



Impact report

1 May 2024 - 30 Apr 2025

Sustainable Wantage (SW) is a Community Benefit Society. We are part of a network of over 100 Community Action Groups across Oxfordshire, focused on activities that protect and enhance our natural environment and strengthen our local community. We are run by volunteers interested in actions that have a positive impact and increase our resourcefulness and resilience. Our current projects are focused on Food, Biodiversity, Waste reduction, Energy and Community.

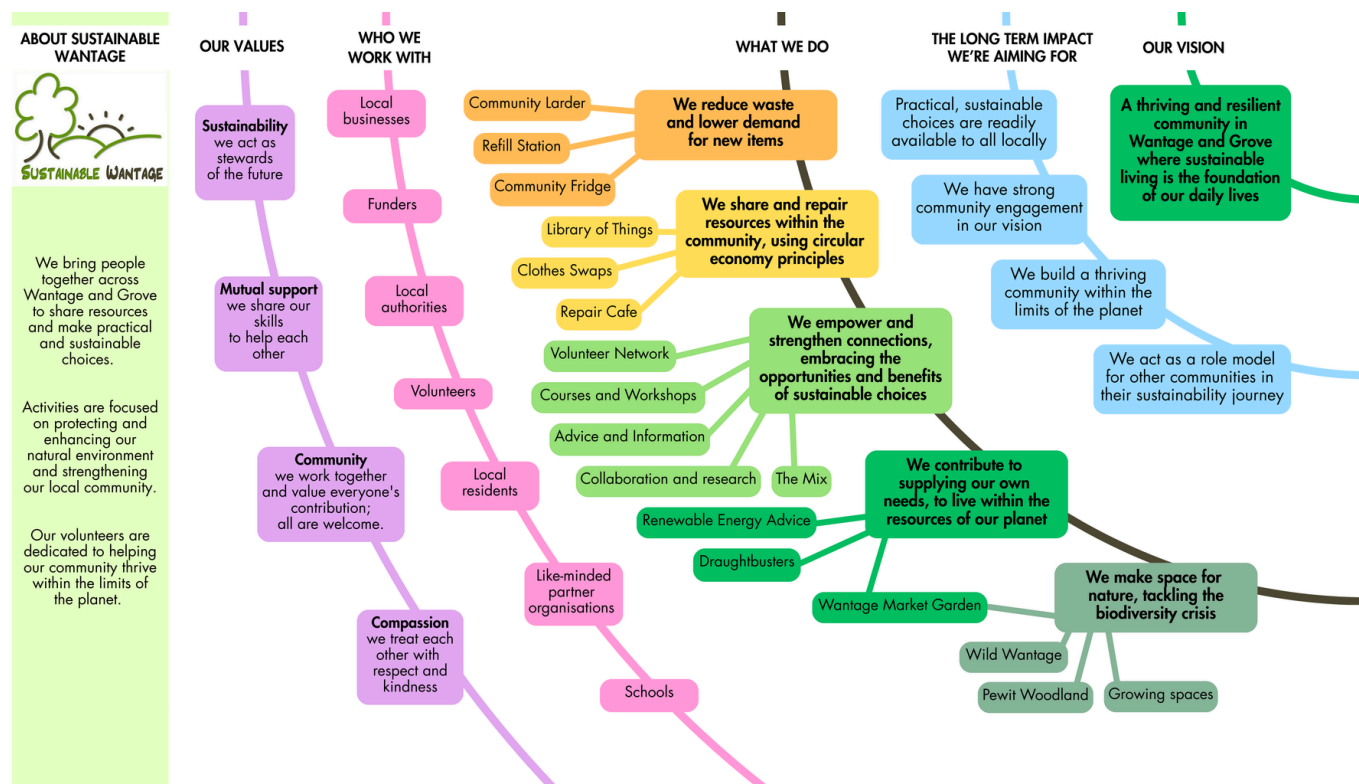
This year has seen an increase in activity generally. The impact has been to reduce food waste, to improve biodiversity, to repair, re-use or recycle items that would otherwise become waste, to promote clean energy, and to provide more opportunities for volunteers, local residents and visitors to contribute to sustainability. Sustainable Wantage activities and networks have also contributed significantly to community cohesion, in the shadow of the pandemic, by bringing together people and organisations from diverse backgrounds who can share a common purpose.



