

# COLD ASTON PARISH COUNCIL

Approved Minutes of meeting 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 recorded as Parish Councillor Paula Marchant, Mark Ziles, Amanda Kimpton, Greg Pearce, 15 members of the public and County Councillor Paul Hodgkinson and no apologies for absences.
3. There were no Declaration of interests by Councillors for matters on the agenda
4. Public session – 15 minutes at the discretion of the Chair of the meeting- 4 members of the public spoke
  - a) Caravan park at Valley View – response from applicants agents is now on the portal and the residents of the Paddocks feel that the Planning Authority in approving the CLOPUD on basis of evidence provided by applicants only. The Planning Authority did not consult any residents with no statutory notices.  
Photographic evidence has now been submitted from residents from 2004 use by Stock and not recreational purposes. The residents would like the planning officers to consider the evidence now submitted and revoke the CLOPUD  
**The residents would like the Parish Council to ascertain the process for the Planning Authority to consider reconsider the CLOPUD, and is there a time scale on the CLOPUD and what is the timescale for appeal**, no statutory planning notices, no residents consulted and photographic evidence has subsequently been submitted, and applicants’ photographic evidence to re-considered and lack of response to the Parish Council  
It was suggested by a member of the public that contact the local MP.
  - b) Agenda item re allotment rental, asked that it be considered that allotments do not have to pay their way
  - c) Bourton on the Water short term parking referred to County Councillor
  - d) Ecological crisis declared by the District and County Council and referred to the Ecology report prepared for the Allotments. Allotment represents history and future and everyone should be working to make them viable and asked if the school was treated as other tenants Praised local farmers for planting trees regarding Ash die back efforts  
Asked the PC to have an ADB Action Plan, respectful to DEFRA and Environment agencies.  
Formal apology from GCC has been received. Concerned about the behaviour of Parish Councillors in May. The situation raised health matters and referred to the delay of the ambulance.  
Meeting on Dec 2<sup>nd</sup> – delegated responsibility – Minutes of Meeting – Freedom of information request for correspondence between Parish Council and GCC
  - e) Ash Die back feedback from other member of the public  
Public Session closed at 7.06pm
5. Correspondence from residents to be discussed by Council - Di Mountford correspondence received with regard to matters relating to Allotments- 13<sup>th</sup> June, 15<sup>th</sup> July, 17<sup>th</sup> July, Resignation of Yvonne Nicholas was noted and letter was read out. thanks were given to Yvonne for all the hard work that she has done for the Parish.

Further correspondence from Diana Ray noted and will be considered in detail at the next meeting

6. Council approved the minutes of the Annual meeting held on the 5<sup>th</sup> May 2021

7. Council considered an update in the valuation of assets - Allotment is in process of being registered and has been a long process (7- 8 years). Chair of Council will try to ascertain where the process is currently. Council agreed to move to other legal advisors if the matter is not resolved.
  
8. Report from County Councillor Paul Hodgkinson
  - a) COVID update - 22 in local hospitals at present time
  - b) River pollution update, a task group has been set up to look into these matters
  - c) Whiteshoots Hill traffic – Initial speed survey showed that speeds are high, second survey shows that the average speeds are now 40-50mph and a drop in the speed limit is now being considered
  
9. Report from District Councillor – Richard Keeling – not available
  
10. Council considered the following issues – Highways – Cllr Ziles no general update at present time:
 

Portal for reporting problems have been used by local resident. Sewage /manhole cover have been referred to Highways to investigate sewage seepage into the road but after investigations it transpired it was not a highways issue but a problem with a septic tank that has now been resolved.

Trees – Cllr Pearce – Council have agreed to commission a report every 3 years for PC owned trees other trees are responsibility of GCC. Under the jurisdiction of Glos County Council **and not the responsibility or under the remit of the Parish Council**, Ash Dieback project Trees have been marked and have not been felled. The PC had previously reported their concerns over safety issues only. A response from GCC has been received by the Chair of the Council (12<sup>th</sup> May) and it was summarised at the meeting.

Over-riding concern of the PC is danger to children and public at large and we defer to their expertise.

  - a) Verges – No Mow proposal will be sent out to Public Consultation, using the website.
  - b) Ash Tree die back - above
  - c) Parking –in the middle of the village at breakfast time identified as being linked to the Simulated Shoot organisation cars allowed to be parked in a specified village as long as its not more than 28 days in a year. Clerk was instructed to send correspondence liaising
  - d) PROW including the definitive map was highlighted to the public – via the GCC website.
  - e) Village Map/information pack noted on going
  - f) Chapel Lane signage has now been installed, and reported as situation improved. Clerk requires an invoice to trigger the donation from the Parish Council
  - g) Kerbside parking - noted
  
11. Council considered allotment issues – see above re registering the land
  - a) Feedback on advice sought from Allotment Association was sought regarding plot 2 pathways. Advice was to give 12 month’s notice that the path would become a formal path. Historically the path was known to be there. Parish Council acknowledge that the map was drawn up a long time ago. It was felt that to give everyone 12 months notice that the plots will be measured and formalised. It was proposed that the PC take the advice of the AA and draw a plan ready for the Autumn. C
  - b) Request for Greenhouse – proposed to defer until after the plan has been agreed, AGREED
  - c) Path ways – specifically the path through the plot has created difficulty and all plots should have paths on 4 sides, one meter wide for medical and DDA access. – see map/plan
  - d) Council agreed to bring to next meeting for adoption 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

Swapping of plots

Tree inspections

Motorised vehicles accessing the allotments - noting Easement drawn up in 2012 has been brought to the attention to the Council

- e) Agreed to obtain a measured and scaled map of all plots ready for the renewal of tenancy agreements with common paths clearly marked – Agreed – AA advice – 3 quotes to obtained. Delegation to Clerk to obtain 3 quotes and to accept the most expedient and realistic price wise ( budget set )
- f) Update on waiting list- understanding an email has been sent.
- g) Ecology report as distributed – to improve the bio-diversity of the allotments and generally the feeling of the public at the meeting was positive. Allotment representative was asked to prepare proposals for an action Plan to be brought forward for consideration specifically Allotment 8 wildflower plot, consideration that the wildflowers are not the correct type. Discuss at the next allotment meeting. Proposal that to ask if author and allotment representative to look at alternative positions within the allotments, how the works would be done. – Proposal that the Council seeks a formal independent to identify the species of lizards – AGREED
- h) Delegate to the Clerk responsibility for the allotments
- i) Review of annual fees -deferred pending policy review. Clerk to research
- j) There is no restricted access on the allotments.

12. Council considered planning matters

a) Outstanding planning applications – 21/02479/FUL – Little Aston Mill – No Comment

b) CLOPUD – see public session – Proposal – See points in public session to be submitted along with resubmit their original objections – send to residents and Councillor Pearce

13. Council approved payment list of Expenses £135.47, CGS £132 (June) CGS £198.00 (April/May), Approval of donation £50 (Clerk to issue cheque) Pump for water tank to be submitted £75 to be paid on receipt of invoice

14. Council approved financial reports defer to next meeting

15. Clerk requests that review of standing orders and other policies be carried forward- Communication policy and bullying policy and criteria for co-option to be drafted

16. Date of next meeting agreed as 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2021 at 18.45pm

17. Close of meeting 20.13

## **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