

Allotment report – 26th August 2024

a. Plot allocation update

All plots are allocated. Most are being well managed but a few need work to bring them up to the standard expected. These plot holders will be notified accordingly and given a target date by which the plots need to be improved. Failure to do so will result in the plots being taken back and their deposits forfeited and the money used to pay for clearance.

We have one person on the waiting list who lives on Lincoln Close and a few others who have expressed an interest but, as yet, have not provided the necessary contact information.

b. Plot condition

2024 has been an extremely difficult year. The plots suffered considerably from the very wet winter which appeared to rain consistently from October 2023 to April 2024 leaving them waterlogged and difficult to prepare for planting.

When the rain finally subsided, and the sun started to warm the soil the slugs appeared. I have never experienced so many slugs as we saw this year. Apparently, the wet soil and the warm weather were ideal for them and they appeared to multiply in their hundreds. The slugs devastated the young plants sown and virtually stripped them back completely.

After the slugs came the hot weather with temperature hitting the high 20's and low 30's. This had the effect of baking the soil so that it turned to concrete and was extremely difficult to dig and the plants that survived the slugs were then scorched.

After the sun came the pigeons and rabbits who invaded the allotments looking for food. The pigeons were particularly destructive devouring brassica plants like cabbages and broccoli and pulling up onions or nipping the tops to stunt their growth.

However, despite all the setbacks most plot holders persevered and we are now seeing the fruits of their labour.

As stated above, most plots are in good order but there are a few which have not been worked. We will follow this up with the relevant plot holder and seek to gain an improvement.

c. 2024 / 2025 Budget Planning

The Project Plan for the Allotment Advisory Group has been approved by the Council and work is now underway to deliver on these plans. An update is below.

General Maintenance & Repairs

- Pest Control Contractor
Reports from the Pest Controller continue to show a reduction in activity but the rats remain present. The pest control programme will continue so that we can monitor the situation and manage the pest population.
- General Maintenance & Repairs.
The rotten plot markers have been inspected by the handymen and the broken posts replaced. We managed to obtain the new posts free of charge so avoided having to spend approximately £300 on new posts.
- Skip / Waste Disposal budget.
We are still planning to rent a skip in October to allow plot holders to dispose of any unwanted materials.
- National Allotment Association membership.
Our annual membership has been renewed.

Ongoing Projects

- *Prize money for the "Best Kept Allotment".*
The Best Kept Allotment competition will be awarded in October.

- *Improving the A1 boundary by planting Pyracantha shrubs (or similar)*
The test Pyracantha plant didn't survive so we are looking at alternative methods to create an effective barrier. We have engaged the Buckden Tree Warden, and we are going to look at creating a fence using natural materials such as brambles and branches to make an impenetrable hedge. This will be completed in the autumn.
- *Free soil improver.*
Martin Hassall, the local District Councillor and allotment plot holder has identified some free-soil improver available from the Huntingdon District Council. I am now engaged with a contact in the Council working to arrange a delivery slot. The intention is for the free-soil improver to be initially available to all residents and then open to plot holders.

The contact at the Council has informed us that the current stock has run out but he is expecting another delivery in the next few weeks. We are next on the list.

2024 Operating Plan update.

- Polytunnel has now been installed and is being fitted out with growing benches. The intention is for any plot holder to use the polytunnel to grow seeds. This will be particularly useful for those who don't have access to a green house. So far feedback from the plot holders has been positive. – NOW COMPLETED
- Eco toilet to improve health and hygiene facilities at the Allotments for plot holders has been cancelled as we cannot find a composting toilet that doesn't require emptying, and we cannot find anyone willing to take on that responsibility. - CANCELLED
- Front fence replacement as it needs repair / replacement. – NOW COMPLETED
- Installing a defibrillator in the allotment car park. It was agreed that there are enough defibrillators in the village to meet the needs of the residents. We will be producing a map showing where they are and will display this in the Allotment Notice Board.

d. Additional funding for the Allotments

We have been informed that the Allotment Group has been awarded an additional £2000 to its budget for 2024. We are continuing to look for projects where we could obtain maximum benefit.

We were looking at creating an accessible area for disabled people by installing some raised beds which are wheelchair accessible, therefore allowing them to join the allotments and reap the benefits of being able to participate in an outdoor activity growing vegetables and flowers. However, the initial quote came in at around £3500 so we have decided to include this project in our 2025 Operating Plan so that it can be funded properly. We will also undergo a due diligence program and obtain three competitive quotations from local businesses to ensure we are getting value for money.

e. Engagement with NHS Health & Wellbeing

We have reached out the Health and Wellbeing group at Buckden Surgery and expressed our interest to work with them to provide a positive environment to assist in patient wellbeing. We are waiting for them to come back to us with a date so we can meet face to face.

f. Engaging with Bramshed.

We are planning to engage with Bramshed, a community workshop in Brampton which is affiliated to the Men's Shed Association. They provide an environment where members can use and gain skills in woodwork, metalwork and restoration and repair projects.

We will ask them if they would work alongside us to create an environment for wildlife at the allotments by building hedgehog boxes, bird boxes and bat boxes.

Allotment rental

The issue of the annual review of allotment plot rental fees was raised at the recent meeting of the Allotment Advisory Group. The consensus was that in the light of the current economic climate, particularly energy costs, we would not recommend an increase in the rental charge this year. It was increased in 2022 and the amount for the deposit was raised significantly last year. Rental for

Buckden residents is currently £25 per annum and £30 for non-residents. The deposit was raised to £50 non returnable if the plot is left in poor condition.

We will inform the allotment holders that there will be no increase this year and ensure they are clear that this is the third year without an increase and that we may need to consider a rent rise in 2025