

The Marlow Allotments Association



Minutes of the thirty-ninth Annual General Meeting, held in Liston Hall, 22nd November 2022 at 7.30pm

Attendance:

Incoming Committee: Chair: Huw Stevenson, Treasurer: Maren Talbot, Secretary: Sylvia Miller, Minutes Secretary: John Stilliard, Denise Bagge, Ian Brown, Pete Cooper, Fred Tillier
New Committee Member to be voted in at this AGM: Ian Brown

MAA Members and Guests: Mr & Mrs Stephen Back, Richard Bailey, Sarah Beddall, Liz Bunt, Bernard Carter, Esme & Chris Davies, Richard De Coverley, Tom Doust, Peter Edmunds, Richard Engall, Peter England, Susan Gale, Catherine Harker, Richard Hockly, John & Yvonne Holland, David & Lyn Howell, Bill & Trish Kilner-Smith, Helen Lucas, Geoff Lomas, Christine Mace, Harry Mac Donald, Colin Naphthine, Clare Rowan, Gill & Peter Smith, Ann Stuart, Lesley Wellington.

Welcome by Acting Chair Huw Stevenson: With thanks to Juliette Chanoir who has recently stood down owing to family commitments – MAA are most grateful to Juliette for her efforts in the role and her ongoing Commitment to the website maintenance.

Good evening and welcome to all attending tonight at Liston Hall, MAA's first 'in person' AGM for 3 years.

Thank you all for coming this evening and do encourage any neighbouring plot holders who are not yet members of the MAA to join. The greater membership adds voice & strength to our various conversations with Marlow Town Council on the issues raised by you, their tenants. Unfortunately, owing to a clash of diary commitments, the Mayor and Council members responsible for the allotments are unable to be here the Committee will take any observations and questions back to them on your behalf. The mayor has provided a message from MTC.

Reading a resume of last year's report, I see that many of the points raised therein, including many by tenants, have been addressed through the year and individual reports as set out in the agenda for this meeting will deal with these. We have been beset with another long hot summer with no precipitation for some 10 weeks from the middle of June, resulting in the inevitable hosepipe ban. Equally predictably, the rain arrived shortly thereafter. I am pleased that notwithstanding the initial advice from MTC they were quick to correct guidance on the permitted use of hosepipes on allotments (for your crops but not your flowers) when prompted by MAA.

Although neither are my speciality, I am advised that both HH and FP were clear of tomato and potato blight this year which will have been a relief to many. Thanks to the generosity of my neighbouring plot holders at FP we had productive kohlrabi, aubergine and pumpkin to enjoy this year, all new to me as home-grown crops, whilst others at FP and HH will have had their own successes (and doubtless some disappointments). The joy of allotmenting is as much in the travel, conversations along the way and trialling something new that you had never thought of growing as it is in the final output (rewarding though that is), and a good year is when the successes leave you optimistic enough to return, and ever hopeful that the next year will be productive. I hope you all have the time and energy in the coming weeks to put your plots comfortably to bed for the winter, ready for a fruitful year ahead. Huw Stevenson – Acting MAA Chair.

(SM) H&S Fire Safety instruction – Please note that the main door will be locked until the meeting has ended for security & safety reasons, points out the Emergency Exits & fire extinguishers in the Main Hall.

(HS) Introduce of Minutes Secretary – Committee Member John Stilliard has offered to be the Official Minutes Secretary. Accepted.

(SM) Apologies for absence from members and tenants: Sylvia Miller thanked Huw for standing in and stated that the mayor and officers could not attend due to a diary clash as this the only evening when we could book the hall. Any questions for the Mayor and the MTC officers will be sent to them and responses will be included in the next newsletter.

(HS) Message from Mayor Councillor Richard Scott - I understand that your Association continues to be strong and from a several visits I have made to the allotments over the past year, I can see that your allotments are productively maintained. Indeed, the range of fruit, vegetables and plants is very impressive. The Council continues to be pleased with your stewardship and we have tried to support this by maintaining our two sites in good order. Trees on both Hanging Hill and Foxes Piece have been inspected by members of the allotment association and the office officers and tree works have been carried out over both sites. There are further tree works to be carried out on the tree at the entrance by Dedmere Rise and the Maple trees next to the old playground at Foxes Piece before the end of the year.

A water leak was detected in a main pipe at Hanging Hill and repaired, our amenity Officers have been quick to respond and repair leaking taps when reported in by tenants.

