



MINUTES OF THE ALLOTMENT CONFERENCE

Wednesday 10 September 2025 at 7.00pm in the Weald Hall, Civic Centre.

In attendance: Councillor. K. Bedwell
Councillor. S. Mayhew
Councillor. A. Smith

55 members of the public
Rachel Newton, Senior Administrative Officer
(Minutes taken by Rachel Newton)

1.0 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Cllr. A. Smith thanked everyone for attending and introduced herself (Chair of Environment and Leisure Committee and Councillor for Uckfield North) as well as other members of the Allotment Working Group and staff at the top table, including Cllr. K. Bedwell (Uckfield Ridgewood), Cllr. S. Mayhew (New Town) and the Senior Administrative Officer.

The Director of Manor Park and Hempstead Residents Association also attended to assist the Town Mayor with the announcement of the Scarecrow Competition winners!

Cllr Smith sensed how important the allotments were to so many people in the town. Thinking of the social value, allotments always seemed to bring so much, including community spirit and cohesion, exercise and wholefood produce.

Cllr. S. Mayhew also praised the allotment reps for their ongoing support and for reporting any issues or concerns on the allotments throughout the year. It was lovely to see so many lovely plots this year and what could be achieved.

2.0a. SCARECROW COMPETITION WINNERS 2025

The Scarecrow competition was a town-wide event this year and held in collaboration with Manor Park and Hempstead Fields Residents Association.

Each scarecrow had its own story to tell and some of them even sat with the audience whilst prizes and certificates were announced and presented to the winners in each of the following categories:



UNDER 12s COMPETITION WINNER:

Georgia, Jacob and Rebecca, Lealands Drive.

'LEGOMAN'

Prize: Certificate & Amazon voucher gifted by Manor Park & Hempstead Residents Association, & presented by Peter Griggs - Secretary



BUSINESS COMPETITION WINNER:

Uckfield Community Fridge, The Source hub garden, Hospital Approach.

'Mary Poppins'

... 'Pop-in' and see us (to complement The Fridge)'.

Certificate and Prize of a Box of Chocolates, gifted by Uckfield Town Council



HOUSEHOLD COMPETITION WINNER:

Wendy Tagg, Manor Park.

'Lady Tatty Flower'

... 'who likes to drift around the garden in a floral frock, gathering herbs and seed heads as she goes'

Prize: Certificate & Box of Chocolates, gifted by Uckfield Town Council



OVERALL WINNER – CAROLE WALDEN – 'RAG BAG'

Carole Walden, Manor Park (Household Competition Entry).

'Rag Bag'

... 'Traditional handmade scarecrow with trimmings. It's been fun making him! I used crown of old morris dancing hat and stuffed with recycling material!'

Prize: Certificate, Box of Chocs & seasonal plant gifted by Uckfield Town Council

2.0b. ALLOTMENT COMPETITION WINNERS 2025

The Chair was pleased to announce that Stavertons Nursery were able to sponsor us again this year. The judging took place in early July and the judges were extremely impressed by the array of produce and flowering plants growing in the summer. There were many worthy winners and it was a difficult one for the judges this year! The sites were full of talented newcomers and improved plots on each site.

The Categories this year were:

Best Kept (on each site), Ecological Award, Children's Award, Most Improved (on each site) and Best Newcomers (on each site).

The competition was automatic entry again this year (except the Childrens' Entries) to acknowledge those tenants who would perhaps not normally enter, as this should be a celebration of each of their efforts and what allotments are all about!

The judging criteria for Best Kept allotment 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 and 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.

For the Children's Award, the category was open to children under 16 years of age and for children to decide what they wanted to grow.

The winners were announced (with photos) under each of the following categories:

Best Kept Winners:

Bird in Eye – Dragos Cismas
Framfield Road West – Chris Scraba
Framfield Road East – Caroline Bunker
Ridgewood – Amy Graves & Claire Harrison
West Park – Louise Tennant
Bell Lane – Tom & Rebecca Merchant

Ecological Award:

Framfield Road East – Phil Manning

Each winner above received a Winners' Certificate and gift voucher worth £25.

Children's Award:

Ridgewood – Leon Szymanska (for creating a bed of sunflowers, a tomato plant & strawberries)

The winner received a Winner's Certificate and gift voucher worth £10.

