefully there will be a use for it! 😊

CHRISTMAS 'DO'



I'm sure all those that attended will agree it was an evening packed with festive fun! Thanks to Julie for organising the themed bingo which brought out the competitive streak in members, and Sally for being the glamorous assistant with the festive tunes. We certainly had some experts on Christmas songs amongst us, able to identify not just the song title but the artist from just a few bars of the introduction! Lydia's handmade creation also got a notable mention. The Proud table theme was "The Winter Garden" and after so many months of trying Julie couldn't have been prouder to win with the flowers picked from her garden. All enjoyed the savoury refreshments and sweet treats including traditional mince pies



and stollen. Thanks also to the ukulele band who joined us again this year, and it didn't take much encouragement to have the whole hall singing along. A great evening and a memorable end to the club year.

And it's never too early to start thinking about Christmas 2026, so if you've got ideas or suggestions for what the club could do to celebrate, please let the committee know.

Liz Crow

There are more photos from the night at the end of the newsletter



TRIP TO BLENHEIM PALACE LIGHTS

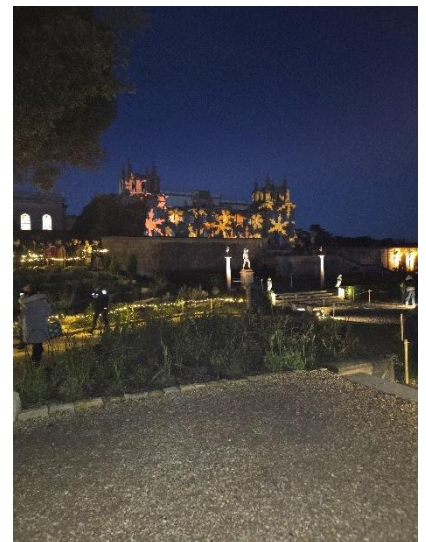


We departed from Sandhurst on time for our visit to Blenheim Palace Light Walk; however this meant we had time to spare as we would arrive at the venue too soon. Mike, our lovely driver (he has been with us 15 years) said not to worry and he took us to a delightful garden centre in Oxfordshire to while away the time. We arrived at Blenheim to find we were parked quite a distance from the Palace and it was very dark. Somewhere between the coach and the ticket office I lost about ten people!!

Bear in mind that half the people on board were from Yateley and therefore unknown to me. My daughter Helen and I made our way to the entrance to the walk and we just waited for the lost people to arrive.

Unfortunately, one couple took exception to the slight hiccup and I got some unpleasant words from them. We also had to return to the ticket office and beg more tickets!!

Finally, Helen and I set off for the gardens walking down from the Palace and taking in the lights before climbing up to the main path. On the way the lights and the music were quite stunning. We had got a bit left behind, so the path was not busy and we were able to stop admire and listen to the music. Eventually we came to the slope which dropped down to near the water. Here we found a bar, toilets and lots of



places to sit. Having bought glasses of wine, we took advantage of sitting just taking in the wonderful light sequence on the slope with the music, which Helen told me was from Polar Express. It was a magical sight.



Eventually we carried on past the lake where Father Christmas was projected in lights across the trees in the lake. There were also lights with music, but we found it a little chilly so moved on and back up to the exit.

We enjoyed our sandwiches in the courtyard, watched the skating and we walked around the perhaps not-so-interesting stalls.

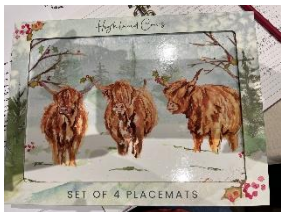
On making our way back to the coach we found most people onboard. A count by both Mike and I revealed we had 41 people not 42. Which meant one person was out in the park on their own. Just

a shade worrying. However, at that moment three ladies from Sandhurst arrived, perhaps not quite the thing to say, but one Yateley lady said well, can we just take one of them to make up the numbers? It rather broke the tension and we had a good laugh. However, Mike and I had a quick chat and he, using the microphone, asked if anyone was on the wrong coach. Two people got up and left without saying a word. They turned out to be the two who took our tickets at the entrance gate and were, to say the least, unpleasant. No apologies forthcoming, but then I did not expect any.

