



## THE MARLOW ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION

### **The thirty-seventh Annual General Meeting, in the form of a Year End Report** **In view of the current situation with the Coronavirus, there can be no Annual General Meeting**

**Message from the Chair Fred Tillier** – A weird season with weather and the COVID crisis, thanks to all tenants who showed respect to their fellow plot holders and here's to Happy Gardening for 2021.

**Minutes of 2019 AGM** – These were circulated with the January newsletter earlier this year and are available on our website, please advise S Miller for a copy if required and of any comments, queries or questions. Please note this is for several reasons ie: reduce the cost of paper and clogging of emails with too many attachments.

**Secretary's Report** – Before I begin this report, I must convey a HUGE message of Thanks from all tenants to Marlow Town Council, with whose support both of the Allotment Sites have remained available all year, giving an invaluable source of hope to all who have been able to venture out in these difficult times. This has been one of the most unusual years on the Allotments and will probably be referred for years to come. We have all had huge problems as a result of the lock down, and the tenants of both sites that I have communicated with, have told me how much they appreciate the efforts made to ensure the Allotment sites remain open and accessible. There are many for whom this has been 'a lifeline to keep them healthy and sane' – quite a few have used that phrase to me.

Sadly, there are those that have been unable to venture outside and have been housebound since March, hopefully things may, in time, be relaxed and the situation will become easier for them as all tenants follow the Social Distancing ruling. The weather has been absolutely splendid, as we all know, and crops have been of an exceptional level. There has been a large surplus and tenants have been able to help those in the local community suffering in difficult situations.

**New Tenants:** Over the past year there have been over 25 new tenants at each site, and most have persevered with the hard work needed to get the plot cleared; some have made such a splendid effort they have taken on a second plot!

**Waiting lists & vacant plots:** At present we have no vacant plots and 28 people on the waiting list of which 9 prefer Foxes Piece, 18 prefer Hanging Hill and the other one has no preference.

**Bonfire Ban:** Clearly this is a matter of great concern to quite a few tenants and is covered at the end of this Report.

**Water shut off date:** This will be on Monday 16th Nov 2020.

**Winter Work party:** In view of the current restrictions there cannot be any gatherings even for this. However, if tenants could spare some time, perhaps the occasional half an hour, to help keep clear and tidy communal areas such as pathways and woodchip bays, this would be greatly appreciated.

**Events:** Unfortunately, all plans have been cancelled for now until the rules relax, which we hope will be Spring 2021.

**Facebook:** This is proving popular, please contact Juliette with news and information that tenants would like to share.

**Wood chippings:** These are available free of charge to all tenants and is proving very popular. There are now four wood chip bays at Hanging Hill, and one has been created at Foxes Piece site. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the volunteers who helped with this and those that are monitoring and maintaining the area.

**The Triangle Project:** This is an area of allotment ground, which has been modified for the use by persons less capable or with a dis-ability and has been running since March 2013. Since the lock down some of the groups have been able to return, with additional rulings such as only 6x adults can attend the site at a ratio of 1x carer to 2x clients, hopefully, the other two groups will also be able to return to site by next Spring.

**Committee meetings:** The committee met only twice this year, the subsequent meetings were via electronic means, and probably will continue so for the foreseeable future, the minutes of each meeting are available on the website and notice boards on both sites. Should any Association member like to be part of the Committee, please contact me.

**Thank you:** This is my opportunity to thank those that have helped and supported the Association throughout the past year, the last AGM feels like a very long time ago!!

Thank You to the Committee Members for their support and advice, especially Maren, our Treasurer, who spends many hours on the accounts and balancing the books for us, and Juliette for all her work on the Webpage and Facebook.

Thank You to the volunteers on both sites who all contribute for the good of the Allotments with work and clearance, and a Very Special Thanks to John Holland who is an exceptional volunteer, going out of his way for the Good of the Association with numerous activities, including maintaining the Community Area in the Orchard, the collection and delivery of the blue barrels and preparing the corner posts for plots, plus much more - our Hidden Hero!!

Of course, a BIG Thank You to the volunteers who deliver the newsletters to tenants that do not have email.

Last, but by no means least, Thank You to Marlow Town Council for their support and consideration for all matters related to the Allotments. Especially this year as there have been so many other vitally important and crucial matters to deal with in the Town, especially Debbie who has gone out of her way on numerous occasions, even at the weekend, to resolve issues on both of the sites.

