

The Marlow Allotments Association



Minutes of the 42nd Annual General Meeting – 06.11.2025 at 7.00pm, New Hall

Attendance: Colin Alderman, Richard Bailey, Mary Bunker, Alan & Sue Burden, Bernard Carter, Karen Clarke, Shaaron Collet, Peter Edmonds, Sue Harley, John & Yvonne Holland, Lyn Howell, Kerin Howlett, Christine Jack, Geoff Lomas, Kristijan Matoski, Peter Morgan, Colin Naphone, Chris O'Connell, Andy Ross, Alexander Schoofs, Pete & Gill Smith, Susan Stokes, Chris & Karen Webb.

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

Minutes Secretary: Sylvia Miller

Committee Members: Denise Bagge, Shaun Kennedy, Fred Tillier, David Howell

Honoured Guests: Marlow Deputy Mayor, Councillor Jennifer Simnett and Councillor Frank Schoofs

Marlow Town Council Officer: Louise Anderson

Apologies: David Ambrose, Chrissy Ashby, Annie & Justin Bailey, Beate & Mark Billington, Ann & Colin Bowles, Johanna Bracken, Sally Brooks, Jo Brown, Pete Cooper, Peter England, Robert Frost, Andy Gallagher, Claire & Martin Green, Nikki Harris, Richard & Nicole Hockly, Elizabeth Jones, Steve Lugg, Allan Noel-Baker, Tracey Perring, Daphne Roberts, Clare Rowan, Libby Spratley, Jess Stephens-Brown, Ann Stewart, Alex Teesdale, Fred & Dave Tillier.

(JS) Welcome – Good evening and welcome back to the New Hall, Pugin Rooms, St Peter's Church for the 42st AGM of the MAA. Can I please ask all members to be careful with electronic media and be very careful in responding to messages – even if they know the name they should check the email address – we have had an incident recently.

We will start the meeting with the traditional Health & Safety, Fire and Safety instructions from Sylvia Miller.

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

(JS) - Introduce Minutes Secretary – Thanks are due once again to Sylvia Miller for taking the Minutes this evening. Please raise a hand if at any point you cannot hear us

(JS) - Introduce Deputy Mayor – We are here again by courtesy of Marlow Town Council and I am delighted to extend a special welcome to Marlow Town Deputy Mayor Jennifer Simnett and Councillor Frank Schoofs, who are joined, in the audience by MTC Officer Louise Anderson, who both plays an active role with responsibility for the allotments. I now have the pleasure of inviting Deputy Mayor Jennifer Simnett to open proceedings and address the meeting. There will then be an opportunity for tenants to raise questions directly with the Council members here tonight. The AGM will follow.

(Deputy Mayor) – Good Evening everyone,

It's a real pleasure to be here with you all at your Annual General Meeting, and particularly special for me as this is my first time attending as Deputy Mayor.

This year's weather has certainly kept us all guessing! After the very wet and challenging conditions of last year, the hot, sunny days we've enjoyed this year have brought quite a different set of challenges for growers. Yet, despite that, when I visited the allotments earlier in the year, I was amazed to see the abundance of produce – especially the fruit. It really has been a bumper year, and a credit to the care, skill and hard work of everyone here.

It's also been wonderful to hear that a number of new tenants have joined the allotment community this year. I hope that they enjoy making their plots productive and rewarding spaces in the years ahead.

At Marlow Town Council, we're committed to working closely with the Allotment Association to support you – particularly around tree maintenance and the general upkeep of the site. We're determined to preserve these valuable green spaces, so they remain accessible and inviting for everyone, giving residents the opportunity to experience the joy and fulfilment that comes from growing their own food.

Finally, I'd like to extend heartfelt thanks to all the committee members who dedicate their time and energy to keeping the Association running so smoothly. Your hard work and commitment are deeply appreciated – not only by the allotment holders, but also by Marlow Town Council.