We will continue to use Community Payback when available to assist with the clearing of brambles at both allotment sites.

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The council has responded to concerns over bonfire banning and tenants are now permitted to burn waste by use of an incinerator during the months of November and December 2022.

The Council has always been pleased to hold regular meetings with representatives of your Association, which gives us the opportunity to exchange views and give updates on current matters.

My best wishes for the Festive Season and we all look forward to a successful 2023.

Kind Regards, Cllr Richard Scott, Marlow Town Mayor

(HS) Year End Report 2021 & matters arising from it: Juliette Chanoir was thanked for her work in maintaining the allotment website.

There were no comments on the report and an acceptance was Proposed by Richard Hockly and Seconded by Fred Tillier.

(DB) Report of pruning and care of trees and shrubs - In Autumn 2021 the Allotment Association brought to the Town Council's attention the need for an ongoing of program of work to get to grips with the trees and large shrubs on both allotment sites. We identified three main categories of action needed.

First, there are a number of trees overhanging plots that may be a danger to the tenants and have an impact on the ability of the tenants to grow produce.

Secondly, there are shrubs and hedges that have become overgrown because of years of neglect. They are often full of dead and dying branches, strangled with brambles and other creeping vines.

Thirdly, there are specimen trees on both sites which are often protected trees, such as Walnuts, that need to be regularly reviewed.

Since Autumn 2021 the Town Council has brought in contractors and done work themselves in all of these areas, we are now reviewing the sites again to see what has to be kept up and if anything has been missed. The aim is to review every Spring and Autumn and to see what can be done within the budget and resources. The Council now has 2 staff who are chainsaw qualified.

We have agreed with the Town Council that it is important that work is undertaken with the knowledge of the tenants on nearby plots and any debris is removed safely without causing damage. Please let MTC know if you have any concerns about the work. Finally, it is the responsibility of all the tenants not to create future problems with the trees and shrubs on their plots. The Town Council have therefore asked that tenants ensure that they restrict themselves to planting fruiting trees and shrubs on suitable dwarf stock; no Xmas trees or Leylandii please!

(SM) Secretary's Report

New Tenants – Over the past year new tenants were FP x21 and HH x25, MAA liaise closely with the Council aiming to relet vacant plots as quickly as possible, in order to ensure the site is continually at full capacity. We all know that taking on a neglected plot is a huge challenge and normally takes a few years until it takes shape, however, this year some new tenants have proved to be excellent allotment gardeners.

Waiting lists & vacant plots – The waiting list total is currently 27 people, of which 14x have a preference for FP, 10x for HH & 3x for either site. This is constantly changing as there is active interest from local residents to take on an allotment plot. Vacant plots are yet to be confirmed, as some ex-tenants are still vacating their plots, and all will be relet at the end of this month or start of December.

Bonfires - As most of you will already be aware, at the request of MAA Committee Members, MTC have allowed bonfires from 1st November to 31st December 2022, incinerators must be used, no open fires are allowed. Tenants should ensure the fires are under control and follow safety guidelines, including ensuring that a bucket of water is nearby in case of emergencies and only burning dry matter.

AWP Meetings - During the last AWP meeting with MTC there were some new matters covered:

Change in Renewal Year - MTC announced their intent to alter the renewal year to fall in line with their Financial Year, which is 1st April to 31st March. This means that the renewal date of 1st November 2022 will cover a five-month period up to 31st March 2023 and the rent charged will be a pro-rata figure. This will have been explained in the renewal notices recently issued by the Council.

Plot Numbering - MTC advised that they plan to renumber all plots on both sites over the coming Winter period. This will mean that each plot will have a unique number and there will no longer be 'a' or 'b' plots. In the case of 10x pole plots, these will be allocated two numbers and marker posts placed in situ, in preparation for a time in the future when the ten-pole plot will be split into two plots.

Winter Work party – There has been a delay with the start of this, it is planned to organise this to begin in January as we are now approaching the 'silly season' of the Christmas period when the volunteers will have family priorities. The first

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project will be to prune back the trees in the Orchard at HH, the second is to repair the deer fence at the top of HH. Some of you have already offered to assist with this, if anyone else would like to help please do not hesitate to contact SM.

