MINUTES OF THE ALLOTMENT CONFERENCE
Wednesday 10 September 2026 at 7.00pm in the Weald Hall, Civic Centre.

In attendance: Councillor. K. Bedwell
Councillor. S. Mayhew
Councillor. B. Reed

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

1.0 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Councillor Karen Bedwell welcomed everyone to the 2026 Allotment Meeting and thanked allotment holders, representatives and volunteers for attending.

The meeting provided an opportunity to look back at the year so far, celebrate work taking place across the allotment sites, hear from guest speakers, receive updates from the Allotment Working Group and take questions from the audience.

Councillor Bernadette Reed, Vice Chair of the Environment & Leisure Committee, introduced herself. Councillor S. Mayhew and Rachel also introduced themselves.

The importance of continuing to work in partnership with allotment holders, representatives and the Uckfield Allotment Association was emphasised, with good communication and partnership working identified as key to well-managed and enjoyable allotments.

2.0 SCARECROW COMPETITION WINNERS 2026

The 2026 Scarecrow Competition was based around the theme “Grow to Learn”, chosen in alliance with National Allotment Week, which took place from 10th to 16th August.

The competition attracted a range of creative entries from allotment holders and the wider community. Certificates and prizes were presented as the winners were announced.

Children’s Under 12s Winner:
Rita Smith – ‘Two Magic Phonics and number beanstalks’ – Mini corn doll and Certificate.

Highly Commended:
‘Teaching Owl’ by Katie Green, Isaac & Reuben Buxton – Certificate.
‘Orla’ by Eadie Harold, Granddaughter of Chris & Julie Goff – Certificate.

Business Category:
Linden Court Crafting Group (Uckfield) – ‘Crafters Scarecrow’ – Mini corn doll and Certificate.

Household Category:

‘Caroline Hoath & Granddaughter, Sophie’ – Mini corn doll and Certificate.

Overall Winner:
Linden Court Crafting Group (Uckfield) – Larger corn doll and Certificate.

Congratulations were extended to everyone who took part, with particular thanks to all entrants for the time, effort and enthusiasm that made the competition a success.

Photos submitted by entrants:



UNDER 12s COMPETITION WINNER:

Magic phonics and number beanstalks that ‘FARMER DADDY SCARECROW’ & ‘RITA SCARECROW’ have grown.

Prize: Certificate & Mini Corn Doll gifted by Uckfield Town Council



HOUSEHOLD COMPETITION WINNER:

‘CAROLINE HOATH’ & GRANDDAUGHTER ‘SOPHIE’

Prize: Certificate & Mini Corn Doll, gifted by Uckfield Town Council



BUSINESS COMPETITION WINNER - OVERALL WINNER:

Linden Court Crafting Group (Uckfield)

‘CRAFTERS SCARECROW’ – all recycled materials

Prize: Certificate & Large Corn Doll, gifted by Uckfield Town Council

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3.0 ALLOTMENT COMPETITION WINNERS 2026

The 2026 Allotment Competition was kindly sponsored by Stavertons Nursery Ltd in Halland. The judges visited the sites during the second week of July and assessed the plots.

The following winners were announced:
Children's Award Winner:

Leon Szymanski (RW2B) - Leon's entry described growing sweetcorn to make his own popcorn, sweet peas for his mum, strawberries for eating fresh and making jam, and tomatoes and cucumelons in the greenhouse. - £25 voucher and Uckfield Town Council Certificate (posted)

Runner-up prizes
Ever Hubick (RW3A) & Sreya Chakravartty (WP5) - Mini corn doll and Uckfield Town Council Certificate each

Ecological Award Winner:
Peter & Annette Gillett (RW20) - £25 voucher and Uckfield Town Council Certificate

Runner-up:
Graham & Jan Smith (FRE47A) - Uckfield Town Council Certificate

Best Kept Allotment Winners:
Phil Manning (FRE47) - £25 voucher and Uckfield Town Council Certificate:

Liz West (BIE11)

Anita Collins (BL44)

Janet Snow (WP14A)

Polly & Nick Rowe (RW21A)

Chris Skraba (FRW3B)

Overall Winner:
Chris Skraba (FRW3B) – name engraved on the Allotment Shield

Best Newcomers:
Stephanie O'Hara (BIE14) & Louise Thorogood (BL42) – Uckfield Town Council Certificates

Most Improved:
Liz West (BIE11) – Uckfield Town Council Certificate

Huge congratulations were extended to all the winners, and thanks were given to everyone who entered. The high standard of the plots and the pride taken by allotment holders this year were noted.

