



## Chairman's Report to 2017 AGM

### Chesham Allotments Group

Greetings and welcome all to this, our annual general meeting for 2017.

The saying goes that time passes quicker the older you get, well I must be older than I thought because this year has flown by. Paradoxically, how did we fit all those activities into just 12 months?

I stepped into some pretty big shoes last year taking over from Allen and Vince whose exemplary leadership had guided the allotments group for more than a decade. With their help, I think we've had a pretty successful year. First a few allotment facts:

#### **Allotment Facts**

- We have 256 allotments available across 2 sites in Chesham which are owned, maintained, and managed by the Chesham Town Council
- Allotment tenants are represented to the Council by the Chesham Allotments Group (CAG) consisting of 13 allotment holders and one town councillor (Jane MacBean)
  - The CAG is governed by a set of Terms of Reference
  - There are 28 coffee mornings throughout the spring and summer
  - There are 4 social events per year
    - 2 Fish & Chips & Quiz evenings
    - Summer Social for all Chesham Organisations
    - Open Day for the Community
  - There are 4 allotment inspections per year
- Currently there are 10 newcomers on the waiting list for plots but the waiting time has been short as of late.
- Next year the rent for an allotment site will stay the same at £3.90 a pole/rod (16.5 feet) for Bellingdon Rd., and £3.40 a pole/rod for Cameron Rd.
- In recent years as tenants have given up their holdings, plot sizes have been halved to allow greater participation.
- Tenants pay an average of £17 per annum for an allotment in Chesham.
- There is a 30% discount on rent available for tenants over 60.

- The Cameron Rd allotments were not owned by Chesham Town Council until 1974, but allotments had existed on the Taylors Farm site since Victorian times and in 2015 we celebrated our 100-year anniversary.

### **Review of the year**

In October of 2016 we took the opportunity to review the **Terms of Reference** for the CAG. After much study and discussion only minor adjustments to the wording were made but the process made each of the representatives much more familiar with our purpose as an intermediary between the Chesham Town Council and the allotment holders and the processes by which we operate. The Chesham Allotments Group is primarily a service organisation and this principle has guided decisions taken over the year.

That review was followed by an examination of the **cultivation rules** for tenants contained in the tenant's rental agreement with the Town Council. Our remit was limited to the cultivation rules with the objective of reducing the number of unworked or underworked plots. This resulted in new rules and guidelines for plot cultivation contained in your new tenancy agreement. During this process, we were acutely aware that the reasons for plot underutilization needed to be addressed and this resulted in several new initiatives for the 2017/18 year.

A perennial challenge for the CAG has been regular and accurate communication with allotment holders. Data protection rules dictate that the Council cannot supply us with tenant's email addresses and so we must solicit them individually resulting in a less than effective communication stream. This **email database** project continues and has seen some success but we persist with the drive to keep our members informed via e-mail. If you are not on our database and would like to be informed please see Chris MacKay who is here tonight. We promise no "Junk Mail".

The communication process continues to have in place "**The Grower**" that has remained a successful channel for allotment news and an example of professionalism under the leadership of Kate Hutchinson. I'm certain she would be happy to consider any contributions you may wish to make in the way of articles, poetry, thoughts, and gardening tips.

Kate also has this year set up an **email** address for the allotments group at [cheshamallotments@gmail.com](mailto:cheshamallotments@gmail.com) to and from which you can communicate with us directly. Likewise, Tony Muir has been diligent in keeping the allotments **website**



current and you can visit <http://www.cheshamallotments.org.uk/> directly or click through from the Town Council's web page.

In early 2017, we were informed by Rachel Watts that the **Environmental Agency** had revived plans for a Chesham Flood Alleviation Scheme first proposed back in 2013. Under that plan the Chesham allotments would have a large surface drainage ditch and holding tank dug through the middle of the Cameron Rd. site. Under Allen's leadership at the time, that challenge from the EA was answered and subsequently abandoned. The new scheme involved sinking large surface water holding tanks into the Cameron Rd site to collect rainwater runoff. Many meetings were organised, a site survey conducted, and a public consultation held which many of you attended. We received official notification last month that, although the EA Flood Alleviation Scheme continues, the Cameron Rd allotment sites are no longer being considered. However, the fact that Chesham does in fact regularly suffer from flooding we expect that this question will at some point in the future raise it's head again.

As we do every year the CAG cooperated with the **Chesham in Bloom** group to represent the allotments during the 2017 Britain in Bloom competition. This year the town was invited to enter both the regional and the national level competitions. We don't know the results yet but the judging visit by the RHS to the Cameron Rd site seemed to go well and the judges were understandably impressed with Loraine and Larry Faulkner's plot by the gate with their beautiful flower displays. A few days later Rachel notified us that the impromptu snap shot taken on the day had made the front page of the national RHS web site.

Any review of the year would be remiss if it did not mention the successful **social events**. Two fish and chips & quiz nights were held this year as always. The first one at the McMinn Centre and second one at the Town Hall. Both were well attended and thoroughly enjoyed.

This year for the first time the **Summer Social** was opened to the other town partner organisations and CiB and CHS were both represented. The idea behind this expansion was to celebrate our collaboration with these organisations with an evening sunset, good friends, and lots and lots of food. We all left quite stuffed!

