

# COLD ASTON PARISH COUNCIL

Agenda of meeting to be held on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2021

At 6.45pm

in the Village Hall

1. Welcome from the Chair of the Council
2. Attendance and absences to be recorded
3. Declaration of interests by Councillors for matters on the agenda
4. Public session – 15 minutes at the discretion of the Chair of the meeting
5. Correspondence from residents to be discussed by Council
6. Council to approve the minutes of the Annual meeting held on the 5<sup>th</sup> May 2021
7. Council to consider an update in the valuation of assets
8. Report from County Councillor
9. Report from District Councillor
10. Council to consider the following issues – Highways – Cllr Ziles : Trees – Cllr Pearce
  - a) Verges
  - b) Ash Tree die back
  - c) Parking –dog training
  - d) PROW including the definitive map
  - e) Village Map/information pack
  - f) Chapel Lane signage
  - g) Kerbsides
11. Council to consider allotment issues – Cllr Nicholas
  - a) Feedback on advice sought from Allotment Association
  - b) Request for Greenhouse
  - c) Path ways
  - d) Council to approve a Policy for the management of the allotments including but not restricted to:
    - Waiting list management
    - Maintenance of common path ways and infrastructure
    - Tenancy agreement setting up and renewal process
    - Access to the Allotments
    - Tree inspections
    - Motorised vehicles accessing the allotments
  - e) To obtain a measured and scaled map of all plots ready for the renewal of tenancy agreements
  - f) Update on waiting list
  - g) Ecology report
  - h) Review of annual fees
12. Council to consider planning matters
  - a) Outstanding planning applications – 21/02479/FUL – Little Aston Mill
  - b) CLOPUD
13. Council to approve payment list
14. Council to approve financial reports
15. Clerk requests that review of
16. Date of next meeting to be agreed as 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2021 at 18.45pm
17. Close of meeting

Annual Meeting of the Parish Council

Held on the 5<sup>th</sup> May 2021

Via zoom link

Starting at 6.45pm

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86295940359?pwd=WndoRHAXR0FkQU1UUDRiTGt4eGV0UT09>

1. Welcome by Current Chair of the Council
2. Election of Chair and Vice Chair of the Council (with a pause for signing acceptance of office forms) Paula Marchant was elected as Chair following proposal and seconder, Yvonne Nicholas was elected vice chair following proposal and seconder.
3. Recording of attendance of Parish Councillors Paula Marchant, Yvonne Nicholas, Greg Pearce, Amanda Kimpton and Mark Ziles and 6 members of the public. Apologies for absence received from County Councillor P Hodgkinson and District Councillor Richard Keeling
4. Public session at the Chair's discretion 15 minutes at discretion of chair of the meeting. Allotment matters were raised by member of the public, including registering as asset and bio-diversity report. Clerk to re-send bio-diversity report to allotment holders.
5. Council agreed approval of the minutes of the meeting held on April 14<sup>th</sup>2021
6. Council reviewed the Standing orders and Financial regulations (previous review September 2020). Changes to include Draft minutes will go on to website within a week.
7. Council agreed to nominate Councillors to specific lead roles : Councillor Nicholas - Allotments, Councillor Pearce -Trees, Councillor Ziles -Highways
8. Council reviewed existing arrangements (including legal agreements) with other local authorities, not-for-profit bodies and businesses eg verge cutting agreement. Grass cutting, Verge Cutting and Website as previous. Clerk was given delegated authority to submit representation on behalf of Council for planning matters
9. Council reviewed representation on/ work with external bodies and arrangements for reporting back -Nuture Nature Group (Diana Ray) and current working party of villagers for map and signage of Village (Mark Ziles)
10. Council agreed it wishes to consider adopting the general power of competence in the future at the next meeting
11. Council conducted a review of inventory of land and other assets and noted it is working to register the allotment and other asset was noted as the pump
12. Council agreed it wishes to renew its insurance cover in respect of all insurable risks in the sum of £357.29 noting the Council is in a "3 year LTA"
13. Council reviewed the Council's subscriptions to other bodies; GAPTC and Allotment society agreed
14. Council reviewed the Council's complaints procedure – no changes
15. Council reviewed policies, procedures and practices in respect of its obligations under freedom of information and data protection legislation (*see also standing orders 11, 20 and 21*); -no change
16. Council agreed its schedule of the time and place of ordinary meetings of the Council up to and including the next annual meeting of the Council- 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of month, 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 23 September, 25<sup>th</sup> November, 20<sup>th</sup> January, 17<sup>th</sup> March 19<sup>th</sup> May 2022 at 6.45pm
17. Council authorised Chair of Council to sign AGAR papers –
18. Councillors noted any other business for information purposes only  
Glebe Land/school update noted  
No-mow May- Agenda in September 2021  
planning application information shared  
Allotment pump expenditure