All photos are available for viewing in the PowerPoint presentation (App A).

4.0 GUEST SPEAKERS:

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The meeting heard from allotment holders Anita Collins (Bell Lane Allotments, BL44) and Louise Thorogood (Bell Lane Allotments, BL42), who shared their experiences of having allotment plots.

- Anita Collins, new tenant on the Bell Lane allotments, prepared a testimonial on the benefits of having an allotment plot for her health and wellbeing:

"When I first got my allotment in April, it was a very small patch that needed quite a lot of love.

I took lots of photographs as I slowly worked my way through it — clearing, weeding, adding compost, deciding what to plant, sowing seeds, labelling things and, eventually, watching things begin to grow.

I have to admit, I probably haven't done everything in the conventional way!

I've worried about whether I'm doing things properly, overthought almost everything, and wondered more than once why I thought taking on an allotment was a good idea!

But I've also discovered something really lovely.

People have been incredibly kind and helpful, and I've learned that you don't have to get everything right. You can experiment, make mistakes, change your mind — and things will still grow, if you give them a bit of care and attention.

I've tried to create something that's part allotment, part colourful pollinator-friendly meadow, and hopefully a place that feels alive and welcoming.

And there's a very personal reason why it means so much to me.

I recently lost my Dad, and throughout all of this, he's been very much in my thoughts. I can picture him coming with me every day to look after my little plot, and I think he would have loved it.

So, in a way, this little patch is for him.

It's still very much a work in progress — there are bald patches, things that haven't worked, and plenty more to learn. But I'm proud of it.

And perhaps that's what I've learned most from having an allotment: you don't have to have everything figured out. You just have to start somewhere, give things a little care, and let them grow.

And that's exactly what I'm doing."

- Louise Thorogood, Allotment tenant (Bell Lane), gave a short talk on her experiences since taking on her plot in April this year:

"*When I found out in April that I'd got Plot 42, I was absolutely delighted — but I don't think I realised just how much having an allotment would come to mean to me.*

It's become a little haven of colour, flowers, bees, butterflies and fresh produce, and I've surprised myself with what I've managed to create.

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But it's become much more than just gardening.

Being part of the allotment community has been a real highlight. I've met people, made friends, and experienced so much kindness, encouragement and support.

As someone who lives alone in a flat, having somewhere to come, spend time outdoors, enjoy the peace and simply watch things grow has been incredibly important to me. It's brought me a lot of happiness.

And perhaps most wonderfully, it's become something I can share with my family.

My granddaughter has discovered the joy of planting seeds and watching them grow, and my 94-year-old mum has visited too. Seeing them both enjoying the allotment together was very special — and meant that, rather unexpectedly, my little plot brought four generations of our family together.

I've also loved the conversations with people passing by. Sometimes complete strangers stop for a chat or offer encouragement, and those little moments have become part of what makes the allotment so special.

So, really, my plot has given me much more than somewhere to grow vegetables and flowers.

It's given me friendship, family time, fresh air, happiness — and a wonderful sense of being part of a community.

And I think the photographs tell that story better than I can."

The meeting then welcomed guest speaker Kevin Martin, Head Gardener at Glyndebourne, who provided an interesting gardening talk and shared his knowledge and experience.

Following his presentation, Kevin Martin answered questions from attendees about gardening practices and the work undertaken at Glyndebourne:

Q. Are the lacewing larvae "tea bags" available for allotment holders to buy?
A. Yes. Kevin explained that lacewing larvae are commercially available and can be used as a natural form of biological pest control, particularly for controlling whitefly.

Q. Does Glyndebourne offer opportunities for members of the public to visit and see the gardens and gardening practices?
A. Glyndebourne normally holds open days in the autumn, usually around September. However, access is limited at certain times due to the theatre and other activities taking place on the estate.

Q. Do you have any initiatives relating to mental health and the way gardening and allotments can bring people together?
A. Kevin explained that several members of the Glyndebourne team have allotments and that allotments provide a valuable opportunity to learn, share knowledge and spend time outdoors. Glyndebourne also provides wellbeing support for its staff.

Q. How long have you worked at Glyndebourne?

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A. Kevin said that he has worked at Glyndebourne for approximately thirty-three years, including around fifteen years as Head Gardener.

Q. How much influence do you have over what is grown at Glyndebourne, and how much is decided by the family?
A. Kevin explained that the choice of plants and crops is primarily made by the gardening team, with advice and input also being provided by consultants where appropriate.

Q. Do you also look after the watercourses, ponds and lakes at Glyndebourne?
A. Yes. Kevin explained that the watercourses are currently being reviewed, particularly the impact of carp on the ecology of the ponds and the stability of the banks. The aim is to reduce the carp population, improve biodiversity and introduce more appropriate planting and wildlife.

