

The Marlow Allotments Association



Minutes of the 41st Annual General Meeting – 07.11.2024 at 7.00pm, New Hall

Attendance:

Committee: Chair: Huw Stevenson, Treasurer: Maren Talbot, Secretary: Sylvia Miller,
Minutes Secretary: John Stilliard

Committee Members: Denise Bagge & Shaun Kennedy

Honoured Guests: Marlow Town Mayor, Councillor David Brown

Council Officers: Hilary Martin (Town Clerk) & Debbie Abbott (Officer), Special Guest: Derek Long

Apologies: Christine Ashby, Richard Bailey, Freda Benlamlih, Ann & Colin Bowles, Sally Brookes, Ian Brown, Mary Bunker, Liz Bunt, Pete Cooper, Peter England, Jocelyn Finch, Brenda & Neil Garside, Andi Gallagher, Stephanie Galloway, Sarah & Guy Greenhouse, Catherine & Keith Harker, Nicole Hockly, Trish & Bill Kilner-Smith, Geoffrey Lomas, Vera Parkes, Daphne Roberts, Frank Schoofs, Bill Starkey, Fred Tillier

Attendance - MAA Members and Guests: Bernard Carter, Vera & Denis Bird, Tony Bridges, Karen Finis, Sue Harley, Richard Hockly, John & Yvonne Holland, David Howell, Kristian Matoski, Richard Maidment, Colin Naphthine, Allan Noel-Baker, Chris O'Connell, Nicola & Andy Ross, Jill & Peter Smith, Kirsty Vaughn, Lizi Wise

(HS) Welcome - Good evening and welcome back to the New Hall, Pugin Rooms, St Peter's Church for the 41st AGM of the MAA. We are here again by courtesy of Marlow Town Council and I am delighted to extend, as last year, a special welcome to Marlow Town Mayor, Councillor David Brown. He is joined, again, in the audience by Town Clerk Hilary Martin and Officer Debbie Abbott from MTC, who both play an active role with responsibility for the allotments. Debbie gets her hands even dirtier on my old plot at Hanging Hill. Thanks are due once again to John Stilliard, for taking the Minutes this evening, and to Derek Long who is an associate of Maren's, for running the sound system which hopefully enables those of you seated at the rear of the hall to fully engage with the proceedings. Please raise a hand if at any point you cannot hear us

(SM) H&S Fire Safety instruction – Points out the Emergency Exits & fire extinguishers in the Main Hall & location of the toilets.

(HS) - Introduce Minutes Secretary – John Stilliard

(HS) - I will now invite Mayor David Brown to open proceedings and address the meeting following which he will present prizes from this summer's competition. There will then be an opportunity for tenants to raise questions directly with the Council members here tonight. The AGM will follow.

(Mayor) –Good evening and thank you for inviting me back to join you at this year's Allotment Association AGM. I would like to begin by addressing the impact of this year's wet weather conditions on the growing season, which has posed several challenges for allotment holders, significantly affecting the growing season and overall crop yield. It also brings with it a proliferation of pests and disease such as slugs, mould and root rot, but despite these challenges many of you have been able to grow some amazing produce. We like to remain hopeful that next year will bring more favourable weather conditions for allotment holders. We, the Town Council, remain committed to collaborating closely with the Allotment Association on tree maintenance and general upkeep. The working party at Foxes Piece has put in considerable effort to clear the area near the doctor's surgery, and I am pleased to report that all the asbestos was cleared, and the Town Council's amenities staff were able to remove all the collected rubbish. We will be doing some clearance and tree maintenance early in the new year with the assistance of our amenities staff and the payback team. We continue to be dedicated in preserving these green spaces ensuring they remain accessible to residents, allowing you to continue experiencing the joy and fulfilment that comes with growing your own food. We would like to extend our thanks to all the Committee Members who have generously dedicated their time to the Allotment Association, ensuring its smooth operation. Your efforts are greatly appreciated by both the allotment tenants and the Town Council.and on that note on behalf of the Town Council, I am pleased to announce the winners of this year's Allotment Competition.