Headlines from the year

It's been a busy year in all our projects, with numerous collaborations and new possibilities emerging.

Behind the scenes, we've been considering how we assess and communicate our purpose, aims and impact. We have started to put in place systems that will help SW work more efficiently. It is important that we listen to a range of ideas from everyone interested in making Wantage and the surrounding locality more sustainable; our new Community Consultation Group (CCG) enables us to question and better represent the views of all our supporters.



As well as regular project activities we organised two larger events this year. In March, a Clean Energy and Free Cake afternoon provided information to people considering the installation of renewable energy technologies in their homes. Later that month, local farmer Julian Gold shared his insights to facilitated a discussion on how our community can work towards being more resilient in food production. These events have both led to early conversations as to how SW can be involved; the former with local energy demand reduction and/or local energy generation and supply, the latter with supporting and facilitating community food growing.

We also took part in a Storytelling Evaluation pilot project with Oxfordshire County Council, Oxfordshire Community Foundation and the Old Fire Station. As part of this we collected 3 stories of local people's interactions with Sustainable Wantage; you can read them here:

[You see all different parts of life](#) - Repair Café volunteer story

[Looking forwards](#) - Mix volunteer story

[I finally found my way](#) - Mindfulness walks and courses participant story

We found these gave us a good insight into how people connect with us and we are hoping to collect more stories in the coming year. Understanding how people experience the different projects will help us shape what we do in the future.



Over 54 tonnes of surplus food distributed through 46 Community Larder sessions for 170 members, and 183 Community Fridge sessions reaching over 180 households a week.



Over 950 people hosted at 39 public events, bringing the community together and providing multiple opportunities for people to learn about sustainability.



19 homes draughtbusted, saving energy and costs for local residents.



SUSTAINABLE WANTAGE

61 work parties organised, maintaining and improving green spaces.



OUR YEAR ON A PAGE

These are some of the highlights of our year from May 24 to April 25 working with volunteers and the community in and around Wantage



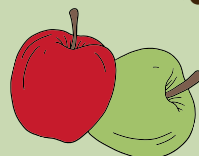
143 items seen in our repair cafe with a fixing rate of 58%; reducing the need for new purchases



1,803 litres of refills sold, avoiding the manufacture of approximately 2,335 single-use plastic bottles



Over 150 volunteers clocked in a tremendous 6025 volunteer hours



236kgs of apples pressed into 140L of juice, helping the harvest last longer



237 gifts exchanged in our Christmas Gift Swap



163.5 kgs of clothes and 73kgs of books/toys/baby equipment swapped, reducing waste, saving money and sharing our resources

News from the projects

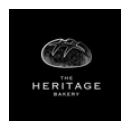
The Mix Community Space

Partners:



Sainsbury's

TESCO
express



Getting
OxfordshireOnline

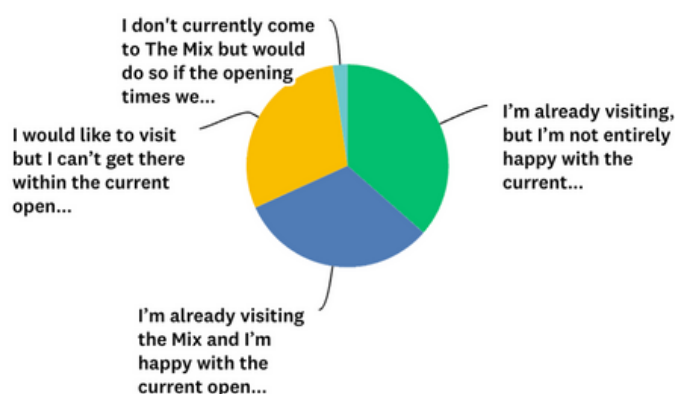
Wantage & Grove
FOOD
BANK

We now have over 1,300 households / individuals collecting surplus food from The Mix Community Fridge, an increase of 17% on last year. We are seeing an increasing number of people asking for a larger bag (offered to those that need more support with food); this now stands at 35% of all bags given out. We have also introduced a new 'crisis' offer where we supplement the usual perishable foods with store cupboard items (also sourced from surplus) This is because some people come to us when they don't have anything to eat that evening and there isn't time for other services to respond. We increased our Mix volunteer rota from 14 shifts a week to 19 to help manage the increase in demand.