Q. Do you have any ash saplings that are growing successfully despite ash dieback?
A. Kevin explained that a number of naturally occurring ash saplings had appeared, particularly during the period when gardening activity was reduced during COVID-19. Some were subsequently potted and planted as part of a tree-planting project associated with Glyndebourne's production of Uprising.

Q. How do you manage water during periods of hot and dry weather?
A. Kevin explained that Glyndebourne uses water from a borehole and tries to minimise water use where possible. The gardening team is also looking at more resilient planting and ways of retaining moisture in the soil, particularly following the loss of some mature trees during periods of drought.

Councillor Karen Bedwell thanked Kevin for his time and contribution.

4.0 UPDATES FROM THE TOWN COUNCIL'S ALLOTMENT WORKING GROUP

The Working Group continues to focus on improving communication with allotment holders and working closely with the Allotment Association and Representatives. Joint meetings provide an opportunity to discuss issues, share updates and work together on improvements.

FEES & CHARGES

There has been no increase in allotment fees and charges for 2026/27. From April 2027, rents will be adjusted in line with CPI plus 1%. The 60+ discount will continue. Renewed contracts and annual invoices will be sent to tenants with details of the charges for the year ahead.

WHERE THE INCOME HAS GONE

Current estimated allotment costs are approximately £10,984, including mowing, hedge cutting, water supply repairs, fencing and gate repairs, tree work and clearing items left by previous tenants.

Approximately £10,000 in allotment income has been received so far. Income and costs are therefore broadly expected to balance. Some costs incurred this year are one-off items and are not expected to recur in the next financial year.

LEAVING PLOTS

Tenants leaving an allotment plot are expected to remove all personal belongings, rubbish and unwanted items. Where items are left behind and require removal, the disposal cost will be charged to the departing tenant. Plots should be left clean and ready for the next tenant.

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NEW LOCKS
New, more robust locks are being sourced for all allotment sites to improve site security. Tenants are encouraged to keep an eye on the gates and report any problems or concerns.

ALLOTMENT UPDATES SINCE APRIL 2026
256 plots across the allotment sites.
19 new tenants welcomed since April 2026.
32 people are currently waiting for their first plot.

The strong demand was noted as a positive indication of the value people place on allotments and their contribution to community, outdoor activity and healthy lifestyles.

ALLOTMENT CHECKS
The Allotment Association will continue to support the Town Council with allotment inspections, helping to keep sites well managed and identify issues at an early stage. All tenants were encouraged to report issues and concerns promptly.

GET INVOLVED
The Allotment Association is keen to encourage more people to volunteer and contribute their time, experience, knowledge and ideas. Carol Washer from the Allotment Association was introduced to speak about the Association's work and opportunities to get involved.

5.0 UCKFIELD ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

Carol Washer and the Uckfield Allotment Association gave a presentation about the Allotment Association's work and support for the allotment community.

The Town Council thanked the Association for its continued support and contribution to the allotments.

6.0 QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

The meeting provided an opportunity for attendees to raise questions, comments and issues.

A constructive discussion took place, and attendees were thanked for their questions and contributions.

Q. How many people are currently waiting for an allotment, and is this figure town-wide?
A. There are currently thirty-two people waiting for a new allotment across Uckfield, rather than at a single site.

Q. Does the Town Council ask developers to provide allotments as part of new developments?
A. Yes. The Town Council regularly requests allotments from developers. However, there is currently no legal requirement for developers to provide them, and decisions ultimately rest with the relevant planning authority. The Council also looks at its own land holdings and opportunities to create additional plots, including dividing larger plots where appropriate.

Q. Can allotment holders support the Council by responding to planning applications?
A. Yes. The Allotment Association encouraged members to respond to relevant planning applications and make the case for additional allotments. A greater number of community

responses would strengthen the case for allotments, particularly by demonstrating their contribution to community, health and wellbeing.

7.0 LOOKING AHEAD TO 2027

Looking ahead to 2027, the focus will remain on working together and improving communication between the Town Council, the Allotment Association, allotment representatives and allotment holders.

The Town Council will continue to support well-managed, welcoming and thriving allotment sites across Uckfield and build on the positive partnership working already taking place.

Councillor Karen Bedwell thanked everyone for their time and continued support, and wished attendees a safe journey home. The Town Council looked forward to working with everyone throughout 2027.

The meeting closed at 8:30pm

Appendices: Appendix A (copy of the PowerPoint presentation)

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