

Upwood and the Raveleys Parish Councillors: Trustees' Meeting

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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) took place on
Monday 04 April 2022 at 6:30pm in Upwood Village Hall**

Present: G. Bonnett-Kolakowska, J. Burgess, J. Edwards, R. Howe (Chairman), R. Mashford, A. Perkins, M. Tew.

In Attendance: Mrs. C. Silverstone (Clerk), Mr. T. Brown, Mrs L. Carter & Mr. Adam Cole, Upwood and the Raveleys Community Allotments Association

Minutes

35-04/22 To receive and approve apologies for absence.

There were no apologies for absence.

36-04/22 To receive and approve the minutes of the trustees' meeting held on 01 March 2021.

The minutes 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 Mashford seconded the proposal. All who had been present at the meeting were in favour and it was **resolved** to do so.

37-04/22 To receive an update from Upwood and the Raveleys Community Allotment Association (URCAA): strengths and challenges to date.

38-04/22 To receive an updated business plan from URCAA.

39-04/22 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 each of the reports and gave trustees the opportunity to ask questions. Mr Brown confirmed that a new committee had been voted in at the recent AGM. Mr Brown asked that his thanks be recorded to the outgoing committee members, all of whom had demonstrated a long-term and exemplary commitment to the charity. He introduced Mr Adam Cole as the new chairman and wished the new committee every success for the future.

The chairman of the trustees recalled the establishment of the formal agreement between the parish council, the trustees and URCAA in September 2014 and reflected on the allotment association's continued success. He noted that both sites are managed impeccably; wise investments and improvements have been made over the years; and the community orchard in particular has developed into a superb asset to this parish. He noted that credit for this success is due to the commitment of the outgoing committee members.

40-04/22 To receive an update from Councillor Edwards (trustee with a portfolio responsibility for the allotments).

Councillor Edwards congratulated the allotments association on its continued success. Mrs Carter asked that thanks be recorded to Councillor Edwards for his practical support on many occasions throughout the year.

41-04/22 To receive an update on plans for the creation of a utilities trench (minute reference 22-03/21); to consider acceptance of a draft deed of easement; and to appoint a surveyor to check the position of the trench (at the developer's expense).

This matter remains in the hands of the solicitors and the draft deed of easement had not been received in advance of the meeting as had been expected. The chairman offered a recommendation based on recent personal experience for a surveyor and proposed that the trustees appoint CJ Surveys Ltd. Councillor Burgess seconded this proposal. All were in favour and it was **resolved** to do so.

42-04/22 Matters for future consideration.

No decisions can be made under this item.

43-04/22 Date of next meeting: 03 April 2023.

Close of meeting: 7:00pm

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

Chairman's Report April 2022

Allotments

1. The Upwood site currently has a total of 45 plots of varying sizes maintained by 42 tenants.
2. The Great Raveley site currently has a total of 5 plots of varying sizes maintained by 4 tenants.
3. There are 15 full sized plots, while the remainder have been sub-divided into smaller more manageable plots.
4. There are no vacant plots at the Great Raveley site.
5. There are also no vacant plots at the Upwood site.
6. There are currently 4 people on the plot waiting list.
7. The tenants using the site are predominantly from Upwood and Great Raveley, but a small number of tenants also come from Woodwalton, Bury, Ramsey and Ramsey Heights.
8. At the Upwood site a large area is let to a farmer tenant for the production of hay.
9. At the Great Raveley site a field section is let to a local farmer for the production of arable crops.
10. 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.
11. 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.
12. 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.
13. 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.
14. The Community Plot (plot one site by Huntingdon Road) has very poor soil and is slowly being transformed into a wildlife area.
15. Vacant plots and the suppression of weeds are always a concern. However, with all the plots occupied, the situation appears to be under control. The majority of the plots are in a good condition and tenants have been reminded to keep their shared areas tidy.
16. Although the parish council has ended its maintenance contract with CGM, the allotment association is contracted to remain with them until the end of the growing season. At this time, the contract situation will be reviewed when we will either continue with CGM or find a suitable replacement contractor. 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.
17. We have increased the plot rent for the first time in many years. This was required to cover increased maintenance costs, water charges and to maintain a healthy balance sheet.
18. Part of the plot rent now covers individual membership of the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG). One of the benefits of joining this association is that plot holders now have National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG).

Orchard

1. There is a separate report for the Community Orchard (attached)

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>
31/03/22	Allotment Account Balance	£3,777.04
31/03/22	Allotment Plots – deposits held	£1,320.00
31/03/22	Orchard Account Balance	£704.16
31/03/22	Total Balance of accounts	£5801.20

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 the Community Orchard appear to be in good health financially, and have good support from the parishioners. All available allotment plots under cultivation. We have a small waiting list, so may even have to consider releasing a small amount of land from the hay field or Great Raveley field plots. Maintenance wise, there are no major causes for concern. However, the grass cutting maintenance contract with CGM will be up for renewal in the Autumn. This contract will be reviewed as they have not proven to be reliable and need constant chasing for their work and billing.

