**East Hoathly with Halland Parish Council**

**Garden Plots**

**Why do we have Garden Plots?**

Firstly, it is important to state that it is a statutory duty of Parish Councils to provide allotments if 6 or more council taxpayers request that the facility be made available. This is enshrined in an Act of Parliament that dates back to 1908. The Parish Council (PC) is expected to acquire suitable land and buy it using Parish funds, wherever possible. The PC was in receipt of a request to provide allotments and so had a statutory duty to source suitable land and provide this resource. We are also obliged to prepare the site and arrange the format of plots and basic facilities, ie. fencing, etc. Thereafter, the PC has to maintain the site and fund any ongoing repairs. These costs can be offset by charging an annual rent for the use of the plots.

Gardening has been proven to have a hugely beneficial impact on physical and mental health & wellbeing. It allows interaction with nature, provides exercise, helps with social isolation, reduces food miles and encourages people to produce their own fresh food, indeed some GPs now prescribe gardening as part of a treatment plan. During Covid the Garden Plots provided a huge resource to the plot holders and also to those who walked through the plots on a daily basis.

**The History of the Garden Plots**

East Hoathly village had allotments in the Church Marks Lane area, but these were lost when houses were built there in 1950-1960s.

An opportunity came about in 2012 to acquire a suitable site with an offer from the owners of Hesmonds Stud to exchange a part of Harrison’s Field for the Long Pond area – land amounting to 3.9 acres. This was gratefully accepted and the PC agreed to pay the legal charges involved in the exchange of titles. The PC also paid for the setting-up costs of preparing the plots for use. Once ready, a Garden Plots Committee (GPC) was formed who have a constitution based on Terms of Reference issued by the PC. The use of the plots is available for a reasonable rent to Plotters, provided they follow the rules set up by the GPC.

**Freedom of Information Request**

In 2019, the Parish Council received a Freedom of Information request from a resident regarding the costs involved in setting up the GPs. Extensive research was done by the present Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) on the previous records kept by the PC. This resulted in an itemised list of invoices paid to complete the project, including all legal charges, which was sent to the resident in November of that year. The total cost was just under £42,000. This cost was met from the PC General Reserve Fund. With applications for new developments, the terms of S106 arrangements are set up between the developer and the Local Planning Authority (not the PC), in this case Wealden District Council, before final approval of the application. Hence, the developments on the Juziers and Nightingales estates, which pre-dated the GP by around 4 years or so, played no part in the funding. The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) legislation only came into force in 2010, so is also not relevant to this situation.

In October 2023 Councillors, the Clerk and the RFO reviewed the figures submitted as part of the FOI on 2019. This included contacting historical parties that were involved in the land legal transfer and establishment of the plots. We can confirm that we have been informed by these parties that no payments were received from East Hoathly with Halland Parish Council at that time or since. Therefore, the figure of just under £42,000 was the cost to the Parish Council relating to the Garden Plots.

**Continued Funding and the Contribution that the GPs make to the Parish**

The GP rent is reviewed annually so that operation does not run at a loss, if at all possible. Over the period from 2014, when the GP became fully operational, a small profit has been returned to the PC of, on average, about £1000/pa after maintenance and water supply costs are deducted. It was always the intention that the cost of establishing the Garden Plots would be recovered over time and, in order to facilitate this and set the plot rental at an affordable rate, on this basis it will take until around 2056 to repay the initial investment in simple terms.

The Parish Council are pleased that we are able to provide this valuable facility as part of our overall responsibility to the Parish and one that has brought interest, enjoyment and community involvement to many. The GPs also sit as an appreciating asset for the Parish as we own the land outright with no borrowing.

**If you are interested in having a Garden Plot, please contact the Clerk who will forward your details to the Garden Plots Committee.**