FP 1st place Geoff Lomas plot 76 - HH 1st place Andy Ross plot 17 - FP 2nd place Karen Finnis plot 30 - HH 2nd place Richard Hockly plot 89, - FP 3rd place Denise Bagge & Bernard Carter plot 66 - HH 3rd place Richard Maidment plot 39 - FP Best new plot Kristijan Matoski plot 24a- HH Best new plot Kirsty Vaughan plot 5. Their exceptional dedication shows what can be achieved with passion, resilience, and a commitment to horticultural excellence. Congratulations to all the winners

Award Prizes -The prizes were awarded & photos taken with the Mayor in turn.

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(HS) – Any questions to the Marlow Town Mayor or Marlow Town Council Officers

Sue Harley – said that she had a very large walnut tree near her plot (40a HH) that was shading her plot and asked if MTC could prune it. MTC said that their priority was health & safety but that they did have a limited budget for routine maintenance and that this tree was on it.

A lady from FP said that she was having problems with rats at FP near the school. MTC said that she should contact them and they would ask Bucks CC to take action as it was their responsibility.

(HS) to MR MAYORour thanks to you and members of MTC for attending this evening and for the continued support of the allotments.

(HS) – We now reach the formal part of the AGM, and as a starter I will ask if Sylvia could advise on any apologies for absence received.

(SM) - Apologies for absence from members and tenants: (as listed above)

(HS) - thank you Sylvia.

(HS) - Minutes from AGM 2023 & matters arising from it: No comments

(HS) - Proposed by: Maren Talbot Seconded by : Sylvia Miller

(SM) Secretary's Report

Welcome to all you lovely hard working Allotment Gardeners, yet again my report of the main activities on both sites over the past year, which I will keep as brief as possible. Unfortunately, due to health problems, I have been unable over the last year to visit the sites as regularly as usual, therefore my report is briefer than usual. (thank goodness some of you say!!)

Waiting lists, new tenants & vacant plots – Over the past year there have been 23 @ FP & 22 @ HH, currently the waiting list stands at 15, made up of 8 for HH & 7 for FP, which is constantly changing throughout the year as plots are given up & relet throughout the year time and weather depending. The Council carry out periodic inspections of plots on both sites and contact tenants of plots that show signs of severe neglect.

Competition – We organised the Allotment Competitions at both sites, the judges were escorted around each site by Committee members (John & myself who do not partake in the Competition) and the results have been announced this evening - congratulations to all the prize winners.

Bonfires – As a result of a request from the Committee, the Council agreed that tenants of both sites can have bonfires, in incinerators only, from 01.11.2024 until 15.12.2024. Please ensure that only incinerators are used, dry material is burnt and no excessive smoke is created. If any tenant would like to be part of the rota to borrow an incinerator please contact me.

AWP Meetings – We covered Plot re-numbering, which is planned for the coming year, as and when Council staff are available, they welcome volunteers to help with this task, MTC will probably work on one site at a time as this is a huge exercise to undertake. With reference to the playground area by FP site, we were advised that at present there are no updates regarding this desolate area.

Events – There were two Plant Stands held in May, one on each site, which were extremely well turned out, many members came along and all seemed satisfied with their purchases, we plan to repeat this next year. Unfortunately, this year, there was no Summer BBQ at the Orchard, however, in August Richard held another fascinating talk on Dahlias at FP, as always with new ideas and advice which was well attended. We always learn something new every day and especially from Richard at these talks!!

Facebook & Website – As mentioned earlier Juliette, after her latest addition to their family, is unable to continue to maintain our Website. We have plans for another tenant to take over this role, and will then be able to update it with the latest articles and reports.

Wildlife Areas at Foxes Piece – as most are aware this site is location in a built-up area and does not have a huge or varied wildlife life population. Earlier this year, Denise Bagge and Dee Marshall organised clearance, with help from volunteers, of an area near the entrance gate in Dedmere Rise. They arranged for bird and bat nesting boxes to be installed around the site, along with areas to encourage hedgehogs and have sown wild flowers to attract butterflies and bees.

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Donated Tools & Equipment – We have received donations of a large variety of tools and equipment, which we give to members in return for a small donation to the Association. Some are here this evening & will be available after the meeting, for more information or details please contact a Committee Member after the meeting. Donations of any surplus tools would be greatly appreciated, please speak to John or myself after the meeting.