We have seen a much larger volume of bread coming from the local supermarkets and regularly need to have a separate 'extra bread' table. Whilst it is useful that we are able to share this, it is also a concern that the supermarkets are consistently over-producing by a significant margin. As we receive a limited selection of foods, and fruit and veg run out quickly, we have pulled together information of where in Wantage and Grove growers can [donate surplus produce](#) from their gardens or allotments, to help share more broadly within the community.



In May 24 we ran a survey about our refill station to find out what was working well and what could be improved. We found (as we suspected) that the opening hours and steps up to the door of The Mix prevent some potential visitors from getting to us. The latter issue means that parents with pushchairs and people with reduced mobility really struggle to obtain refills as well as accessing the Community Fridge, Repair Cafe, and other Mix activities. We followed up with a survey specifically about our opening hours in November, with the clear response being that people would prefer more consistent opening times. Following a period of recruiting and training new volunteers we increased the opening hours of The Mix in June 25.



"Would love to see you move to a larger and more accessible space."

News from the projects

The Mix Community Space

Several of the hard-to-recycle waste collections came to an end, meaning we can no longer take blister packs (these are now collected in Boots) old writing implements, candle wax, and tupperware/ water bottles; the children's clothes bank have also had to pause operation due to capacity issues. We continue to accept printer ink cartridges, disposable gloves and good quality stationery (which we pass to [Markers for Mindfulness](#)). We have teamed up with [Getting Oxfordshire Online](#) to maximise the collection and refurbishment of tech for those in need of a device; instead of processing these ourselves we now act as a collection point, with donated devices feeding into a larger network of repairers who are able to take on a wider range of items. Our tech repairers complement this system by working on the harder to fix laptops, allowing Getting Oxfordshire Online volunteers to focus on those that are quicker to turnover. The Christmas gift swap was well received again this year.



Sales of refills remain steady, with washing up and laundry liquid continuing to be the most purchased items. We explored new items to stock, suggested in the refill survey, but unfortunately found the majority to be unworkable, requiring large minimum orders or ending up as very expensive to customers. We purchased 1L bottles made from recycled plastic and are now able to offer prefills with a bottle deposit. The library of things is still moving slowly with a burst in interest following a few social media posts and an article about libraries of things generally in the Guardian newspaper. People love the idea of it when we talk about it but this has been slow to translate into actual hires. Our most popular hires have been the pressure washer, party tableware, compact steam cleaner, mini dehumidifier and strimmer. We will be exploring this further in the coming year, to see how we can help foster a culture of sharing resources over individual ownership.

Thanks to a grant from Clarion Futures Resilience Fund we were able to install a new ceiling, to improve insulation, add better energy efficient lighting, and widen the ramp into the kitchen area to open up the space. The directors took the opportunity to give The Mix a clean and a fresh coat of paint. We are very grateful to Wantage Baptist Church who gave us use of their hall so that we could run a pop-up Community Fridge while The Mix was out of action.

"Very friendly and helpful, doing a lot with a little!"

"Great that you offer refills, great that you offer courses, and the tool library is also a fantastic resource. Similarly the fix-it sessions... I think Sustainable Wantage is a great organisation."

Supported
by funding
from:



News from the projects

Wantage Community Larder

Partners:



In June last year we surveyed the Larder members about the timings of sessions, hoping to amend the opening times and thereby reduce the running costs of the Larder. 104 Larder members responded to the poll, with 72% reporting they would be minimally impacted by the proposed changes. Based on this feedback, we adjusted the proposed changes to:

Shift A: 1.45-3pm

Shift B: 3.15-4.15pm

The extra 15 mins for shift A was added to make it easier for parents to do their Larder shop before the school run. We switched to the new timings in August.



The surplus food for the Larder is collected and delivered by [SOFEA](#); unfortunately their warehouse was flooded during the heavy rains in November and we had to cancel the Larder at short notice on one occasion. We were really impressed that the SOFEA team got everything back up and running so quickly afterwards.