19. Close of meeting 19.21pm

## **Projects to improve both the environmental quality and productivity of the allotments.**

There are almost any number of potential projects that would improve the allotments in the senses of increased diversity and abundance of wildlife and reduced carbon footprint. The aim here is to focus on a very few, well-defined and easily-achievable projects that will give clear outcomes.

### **1. Bird nests**

Birds are important predators of pests – the nestlings in a single blue tit nest consume about 10,000 insects during their development, for example. It is often assumed within the parish that local farms and gardens are well-provisioned with potential nest sites. This is not so. The frequent adoption of nest boxes and other sites which are less than ideal – many of us have stories of nests built in strange places - tells us that natural nest sites are in short supply. The long-term aim would be to create plantings in which birds can nest successfully. In the meantime, nest boxes will have to do and this is one project that the school might like to become involved in. The construction, placement and monitoring of a few nest boxes on the allotments might be something that the children would enjoy and learn from, especially if camera nest boxes could be used.

### **2. The lizard colony**

Several lizards have been seen recently, basking in the sun on the wood chippings in the school allotment. This tells us firstly that the lizards are still there – good news. Secondly, it tells us that the lizards, which were formerly restricted to the bank behind the school allotment, have to encroach further onto the allotment plots – to bask and to hunt - as vegetation increasingly covers the bank itself.

The main problem here is creeping comfrey *Symphytum grandiflorum*. All comfrees are well-known bee-friendly plants; creeping comfrey is no exception and it was indeed first planted on the allotment site in an early attempt to encourage bees. It is, however, now recognised as an invasive alien species and its control should be sought as a matter of priority. It has spread from the bank, along behind the school allotment and onto the wildflower meadow allotment and will spread further if not controlled.

However, the presence of lizards means that great care must be taken in its removal. Herbicides notoriously affect the sex hormones of amphibia, and those of reptiles are likely to be similarly affected. Herbicide use should only be considered in areas well away from the bank. Near the bank, an alternative is the piecemeal removal of a small patch of comfrey at a time – including rhizomes – to minimise disturbance to the colony, although light exclusion might work too. Again, cameras and camera traps could work well here to inform us of progress. Nothing should be attempted before advice is obtained from a lizard expert, though.

### **3. Wildflowers**

As described in an earlier submission to the Parish Council, pollen and nectar production by wildflowers encourages bees and other insects that go on to pollinate our food crops. Unfortunately, the allotments have few of the right kind of wildflowers at the moment, as even the briefest inspection will show clearly.

The Parish Council reserved one allotment as a wildflower meadow but the absence of any management there means that disaster is approaching. Pollinator-friendly wildflowers are mostly absent here and, besides creeping comfrey, pernicious weeds such as nettles, ground elder, docks, creeping buttercup and others have taken hold and will shortly become a serious problem for the holders of adjacent allotments. If a workable management plan for wildflowers is not adopted and acted upon then this allotment would be far better returned to use as a productive plot. My understanding is that there is an allotment waiting list.

Many wildflowers live perfectly happily in nooks and crannies; all wildflowers need is to be allowed to set seed. With hardly any effort I have now some cowslips, violets, white dead nettle, ox eye daisy, herb Robert, sweet rocket, teasel, Aaron`s rod, white campion, hedge bedstraw, germander speedwell and crosswort along the perimeter by my allotment simply because I do not trim, and none of these attractive and useful species could be called weeds. This is not a plea for a strimming ban, just for more thoughtful control that really is as simple as recognising the flowers of desirable plants and then not strimming them off.