Of course, throughout the summer, Beverly MacKay has organised our **Coffee Mornings** which have grown in attendance and importance as a mechanism for

communication, information sharing, and developing a real sense of community for the allotment holders.

**Open Day** a few weeks ago was a remarkable success in terms of participants, weather, and finances and continues to be our flagship social event in which the wider community participates. We calculated that there were over 150 participants, if you count the children and dogs, and that many were visiting the allotments for the first time.

### **On-going projects**

We have known for some time that a **safety fence** was needed along the south side of the focal point and this year we were granted financial support to accomplish this. The Chesham Connect organisation has made an initial award and we seek matching financial funding to complete this prior to events kicking off again in 2018.

We have been pleased to welcome CiB as an allotment tenant this summer. They joined us this year on plot 54B. You can see the **CiB polytunnel** from the road where they plan on growing and storing plants both for use in their beautification efforts around the town and for sale. Their chairman Mohammed Fayyaz is with us tonight and we look forward to working with them over the coming year.

Long the same lines, **CHS** is about to join us on the plot right next to the Focal Point. They will be erecting a new shed soon from which they'll be selling potatoes and agri-supplies. There will be obvious benefits for the CAG and of course they will be closer to the cake.

### **Objectives for the next 12 months**

Over the next year the CAG has identified several objectives which we would like to pursue. This is important since these will direct our activities, thoughts, and finances.

Starting right away, we will introduce the assignment of **defined roles** for CAG representatives and officers. With this idea in place there will no longer be just representatives, but instead we will be "Representative from Ashridge Rd in charge of security", or maintenance, or events coordinator. You will notice tonight that each person put forward by the Group and standing for representative has a function next to their name. I will not read all of these out tonight but they are



listed here and a copy of these comments will be placed on the web site for everyone to see.

**Secretary** - Records and distributes the minutes of all official CAG meetings as well as writes letters of correspondence on behalf of the committee.

**Editor – The Grower** - Sees that the newsletter *The Grower* is published and distributed 6 times a year. Solicits articles and works closely with the Reporter.

**Database Manager** - A functionary who collects, updates, and manages the database of allotment holders, keeps the e-archive of documents.

**Treasurer** - Manages the finances of the CAG including banking, liability insurance, payments, and reporting.

**Chairman** - Coordinates the activities of the other Group members, provides direction, schedules and chairs the meetings. Works closely with the Chesham Town Council during inspections. Liasion with the Chesham Horticultural Society, Chesham in Bloom, and other community groups.

**Events Coordinator** - Arranges and coordinates the 5 events per year including a rota of help, a standard acitivity checklist, scheduling, and activities.

**Widening Participation** - Encourages the allotment holders to participate in CAG activities and contribute time and resources. This position also manages the Discount Card scheme.

**Vice Chairman** - Assists the Chairman in Group activities. Works closely with the Chesham Town Council. Interacts with national allotment organisations, completes the Risk Assessments in conjuction with the Events Coordinator.

**Historian and Archivist** - Assembles historical accounts of the Chesham Allotments, collects and archives newspaper articles and photos of events. Works closely with the Reporter.

**Maintenance & Facilities** - Responsible for assembling working parties to maintain the Focal Point shed, generator hut, grass areas, marquee, inspecting fencing and gates, and creating the loo rota and calling MT Loos as needed.

**Coffee Morning Coordinator** - Assembles the coffee morning rota and make arrangements for cakes and hut supplies. Has access to the database and a a standard coffee morning checklist.

**Reporter and Community liasion** - Writes stories with photos about the CAG for the local publications. Objective is to raise public awareness. Works closely with the archivist and Editor of the Grower. Liasion with the Chesham Horticultural Society, Chesham in Bloom, and other community groups.

**Education & Orientation Coordinator** - Arranges and/or provides a face-to-face orientation session and welcome pack for new allotment holders.

Putting these positions in place allows us to better focus attention on the necessary functional areas of the CAG, ensures that everything gets covered, and much more evenly spreads responsibilities.

**Maintenance** of focal point has been a challenge since a regular rota of mowing, painting, cleaning, and rubbish removal is required. With a volunteer organisation, this can be difficult since time seems to be in short supply for all of us. However, during 2018 we will endeavour to identify a physical facilities officer among our members who can coordinate (not necessarily do) these responsibilities.

**Increasing participation** is an important priority for the CAG. This takes 2 forms; first, participation from the existing tenants in providing services, conducting social activities, and self-managing the two sites. The second form is the wider community of Chesham and the many who hope to become allotmenters. Both forms are needed to ensure the successful future of our allotments and this must become a critical part of our future plans.

Although it has been a bit better this year, **security** continues to be regular concern for our allotment holders and we will strive to introduce practices and mechanisms which will help. We will carry on working closely with the Council and local police community support officers (PCSOs) in this effort.

### **Thank You's**

We have lost a couple of good friends and fellow allotmenters who have passed away over the last 12 months and I would like to remember and **pay tribute** to Dave Spencer.

Finally, tonight, I would like also to say **thank you** to Paul Isom and his team who have done an excellent job in mowing and maintaining the sites. The grass on the paths grows at lightspeed and they've managed to keep it looking neat and tidy for our use and visitor's enjoyment. Additionally, Bill, Rachel, Maria, and Katherine have each contributed greatly to a successful 2017.

Thank You