Events – There have been two BBQ events this year with a good attendance at each event. In August Richard was able to repeat the marvellous Dahlia talk that he has carried out in previous years, which again was informative and interesting with new advice and information. Last month Maren organised an orchid talk which was fascinating & informative. Thank you to all who contributed to these events. Finally, we plan to organise a Seed Swap at the start of next year in Holland's Hut, this will give members a chance to swap their surplus seeds & seedlings with others. We will contact you all nearer the time with details.

Facebook – Despite the need to stand down from the Committee, Juliette will continue to manage & update the Website & Facebook page for MAA. Details and links will be on the website, along with her contact details should you have problem accessing this.

Wood chippings – These are available free of charge to all tenants. There are four wood chip bays at Hanging Hill, and one at FP with plans for a second woodchip bay to be constructed near the entrance by the Flats. Please note that the arrangement for the delivery of the woodchips is with a 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.

FP Playground Area – MTC report that there have been no further steps regarding the planning action.

Water Shut off – The water supply on both sites will be turned off for the winter period on 28.11.2022.

Donated Tools & Equipment – We have received donations of a large quantity of tools and equipment, which we give to members in return for a small donation to the Association. Please contact a Committee Member for more details.

Allotment Competitions - We are hopeful that the Allotment Competitions can be re-commenced next year and should have some news on this in the next Newsletter, which will be early next year.

Committee Meetings - Committee were only able to meet twice over the past year, the minutes of each meeting are available on the website and notice boards on both sites. If any member would like to attend a Committee Meeting as an Observer or join the Committee, please get in touch with me.

Thank you to the Committee members – JC as Chair, and for her work on the Website and Facebook Page, MT as Treasurer, DB for her time with the new project on dangerous and overhanging trees & shrubs, Huw for stepping in as Chair on a co-opt basis this evening and the other Committee Members for their input, support and encouragement.

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

Thank you to MTC for their continual support of the Allotments Sites and arranging the hire of this room, and 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 a productive crop for the coming year.

(HS) Chair requests a Proposer and Seconder for the Report from those present, Proposed by Peter England and Seconded by Geoff Lomas.

(MT) Treasurer & Seed Secretary's Report: Dear Members, last year was a good year for membership with 144 tenants signing up as members of the Marlow Allotments Association. This is a little down on the year before (153) and we hope to do better this year. The benefits offered include membership of the National Allotments Society (NSALG), whose aims are to protect the Integrity of the Allotments Sites, access to Seed Orders from Kings at favourable rates & access to our tool recycling initiative, where members donate pre-loved equipment to be passed on to newcomers or other members for a modest donation.

The 'pre-loved' tools sale has been a great success gaining over £300.00 to the Association. If people have any spare tools, please consider giving them to the Association.

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

Most of your contribution goes to the NSALG (currently £3.00 per person). They are not planning to increase their membership fees and neither are we for at least another year., and we have managed to reduce our insurance costs by £11.66 as we are good customers. We continue to try and eliminate 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 M Talbot, 4 Hazel Close, Marlow SL7 3PW.

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Regarding the Seed Scheme, we are encouraging members to place orders online via the NSALG/Kings website. Last year, over twice 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 and order forms are still available, but to save paper and the cost of distribution, Kings have put the 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 transfer to the MAA. At the end of the year MAA receives a discount, which came to £109.10 this year, that's 10% up on last year, a welcome result! Wishing you all a Happy New Gardening Year. Maren Talbot, Treasurer & Seed Secretary (mtalbot@talktalk.net) (HS) Chair requests a Proposer and Seconder for the Report from those present. Proposed by Sylvia Miller and Seconded by Fred Tillier.

(SM) Elections with Proposers & Seconders

		Proposer	Seconder
Officer - Chair:	Huw Stevenson	Ian Brown	Kate Marshall
Officer - Treasurer:	Maren Talbot	Guy Greenhouse	Sarah Greenhouse
Officer - Secretary:	Sylvia Miller	Peter England	Daphne Roberts
Minutes Secretary:	John Stilliard	John Holland	Sylvia Miller
Committee Member:	Denise Bagge	Robert Frost	Bernard Carter
Committee Member:	Pete Cooper	Geraldine Rowe	Maren Talbot
Committee Member:	Fred Tillier	Neil Garside	Mike Hopper
Committee Member:	Richard Harker	Claire Lugg	Susan Gale
New Committee Member:	Ian Brown	Sylvia Miller	Huw Stevenson

Request by Secretary for show of hands (for/against/abstain) for each Committee Member in turn, there was a majority of votes for each Incoming Committee Member.