#### **4. Hazel for bean poles, pea sticks and other plant supports**

Bamboo canes, which are all imported from the Far East, have a high carbon footprint. My estimate is that a bundle of 10 eight-foot poles has a carbon footprint of at least 5kg in transport emissions alone, almost three times the weight of the product. Plant supports are a major cost for allotmenters, too. Canes and poles cost about a pound each and pea sticks work out at about £6 per bundle. A decent row of peas uses about three bundles, making the cost of the plant supports higher than the monetary value of the crop.

The traditional material used for plant supports in Britain is hazel. It is a native woody shrub and is harvested on a three- to seven-year rotation, providing both poles and pea sticks. It has other benefits as a home to much wildlife including larger moths, a group that has undergone severe decline both locally and nationally. A few coppiced hazel somewhere on the allotment site could easily lower allotmenters` carbon footprint, save money and support wildlife. The sale of excess poles and pea sticks could raise a little revenue, too.

All these four projects have at their heart frequent, small, local actions by interested parties that even a local body like the Parish Council would find hard to manage effectively on a day-to-day or weekly basis. A solution might be to reinstate the allotment holders` meetings at which group decisions could be made once again, and actions taken. The Parish Council would then not need to spend any time in micro-managing all the tiny aspects of these projects. My understanding is that the Parish Council is worried that the costs of managing long-term plantings might fall upon it, but a working allotment-holders` group could easily deal with these issues itself. At the most, some adjustment to allotment holders` responsibilities in the rental agreement might be needed.

## Wildlife and the allotments (January 2021)

1. Introduction
2. Shared areas and paths
3. Nesting sites for birds
4. Trees
5. The common lizard colony
6. The ivy question
7. Finally

### 1. Introduction

Questions concerning the future direction of the allotments continue to exercise the parish council and allotmenters. A wide range of views have been expressed, from those who would prefer by far the allotment patch to be neater and tidier than it is now, to those who see the area primarily as a wildlife haven. Opinion has polarised around these positions but it is my aim here to show that there is a middle path.

The primary purpose of an allotment is to grow food. On a well-run allotment, yields can be achieved of about a pound weight per square foot of ground cultivated, placing allotments among the most productive land in the parish. (This value is equivalent to very slightly under 20 tons per acre, far above agricultural yields which are about 4 tons per acre in the parish). Locally-grown food has well-known benefits in terms of carbon footprint, food miles, freshness and nutrient content.

There are as many styles of horticulture practised on the allotments as there are allotment holders. At the extremes, some practise conventional horticulture using pesticides and synthetic fertilisers whereas others use organic methods which employ natural controls and composts. At first sight these two approaches have little in common; this is not true.

Even the most conventional horticultural system relies on wildlife to some extent, and particularly upon pollinators. All soft fruit (raspberries, blackcurrants, strawberries, etc) and all top fruit (apples, pears, plums, etc) are insect-pollinated - particularly by bees. Many crops flower too early to be pollinated by honeybees and so we must rely on wild bees to pollinate them. Also, fruit-set on later-flowering crops is usually superior if wild bees rather than honey bees do the pollinating. As for vegetables, legumes (all beans but not peas, they are self-pollinated), cucurbits (squashes, courgettes etc) and solanaceous (peppers, tomatoes etc) crops among others are bee-pollinated. In every case we must `borrow` wild bees from nearby habitats because they do not live on the allotment plots themselves.

But, we cannot merely supply some pollen and nectar in spring and early summer and expect the bees to hang around. If their needs are not supplied they will – if they can - go elsewhere at the very least or may even be driven to local extinction. They need to collect pollen and nectar when our crops no longer provide any and also need places to nest and to hibernate too. Every useful bee has slightly different requirements; some collect pollen from a very few kinds of flower, some nest in bare soil, some in short turf and others nest in timber and in old, dead stems. There are over 250 species of wild bee in Britain, all with different requirements.

Very similar arguments apply to predatory insects (ladybirds – 43 species; hoverflies – 286 species; solitary wasps – over 7,000 species, and yes, that last figure is correct) that help to control pests (aphids, thrips, mites etc) even in conventional systems.