Alongside the Larder we were visited by [Stop For Life Oxon](#) and South and Vale Community Connectors, and over the winter took part in the [Garden Tree Giveaway](#), giving away baby trees to our members. During the school holidays, Sarah and Sharon shared a fantastic variety of crafts with Larder children. They also distributed festive crafts bags packed with creative supplies to help keep these children entertained over the Christmas break. Members and volunteers shared tips and recipes, including the great suggestion of using the giant tins of coconut milk and bottles of coffee syrup to make ice cream! Earlier this year National Lottery funding allowed us to give a Larder apron and name badge to each of our volunteer helpers.

Supported
by funding
from:



News from the projects

Wild Wantage

Partners: **BETJEMAN
MILLENNIUM
PARK**

 **Letcombe
Brook Project**

 **Sovereign
Network
Group**

 **CAG Oxfordshire
COMMUNITY
ACTION
GROUPS**

 **PUREGYM**

The Wild Wantage Project has had another busy and successful year - taking a range of practical outdoor action and community engagement sessions to help improve local biodiversity and green spaces. Sadly, after over 3 years, we said goodbye to our wonderful project leader Tom Page at the end of September; very fortunately, his successor, the excellent Julian Parfitt, took over in January. Thanks to volunteers, especially Bev (who stepped in to run Green Gym sessions and produce the Wild Wantage newsletter), there was no gap in the calendar of activities during this change!

A major achievement of the year was the production of the Wantage and Grove Biodiversity Survey Report. Building on work the previous year, we held our first training day in May where volunteers learned how to identify and record local species, and between May and September completed site reports. Wildlife identification sessions were also held with local schools and families.



One of the key practical actions for biodiversity this year was the creation of a hedge at Manor Road Park. We successfully planted and mulched approx 2,300 native hedging plants, creating 500m of hedge (equivalent to over 2 and a half times round the Market Place!) This major project took many hundreds of volunteer hours and will provide homes and shelter for local wildlife and an enhanced green corridor.

Our successful monthly Green Gym sessions also continued to take practical actions to improve local biodiversity, including several sessions at Wantage Library and the Old Stables Gardens - tidying, pruning and planting lots of fantastic pollinator-friendly plants. We also litter-picked around the Letcombe Brook and worked with the Ridgeway Partnership to clear dogwood from around the Lord Wantage Monument.

Nature activities were held at the Market Garden - sowing seeds, pond dipping, bug hunting, making bug and bee hotels and wreaths. We also ran Dawn Chorus and Bat walks and engaged with a mix of local organisations, groups and schools, including: Elmbrook Court Care Home, local Brownies, Style Acre, and the Small Steps Project at Down to Earth Cafe. Working with residents at Maude House included constructing and putting up a bat box made from scrap wood. Wild Wantage participated in the Letcombe Valley Nature Reserve Discovery Day and other community events, providing a mix of information and nature craft stalls.

News from the projects

Wild Wantage

There is an overlap of volunteers between the local Letcombe Brook Project and our Wild Wantage project, so we have started to collaborate more closely. This includes sharing long term plans for work parties and training, as well as tools, to make best use of resources in working towards joint aims. We were delighted to have so much input into our first biodiversity surveying activity (Spring / Summer 2024), including from pupils at King Alfred's Academy and Charlton Primary School, Friends of Betjeman Park, 1st Grove Brownies and families who participated in the Nature Activity and Night-time Safari sessions at the Wantage Market Garden. Many other local residents undertook surveying of various sites and let us know through on-line questionnaires what they do in their gardens to support wildlife.



Photos by Ed Nix

Supported
by funding
from:



Sovereign
Network
Group



News from the projects

Wantage Market Garden

Partners: Style Acre
Supporting people with learning disabilities



During the year, the grant from the National Garden Scheme (NGS) was put to good use, enabling the purchase of tables, and new raised beds, both made from recycled plastic. The grant also funded replacement covering for the small polytunnel, the original cover being very damaged and unfit for purpose. The new cooking/dining space has been paved, thanks to Alan for his hard work on this; this means the area is more accessible for anyone with mobility issues.



Two groups of corporate volunteers from energy suppliers Centrica and from Vertex Pharmaceuticals helped in the garden. Both were a tremendous help, working hard during their time with us.