(HS) Amendment to MAA Rules – Changes as agreed by the Committee (Meeting 26th September 2022).

Context	Proposed change/addition	Reason:
Addition	Statement that MAA operates solely in the UK	Required by banks
Election of Committee Officers & Members	Proposers and Seconders must be Members of the Association at the time of proposal.	To provide clarity
Addition	<u>Rule Changes:</u> Any changes to Rules shall be included in the Notice convening the General Meeting. Rule changes must be agreed by a majority of members present and voting at any General Meeting.	Currently missing
Addition	<u>Data Protection:</u> The Association shall hold limited personal information about its members to enable the efficient running of and communication within the Association. It fully complies with UK legislation. Details are covered in the MAA Data Protection document is available upon request.	Currently missing

The Chair thanked Maren for her hard work and input for this report and requested for a Proposer and Seconder. Proposed Ian Brown & Seconded by John Holland, HS also asked for a show of hands in favour of the changes, the majority of those present voted in favour.

(SM) Badger Damage Report

Over the years there has been clear evidence of the presence of badgers at HH site, with the appearance of large holes excavated in the ground some with aromatic deposits, plus the occasional vegetables excavated & chewed. However, in recent years the damaged crop incidents have increased dramatically, now that they have sampled strawberries and sweetcorn. In the last two years neither of these crops have been safe from badgers, no matter how secure that fencing attempts, there is video footage of them accessing strawberry cages and trampling on the crop that they do not eat, likewise they are filmed forcing their way into wire mesh & wood re-enforced cages (or digging underneath) to access the sweetcorn, they then lean against the plants which topple to the ground and will trample & destroy the crop they do not eat. This year they have added

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carrots to their varied diet, they will dig them all out of the ground partially chew and leave the bed in a devastated state. Therefore, I have prepared a report containing details of plots that have been affected with loss of crop, there are many more plots affected from holes dug and plants excavated where the badgers are searching for slow worms & slugs etc, as that is the price for living with the wildlife I have not at present included those in my report. There is clear evidence that they are accessing the site from three directions.

As we are all aware they are a protected species and there are those out there that wish to harm these large beautiful creatures. Whilst MAA is keen to ensure tenants can work unencumbered on their plots, working with nature and wildlife, this damage is far more than a few holes dug to access slugs or the gift of a manure deposit. However, we are in a quandary with the need to construct ever stronger defence systems in order to grow our crop, if that is our only option, then so be it.

There is another concern, because as tenants suffer complete devastation of their crop each year due to the ever-growing presence of badgers, the word will spread to their friends and neighbours, until eventually those that wish the badgers harm will learn of this, which could then endanger the healthy and expanding badger population by hunters for the fur. Unless anyone here can make an alternative suggestion, it appears that have two possible strategies which may result in their relocation, the first is on the grounds of their protection from local hunters and the second is if it can be confirmed they carry Bovine TB. Should a dead badger be discovered, the Council must be notified immediately in order to test for Bovine TB, which could harm local cattle.

With support from our members, we plan to contact the local organisations that are concerned with Badger Welfare to discover what can be done in an attempt protect the species, which hopefully will then ensure that next year we will have more success with our crops.

If anyone has any ideas as to how to improve the situation, please provide them to Sylvia Miller.

HS called for votes in favour of this report and the proposals put forward to deal with the problem, there was a majority vote supporting this action.

Holland's Hut

HS thanked all those that voted for a name from the selections volunteered by members, the clear winner by a large majority was 'Holland's Hut', many voters mentioned that they felt that John should have recognition for the many hours/days of hard work that he put into this project.

As previously advised, he has been able to source a large amount of material second hand, however, he has also purchased supplies required such as solid wood for the base, roofing materials, paint, nails etc, the cost to him for this was in the excess of £100.00. He has actually lodged a claim valued £97.00, to MAA in respect of compensation for these 'out of pocket expenses', which have resulted in a solid awesome construction that will benefit the Association for many years to come. This has already been authorised unanimously by the Committee, however, before claiming these funds, John would prefer that all members support this compensation claim and has requested a vote from members present.

Request by Chair for votes for & against- there was a majority of votes in favour. HS then presented to John an engraved plaque and a case of beer, John Holland was almost lost for words with presentation, (a rare occasion for all who know John) and mentioned that there are a lot of people on both sites who chip in & helped out at the allotments.