Wildlife is thus an integral part of small-scale horticulture. The allotmenters all need beneficial insects - it is just that the organic growers need them more because they do not use chemical props - and we need to provide diverse habitats in which all our insect friends thrive. Ecologists have found repeatedly that the imposition of anthropocentric values such as neatness and tidiness only serve to reduce diversity and thus the number of beneficial insects available to us. A certain amount of wildlife-friendliness is essential to the well-being of the allotments.

The allotments generally made a giant leap towards environmental friendliness with the installation of the rainwater harvesting system. It works, despite teething problems, and improvements are under consideration. I suggest that the following simple steps can also be taken easily to further improve the environmental credentials of the site generally.

## **2.Shared areas and paths.**

Paths are of course the responsibility of the allotment holders, but shared areas which are not often or never used for foot traffic can be used to encourage wildflowers, further encouraging beneficial insects. A few years ago, rather uncommon plants such as hound's tongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*) could be found on the allotments; it is a wonderful plant for bees, but has not been seen for some years.

## **3.Nesting sites for birds.**

Birds too are useful predators of pests but there are few suitable nest sites on the allotments. Nests boxes could be erected but the long-term aim should be to encourage plants in which birds will nest naturally. A productive blackberry bush on one of the allotments is home every year to blackbirds and occasionally dunnocks.

## **4.Trees.**

NB. THE PARISH COUNCIL'S TREE REPORT IS NOT ACCESSIBLE. THE LINK DOES NOT WORK.

Trees generally are excellent for wildlife but are not necessarily altogether desirable on an allotment site because they compete with crop plants for light, water and nutrients. However, some of our native species - and apple trees - support hundreds of invertebrate species many of which play a role in pest control.

Unused areas could also be planted with fruit trees further enhancing productivity. The idea, suggested at the on-site meeting, of planting hazel (which is not a tree, it is a shrub) would in just a few years generate a supply of bean poles, pea sticks and plant supports for allotmenters and would reduce the use of high-footprint bamboo. Also, the simple fact that hazel is harvested on a five- or six-year rotation would serve to eliminate light obstruction of nearby dwellings. The conifers in the corner take a great deal of light from the nearby allotments and houses; the removal and replacement of these non-natives would help all round. At the moment, from the allotments' point of view all they do is provide some physical shelter for wildlife. If an evergreen replacement were desired one could do far worse than yew, which has a great advantage - among conifers - in that it regenerates from mature wood and can thus easily withstand major pruning, as well as having native status and providing both food and shelter for birds.

## **5.The common lizard colony.**

The common lizard is a protected but declining native species. Advice should be sought from specialists such as the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust on helping the colony to thrive. At the moment vegetation is encroaching on the site of the colony.

## **6.The ivy question.**

Ivy generates heated debate. On one side, ivy is considered to be pernicious and therefore best removed; on the other, ivy is seen as harmless and a great boon to wildlife for its late flowers, winter berries and all-year provision of shelter. This controversy about ivy has rumbled on in Britain for decades. Received opinion today is that ivy only takes hold in trees that are stressed in some way or have open canopies allowing light to percolate down, such as ash. In this view the growth of ivy is more a consequence of poor tree health, rather than the ivy growing and causing poor tree health, in other words a reversal of the view so commonly held. One only has to look at trees in the parish to see that most ivy in trees occurs in either ash with its naturally open canopy or other trees in which the canopy is open or rather small for some reason, such as poor pruning or very packed plantings. Almost any arboricultural website will explain the issue more fully. The Arboricultural Association – the official trade body – has a good site.

## **7.Finally**

The overall aim for the allotments should therefore be one of productivity with enhanced wildlife diversity. With their productivity, the rainwater harvesting system, some existing highly diverse areas and the lizard colony the allotments are already more than halfway to achieving excellent environmental credentials.

It is not unusual for successful community projects to receive recognition officially. There is even a series of awards run by the CPRE for small environmentally-friendly schemes (partially replacing the Bledisloe cup).

Jo Kirby

14 January 2021