Thank you all, and I wish you another successful and fruitful year ahead – in every sense of the word!

(JS) –Thank you to the Deputy Mayor, now for Questions to the council

John Stilliard: I was very surprised to see the quantity and size of the 'Call for sites' in the map for Marlow. I realise that they are not yet approved, but it would seem that if approved there is an attempt to increase the size of Marlow by about

20%. Much of this land will be on Green Belt and AONB land. Oddly, High Wycombe seems to have very little “call for sites”. Can MTC please give an assurance that any attempt to take over the Allotments Sites will be resisted?

Cllr Schoofs replied: After a call from Bucks Council as part of its Local Plan development, various groups, organisations and landowners came forward to volunteer sites for (housing) development. This does not mean they will all be used, as the matter is currently under revision and all will be subject to planning permission. This Local Plan remains ‘work in progress’.

Richard Bailey: I would like to ask the Council how they view the state of The Allotments, and what we can do to encourage plot holders to cultivate their plots. As I recommended 2 Years ago to use The Pay back Team to help clear overgrown plots, obviously the plot would have to be vacant. The notice on the gate at Foxes Peace re membership, states what we can do to clear unmown paths etc

Cllr Simnett replied: The sites are inspected twice a year when all plots are reviewed, and tenants contacted by the Council Officers. The Payback Team do not carry out general maintenance on the sites, the tree pruning is currently ad hoc due to scarce resources, MTC request that tenants to notify them if they spot something.

SM – offered that MAA would try to find volunteers to help with this.

Sue Harley: The question of St Peter’s School and what will happen once the school closes down.

Cllr Simnett replied: The matter has not yet been decided.

SM: The staff of the school have advised MAA that they believe the school building and grounds might be utilised by an Organisation on behalf of Children with Disabilities, who will benefit from the current set up and layout.

Geoff Lomas: Asked what happens about pathways that are overgrown with brambles going over onto plots, specifically on the path along the fence by plot 76 at FP.

Louise Anderson: Replied that this would be looked into

Susan Stokes: Proposed that custodians are appointed to clear vacant plots.

SM: This would need volunteers and I can take names after the meeting.

John Holland: Pointed out that last year he had cleared 3 vacant plots, which were then let and new tenants did no work on any of the plots. This year he also cleared 3 vacant plots and these have been worked on well by the new tenants.

Susan Stokes: mentioned a shed near the small car park that was tilting dangerously.

SM: is aware of this as it has been like that for many years and over several tenants, and will discuss this with the Council.

Susan Stokes: Requested that if new tenants do nothing for 6 months they should be asked to leave.

SM: That would not be feasible because most times it is due to ill health or family issues.

Louise Anderson: Responded to say there will be some reviews this month and requested feedback.

(JS) to MTC Deputy Mayor Jennifer Simnett & MTC Officer Louise Anderson - Again I would like to thank the MTC councillors and their staff for attending this evening and for their continued support of the allotments.

Official Start of the 42nd AGM for the Marlow Allotments Association.

(JS) – We have now reached 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)

(JS) - Thank you Sylvia.

(JS) - Minutes from AGM 2024, & matters arising from it: No comments, I now request a proposer and seconder for the formal acceptance of the 2024 AGM Minutes.

(JS) - I now request a proposer and seconder for the formal acceptance of the 2024 AGM Minutes.

Proposed by: **David Howell** Seconded by: **Yvonne Holland**

(JS) I now request Sylvia to present the Secretary's report

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. Unfortunately, due to health problems, I have been unable to visit the sites as regularly as usual, therefore my report is brief. (thank goodness some of you say!!)

Waiting lists, new tenants & vacant plots – Over the past year the number of plots that have been let were 25 @ FP & 29 @ HH, all thanks to John who has been invaluable by trudging around both sites for me over the past year.

The waiting list stands at 11, made up of 1 for HH & 8 for FP and 2 applicants for either site, vacant plots are 2x FP & 9x HH, 4 of which at HH are so severely overgrown they are inaccessible.