All help, no matter how small, means that together we make the Allotment Community such a pleasure to be part of.



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**Allotment Working Party Meeting.** The Committee members met recently, via Zoom, with Marlow Town Council to cover allotment issues, below is a brief summary of these matters:

- a) FP playground area: At present no planning permission will be put forward for this area, the Council have no confirmed plans for this area at this time.
- b) Additional Standpipe at HH. The Council have agreed to install an additional stand pipe at Hanging Hill in a location where a further 6 plots have been created recently, causing a huge demand on the nearest tap.
- c) Locks: As the combination locks have proved to be a preferred option to the previous key padlocks, MTC will be organising a refund system for deposits paid on the keys for the old system.
- d) Open & closing times for the allotments: Due to complaints by residents regarding the noise made by the opening and closing of the allotment gates in the early hours of the morning, it was agreed that open/closing times will be included in the Allotment Rules & Regulations being from 6am until dark.

**Treasurer's (and Seed Secretary's) Report** - At the end of an "interesting" year, I am happy to report that our finances are in good shape: our membership went up to 141 from 122 in 2019/20, and donations were received outright or in exchange for blue barrels, rabbit manure etc. MAA is also helping newcomers with recycled gardening tools, for which MAA receives small donations a welcome initiative and win/win all round.

A large donation was received to support the Triangle; this did not affect MAA finances because it went straight through to the Council to spend on the Triangle Project, an arrangement we have had since the start of the project, which is still actively supported by MAA (Sylvia).

Membership subscriptions for 2020/21: we have already received 50 early payments, reflected in the accounts – see Note 4, and at the present time of writing, membership has increased to 67. That's very helpful since we are not having our usual AGM, where we collect the bulk of subscriptions. Members are increasingly paying by bank transfer, our preferred payment method at present, as it means we do not have to handle paperwork or money. Cheques or cash are accepted; I heard five pound coins plop through my letterbox the other day, made me smile - if you are delivering your membership payment to my door and require a membership card and / or catalogue, please ring my doorbell so that I can hand them to you (in a socially distanced way) rather than having to deliver them.

The on-line seed order process has really taken off, again, an initiative that 'cuts out the middle man / woman', much appreciated at this time. If you would like to try this option, send me an email and I will arrange it for you. We still get a discount from Kings as you can see on the accounts at Note 2.

In conclusion, a productive year, much needed exercise, fresh air, lovely produce and distraction. Thanks to the Council for keeping the allotments open, thank you for your support and my best wishes to everyone.

### **Elections for the incoming Committee Members with Proposers & Seconders**

We have the pleasure of welcoming a new Committee Member who is keen to be part of the team.

<b>Officer - Chair:</b>	Juliette Chanoir - Proposer: Loredana Cornea	Secunder: Peter Smith
<b>Officer - Treasurer:</b>	Maren Talbot - Proposer: Bill Masser	Secunder: Guy Greenhouse
<b>Officer - Secretary:</b>	Sylvia Miller - Proposer: Richard Hockly	Secunder: Nicole Hockly
<b>Committee Member:</b>	Denise Bagge - Proposer: Bernard Carter	Secunder: Sylvia Miller
<b>Committee Member:</b>	Pete Cooper - Proposer: Fiona Rabson	Secunder: Geraldine Rowe
<b>Committee Member:</b>	John Stilliard - Proposer: John Price	Secunder: John Holland
<b>Committee Member:</b>	Fred Tillier - Proposer: Mike Hopper	Secunder: Graham Miles
<b>New Committee member</b>	Richard Harker - Proposer: Sylvia Miller	Secunder: Maren Talbot

All Committee Officers and Members have been voted in by proxy – if any MAA members wish to comment, question or disagree with any nominations, please do not hesitate to contact a Member of the Committee to lodge this.

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### Messages from tenants:

Shan- Plot 46aHH - *Like many others just wanted to say what a wonderful gift to have the allotments in lockdown. Also, with climate change, what policies if any are in place for allotments to take on board the issues of food scarcity, water and soil depletion in the light of climate change? Is there a way that allotments can design themselves more significantly and holistically to capture water, be it a dew pond and man-made ponds? I am very grateful to all those that have helped over this difficult time to keep the site safe and provide the outside space, whilst enjoying the beautiful growing weather! Thank you all, it makes me feel very lucky to be part of this community.*

Response from S. Miller– Thank you, we all appreciate this gift. Tenants do conserve rainwater, some have drainage systems or have created ponds and wildlife areas, they also create their own compost. Regarding food scarcity, please contact me and I can supply details of local Organisations and Charities that would welcome surplus crop.