At the recent AGM, a full change of officers has occurred, so this will be my last report as chairman before Adam takes over. I personally would like to thank the outgoing secretary and treasurer for their hard work and dedication supporting me and the association after being in post for many years.

UPWOOD COMMUNITY ORCHARD – REPORT FOR TRUSTEES

During the past year we have seen some dramatic changes to the Community Orchard.

The grass cutting contract was cancelled in the spring of 2021 and the whole area allowed to grow naturally with mown paths created through the site to provide access. Visitors commented on how pleasant it now was to walk through or round the Orchard. Pernicious weeds (sow thistle and ragwort) were carefully eliminated whilst others such as wild carrot, knapweed and hawkbit were encouraged. The whole area was mown at the end of the summer to help spread the seeds. This was augmented by the donation of a bale of hay taken from Kings College Cambridge which was carefully shaken out over raked areas to, again, encourage a wider selection of wild flowers and grasses and small plugs of wild flowers were planted. Unfortunately, CGM managed to enter the Orchard and cut the grass at the start of this March, despite being reminded not to go near it. On the positive side they avoided all the obvious planting but have mown many of the wild flower plugs.

Volunteers were called upon in the autumn to create some wild flower 'smiles' - curved scrapes - which were then sown with collected wild flower seeds and there were signs of young plants which might make a colourful display amongst the grasses if they survived the cutting in March. In addition, daffodil bulbs taken from the old raised beds were planted in random clumps around the Orchard and are now in flower. These will hopefully colonise the area.

All of the trees have been surveyed over the winter with necessary pruning undertaken – plums to be done later this spring. One tree had died from waterlogging and was replaced, in a different location. The waterlogging of the lower part of the site is still a problem and some willow slips have been planted to help soak up the surplus and, hopefully, provide some willow for fencing projects in due course. In early February we welcomed the addition of a Japanese Flowering Cherry tree, planted in memory of the late Andrew Silverstone. In addition to the new tree, a new bench has also been added alongside providing two seating areas within the Orchard from which to enjoy the view across the fenland landscape.

The largest change, however, came with the successful application to the Ramsey Windfarm Community Fund, via Grantscape, for the supply of three new raised beds. The original wooden ones, which were made from recycled wood, had started to fall apart with one disintegrating completely and another losing a corner. The grant money came in two chunks, enabling us to purchase three recycled plastic, wood effect raised beds almost the same size as the original beds which were emptied and dismantled. The surviving plants were rehomed over the winter.

The new beds were delivered in January and erected with the help of two local volunteers. The second half of the grant money funded special mulch which arrived one frosty morning on a lorry too big to squeeze through the barrier and so was left, in bags, at the entrance. Fortunately our local knight in shining (yellow) armour

arrived with his forklift to move the bags into the site and the group of volunteers then filled the three beds.

The total spent on the beds and mulch came to less than the grant money requested and we were delighted when Grantscape confirmed that the remaining balance could be used to purchase some plants for the beds – this had originally been put down as our own contribution to the funding. We have therefore been able to not only replace the beds but also some of the plants with the grant monies. Additional plants have been purchased and two of the three beds are now planted up, the third will be planted up later in the spring with herbs. There is a possibility that it may be designated a Platinum Jubilee Herb bed if a suggested donation materialises. The untidy, impromptu bed by the hedge, created from the spoil from the old beds, has now been rebuilt and planted up and a new corner bed has been made from recycled timber, shortly to be planted up.

There is still plenty of work to do in the Orchard – we are currently putting a low fence along the top boundary to help define the extent of the Orchard. The rose hedge along the track is needing some attention and whilst a recent volunteer day saw all the tree bases cleared of grass, the mulching is ongoing. New slate labels for the trees have been purchased and will be placed by the trees as soon as the mulching is completed. Looking to the future, we would like to put wood surrounds around each tree to enable effective mulching and weeding of the tree bases and to provide a uniform look to the site. Funding for this project will come either from a fund-raising event or a grant application.

The Community Orchard is open to all and receives many visitors from outside the village. The Upwood Home to Home group are using it for their May meeting when the local Raptor Centre will be giving a flying display in the early evening. Primarily, however, it is a place of contemplation and reflection – a peaceful haven in troubled times.

The Community Orchard is run by a very small team of 3 volunteers – if anyone would like to join us you would be most welcome!

Liz Carter – Upwood Community Orchard
30 MARCH 2022

URCAA – Business Plan 2022/23 – Update date 010422

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 relaxing of the Covid-19 situation, we have recently been able to hold a normal AGM this year in the village hall. As the current committee members have been in post for a number of years a completely fresh committee was voted in at the AGM. Hopefully new faces will bring continued enthusiasm to the running of the association.