One look with Mike and an agreement was made, no more counting, we were off home.

A great trip, a fantastic walk around the gardens, the lights were stunning and the music was superb.

Sheila Davenport



Good to hear that the trip was such a success apart from the hiccups – and congratulations to Sheila for providing such an entertaining recount! The photos are courtesy of Andy Bale. The placemats and bulbs still haven't been claimed – see photo (left). If they haven't been claimed by the Feb meeting they will become a raffle prize.

BIG GARDEN BIRDWATCH 2026

This is the largest and longest-running garden wildlife survey – are you taking part?



Choose an hour between
23 and 25 January



Only record the birds that
land in your patch



Record the highest number
of each bird species you
see at any one time

Then let the RSPB know what you have seen by email <http://www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch> or by post (see [website](https://www.rspb.org.uk/whats-happening/big-garden-birdwatch) for details: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/whats-happening/big-garden-birdwatch>)

DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES:

Date	Event	Venue
Wed 21 st Jan 7.15 pm	Talk: The Itchen Way	Community Hall
Tues 3 rd Feb 2.30 pm	Afternoon talk: forage for bees	Kitty Dancy room
Wed. 18 th Feb 7.15 pm	AGM Talk: Bugs that bite back	Community Hall
Wed 18 th March 7.15 pm	Talk: Gertrude Jekyll at Munstead Wood Daffodil/spring show	Community Hall
Wed 15 th Apr 7.15 pm	Talk: The history of allotments	Community Hall
Wed 20 th May 7.15 pm	Talk: A lifetime with roses	Community Hall
Saturday May 30 th	Plant sale - details tbc	Broomacres
Sat 20 th June	Summer show	Community Hall
Wed 15 th July 7.15 pm	Talk: Greenhouses & polytunnels - year round use	Community Hall
Sat 5 th Sept	Autumn show	Community Hall
Tues 6 th Oct 2.30 pm	Afternoon talk	Kitty Dancy room
Wed 21 st Oct 7.15 pm	Talk: A gardener's life	Community Hall
Tues 3 rd Nov 2.30 pm	Afternoon talk	Kitty Dancy room
Wed 18 th Nov 7.15 pm	Talk: companion planting	Community Hall
Dec – date tbc	Christmas party	Community Hall
2027		
Tues 5 th Jan 2.30 pm	Afternoon talk	Kitty Dancy room
Tues 2 nd Feb 2.30 pm	Afternoon talk	Kitty Dancy room
Wed 17 th Feb 7.15 pm	AGM Talk: Hedgehogs	Community Hall

CONTACT DETAILS:

Hon co- Chairs: David Dunford* & Liz Crow* chair@sandhurstgardeningclub.co.uk

Hon Secretary: Julie Sheppard* 07711 056 815 secretary@sandhurstgardeningclub.co.uk

Treasurer: Andy Bale* andrew.bale4@ntlworld.com and Ian Hopley* hopley.ian@googlemail.com

Trading Hut: hut@sandhurstgardeningclub.co.uk or sgctradinghut@gmail.com.

Coach Trips: Sheila Davenport* trips@sandhurstgardeningclub.co.uk

Show entries: Email entries are preferred. shows@sandhurstgardeningclub.co.uk

Show contact details: shows@sandhurstgardeningclub.co.uk

Wisley Tickets: Sandra Hooper* 01276 34112

Newsletter Contributions: secretary@sandhurstgardeningclub.co.uk

Bulb Orders: Liz Crow* gardening@mrscrow.co.uk

Trading Hut Volunteers: Lesley Williams johnwilliams288@hotmail.com

Online membership: membership@sandhurstgardeningclub.co.uk

Postal membership renewals – Ian Hopley* 24, Waterside Lane, Sandhurst. GU47 8AD

Please include a SAE with your completed membership form.

Seed and Plant orders: David Dunford* 01252 656826 chair@sandhurstgardeningclub.co.uk

General enquiries: enquiries@sandhurstgardeningclub.co.uk

* Denotes committee members



