

Upwood and the Raveleys Parish Councillors: Trustees' Meeting

Parish Clerk – Mrs Carol Bilverstone. Kilimanjaro, 9 Meadow Road, Upwood, Huntingdon, Cambs. PE26 2QJ
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**The Annual General Meeting of Upwood and the Raveleys Parish Councillors, the Trustees of:
Upwood & the Raveleys Allotments (Charity no. 264373 was held on Monday 12 April 2021 at 6:30pm via "Zoom"**

Present: Councillors D. Chattaway, G. Bonnett Kolakowska, J. Burgess, J. Edwards, R. Howe (Chairman), N. Maddocks, R. Mashford, A. Perkins.

In Attendance: Mrs. C. Bilverstone (Clerk), Mr. T. Brown, Chairman, Upwood and the Raveleys Community Allotments Association.

Minutes

The chairman opened the meeting and invited those present to observe a minute's silence in memory of His Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh.

26-04/21 To receive and approve apologies for absence. There were no apologies for absence.

27-04/21 To receive and approve the minutes of the trustees' meeting held on 01 March 2021.
The minutes of the meeting of the meeting held on 01 March 2021 had been circulated in advance following the informal approval of the chairman. Councillor Burgess proposed that the minutes be approved. Councillor Maddocks seconded the proposal. All were in favour and it was **resolved** to do so.

28-04/21 To receive an update from Upwood and the Raveleys Community Allotment Association (URCAA): strengths and challenges to date.

29-04/21 To receive an updated business plan from URCAA.

30-04/21 To receive a financial statement from URCAA.

Comprehensive reports (see attached) had been prepared by URCAA committee members and circulated in advance of this meeting. Mr. Brown presented the reports and gave trustees the opportunity to ask questions. All agreed that the management of the association remains in good hands and sound financial health and that it continues to thrive.

The chairman suggested that the allotments sites have never looked better, and they have developed into really picturesque areas of our parish. Full occupancy is an excellent achievement, and the association should be commended for their ongoing commitment.

31-04/21 To receive an update from Councillor Edwards (trustee with a portfolio responsibility for the allotments).

Councillor Edwards suggested that an application to Ramsey Windfarm Community Benefit Fund might enable the association to realise some of its aspirations for ongoing improvements.

32-04/21 To receive an update on plans for the creation of a utilities trench (minute reference 22-03/21).

The clerk confirmed that she had completed the registration process and identity check with Milnes Legal. Nothing further had been heard from the developer at this time.

33-04/21 Matters for future consideration.

No decisions can be made under this item. There were no further matters for consideration.

34-03/21 Date of next meeting: 04 April 2022.

Close of meeting: 6:50pm

Upwood and Raveley Community Allotment Association (URCAA) and Upwood Community Orchard

Chairman's Report April 2021

Allotments

1. The Upwood site currently has a total of 45 plots of varying sizes maintained by 40 tenants (5 tenants have more than 1 plot of varying sizes).
2. The Great Raveley site currently has a total of 5 plots of varying sizes maintained by 3 tenants (a 1/2 plot is un-tenanted).
3. The Upwood and Great Raveley sites have a combined total of 50 plots of which 49 are occupied.
4. There is currently a ½ plot vacant at the Great Raveley site.
5. There are no vacant plots at the Upwood site.
6. There are currently 2 people on the plot waiting list.
7. At the Upwood site a large area is let to a farmer tenant for the production of hay.
8. At the Great Raveley site a field section is let to a local farmer for the production of arable crops.
9. Filling the galvanised water storage tanks on the Upwood site is difficult from a single tap. The tenants have been asked to devise a scheme to maintain the water levels in the tanks. Some allotment holders have rigged up their own water catchment system.
10. There may be a possibility of an additional water supply being installed at the top end of the allotments, but this is largely dependent upon a current planning application being submitted by a local builder. This would be in the form of an easement to compensate for running a utility trench across the allotment site.
11. The Great Raveley site has no fixed water supply and utilises a single 1000 litre rigid plastic container which has to be manually topped up. Two of the allotment holders have devised their own water catchment systems.
12. There are some issues with the access track on the Upwood site with cars being driven in wet weather resulting in the ground becoming very churned up. Tenants have been reminded to only use vehicles on the track when absolutely necessary and not when conditions are bad.
13. The plot one site has a large amount of scrub and bracken which is being reclaimed and managed for wild flowers by Ali and a team of helpers.
14. Vacant plots and the suppression of weeds are always a concern. However, with virtually all the plots occupied, the situation appears to be under control. The majority of the plots in a good condition and tenants have been reminded to keep their shared areas tidy.
15. The hedgerow on the Huntingdon Road boundary requires some maintenance and it is hoped to form a working party to tidy this area up shortly.
16. With the COVID situation, more public are walking themselves and /or their dogs across the allotment site and need to be reminded that this is a food growing area. We possibly require more signage to alert people.
17. The grass cutting contract with CGM has been amended so that they cut the access track and parking area only. In the Community Orchard the grass is allowed to grow with regular weed checks and a spring and late summer cut to be carried out by a local person. A path around the Orchard will be maintained by strimming with access to the 2 seats. This will be carried out regularly by a member of the committee using URCAA & personal equipment.
18. We notified tenants last year that we would be reviewing the annual rents as they have not increased for some time. Meanwhile, maintenance and water costs have gone up, so we may have to increase the rent accordingly in the future. Also, we have no budget for any capital projects.