- At the AGM, volunteers from with the tenants agreed to monitor the maintenance situation to ensure that the site continues to look its best.
- 45 of the available 45 plots at Upwood are actively cultivated and managed by allotment holders.
- There are no vacant plots at the Upwood.
- The Great Raveley site also has full occupancy.
- Currently there are 4 people on the waiting list for vacant plots. This situation is under review as land may need to be found unless current plots become available.
- 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 will be reviewing this in the Autumn. This will leave the orchard grass paths to be cut on an ad-hoc basis by the tenants, therefore encouraging wild flowers and insects such as bees to flourish on the uncut areas.

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 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 for example, and to drive forward future projects.
A number of volunteers stepped forward at the AGM to monitor maintenance, manage publicity and social media sites.
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 2022/23 through the village newsletter, the local free newspapers, social media 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.
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 nearly 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 dilapidated raised flower beds have been replaced after obtaining funding from Grantscape.

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 2022/23 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 free of charge. 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 the community plot (plot 1), and the presence of wildflowers in this area, has led the committee and volunteers 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 continued on this project and good progress has been made. 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. After being raised again at the recent AGM, the practicality and costs of this amenity requires 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. It would appear that a local developer is likely to install a utilities trench on the allotments site. The trustees and the URCAA committee need to consider a proposed easement in the form of a water supply at the top end of the allotments.

There is no permanent water supply at the Great Raveley site, so this should also be Considered as a future project.

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.

4) Community raised beds.

A proposal was put forward at the AGM to have some raised beds made available for the use of the residents of the local care home. This would require funding and further investigation.

FINANCE

Allotment rents are now collected and managed by URCAA and retained for future Investment and day to day running costs. Currently there is enough income to manage and maintain the site 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 or unexpected expenses. All projects are dependent on fund raising, sponsorship and annual allotment rents collected by URCAA.

However, maintenance costs and water bills are always going up, so after many years, we have reluctantly increased the plot rents to cover this. Hopefully we can generate a small surplus that can be used to finance any future projects.

RISK ANALYSIS

The main risks that the URCAA committee have identified are fairly insignificant, and some have been addressed, such as public liability insurance.

- Covid-19 – The easing of Covid-19 restrictions over the past year has reduced some of the concerns we had over public safety for example. Due to the open nature of the allotments, we cannot be responsible for the general public adhering to the latest government guidelines. The onsite notice board and signs at the entrances continues to draw attention to Covid-19 guidelines.
- Covid-19 – Again, due to the pandemic, the committee are unable to organise any fund-raising events. This could have impacted 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 now be reduced due to the recent rent increase.
- 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.
- Individual liability - We have enrolled the URCAA into the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG) which has the benefit of providing individual plot holders with free liability insurance.
- 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 been the case as more people have shown an interest in growing their own vegetables during the Covid-19 pandemic. We are currently running at 100% plot occupancy, and even have a small waiting list.
- 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. An additional water supply would help in drought conditions.

Pending transactions to be cleared for end of Financial Year *

URCAA TRUSTEES FINANCIAL REPORT - 01/04/22

Bank account balance statement

	£5,801.20	
Bank account adjusted for pending payments	£5,744.51	
Allotment accounts balance:	£3,777.04	
Deposits held:	£1,320.00	Need to adjust at end of FY
Orchard accounts balance:	£704.16	

Income/expenditure from 31/03/2021 to 31/03/2022

Allotment accounts summary at 31/03/22

	£3,777.04
<i>Allotment accounts incl pending</i>	£3710.60*
Opening balance (01 Mar 21)	£3,088.50

Rental income	£1,297.50
Water costs	-£99.58
Padlock & noticeboard keys	-£49.80
Grass cutting (9 cuts)	-£302.40
Admin costs (printing, stamps etc)	-£39.22
Meeting costs (incl hall deposit - final payment tbc)	-£45.40
NSALG membership	-£139.00

Summary (Allotments)

Monies in	£1,297.50
Monies out	£675.40

Orchard accounts summary at 31/03/22

	£704.16
<i>Orchard accounts incl pending*</i>	£713.91
Opening balance (01 Mar 21)	£708.87

<i>Grantscape - grant award for raised beds +</i>	£2,312.00
Raised beds	-£1,662.00
Mulch	-£527.90
Plants	-£167.94

Maintenance, Bulb pots, seeds etc	-£98.87
Donation	£160.00
Orchard sign (was pending from 20/21)	-£25.00

Grass cutting (one off cut) -£60.00 Not invoiced or incl. in pending

Summary (Orchard)

Monies in (incl Grantscape and donation)	£2,472.00
Monies out	£2,541.71