Phil -Plot 66aHH - *I wanted to thank the Town Council and MAA Committee for all their hard work this last 7 months to keep the allotments open, I think that they have done a fantastic job to keep the allotments safe, providing clear communication and guidance during this time. The allotments have been a lifeline to many people, providing the only outside opportunity in some cases. At the same time, people such as Sylvia at Hanging Hill have worked hard to fill the vacant plots, thus creating more opportunities for people to use the site, which is fantastic.*

Response from S. Miller: Thank you, your appreciation makes the work that we do worthwhile.

Maren - Plot 28HH -*May I express my thanks to the Council for their positive attitude towards keeping the allotments open during Covid-19. This has been a life saver for us, especially when we were under lockdown and could only venture 2 miles from our homes. The ability to get out of the house, do meaningful exercise in fresh air and work to grow food for the stomach and flowers for the soul was essential for our physical and mental health. The Council showed a visionary and caring approach, many thanks for that.*

Richard – Plot 98FP - *Having my allotment plots, during the pandemic, has been really important for me, everyone has kept to the rules, being outside in a safe environment has been great, especially good for your mental health, focusing on gardening and away from the World outside the fence.*

*Sorry about the Dahlia Talk, let us hope for better things next Year.*

Mary – Plot 40aHH - *As a tenant of part of an allotment, I thought I would like to express my appreciation to the Council for continuing to provide the allotments in Marlow, but especially the one I use at the Hanging Hill site. Especially since March, this has been a haven of peace where I have been able to temporarily escape the restrictions of lockdown, develop and improve my cultivation skills and meet with others (at a distance, of course) doing the same. From conversations I have had with fellow users, this sentiment is commonly felt, especially amongst those living alone. I, and others that I know, also acknowledge the important part played by Marlow Allotments Association and appreciate the excellent communication and support which they provide.*

Sue - Plot40HH - *Dear Debbie and Sylvia, I wanted to thank you for your joint efforts in keeping the Marlow Allotments open to tenants during the current pandemic. It has been such a blessing to be able to escape to the allotments to do a spot of weeding or digging, not to mention the pleasure of harvesting some home grown produce from time to time. Thank you too Sylvia for dropping round my Allotments Association membership card and King's seed Catalogue so promptly. You are both so appreciated, thank you again, stay safe and well. Thanks also to other committee members and our treasurer Maren Talbot who all share the load.*

### Questions from tenants:

Andreij - plot 18HH - *Perhaps the Council would reconsider the bonfire ban on the condition that we could dedicate a special bonfire area, where the tenants could use for burning. Perhaps an area that is furthest away from the residential areas so that the smoke is going to be less of a problem. For example, the communal area situated at the top of the hill. As there are no houses around this area, and it's at the top of the hill, the smoke should not bother the residents.*

Scot - plot 13FP – *A request to the Council about bonfires and the difficulty of disposing of, particularly, diseased or non-compostable plant materials. Whilst appreciating the needs of neighbouring properties, would the council please consider allocating specific times when fires would be allowed, over the late autumn and winter months.*

Shaun - plot 69aHH - *Sorry to burden you with a comment more than a complaint, but would love a bonfire at some time! There is so much garden rubbish that will not rot down!!*

Geoff - plot 75FP - *I am hoping that the council will reconsider this total ban on bonfires. A bonfire once or twice a year is part of nature's recycling of essential elements from pruning to ash & is the only method of disposal in the absence of a powerful shredder. There have been too many inconsiderate bonfires in the past, to remedy this, I suggest that the Council introduce a mandatory restrictive timetable & I would suggest late afternoon in Winter months only (when windows are likely to be closed). Please put this forward at your next meeting.*

Nina & Mike – plot 55HH - *Bonfires and the burning of contaminated/ diseased allotment waste. Why are we no longer able to dispose of this in the most hygienic way? If we do not want it in our own compost why should we put it into the garden waste at home to pass onto others (most inconsiderate and unhygienic)?*

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**Bernard – plot 66FP** -Please give an update on the position of the disused playground adjoining Foxes Piece, noting the categorical assurance given at last year's AGM that there would be no loss of land on the allotments.