Wood chippings – These are available free of charge to all tenants. There are four wood chip bays at Hanging Hill, and two at Foxes Piece, these bays are filled with woodchips as and when available. Robin and his boys try to ensure that only the best quality woodchips are delivered to us, so there may be delays with deliveries occasionally. Please let me know if there are any problems or excessive delays at times of high demand. It is vital to note that the arrangement for the delivery of the woodchips is with only one local and trusted Company, other Companies are not allowed free access to the either site to deliver wood chips or any other material for security & safety reasons. In the past someone tried to access one of our sites, they had a large amount of waste in the truck hidden behind the woodchips, as it happened it was myself who happened to be at the gate & they were trying to convince me that they had permission from an authorised person named Ray to access the site – big mistake for them!!

Slow Worm Relocation – A local Eco Group contacted us regarding locating a population of slow worms from a building site to the Allotments site. Unfortunately, there are guidelines in place and due to its location Foxes Piece is not suitable, however, there is an area that they have viewed at Hanging Hill which would be ideal, especially as the site backs onto fields. This is under the large Walnut Tree by the large car park at the top of the hill, the area will need some minor clearance. So, this will be put forward with the planning permission application for the building works, now that they have a suitable location for the slow worm population to be relocated to. It is unlikely to happen until Spring next year at the earliest.

Communal Tables - There are Communal Tables & pot swap areas on both sites, at FP one is by the entrance at the flats and at HH by the entrance in Prospect Road, these have proved very popular, with Grateful Thanks to those individuals who constructed them. Tenants can leave surplus crop and seedlings along with other items that may be of use. Sadly, some tenants leave unwanted and sometimes unusable items. While it is possible that someone else may want the article, if these remain there for a week, please remove and dispose of the item.

Water Shut off – The water supply on both sites will be turned off for the winter period after 16th December, to allow access to water while fires are allowed, weather permitting.

Committee Meetings – The Committee were able to meet four times this year, if any member would like to attend a Committee Meeting as an Observer or to join the Committee, please get in touch with me.

Thank you to the Committee members for their input and work supporting both allotment sites, especially Maren who toils for many hours over the accounts, preparing accurate and detailed reports of the Association funds.

Thank you to all the volunteers for help around both sites, for the newsletter deliveries, and to the those helping out this evening.

Thank you to MTC for their continual support of the Allotments Sites and organising the hire of this room, especially Debbie for her time & energy in running both sites, even coming out in the evenings and at the weekend to attend On Site emergencies, sometimes late at night.

Finally thank you all for coming along and I wish you all good health and a productive crop for the coming year.

(HS) - Proposed by: John Stilliard Seconded by : Dennis Bird

(MT) Treasurer & Seed Secretary's Report:

Dear Members,

Last year was a good year for membership with 138 tenants signing up as members of the Marlow Allotments Association (MAA). This is an improvement over last year (128) and we hope to continue the trend.

Just to remind you, the benefits offered include:

1. membership of the National Allotments Society (NSALG), whose aims are to protect the Integrity of the Allotments Sites.
2. access to Seed Orders from Kings at favourable rates
3. our tool recycling initiative, where members donate pre-loved equipment to be passed on to newcomers or other members for a modest donation.

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Our finances are in good order, we pay our bills on time (insurance, web and monthly bank charges etc.) and are able to put away some money if needed.

Most of your membership fee goes to the NSALG (National Society for Allotment and Leisure Gardeners). Their subscription fee is currently £3.00 per person. They are not planning to increase their membership fees, and neither are we for at least another year.

We have eliminated cheques from our dealings (80p bank charge per cheque), so please pay anything you owe to the MAA by bank transfer (Sort Code: 403219, Account No: 41460919, Acc. Name: The Marlow Allotments Association) or in cash, either to any Committee Member or suitably disguised in an envelope to Maren Talbot, 4 Hazel Close, Marlow SL7 3PW.

Regarding the Seed Scheme, we are encouraging members to place orders online via the NSALG/Kings website. Last year, four times as many members used this facility than paper orders in the past, a sign that members prefer this method. To do this, contact Maren who will register you on their website.

Paper catalogues are still available, but to save paper and the cost of distribution, Kings have put their catalogue online, ask Maren for instructions.

For those unable to order online, Maren continues to do it for them if they send her a completed order form and cash or pay by bank transfer to the MAA.

At the end of the year, the MAA receives a discount, which came to £187.26, that's 40% up on the year before, a welcome result!