The Overall Winner:

Framfield Road East – Caroline Bunker

The 'Allotment Shield' was engraved and presented to this years' winner along with their Winners' Certificate.

Most Improved:

FRE43B – Heather Berry
FRW4B – Alex Harold, Chris & Julie Goff
BIE10 – Rebecca Lee & Buzz Page
RW26B & RW26F – Ian Scutt
WP11A & WP11B – Will Humphries
BL43A – Vic Oliver

Best Newcomers:

FRE121 – Zacc & Bridget Kauma
FRW13A – Michael Prendergast
BIE10 – Rebecca Lee & Buzz Page
RW2B – Alisa Szymanska
WP7 – Sarah Brown
BL38 – Stephen West

3.0 GUEST SPEAKERS:

- Liz Rennick, new tenant on the Bird in Eye allotments, prepared a testimonial on the benefits of having an allotment plot for her health and wellbeing:

"Having an allotment has truly transformed my mental health, and the way I manage my ADHD. It's become my sanctuary- a peaceful grounding space where I can slow down breathe, and reconnect with nature.

The act of digging, planting and simply being outdoors helps quiet my mind and ease the constant noise that comes from being neurodivergent. There's a soothing rhythm to it all that brings me a sense of calm I rarely find elsewhere.

What's made it even more special is my regular companion: a friendly little robin I named Christopher. He shows up almost every visit, hopping around me as I work, like a tiny guardian of the plot. His presence is a gentle reminder that even small, quiet moments can bring great joy.

The allotment gives me structure, purpose, and a tangible sense of achievement- something that's hard to grasp when living with ADHD. It's not just about growing vegetables; it's about growing stability, peace and self-compassion. Christopher and I agree, it's been the best therapy I never knew I needed."

- Georgia Davis, Supervisor at Coolings Wych Cross Garden Cross, Forest Row talked about their home grown produce and composting efforts, and how the company were working towards minimising their impact on our precious planet. They had impressive plastic and waste management systems in place and avoided pesticides, which was impressive.

- Michael Parker, allotment tenant (Ridgewood) provided an interesting talk on the properties of a Chinese vegetable he was growing on his plot called Light Root. He also handed some seeds out and plants to take home, courtesy of friends in Forest Row who also enjoyed growing this vegetable as part of their diet.

- Vic Oliver, Allotment tenant (Bell Lane) gave a short talk on a story about the bees at Holy Cross Church.

4.0 UPDATES FROM THE TOWN COUNCIL'S ALLOTMENT WORKING GROUP

There was an excellent turnout at the Joint Allotment Working Group on 3 September, which included members of the Allotment Association and reps for each site.

Councillor K. Bedwell provided some of the latest updates:

Framfield allotments car park to be locked at night

From 1 November, the gate to the Framfield Road allotments car park would be closed on a trial basis after 6pm and opened up each morning by a member of the Allotment Association between 9-9:30am. This car park was for allotment holders to drop off gardening equipment and plants. A temporary notice would be placed on the gate and tenants would be notified in advance.

It was suggested to contact the Mens' Shed to see if they could help with more permanent signage if this worked.

Bicycle locks are a success!

The bike lock system was being trialled on the Ridgewood and Framfield West allotment sites and we received some positive feedback from the Allotment Association and tenants.

This was initially being trialled on the Bird in Eye site, to deter anti-social behaviour and dog walkers from accessing the allotment sites with dogs off leads. However, it was felt that at this particular entrance, it would encourage better use of the lock by moving the gate to provide a car length space to enable safer locking and unlocking. Those works will commence shortly.

ALLOTMENT FEES & CHARGES

The next annual invoicing period would commence from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027 and members would review the allotment charges for 2026/27 later in the year.

WAITING LIST AND GROUNDS MAINTENANCE UPDATES

37 people currently waiting for a plot (waiting list similar to last year)

31 new starters since April 2025, with some impressive plots including three new plots created to accommodate by dividing some larger plots. One further plot created recently near the entrance to the Bird in Eye site, which should also enhance this space.

5.0 'GARDENING QUESTION TIME'

We were lucky to have a panel of gardening experts this year from each allotment site answering questions from the audience. Councillor Bedwell facilitated this session with Rachel providing a roving microphone to assist with sound levels.