What plans does the Council have to undertake repairs or improvement to the Foxes Piece site, (e.g. new fencing, gates and safer paths)?

**Bill - plot 40FP** - The extra trips to the local dump will cause vehicle pollution which also impacts residents, the difference is that this pollution is invisible and less smelly so more difficult to manage. The argument that bonfires cause problems for people shielding can be solved by closing windows as well as by stopping bonfires. Another Covid related point has an analogy here. We hear that a future problem for the NHS will be all the undiagnosed diseases such as cancer that are being ignored now will come back to bite. The same is true with larger waste than would normally be burned. This could be stored on allotments or even fly tipped by the same kind of allotment holders that create a lot of smoke. Can some sort of compromise be found? We've gone from being able to have bonfires from Sept to May to having none at all in one step. For example, there will be lots of smoke around on Nov 5<sup>th</sup>, you could allow bonfires from 16.00 that day, or very still wind-free days, or organise a late night fire. If we work together, we can happily coexist, but I'm very unhappy about this blanket rule & don't see a strong link between people shielding & bonfires in winter months, in summer yes as windows are left open. In winter much less so.

**Peter - plot 26FP**- I'm grateful to you and the committee for supporting the allotment holders and liaising with the Town Council on our behalf. The problems arising from the Covid pandemic are considerable and have been managed with consideration and care for all. I do question, however, if the blanket and indefinite ban on bonfires is consistent with striking a balance between the needs of allotment holders and our neighbours. The rationale from the Town Council is that there are more people at home because of general restrictions. This is perhaps changing a little, especially during the cooler weather, neighbours might be able to and want to keep their windows shut. Could I please therefore ask, if there is not another approach that could be considered, perhaps by limiting the hours or days during the week or at least to review this ban when there is more evidence about what might be the level of harm and distress caused and how to mitigate these?

**Tim – plot 5HH** - Couple of questions/ points to raise from me:1. Do we know if the local residents to the allotment do have respiratory issues or is the council assuming they do without actually knowing for sure?2. There is not a house lock down - residents are allowed to leave their houses if we specified one particular day for bonfires.3. Will the council be offering an alternative way of getting rid of unwanted waste such as several large skips that can be filled and taken away by the council? Happy to chat this through, as I like to see suggested solutions to a potential issue not just a blanket ban on bonfires without considering an alternative.

**Richard – Plot 98FP** – My first point that I would like to ask the Council is if the large branches overhanging Plot 92 (by the fence) can be pruned safely, to let more light onto my plot, and lessen the chance of them falling on my head if weakened by Winter Gales etc. The Second point to ask the Council, is about the safety of the very large tree by the entrance to Foxes Piece near the Flats. The lower branches seem to have grown horizontally, and might be a danger to walk under in high winds.PS Mr Les Tester and myself (less frequently) cut the grass outside the gate, and cut the grass near, and under the notice board. I have also helped keep the grass paths near Martin's plot under control.

### Replies and Messages from Marlow Town Council

**Key Refunds** -Though we had planned to do key refunds with the renewals this year, unfortunately, we were informed that due to the rise in COVID cases the office must remain closed to the public. We have therefore been unable to complete this process. Once we get the go ahead to reopen to the public, this will be communicated to all tenants.

**Bonfires** -We understand the frustration in the ban on bonfires but, again due to COVID, we have had to put a stop to all fires for the immediate future. Please understand that the allotment sites have care homes, medical facilities, schools and people that are shielding as immediate neighbours. We ask that you please remove any non-compostable materials from the allotments rather than allowing waste to build up on site. As per the Allotment Rules, tenants are responsible for the removal of their own waste. Once again when we receive the go ahead, bonfires will again be permitted.

**Playground Area at Foxes Piece** –That is covered in the section reporting the AWP meeting.

**Site Renovations at Foxes Piece** -There are no confirmed plans at present for Foxes Piece Site.

**Tree by Foxes Piece entrance gate at the flats** -The tree at the entrance to Foxes Piece has been surveyed by the tree officers at Buckinghamshire Council and there is no work scheduled for the tree.

**Tenancy Renewals** - These must be completed, submitted and paid before the end of November. If any tenants have not yet received theirs please contact: Marlow Town Council Office tel: 484024 or email: debbie@marlow-tc.gov.uk

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The Committee of the Marlow Allotments Association sends best wishes for a healthy and fruitful year, stay safe.