



MINUTES OF THE ALLOTMENT CONFERENCE

Wednesday 12 October 2022 at 7.00pm in the Weald Hall, Civic Centre.

In attendance: Councillor. K. Bedwell
Councillor. B. Cox

32 members of the public
Councillor. D. French
Holly Goring, Town Clerk
Rachel Newton, Senior Administrative Officer
(Minutes taken by Rachel Newton)

1.0 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Before the conference, Cllr. B. Cox (New Town) took a moment to reflect on the recent loss of the late Mike Skinner, who sadly passed away the previous week. Mike Skinner was a dear friend within our community and would be sorely missed.

Cllr. B. Cox introduced members and staff at the top table, including Cllr. K. Bedwell (Ridgewood), members of the Allotment Working Group, the Town Clerk and the Senior Administrative Officer before moving onto the presentation of the allotment winners.

2.0 ALLOTMENT COMPETITION WINNERS 2022

Stavertons Nursery had judged the allotment plots that were entered this year and also read through the accompanying statements from all our entrees which provided a great insight into their workmanship.

The judging criteria for Best Kept included condition of plot, good workmanship, quality of crops, flowers, fruits and veg and plants, water conservation, encouragement of wildlife, use of recycled materials and condition of paths, garden buildings.

The judging criteria for Ecological Award included reuse, reduce and recycle, efforts to conserve water, encouraging insects and wildlife to the plot and ecological statement.

The winners were read out under each of the following categories:

Best Kept Winners:

Framfield Road West – Andrew & Mary Ford
Framfield Road East – Gareth & Zoe Sherry
Bell Lane – Vic Oliver
Bell Lane– Leon Stephen Davies (runner up)

Ecological Award:

Framfield Road West – Andrew & Mary Ford

Children's Award:

Framfield Road West – Maya Kala (who grows pumpkins because she loves pumpkin soup in winter!)

Each winner above received a Winners' Certificate and spending voucher worth £25, with the runner up prize £10.

The Overall Winner:

Framfield Road West – Andrew & Mary Ford

The 'Allotment Shield' was presented to this years' winners (with engraving of names included) along with their Winners' Certificate.

3.0 SHORT TALK FROM GEOFF KNIGHT (ALLOTMENT TENANT) ON THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF HAVING AN ALLOTMENT

Allotment holder, Geoff Knight, talked about the rewards and health benefits of time spent on an allotment. This was a very positive and insightful message to all allotment tenants and others who may wish to join and become healthier and happier.

Geoff explained that his journey had been so rewarding over the year and had improved his physical, mental and spiritual health. Although it was hard graft and involved time and planning, the true value of learning new life skills and producing tasty food (especially in the current economic climate) was important to so many of us.

Also, with mental health issues on the rise and often mentioned in the media, especially during the pandemic, an allotment had provided a safe space for so many to enjoy and socially interact and be part of a community.

The allotments were also shared by many members of the Uckfield Men's Shed who were retirees and needed a different form of activity and connection with others. The allotments provided an opportunity for many of these men to get fit again and have a sense of purpose and provide the opportunity to share the produce with family and friends.

Geoff concluded in his talk that the local Community Fridge was a place where allotment holders could play their part in helping others, by taking along any surplus food, and seeds could also be swapped and shared there too.

4.0 PRESENTATION FROM THE UCKFIELD GREEN PARTNERSHIP

The Uckfield Green Partnership (UGP), a local group of volunteers offering advice and support to families and companies to save money and reduce pollution and waste, were looking at ways to promote UGP and collaborate with like-minded groups in the area.

Roger Isaacson, of The Uckfield Green Partnership provided a short presentation on the ways in which we could all improve our lifestyles and make Uckfield a greener place to live.

There were three focus groups: 'Energy and Transport', 'Green Environment' and 'Sustainable Living'. Allotment holders were asked to look out for articles and ideas under these headings in the local Uckfield Matters newsletter which was issued every month.

The topics which had already been covered in the newsletter included promoting the idea of cycling and public transport options, how much energy home appliances used and cost of living tips.

There were also several closely associated Uckfield Groups with many incredible volunteers, who had already helped to provide a whole range of environmentally friendly solutions. The following list of groups was provided for anyone who may wish to join:

Brighter Uckfield, Fairtrade Uckfield, Uckfield Local Nature Reserve Supporters Group, Uckfield Community Fridge, Manor Park and Hempstead Fields, Uckfield Men's Shed, Uckfield Millennium Green Trust and The Uckfield Repair Café.

In conclusion, Roger announced that this was the first of many steps being, and to be, taken by volunteers over the next decade or so, and it was hoped that this talk had brought attention to these important issues.

Cllr B. Cox thanked both speakers for their inspirational talks and hoped that they had encouraged people to join those groups and work alongside one another.