Events held at the Market Garden include our Open Days in May and September, which together raised over £1500 through sales of plants and cakes most of which will be spent on compost, seeds and DIY equipment. Two night-time safaris were held in conjunction with Wild Wantage. Early in Spring 2025 seedlings were grown for sale/donation at The Mix. We had our first craft session with Andrea in March this year and look forward to continuing these. The volunteers also enjoyed learning to weave willow bird feeders with Suz of The Coppice Co, see if you can spot these round the garden when you visit! We also celebrated our volunteers with a summer barbecue, a flower arranging workshop and a post Christmas party.

News from the projects

Pewit Woodland

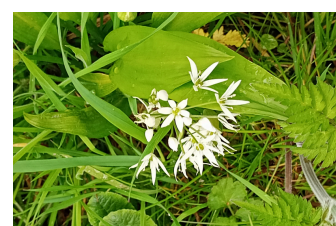


Pewit Woodland continues as a valuable amenity for local wildlife such as a herd of roe deer, and appreciated by a range of local people, including scout groups. Public access is granted by the land owner (the Woodland Trust) and others use the space for picnics and evening gatherings or just to enjoy the magnificent view.

Some low level maintenance continues, with nettle pulling now an annual spring event. The woodland remains healthy, with the ash trees not showing any signs of Ash Dieback Disease. We will continue to keep a close eye on these trees.

Top Lock Meadow

Over the years Top Lock Meadow has evolved. Now most of the plants seen there are perennials, such as oxeye daisies, knapweed, tansy, and the much maligned ragwort. As we planted most of these initially, their presence is no surprise; what is fascinating is seeing what does particularly well in one year only to be out-paced by something else in the next. This is at least in part due to the vagaries of our British climate. We tried to plant UK natives, in order to give the most support to our own fauna. However we are sometimes surprised by the appearance of a non-native, which has drifted in from elsewhere, or been present as seed in the soil, from the plants we have germinated at home. In the summer the tall foliage is the haunt of many insects, including butterflies.



Our main success at Top Lock this year has been the installation of a new gate in a better position, although access is still a little steep. There was some minor vandalism to the new gate initially, but this seems to have stopped. Dog fouling has been minimal this year, although our notice requesting not to leave dog bags in the ditch, has disappeared. A tree fell across the meadow which was successfully removed with no real damage done; in fact, more daylight can now reach ground-level plants.

News from the projects

Millbrook Community Plot

The trees and bushes at Millbrook Community Plot are now well established, with apple, hazel, damsons, cherry plum and blackcurrants available to the community to harvest. The plot is maintained by 4 regular volunteers on an ad hoc basis. They have improved communications between themselves and there has been some community engagement with passers-by and people who harvest the fruit. The impact has been to improve a community space and provide food for community use.



Sustainable Wantage volunteers also continue to look after the planter by the Sorting Office; we are waiting to hear how redesign of the Market Place might affect this area.

Draughtbusters



We have enjoyed another successful season with 19 homes draughtbusted over the winter.

Compared with earlier years it has proved difficult to find interested clients with genuine need for our help. Engagement with the service from other groups has also declined. This is likely to be due to reduced media coverage of the fuel shortages and energy price rises in recent years. We will continue to monitor and adapt our approach to reducing energy demand locally.

We have shared our Draughtbusting set-up, learnings and resources with Heat Upper Heyford and Nassington Energy and Thermal this year, and wish them well as they work to get draughtbusting in their communities.

Events

In addition to our projects, we organised a variety of events throughout the year, including:

• 5 May • Dawn Chorus Walk	• 19 May • Market Garden Open Day	• 15 June • Free bike checks with Dr Bike at Grove Extravaganza	• 12 Aug • Nighttime safari at the Market Garden
• 16 Aug • Bat walk	• 9 Sept • Nighttime safari at the Market Garden	• 15 Sept • Market Garden Open Day	• 6 Oct • Apple pressing
• 19 Oct • Clothes Swap + International Repair Day in Grove	• Dec • Christmas tree festival, Dickensian evening, Gift swap	• 13 Dec • Started hedgeplanting Manor Road	• 19 Jan • Apple tree pruning workshop
• 12 Feb • Talk on Sustainable Wantage to Wantage WI	• 8 Mar • Clean Energy and Free Cake Afternoon	• 26 Mar • The Broken Food System: From Field To Fork - a Facilitated Discussion by Julian Gold	• 28 Mar • Fruit tree planting in Charlton