Message from John Holland

Please find below a brief breakdown of expenditure and below a description of examples of the use of recycled materials to minimise need for additional expense, (financial outlay):

1) Purchase of Donor shed (sourced to provide timber to construct a Surplus tool and Orchard Lawnmower store, shed, discounted price£50. During dismantling process - in Frieth, plank by plank (Donor was not a sectional shed) roofing felt beyond saving, rear side riddled with wood worm - seller refunded half of original selling price of £100.

2) Purchase of reclaimed OSB boards for Floor covering, Qty five boards 6ft x 30inches (Floor area 12ft long by 6ft wide) 5x £5ea.....£25

3) Wood stain 2x 5L from Hunts closing down sale reduced from £21ea to £11 each, (Qty 2 x £11)£22.
The above makes a total of £97.

Reason for considering uses of a Donor shed: In regards to purchase of Donor shed - Following COVID, timber prices have sky rocketed, (not just DIY supplies but also Reclaimed timber at Cressex). The Donor although experiencing some rotten panels (wood worm etc). The timber frame on its own was a worth the money for example: 3-4inch posts are £3.50 to £4 per metre, 12foot horizontal rails would be 3m ea (£12ea and there are qty 6 used in the re- construction).

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Obviously, this example doesn't include vertical supports, roof joists & cladding planks, so I think the £50 is well spent. I have used a myriad of screws nails, clout nails for roofing felt, 40 & 50mm screws for cladding the planks, 70,80,100, 150mm screws and bolts for the frame, (Very long bolts, the floor joists and main timber frame are 3-4inches thick), some gutter brackets, end stops and down pipe connector. These costs have not been included above, but it would be churlish to try and account for every nail, consider it my gift.

The Donor shed could not be rebuilt exactly, plank by plank due to wood worm issues hence the need for a redesign to make use of more glass in the form of French Doors and double-glazed windows (recycled/repurposed items). Donated items from others;

a) Pair of wooden framed French doors.

b) Pair of UPVC framed French doors.

c) qty 4x double glazed units two along Front side, two along rear side.

d) Roofing Felt Qty 2 donations, one half roll for front side of pitch roof second half roll for the rear roof section.

e) Canopy over UPVC Doors

f) Guttering and down Pipe to include fixings.

g) Roof joist timbers to make solid rectangular and to level the base due to the slope of orchard, ahead of shed floor being constructed/laid.

One aspect that may not be apparent in viewing shed or pictures of the shed;

This was not a sectional shed it had to be dis-assembled plank by plank (and de-nailed). Re-design had to factor in the size of donated windows and careful selection of Cladding planks to make best use of short Vs Long and trying to reduce how many long plans to cut down, in case a long plank would be needed later on. That said I derived a lot of pleasure in applying my motto, "Adapt, Improve, Overcome".

Although the shed's purpose was originally intended to store donated tools & equipment, plus the donated lawnmower (used to regularly cut the orchard's lush grass), I am pleased that it has also been used to host at least one of the MAA meetings.

Ideas, proposals and questions from members - Chair

Bonfires. Geoff Lomas proposed that as the winter pruning is done in January and need to dry out before being burnt that the bonfire timings should be in February & March instead of November & December. SM responded stating this was at the request of the Committee & was her proposal on the basis that last time we were allowed bonfires in February when it rained most of month. Quite a few have pruned back in September and a lot of tenants still had pruning from the previous year that they could not burn. The reason we were able to persuade the Council to have bonfires was due to the justification that it is part of the Eco System when we burn branches and cuttings and return the ash to the soil.

It was agreed that the Committee will ask MTC at the next Working Party to see if February to Mid-March would be acceptable for bonfires. Bill Kilner-Smith said that timing is not a problem if you get yourself organised.

Uncultivated plots. Liz Bunt asked if MTC were doing enough to monitor allotments as many seem to be overgrown and there was a waiting list. SM explained that some tenants were not being offered renewal if they have not been cultivating them and that this was being discussed in the January 2023 committee meeting when a list of plots that were not being cultivated will be sent to MTC for action.

Recycling Equipment Richard Bailey said that Bucks County Council is recommending the following website (<https://www.greatgreensystems.com> based in Leeds) which offers compost bins and other equipment at a reduced cost (400 Litres for £52.99)

Any other business – Chair -There was no other business

Close of meeting – Chair, HS closed the meeting at 8.35 pm