Orchard

1. The orchard is now in its 7th year and is fully planted with all the trees surviving another winter.
2. New pallet fencing has been erected to define the Meadow Road entrance to the orchard and another pallet fence has been used to fill a gap in the boundary fence just above the pond. A wild bramble has been planted to grow over the latter with honeysuckle being added later this spring.
3. A further pallet fence will be made at the top of the orchard in order to define the area and a new welcome sign has been commissioned and is ready for mounting.
4. The grass cutting regime has been amended to allow the grass and selected wildflowers to flourish, while a path will be cut around and through the orchard to allow access for visitors. The whole area will be cut towards the end of the summer in order to encourage the seeding of wildflowers.
5. A pallet enclosure has been erected as a compost area for the orchard waste.
6. The bug hotel will be overhauled this autumn in order to encourage a varied population of smaller critters.
7. The raised beds are in need of refurbishment as the timber surrounds are becoming rotten. Two additional small beds have been created and planted up with scented perennial shrubs to attract insects and bees.
8. The pond at the lower end of the orchard site continues to be a success at trapping run off water that would otherwise flood the parking area. Apart from its practical use, it is hoped the pond may also attract a variety of wildlife.
9. Hazel and willow whips have been strategically planted to aid water drainage. Additional hedging whips have been purchased to fill any gaps in the existing hedge.
10. The briar hedge along the central track has been pruned and any gaps will be filled this spring.
11. It is hoped to install a second bench in the orchard with additional temporary log seating for children.

URCAA Financial Report

1. A summary of the UCRAA financial situation can be seen below.
2. A full statement of accounts can be seen on the Upwood and the Raveleys Parish Council Google drive.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Totals</u>
31/03/21	Allotment Account Balance	£3,130.96
31/03/21	Allotment Plots – deposits held	£1,080.00
31/03/21	Orchard Account Balance	£708.87
31/03/21	Total Balance of accounts	£4,919.83

Business Plan

1. A copy of the UCRAA Business Plan can be seen on the Upwood and the Raveleys Parish Council Google drive.

Summary

The URCAA and Community Orchard appears to be in good health financially, and has good support from the parishioners with virtually all available plots under cultivation. Until only this week we had 100% occupation for the first time, but unfortunately a Great Raveley plot has just been handed back. We have a small waiting list, so hopefully we can return to full occupancy again soon. The COVID situation of the past year has probably helped with plot take-up as people were locked down and had time to grow their own produce. Newcomers to the URCAA have been a welcome addition to the membership, and are getting stuck into their plots. A few minor matters need to be addressed, such as the condition of the access track and hedge maintenance, but there are no major causes for concern. The grass cutting maintenance contract with CGM has been amended to cover only the main allotment site in order to allow the wildflowers to flourish in the orchard.

URCAA – Business Plan 2021/22 – Update date 010421

BUSINESS PLAN FOR THE UPWOOD & RAVELEY COMMUNITY ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION (URCAA).

The Upwood and Raveley Community Allotments Association was formed in 2012 with its own constitution and a management committee comprising of the 3 key positions of Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer plus supporting officers. URCAA is responsible for the routine running of the allotment plots situated in Upwood (Meadow Road site) and Great Raveley (junction with Raveley and Huntingdon Road) with guidance from the Allotment Trustees who report to the Charities Commission.

URCAA is responsible for:

- rent collection
- rule enforcement
- elements of ground maintenance within the internal boundaries of the site.

Responsibility for the maintenance to the external boundaries of the site fall to the Upwood Parish Council.

The Upwood site currently consists of 45 allotment plots split into a range of sizes, large, medium, small and mini. The various sizes meet the varying needs of the community and changing ways in which people engage with allotments. Included at the Upwood site is a communal plot as well as a community orchard. The site is divided roughly in half with one half of the land being rented for hay production.