Spreading the word

Through our newly formed Community Consultation Group, together with surveys in The Mix, we discovered that people find out about SW activities primarily from the Sustainable Wantage and Wild Wantage newsletters, the website, in person (e.g. at The Mix / Larder) and through social media (facebook and instagram). The Sustainable Wantage newsletter had 889 subscribers, while the Wild Wantage version had 330 subscribers, by the end of this year. We also had 111 members, including two group memberships.

Wild Wantage has been highlighted in the local press several times over the year; [activities for school children at Down to Earth](#) in May24, [biodiversity surveying](#) in July and [hedge planting](#) in Jan 25. Wantage Market Garden got a [mention in parliament](#), Olwen was interviewed about the Garden on the [Penny Post Eco Podcast](#) (starts at 13mins54) and also won a well deserved [Oxfordshire Care Award](#).

Sustainable Wantage / The Mix is now a case study in [use of high street spaces guidance](#) on the UK gov website, as well as appearing in [Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership's Community Wealth Building Big Conversations](#). Board member Alison was interviewed by Radio Solent about our Clean Energy and Free Cake event.



We're very grateful to our volunteers:

Silviya, who led a communications workshop with project leaders;

Jon, who created a presentation pack to introduce SW to local businesses; and

Ali, who began supporting our social media messaging.

We would also like to thank everyone who helped increase our reach by mentioning us in blogs, articles and reports, and by interacting with us on facebook and instagram.

Collaborations



Why compete when you can collaborate? We love working with others and this year has included many highlights.

We had a really interesting experience of being involved in research work through the [FEAST project with Good Food Oxfordshire](#), in which we explored access to healthy and sustainable food for young families, through focus groups and co-design workshops. As part of this we were able to provide nutritionists to attend GroW toddler groups sessions to chat with parents, and together we produced a collection of [Family Favourite Recipes](#). Following this we have started working with Oxfordshire County Council and Earthwatch on [CircleUp](#), a project across 5 European countries looking at engagement with circular economy behaviours, and we have initiated a citizen science project on the same theme with Nottingham University. Sign up to our newsletter ([add link](#)) to keep up to date with our progress on these!

We invited many other groups to collaborate with us on events this year. As The Mix is a small space we are limited in how many repair slots we can offer. To help give more local residents a chance to attend we ran an open repair afternoon in Grove for International Repair Day in October. We invited Stanford in the Vale Repair Cafe volunteers to join us and were able to gather 13 fixers who worked their way through a whopping 36 items. Joining forces for this larger event proved a good way to reach a wider audience, keep more items in use, and spread the joy of repair.

We also teamed up with GroW families for an autumn Clothes Swap and swapped baby and children's clothes, books, toys and equipment as well as adult clothing. Our Clean Energy and Free Cake afternoon came together with input from many contributors, Low Carbon Hub, Cosy Homes Oxfordshire, Low Carbon Oxford North, Energy My Way, Spirit Energy, Honest Solar, Westmill Sustainable Energy Trust and Down to Earth Cafe. We were also very fortunate to have Tom King share his apple tree pruning expertise with us. Wantage and Grove Methodist Churches have hosted some of our events, and Wantage Baptist Church gave space to The Mix Community Fridge while The Mix itself was closed for ceiling works. Cherwell Collective provided valuable support in planning, mapping and strategising to help Sustainable Wantage run effectively. We collaborated with Sally Harris for Mindfulness walks and courses and Down to Earth Community Cafe for a monthly Lunch Club in 2024 and a monthly community meal in 2025.