A new tenant on the Bird in Eye allotment site had submitted a couple of questions prior to the conference to raise:

Q. Please can I have some advice on what to plant from now to have a spring crop? This would be useful to know for us newbies.

A. Tenants can get autumn sowing broad beans from Kings seeds and plant in autumn and beans would come up as an early spring crop.

Q. Is there any way we can have swap shop or market place of things like equipment, netting, greenhouses, fruit cages etc, either online or a notice board at the "hut"?

A. The Allotment Association were in the middle of making huge improvements to the hut so this would be passed on to them for something to consider in the near future.

Q. Stuart Woodham, rep on the Framfield East allotment site, had alerted tenants to recent blight on potatoes and tomatoes, and asked:

Is there any way to limit blight, to prevent it from spreading from one allotment to another?

A. With spores coming from this kind of invasion, a recommendation was made to do an early harvest of cauliflower and cabbages, which should prevent this from happening in the first place.

Q. The hedge border between the hospital and the Framfield East allotments side needs cutting back again.

A. The Head Groundsman had put this item on his maintenance list for the allotments side and stock fencing to be repaired. Rachel was in the process of establishing when car park side would be cut again, as the hospital contractors had changed, and would ask them to put any cuttings at the end of the allotments for disposal.

(Rachel also reported the hedge between the Hospital and the Framfield West allotments was over 3m high which was passed onto their landscaping contractor to carry out those works)

Q. Following the Joint Allotment Working Group meeting on 3rd September, has there been an official reply from Persimmons developers regarding the recent request for an additional pedestrian access point onto the allotment site, from the other end?

The Property Manager from Persimmons had responded in July, although we did provide a verbal update at a previous working group meeting, so apologies that this did not get relayed officially.

There are concerns with public liability insurance for the estate's privately managed areas and Persimmons would need to speak to their broker if they were opening up a path for public use (i.e. for non-residents of Harland Park area) in land that was not meant to be accessed.

Also, if the path was being cleared by someone other than a contractor, they would also need a risk assessment and health and safety documents, including a method statement so this was not a viable option.

Persimmons also had a slight concern about people walking across the land to access the allotments, as there was currently no defined path and the ground is uneven.

6.0 PRESENTATION BY DAVID NEWBERY, SECRETARY OF THE ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

The Secretary of the Allotment Association, David Newbery provided a powerpoint presentation to highlight some recent improvements to the allotment hut (AppB attached) and to encourage tenants to make use of this asset.

From January 2026 the £6 membership fee would be scrapped to enable all allotment holders to become automatic members. Instead of charging the £6 fee, the idea was to generate money by the numbers using the shop.

Only allotment holders will be entitled to the 50% discount on seed orders and cheaper products from September 2026. The hut was at the Framfield Road allotments car park, which is open every Sunday.

The Allotment shop price list and monthly newsletter would be distributed to all tenants, including updates to the shop and opening times.

Members would be encouraged to use the shop as much as possible, as this would boost revenue and over time, who knows where this will lead!

A WhatsApp group was also being trialled on the Framfield West allotment site first, to provide a sense of community for local growers. This would be expanded to other sites so that reps can be contacted directly.

The association also planned to carry out the allotment checks next year without the attendance of council officials for the first time, whilst flagging up any issues or concerns. This could be time consuming and made perfect sense for the Allotment Association to monitor the sites as they were onsite throughout the year.

7.0 LOOKING AHEAD TO 2026 – ALLOTMENT COMPETITION & CONFERENCE

Cllr Smith thanked everyone for their time and for attending and participating in this year's 'Gardening Question Time'.

Looking towards 2026, two diary dates were booked ahead:

- Plant Swap on Saturday 23 May 2026
- Flower and Produce Show on Saturday 25 July 2026

(The Source Car Park, Civic Approach, Uckfield)

Please get in touch with any ideas, including cake making, competitions, wonky fruit, banners and anything else, we'd love to hear from you!

The Town Council also welcomed any new ideas for the Allotment Competition next year and were looking forward to seeing everyone at the Allotment Conference in 2026.

The meeting closed at 8:20pm

Appendices: Appendix A (copy of the PowerPoint presentation)