The Great Raveley allotment site consists of 5 defined plots and a block of land which is rented for crop production.

The URCAA Group's mission statement is to provide a community-managed resource for the purpose of self-sustainment and crop production for local residents and aims to achieve this by:

- Providing plots which local people can hire at a reasonable annual rent.
- Providing basic facilities on site including access, water, and parking.
- Create a social group that shares a common interest in growing vegetables, crops or flowers.
- Encourage community schemes that utilise the site for all groups.

CURRENT SITUATION

- Due to the ongoing Covid-19 situation, we have been unable to hold a physical AGM this year. However, we recently held an AGM via Zoom where all tenants were invited to attend, or present any questions or issues in writing beforehand. The committee has also managed to run meetings on Zoom as required covering issues such as routine maintenance and a planning request affecting allotment land.

- Site maintenance is being managed by Liz using local villagers for ad-hoc strimming and rotovating unused plots. The grass cutting situation is covered in more detail under the Short-Term Objectives.
- 45 of the available 45 plots at Upwood are actively cultivated and managed by allotment holders. This is full occupancy for the first time that anyone can remember.
- There are no vacant plots at the Upwood.
- The Great Raveley site has 4 of the 5 plots in active cultivation.
- Currently there is two people on the waiting list for vacant plots, but prefer a plot on the Upwood site.
- A number of keen new tenants have joined us this year, possibly spurred on by the COVID situation.
- The Upwood site is flanked by natural hedgerow on two sides with a restricted access track running through the site, leading to two secure points of entry onto the site.
- There is a parking area opposite the plots at the Meadow road entrance, together with a standpipe tap for the hand watering of crops.
- There are several personal tool stores, small sheds and water containers on Site for equipment storage and rainwater harvesting.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Short to Medium Term Objectives.

1) General Maintenance

Re-sizing and maintenance of vacant plots is being actively progressed at the Upwood site over the past year. People's expectations from working an allotment has changed over time and this generally results in a requirement for wanting smaller plots than the historically defined larger allotment plot sizes. By creating smaller plot sizes and using weed suppressant membrane to reduce overall maintenance requirements, we have continued the drive to get more people actively engaged in the allotments, resulting in full occupancy. When plots were unoccupied, we covered the area with manure and membrane with a view to making the prospect of taking on a plot more appealing to any new members.

The inside of the hedge, and shared access paths will continue to be the responsibility of individual plot holders as they are expected to maintain their own plot area.

Communal grass cutting is currently contracted out to CGM, and we amended the contract to have just the main access track and parking area regularly maintained. This will leave the orchard grass to be cut on an ad-hoc basis by the tenants, therefore encouraging wild flowers and insects such as bees to flourish.

A number of hedges have been laid with whips, and this work will continue this spring. This will enhance the look of the site, and have long term benefits for the wildlife.

Plot one is being actively cleared and managed by the members, enhancing the appearance of the site and encouraging wildlife and wildflowers to flourish.

2) Strengthening the association.

The URCAA committee has traditionally been made up of five members, including a representative from the Great Raveley site.

There is always a need to recruit additional members to share some of the everyday site management and to drive forward future projects but this is particularly important as the Association has grown.

URCAA will seek to engage the wider membership in general maintenance tasks and projects beneficial to the group or wider community.

Recruitment and the retention of plot holders remains a high priority.

3) Publicity.

Whilst we are managing vacant plots as they arise, with natural turnover and some downsizing, there is always a need to attract new interest in the allotments. We will continue to publicise plot availability in 2021/22 through the village newsletter, the local free newspapers and by any other means.

The Facebook group page appears to be well supported and used for sharing gardening tips and sharing produce. We continue to add members to this group.

4) Social events.

The committee would like to hold at least one social event in the year, to raise the Group's profile as well as engender a community spirit. Unfortunately with the current Covid-19 situation this is unlikely to occur in the short term. As we emerge from the Covid-19 restrictions, then we will endeavour to organise an event involving the tenants, and perhaps the local community..

5) Community Orchard Project.

The Orchard will continue to be maintained as all the trees have survived another winter. New hedging has been planted and fencing erected over the past year to enhance the area and define the boundaries between the orchard and the other plots. Further planting and improvements will continue this spring.

The raised flower beds are in need of attention and the creation of new beds will also continue this spring.

6) Water provision.

There are currently four water troughs at the Upwood site and a 1000 litre water container at the Great Raveley site. Over 2021/22 we will continue to look at innovative ways to fill them as we work towards a long-term aim of providing access to water for all plots.

We may have an opportunity to have an additional water supply installed at the top of the allotments. This may come about as a result of a proposed planning application that requires a utility trench to be installed on allotment land. The funding for this additional water supply may come in the form of an easement.

