

## A Site for Sore Eyes...

How often have you driven past the allotment site on Brenchley Road? Did you even know that it is called Whitethorn Allotments?

The provision of allotments is one of the very few obligations of a Parish Council – if residents ask for a site it must be provided from Parish-Council owned land. Whitethorn Allotments was bought at auction by the Parish Council in 1957 for £375. Although you might think a plot of that size in the beautiful Kent countryside is worth a fortune now, however Local Government accounting rules dictate that it remains in the Council's Asset Register at a value of £375.

An allotment is traditionally measured in rods (perches or poles), an old measurement of length dating back to Anglo-Saxon times. 10 poles is the accepted size of an allotment, the equivalent of 250 square metres or about the size of a doubles tennis court. This however has not troubled Whitethorn allotments and the plots are a random size and shape – only adding to its charm.

Since 1957 the site has had good use and some tenants have held plots for many decades. There is much expertise available and it has been known for seeds, compost and bamboo stakes to be offered to anyone who needs them. It's a shared endeavour and no one really minds who grows the largest cabbage or has the best crop of spuds, though the tallest sunflower might require a trophy at some point.

When I became Clerk the allotment site was one of the more enjoyable things I became involved in and I have regular contact with the tenants via the Matfield Allotment Holders Association (MaHa). We work together so that I can put suggestions for improvements to the Parish Council. By last year, some plots were overgrown or empty and the site was ready for an overhaul... it's only been 60 years after all! So, the PC allocated £5,000 towards improvements in the hope that it would encourage its full usage.

As a result, six new smaller allotment plots (two with raised beds) were installed and the internal hedges were cut back. New tenants snapped up these plots and have made full use of them:

Before....



During ...



After....



This summer, with lockdown making the allotments even more precious, the Council has split a large plot into three, tenants have created a wildflower meadow to encourage pollinators and are putting in a bench for socially distanced get-togethers, and the communal fruit trees are providing all tenants with opportunities for apple pie or cider, whichever is more needed!

Whitethorn Allotments are a real success story in the parish, so much so that I'm afraid there is a waiting list now!.

**Chantal Brooks, Clerk, Brenchley and Matfield Parish Council**