The Council do make periodic inspections and contact tenants of plots that show signs of severe neglect, to encourage tenants to get working on their plot.

Marlow Bottom Applicants – As a result of recent rule changes by Marlow Town Council, residents from Marlow Bottom can now apply for a plot, there will be certain rules and conditions applicable. Please speak to me after the meeting for more details

Fires on the Allotment Site – As a result of a request from the Committee, MTC agreed a concession to the ban on fires, tenants of both sites can have fires, only in incinerators, from 15.11.25 until 31.12.25. Should the weather yet again be severe during this period the Council have confirmed that they will consider extending this period.

Please note that incinerators must be used for the fires, only dry material can be burnt & no excessive smoke is created. If this is abused the ban will be permanent over both sites.

MAA has incinerators available, if any tenant would like to be part of the rota to borrow an incinerator please contact me.

Plot Numbered Marker Posts – The plots will not be renumbered, but a new clear marker post will be placed in one corner of each plot, the Council plan to commence this in the new year, there have been some volunteers from HH keen to help but so far none from FP, therefore, they are considering starting with HH first and I will try to get volunteers from FP. If anyone here would like to volunteer, please have a chat with me after the meeting.

AWP Meetings – There were two meetings with the Council this year to discuss allotment matters, most of which are covered in this report.

Tree Pruning – Again Robin Teasdill has offered his time and expertise giving advice and demonstrations on both site regarding pruning fruit trees, at the start of next year.

Deer at HH – The Impressive Deer fencing constructed by volunteers under the supervision of the Legendary Bill Masser and funded by MTC, is now in need of renovation due to gaps in the fence which are allowing the deer access onto the site. The Council have organised quotes for the repair of this, which they are collating and will then put forward for approval by Councillors soon.

Badgers at HH – Over the past year there has been a huge presence of badgers at HH, and around the town, searching for water and food, both of which were scarce due to the drought this summer. Consequently, the tenants have suffered excessive damage to crops and fencing, even the most solid of which held no challenge to the hungry badgers, who would just lean against the fence until it collapsed. There is a large Badger Sett in the playing field within St Peter's School grounds & the badgers burrow under the fence to access the allotments site. Being a protected species there is very little that we can do to stop or deter this, the Bucks Badger Society have kindly given us a talk on the subject and have compiled details of how we can deter them from our crop which I have emailed to all tenants.

There are printouts on the table, so far FP tenants have not suffered from this experience, however, as there have been numerous sightings around the town the badgers may attempt to venture onto FP site next year.

Events – There were two Plant Stands held in May, one on each site, both were extremely well turned out, many members came along and all seemed satisfied with their purchases, next year there will just be one at HH. 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 from Richard at these talks!!

Donated Tools & Equipment – We have received donations of a large variety of tools and equipment, which we give to members in return for a donation to the Association. Some are here this evening & will be available after the meeting, for more information or details please speak to our Chairman, John, 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. Robin and his boys try to ensure that only the best quality woodchips are delivered to us, so there may be delays with deliveries.

Please note that the woodchip deliveries are arranged with one local & trusted Company, New leaf Tree Surgeons, no other Companies are authorised to enter either site.

Manure Deliveries – The manure deliveries have been delayed due to health problems of the man that donates this.

Spent Hops Deliveries – The local brewery delivers bags of these as and when they have a surplus, the deliveries are alternated between sites, the last load was to HH so the next one will be at FP.

Slow Worm Relocation to HH – Due to delays with planning permission for the Construction Site, the relocation has been deferred. After a brief discussion recently with the group organising, they are not perturbed by the presence of badgers on site.

Communal Tables - There are Communal Tables & pot swap areas on both sites, at FP 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. Some tenants leave unwanted items by the table, while it is possible that someone else may have a use for the article, if it remains there for over 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 no later than Friday 12th December 2025, weather permitting – should the weather plummet with temperatures below Zero degrees, the date will be brought forward. Please ensure that water butts are topped up in advance, especially tenants planning to have fires.