Finance statement

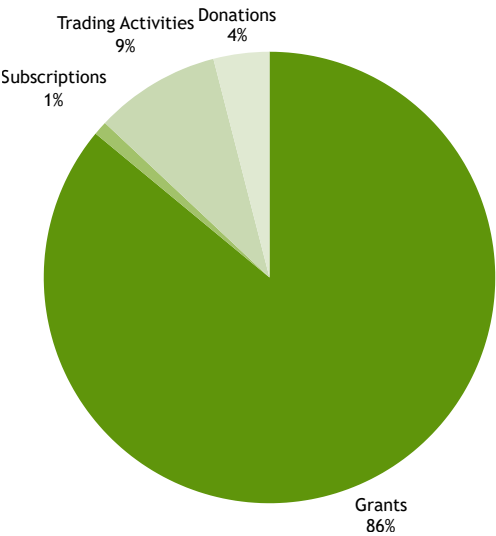
See below a summary of our income and expenses and our end of year bank balance. Please see [our entry on the Financial Conduct Authority Mutuals Public Register](#) for full accounts.

	2025	2024	2023
Income	£106,917	£115,649	£55,047
Expenditure	£97,14	£84,550	£58,324
Surplus	£9,774	£31,099	£3,277
Cash Balance	£62,336	£61,522	£27,470

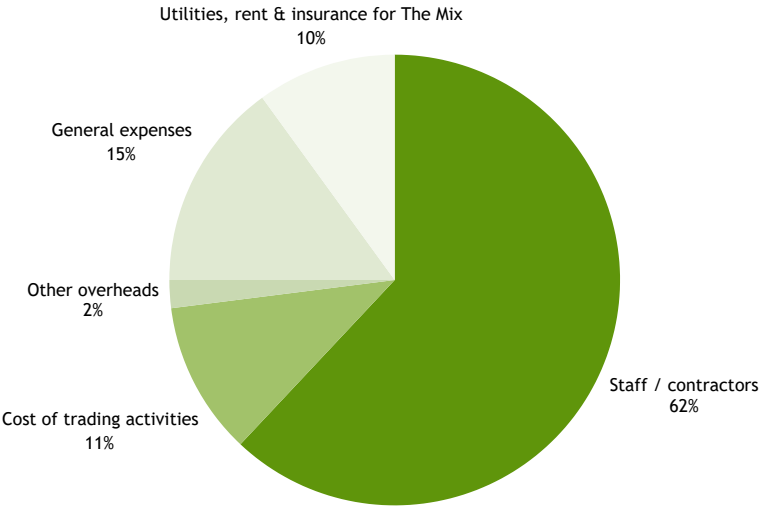
Our surplus includes monies received from both restricted and unrestricted funding. Restricted grant funding will be spent on specified projects in future years.

Any unrestricted funds, for example from donations, subscriptions and self-generated income, are used to cover current and future operational costs.

Key income streams 2025



Key expenditure streams 2025



The team

How do all these things happen? Volunteer teams such as The Mix, Community Larder and Market Garden crews work week-in week-out to keep these projects running. Others such as the Repair Cafe fixers and Wild Wantage volunteers spring into action every month, with still more such as the Clothes Swap team, biodiversity survey volunteers and Draughtbusters contributing across the year. A special mention this year goes to the huge numbers of volunteers who came out in all weathers over the winter to plant the hedging along the top of Manor Road Recreation Ground.

Lots of work takes place behind the scenes to keep everything flowing. We particularly thank the project leaders who invest so much time and energy; Olwen at Wantage Market Garden, Jaysn, Fiona and Ken at the Community Larder, Damian at Pewit Woodland and also leading the draughtbusters, Jacky at Top Lock Meadow, and Kim coordinating bike fixing. We are also delighted to be working with Penny and Marta at The Mix and Julian in Wild Wantage. Many volunteers support in planning, strategy and communications; notably Hugh in Energy, John in Active Travel and Zoe who compiles the Sustainable Wantage newsletter. None of this would be possible without the Board of directors; Mim Norvell (Chair), Maria Rosa and Jerry Bird (Treasurers), Kath Boyce (secretary), Rachel Smith (membership secretary), Alison Wall (minutes secretary) and Harry Kenyon-Slaney; thank you for steering the ship! And a huge 'Thank-you' to Jo, our wonderful coordinator, we are so lucky to have her at the heart of everything Sustainable Wantage does.