5.0 UPDATE FROM THE TOWN COUNCIL'S ALLOTMENT WORKING GROUP

Councillor K. Bedwell provided a PowerPoint presentation [see item 6.1 (App A) – Allotment Conference Powerpoint slides]

The Town Clerk added that as part of a new contract agreement with tenants from 1 April 2023, there would be a schedule of grounds maintenance and what was expected from tenants. The grass cutting had not been as effective last year, partly due to staffing issues and weather related issues. The Town Clerk asked for tenants to bear with the organisation whilst we worked through this change.

6.0 QUESTIONS ALREADY SUBMITTED PRIOR TO THE CONFERENCE

None received.

7.0 Q&A FROM THE FLOOR

Attendees were welcomed to ask questions from the floor. Councillor. B. Cox facilitated the Q&A session with the Town Clerk providing a roving microphone to assist with sound levels.

Q. Where are the two new allotments created? Just to bear in mind that some people would struggle to go the distance to get to the water taps.

A. The resident was informed that one allotment was created on the Ridgewood allotment site and another was planned to be created at the Bird in Eye allotment site. Also, during the hosepipe ban, people who were Blue Badge holders had been able to register on the Priority Service Register with a mobility issue, so could still use a hose for watering an allotment. Tenants were asked to let the council know if this was the case.

Q. I only recall two grass cuts, although six were mentioned. The last one, carried out by a contractor, resulted in piles of cut dead grass where the machine had jumped over it and left long grass. They did not come down the pathways in between. The old Ground staff used to use a hand mower, which went up and down and kept it really nice.

A. The Town Clerk said that contractors did cut the grass in our open spaces for a period of time during the summer to assist the Grounds team whilst they held staff vacancies and apologised if service standards had been impacted as a result of these issues. New staff had to be guided with this new way of working. The Town Clerk would discuss further with the Head Groundsman prior to the 2023 cutting season.

Q. A resident and member of Brighter Uckfield wished to thank Rachel and the Grounds staff because the brambles and stinging nettles had been cut against the fence to the left-hand side of Framfield Road.

Q It was a great help and they had done what they said they would do. Also, on the point about the hand mower, the former Head Groundsman did find on several occasions that on Framfield Road East allotments site it wrecked their mowers if they used them on long grass. He hadn't seen the strimmer impacted in this way however.

A. This was noted by staff and councillors.

Q. A tap on the Framfield Road West allotment site was not working and had been placed upside down on the pipework, so it looked a bit odd.

A. Rachel explained that the Head Groundsman had specified that this tap had been left like this until next spring because there would be no point fixing the tap whilst the water was turned off and once the weather changed, taps tended to freeze and break. It would therefore be rectified at that point.

Q. The grass was long on the Bell Lane allotment site as it wasn't cut at the right time of the year.

A. The Town Clerk explained that the Grounds team had experienced a difficult year with substantial changes in staffing, and taking on the grass cutting for the Town Council's open spaces, cemetery and allotments, which had previously been outsourced. This had in itself posed challenges, with new equipment, older equipment needing repair and finding the right balance for the new schedule of cutting.

The Town Clerk would be working with the Head Groundsman to review the year ahead for 2023, and prioritisation of work schedules.

There were other works that fell under the responsibility of the team including preparation of burials and ashes interments at Cemetery, preparation and maintenance of the sports pitches, tree works and addressing ash dieback, culvert clearance etc. Rachel and the new site reps had already identified areas for improvement and communications across the allotments, so tenants were asked to speak to their reps if they have any concerns and this would be fed back to the Town Council.

Q. I don't know who my site rep is.

A. Cllr B. Cox said that the names of all site reps would be placed on the noticeboards so that it would be easier for tenants to know who they were. Also, tenants were told that that they could also contact their local councillors if they preferred, or Rachel at Uckfield Town Council.

Q. It's stopped now but people were dumping rubbish in the river at West Park. Also, marestail was growing along the river bank and up on to the allotments. What could be done about this?

A. Marestail was a real problem and difficult to get rid of. Rachel would find out if there was any further advice that could be circulated about this and would let

allotment holders know.

8.0 LOOKING AHEAD TO 2023 – ALLOTMENT COMPETITION & CONFERENCE

Cllr. B. Cox thanked everyone for all their feedback; last year everyone learnt a lot from this Q&A session and took on board issues that were raised. Any decisions made were guided by that feedback.

Cllr. K. Bedwell thanked everyone for attending and advised that the Town Council would run the Allotment Competition again in 2023. She commended the support of Staverton's Nursery who had been a great help over the years and provided excellent prizes. She asked tenants to get to know their site reps and to join the Allotment Association and if anyone had any feedback on the competition, they were asked to get in touch with the Town Council office before they started planning for next year.

The Allotment Competition could include different categories to enter such as 'Best Newcomer', 'Most Colourful' and 'Most Spectacular', so watch this space!

The meeting closed at 8:05pm

Appendices: Appendix A (copy of the PowerPoint presentation)

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