Committee Meetings – The Committee were able to meet four times this year, if any Association Member would like to attend a Committee Meeting either 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's funds. Also, John who has nobly stepped in to assist me with my duties whilst I have not been able to, proving to be an invaluable help to me.

Thank you to all the volunteers for help around both sites, including those that have cleared vacant plots ready for viewings, for the newsletter deliveries, help & organising of the Plant Stands, 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 & Louise for their time & energy in running both sites.

Finally thank you all for coming along to our 42nd Annual General Meeting and I wish you all good health and a productive crop for the coming year.

(JS) - If there are no objections then I request a proposer and seconder for the Secretary's report.

Proposed by: **Kristijan Matoski** Seconded by: **Chris O'Connell**

(JS) - I now request Maren Talbot to present the Treasurer's report

(MT) MAA Treasurer & Seed Secretary's Report:

Dear Members,

Last year was a good year for **membership** with 130 tenants signing up as members of the Marlow Allotments Association (MAA). This is eight fewer than last year, but very much line of annual trends over the last 10 years.

Just to remind you, the benefits of membership include: 1) membership of the National Allotments Society (NSALG/NAS), whose aims are to help protect the integrity of the Allotments Sites. 2) access to Seed Orders from Kings at favourable rates. 3) our tool recycling initiative, members donate pre-loved equipment to be passed on to newcomers or other members for a modest donation. 4) our annual Plant Stand, members can obtain well grown plants for a modest donation, a particular godsend particularly for new gardeners to help them get going in the spring.

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

Most of the membership fee goes to the NSALG (National Society for Allotment and Leisure Gardeners) aka NAS (National Allotment Society). Their subscription fee is currently £3.50 per person, an increase of 50p. However, we are not increasing our membership fee for at least another year.

Since we can no longer accept cheques (80p bank charge per cheque), please pay anything due to the MAA by bank transfer (Sort Code: 403219, Account No: 41460919, Acc. Name: The Marlow Allotments Association) or in cash, either to a Committee Member or suitably disguised in an envelope to Maren Talbot, 4 Hazel Close, Marlow SL7 3PW. The bank is no longer charging us a monthly fee, so we are saving £60 per annum.

Regarding the Seed Scheme, we are encouraging members to place orders online via the NSALG/Kings website. To do this, contact Maren who will register members onto 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 this for them, just 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 a very welcome £244.73, nearly twice as much as last year, but the increase included a calculation error in a previous year, **made by Kings**.

An additional discount is available if orders are placed before the 15th November.

Talking about the NSALG/NAS, we did have a little dispute with them earlier this year when they announced that they required members' details including name, address, phone and email. We have always provided them with name and address, but nothing more. We were not happy that they were asking for phone numbers, as it is not essential to the service

that they provide to us. After some considerable effort, it was established that the Individual Seed Secretary could decide how much information they wanted to put on the NAS website to prove that they were 'bona fide' members. Email address is definitely required, because that is the means by which individual members can log into the NAS website Members' Page and avail themselves of all the information and benefits available to them.

We discussed this with the Marlow Town Council, who provide us with tenants' details. In line with Data Protection legislation, they require that we ask our members for their permission to use their contact information. We are complying with this requirement by including a relevant sentence on our Membership application/renewal form.

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

(JS) - If there are no objections then I request a proposer and seconder for the Treasurer's report.

Proposed by: **Sylvia Miller**

Seconded by: **Susan Stokes**

(JS) - I now request Denise Bagge to present a report on the planned pruning of large trees and shrubs.