7) Rewilding.

Returning land to nature, rewilding, is becoming more prominent in government policy and the public's thinking. The poor quality of the soil on plot 1 which is

currently designated as a “community plot”, and the presence of wildflowers in this area, has led the committee to attempt to rewild this area. The intention is to suppress invasive weeds and scrub in order to allow more diverse wild plants to thrive. Work has started on this project with Ali and a small team of volunteers making good progress. This work will continue this year and will encourage wild flora and fauna, such as bees. This will benefit nature and the community in the short and long term.

8) On site toilet.

An on-site toilet would especially benefit those plot holders who live some distance from their plots. Some type of Eco Loo that requires no permanent plumbing would be ideal. The practicality and costs of this amenity require further investigation.

Long Term Objectives.

1) Water Provision.

Notwithstanding the water provision comments in the Short to Medium term plan, there still exists a need for further water provision on the Upwood site. If nothing comes from the planning permission and easement mentioned earlier, then we should consider installing an additional water supply ourselves.

There is no permanent water supply at the Great Raveley site, so this should also be considered.

Both sites would benefit from additional water supplies.

2) Shelter or communal hut.

A communal shelter hut or shelter is still an objective. A building or shelter would engender a communal spirit if plot holders could share a space together on site.

3) Improve the Orchard.

It intended that a gate be erected at the entrance to the orchard and extend the boundary fence and hedge to better enclose this area. Fund raising will be required for this project.

FINANCE

Allotment rents are now collected and managed by URCAA and retained for future Investment. Currently there is enough income to manage the site on a day to day basis with a small surplus generated for site improvements. URCAA aim to build up a reserve from any fund-raising events and maintain a minimum of £300 in reserve for any ongoing maintenance.

All projects are dependent on fund raising, sponsorship and annual allotment rents collected by URCAA. At present the association funds would appear to be healthy and able to support the ongoing maintenance costs.

However, maintenance costs and water bills are always going up and we have not increased the rents for some years. Also, we have no spare money for projects such

as an additional water supply for example. To avert any future shortfall in income, we notified the plot holders last November that we are considering an appropriate rent increase. A final figure has yet to be decided upon.

RISK ANALYSIS

The main risks that the URCAA committee have identified are fairly small, and Covid-19 has impacted on a number of areas though.

- Covid-19 – Due to the open nature of the allotments, we cannot be responsible for the general public adhering to the government guidelines. The onsite notice board and signs at the entrances draw attention to Covid-19 these guidelines.
- Covid-19 – Again, due to the pandemic, the committee are unable to organise any fund-raising events. This has the possibility of impacting upon the association's finances, but we do not consider that to be an immediate issue. However, funding for any short to long term projects could be problematic unless we increase the rent.
- Public liability – As the allotments are an open site and therefore accessible to the general public as well as plot holders, public liability insurance is covered by the council.
- Reduction in the number of plot-holders – There is a risk of a reduced take up of allotments and new plot holders not coming forward. Fortunately, this has not proved to be the case as more people have shown an interest in growing their own vegetables during the Covid-19 pandemic. Until only last week, we were running at 100% plot occupancy for the first time.
- Adverse weather – Severe weather could damage the site and the growing potential of the plants and vegetables, most notably drought, flooding and wind damage. This could dishearten plot holders resulting in a decline in allotment usage and therefore the funding needed to support the allotments. We are attempting to alleviate the flood problem by planting shrubs and hedging. As additional water supply would help in drought conditions.

URCAA TRUSTEES FINANCIAL REPORT – 310321		
31/03/2021	Allotment Account Balance	£3,130.96
31/03/2021	Allotment Plots - Deposits Held	£1,080.00
31/03/2021	Orchard Account Balance	£708.87
31/03/2021	Total Balance of accounts	£4,919.83
Income/Expenditure from 31/03/2020 to 31/03/2021		
Allotments account summary 31/03/21		£3,130.96
	<i>Opening Balance (April 2020)</i>	<i>£3,042.46</i>
Key activities	Allotment Rents income	£906.50
	Water costs	-£62.00
	Plot clearance + prep	-£160.00
	Water tap repair	-£65.00
	Maintenance (Grass cutting)	-£252.00
	Notice Board - install	-£100.00
	Maintenance of equipment (petrol strimmer)	-£179.00
Orchard accounts summary 31/03/2021		£708.87
	<i>Opening Balance (April 2020)</i>	<i>£977.94</i>
Key activities	Grass cutting	-£180.00
	Maintenance (Tree guards, fence posts)	-£64.07
	Orchards signage	-£25.00