Wishing you all a Happy New Gardening Year. *Maren Talbot*

(HS) - Proposed by: Bernard Carter Seconded by : Yvonne Holland

Denise Bagge said that the plant sales success had been largely due to Maren Talbot's huge effort in producing so many seedlings. She was thanked by the audience.

(DB) - Report of pruning and care of trees and shrubs:

As you know, since Autumn 2021 the Allotments Association has been liaising with the Town Council to encourage an ongoing program of work to get to grips with neglected trees and shrubs on both allotment sites following years of neglect. Unfortunately, the tree and shrub work this year has fallen away because of staff shortages at Marlow Town Council and the failure of Bucks Council to fulfil its undertakings. Another push will be needed to get this going again. On 20 September a review was done of trees and shrubs on both sites following requests from tenants.

Next Steps

Following that review, we understand that Marlow Town Council plans to address some of the smaller trees and areas in January and February using their own amenities staff and payback teams. For the larger trees, they will be hiring tree surgeons and will seek quotes for that work. The timeline for these projects will depend on their budget, with priority given to those trees deemed unsafe. Note that walnut trees can only be pruned in the summer.

Our role as tenants

It is important to recognise that we also have a role to play. We must keep trees and shrubs on our plots under control so that they are not a nuisance to other tenants. We also need to avoid planting or allowing problem trees of the future eg: if you see sycamore saplings taking root then please get them out now. Use the winter months to get to grip with the trees and shrubs on your plot and if you are not sure about whether you are allowed to tackle something then get in touch with Debbie Abbott at the Council Office, maybe send her an email and photograph, who will be happy to give you a steer (see her letter of 30 Sept).

(HS) At the end of the last membership year, which concluded at the end of October, we had 138 MAA members across the HH and FP sites. I suspect the majority of those attending tonight are already members, but if you are not and would like to join there is a facility for anyone present to join this evening. If you somehow managed to elude them on the way in do

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please see one of the Committee afterwards! The greater membership adds volume to our conversations with Marlow Town Council on the issues raised by you, their tenants.

Last year I thanked Juliette Chanoir for her continued support of MAA with her ongoing commitment to the website and its maintenance, despite her having to give up her allotment for family reasons. Those family reasons have extended and the Committee wish to relieve her of this responsibility and to seek another willing helper to manage, maintain and develop the website. The structure and instructions are all in place - if you have a skill or interest in this area and are willing to assist do make contact with Sylvia afterwards.

Dwelling on the expertise of our members, the Committee have this year again taken advantage of the centre of excellence in the world of dahlias at Foxes Piece with another of Richard's talks on their cultivation. He probably would not tell you but he was again a prize-winner at the Dahlia Society annual competition this year.

At the opposite end of the scale of planting, we were delighted that resident tree surgeon Robin Teasdill was able to find time in the spring to address tenants on both sites (in a single morning) on fruit tree pruning. Many took advantage of his tips and hopefully the advice bore fruit, literally as well as metaphorically. Robin has kindly agreed to follow up with further sessions at the end of this year, or early next, for any who were unable to attend previously, or who need to revise! Dates will be advised in due course.

A small team have been developing more wildlife habitats in some of the common areas at Foxes Piece to complement the agricultural and horticultural labours of the majority. If this is an area of particular interest to anyone, please step forward. Richard Harker led an offensive at the beginning of the year to clear some of the accumulated debris in the 'sheds' behind the Doctors Surgery at the west side of Foxes Piece. MTC removed a vast number of bags of old wire, plastic bags, wood, glass, machinery, plant pots etc. The structures are now clear to be demolished and removed and no doubt a plea will soon go out to identify those of you with a destructive bent who are not allowed such frivolous activity at home.

A wetter than usual start to the year left most of us ruing the emergence of an invigorated slug population. If it is any consolation, I can advise that the problem is not restricted to the humble allotment keeper. Status is no barrier and on a trip to Highgrove House I saw at first hand just what a tough year royalty were also having. Given the Monarch's wildlife credentials I suspect they are allowed to roam and eat freely there.

As Chair, I must also extend personal thanks, and do so on behalf of all tenants and members, to the other Committee members for their continued hard work keeping the overall allotment process running across the 2 sites and, especially, to Sylvia and Maren with their particular responsibilities on the secretarial and treasury front.