DB: Report on neglected trees and shrubs

Denise Bagge (DB) started her report by asking for a show of hands about the problems tenants face from neglected trees and shrubs. First "how many have trees and shrubs growing on their plot or nearby that have a bad impact on growing crops" (some in the audience). Secondly "how many are affected by overhanging trees and shrubs on the way to their plot" (many). DB reminded everyone that the Association has been working with the Council since Autumn 2021 to tackle neglected trees and shrubs. Since then, the priority for the Council has been taking action on trees that are a risk to tenants and to people passing by the allotments. For example, some dead trees have been taken out at Foxes Piece this year. The Council also has to review and maintain the protected specimen trees on the two sites, such as Walnuts. However, what has fallen away this past year is the work in the common areas where the brambles have taken a grip. This is due to lack of resources, particularly in terms of access to the use of the payback team - and we can all see the impact. In reviewing the two sites in recent weeks it is clear that in addition to the common areas that are overgrown with brambles, there are trees and shrubs on our plots that are causing shade now and will get worse in future. Examples include: ex Christmas trees, sycamore saplings and large fig trees. This means that alongside the Council, tenants also have a part to play in tackling problem trees and shrubs.

First, to alert Council staff to any trees or large shrubs that may represent a danger to tenants and others. Secondly, to prune trees and shrubs so that they do not get in the way of other tenants, especially where they may overhang a path. Thirdly to be proactive in tackling future problems such as Christmas trees. Louise at the Marlow Town Council office (MTC) sent out an email about this on Tuesday 4th November. If a tenant is in any doubt about whether they should tackle a problem tree or shrub, then please contact Louise in the MTC office.

In response to DB's questions about what resources are available this year and next to tackle this work, Louise explained that a large part of the budget this year had been used to remove asbestos from Foxes Piece. The 2 part-time Council staff are mostly engaged in work around the town, but could tackle urgent work on the allotments if they are using equipment from the ground (no ladders etc).

(JS) - I would like to stress Debbie and Louise's email of the 4th November re trees, overhanging branches and waste disposal.

(JS) - I now move onto the Elections for the Committee. Each one will be read out in turn with their proposer and seconder's names. Acceptance will be by a show of hands.

(JS) Elections with Proposers & Seconders

		PROPOSER	SECONDER
Officer - Chairman:	John Stilliard (HH)	John Holland	Yvonne Holland
Officer - Treasurer:	Maren Talbot (HH)	Nicole Hockly	Susan Stokes
Officer - Secretary:	Sylvia Miller (HH)	Peter England	Daphne Roberts
Committee Member:	Denise Bagge (FP)	Robert Frost	Dee Marshall
Committee Member:	Harry Ferris (FP)	John Stilliard	Sylvia Miller
Committee Member:	Fred Tillier (FP)	Neil Garside	Dave Tillier
New Committee Member:	David Howell (HH)	Denise Bagge	John Stilliard

Those present confirmed acceptance of all Committee Members by a majority show of hands for each Member.

(JS) - As chair I must 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 allotmenteering process running across the 2 sites and, especially, to Sylvia and Maren with their particular responsibilities on the secretarial and treasury front. I would like to thank the following people who have left the Committee for their work, Shaun Kennedy & Pete Cooper. 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 please do step forward if the idea appeals to you. We would welcome new committee members.

(JS) Allotment competitions - These are being planned and details will be provided in the New Year.

(JS) Ideas, proposals and questions from members - Are there any ideas, proposals or questions from members?

Richard Bailey: Thank you all those that attended the Dahlia talk, there was a record number of attendees.

Peter Edmonds: Mentioned that a shed had been taken down at FP & MTC had taken away the asbestos but left the rest of the shed.

Louise Anderson: Advised that this would be looked into.

Chris O Connell: asked about maps of each site

SM: The plans are on each notice board on each site, and will also email all tenants a map of the site after the meeting.

Peter Smith: asked if we could start having social events again.

SM: replied that she hopes to organise some next year.

(JS) - Any other business – no response

(JS) Introduce Shaun - Raffle – Again Shaun executed the raffle and prizes expertly and with good humour, we shall miss him on the Committee.

(JS) - Close of meeting – 8.22