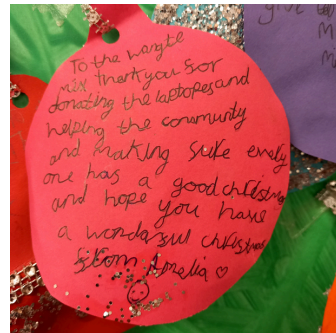
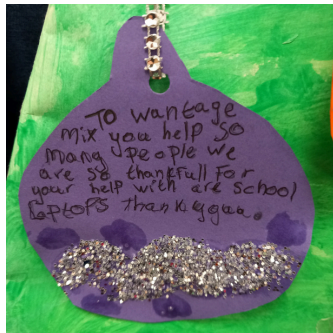
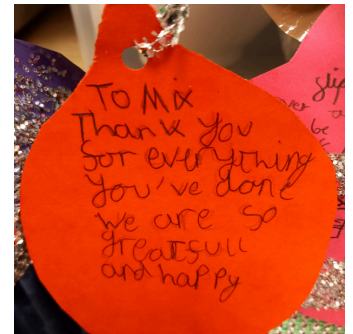
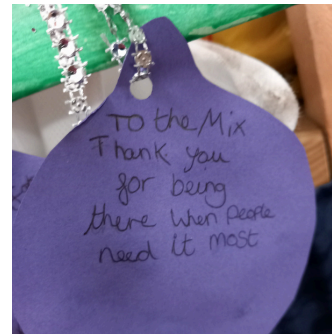


Everything you've read here is a testament to our amazing volunteers, who this year gave 6025 hours to making all these things happen, which is equivalent to 3.7 years of full time work! Whilst news about the climate and biodiversity emergency can often be overwhelming, we can see that coming together to share our time, skills, ideas and enthusiasm, here on our doorstep, can help build a sustainable, resilient and thriving community for all of us.

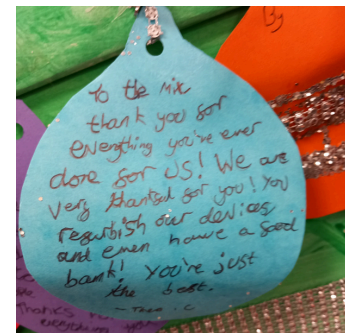
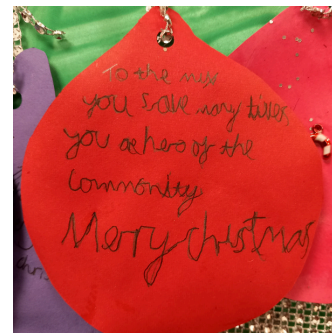
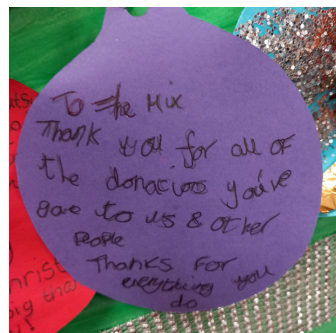
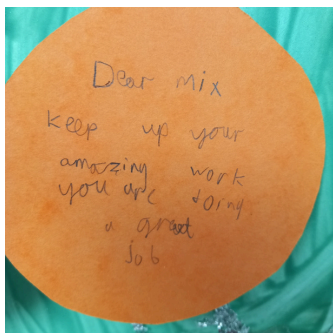
"I'm so so proud of us, of our community and how we all come together to inspire and deliver such a positive outcome. I look forward to another year of working together and laughing with you, reaching new milestones, and helping people in our community live a happier and more sustainable life."

Thank yous

"Your sustainable initiatives are amazing! And we're so lucky to have you in town ♥"



"Keep up the wonderful work you're doing! You're such an amazing asset to our community and we are truly lucky to have you!"



"As we near the end of my Son's 6 month's Duke of Edinburgh Volunteering with the Mix. I just wanted to say a huge Thank You from our family for the opportunity you have given to him. As you are aware, our son has autism and as such, can find social interactions difficult, his first day at The Mix was not easy for him, but with the experience of meeting lots of different people, of all ages along with the kindness you have shown to him, he has really come out of his shell. He really looks forward to going every Saturday morning and for a 14 year old boy to jump out of bed on a Saturday morning at 7.30am to go to work, I think it shows how much he has learnt about giving back to society and helping others. The fact he asked if he could extend his 6 months volunteering to a year is testament to the wonderful work you all do at The Mix. Thank you once again from our family for the experience."