A number of committee members are standing down this year and we all thank them for their contributions during their time in office. In addition to any obvious projects, organisations all require a lot of unseen background work.

There remains scope for additional members from both allotment sites on the Committee, and Sylvia has already invited interested members to make themselves known. A member can join the Committee at any time during the year – the process is not restricted to the formality of the AGM – so do step forward if the idea appeals to you.

(HS) Elections with Proposers & Seconders

		PROPOSER	SECONDER
Officer - Chairman:	John Stilliard	John Holland	Sylvia Miller
Officer - Treasurer:	Maren Talbot	Guy Greenhouse	Sarah Greenhouse
Officer - Secretary:	Sylvia Miller	Peter England	Daphne Roberts
Committee Member:	Denise Bagge	Robert Frost	Bernard Carter
Committee Member:	Pete Cooper	Maren Talbot	Geraldine Rowe
Committee Member:	Fred Tillier	Neil Garside	Mike Hopper
New Committee Member:	Harry Ferris	John Stilliard	Maren Talbot
New Committee Member:	Shaun Kennedy	Jill Kennedy	John Stilliard

Request by Chairman for show of hands (for/against/abstain) for each Committee Member in turn. All were agreed.

(HS) Handover of Chairmanship to JS

(JS) Thank you to the departing chairman and committee members.

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(JS) - Ideas, proposals and questions from members,

There were 3 main issues or matters raised by the guests, which resulted in a very pleasant general discussion between Guests and Committee members. Unfortunately, only a few names of those that put points and ideas forward were recorded, therefore, the following is a general report of the points discussed, with positive and helpful input from most of those present in a friendly atmosphere.

- 1) Thieving of crops and possessions – A large number of tenants at HH have suffered from theft of produce including their whole fruit crop, which is extremely distressing for the victim. The matter of cameras was discussed, which would then supply physical evidence of the theft and would enable prosecution and eviction of the culprit. Sadly, there is the possibility that the camera would be stolen. SM also mentioned a new tenant at FP who has already suffered the loss of 2 composters and the roofing felt from her shed. This is not the only theft of possessions at both sites, there have been other such incidences reported and probably more that have not been. These acts are appalling and very concerning, which the Committee will be putting forward at the next AWP meeting with MTC. These thefts are very traumatic for the victim, and need to be addressed as soon as possible, before the matter turns violent.
- 2) Unkept pathways on both sites, this turned into a huge debate with a large majority of guests giving input regarding their neighbours that do not bother with the pathways, because others mowed them regularly. Even though the rules clearly state it is the tenants' responsibility, some newcomers are unclear of their responsibilities. It was agreed that tenants should discuss this with their neighbours and arrange to share the duty of keeping the pathways mown, with either by mower, strimmer or shears. The general feeling was that the Council will be requested by MAA to remind tenants of this responsibility, as this type of neglect leads to dangerous and treacherous pathways. MAA will also place notices on site, with a Spring email and a mention in newsletters to emphasise the point.
- 3) Maps on each site detailing the layout and plot numbers – a suggestion for maps of each site to be placed on notice boards and on the website detailing plot numbers (not tenants names), this was supported by guests and members present. SM will organise this.
- 4) MT asked why MTC had rejected her suggestion of an electric fence linked to a battery to keep deer out. It was agreed to take this up at the next Working Group.

(JS) - Any other business & raffle

AOB – SM advised those present of the recent system in place regarding deputies for MAA, this had been put forward at the last AGM and subsequently agreed by unanimous votes at the follow Committee meeting.

Treasurer and Seed Secretary - The strategy in place is that MT supplies monthly reports to SM, which would enable her to take over recording and dealing with Finances should MT be unable to. The Committee members who are currently cheque signatories are MT, SM & DB (who is our longest standing Committee Member), it may be agreed at the next meeting for there to be a fourth member with this authority.

Secretary – As suggested last year, JS has agreed to be the Deputy for this role and over the past year has been advised by SM of the various roles, and assisting with some of them. This is still in the early stages, but hopefully after a couple of years he will be more familiar with the various duties and what is entailed.

This means that MAA has a backup plan to cover unforeseen events to ensure the efficient continuation of the Association. This deputization was agreed.

Raffle – Our newest Committee Member, Shaun, undertook this task with great success and created a good deal of entertainment and humour with this.

(JS) - Close of meeting – 08.35 PM