

Meeting between Worplesdon Parish Council and Guildford Allotment Society (GAS)

Date: 7 October 2026

Attendees

- Andrew Simmonds – Guildford Allotment Society (GAS)
 - Nigel Mitchell – Chairman, Worplesdon Parish Council (WPC)
 - Marie Wingate – Clerk to WPC
 - Victoria Fear – Assistant Clerk to WPC
 - Helen Lawrence – Finance Officer, WPC
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1. Background and Site History

Andrew provided an overview of the history of the North Moors allotment site.

The development of the Weyside Urban Village resulted in the loss of approximately two-thirds of the Bellfields allotment site. Alternative provision was therefore required, with North Moors identified as the replacement site.

GAS had expressed concerns about the suitability of North Moors from the outset, including:

- Its location within an industrial estate rather than a residential area, with anticipated reliance on cars.
- The stony nature and poor condition of the site.
- Extensive bramble growth prior to development.
- A significant rabbit population.
- The presence of a public footpath through the site, which was subsequently re-routed.
- Difficulties with the initial site design.

The first iteration of the plan inadvertently incorporated land belonging to Royal Mail. The plan was subsequently amended. A later design did not provide an adequate means of walking through the allotment plots. Andrew subsequently redesigned the layout, resulting in the arrangement of the site as delivered.

Site delivery and outstanding issues

GAS considers that a number of aspects of the site were inadequately delivered and remain unresolved.

Waste/septic tank:

A septic tank was not installed. Instead, a holding tank was provided. GAS estimates that, based on the size of the site, a properly sized septic tank would require emptying approximately once every ten years, whereas the existing tank could require emptying approximately three times per year if all plots were fully occupied.

Fencing:

The perimeter fencing does not extend approximately 600mm below ground level, which GAS considers necessary to minimise rabbits burrowing beneath the fence.

Parking:

The original proposal provided for approximately 12 parking spaces. This was subsequently reduced to five spaces and a cycle rack.

Electricity:

The electricity supply to the site runs up the metal fencing. GAS raised concerns that damage to the cable insulation could potentially result in the fencing becoming live. Similar concerns were raised regarding the electric bike charging point, where cabling runs through/along the metal bike rack.

GAS advised that it had been unable to obtain insurance for the site because of concerns regarding the electrical installation.

Construction and soil compaction:

GAS stated that Blakedown, the contractor responsible for delivering the site, used heavy plant which caused significant soil compaction. This is not conducive to good growing condition.

Outstanding remedial works:

GAS stated that Guildford Borough Council (GBC) had previously undertaken to address the fencing and electrical issues but that these works had not yet been completed.

Royal Mail boundary:

Two unidentified green pipes remain along the Royal Mail boundary. Their purpose and origin are currently unknown and they may relate to previous uses of the site.

Soil testing:

GBC has undertaken soil sampling at the site. GAS stated that the results have not been provided to them.

Solar panels/battery:

GAS stated that solar panels and a battery were originally expected to be provided to power the site facilities but have not been installed. It was noted that this should be checked against the relevant planning permission and/or approved plans.

EV charging:

The question of who would be responsible for the electricity costs associated with the EV/bike charging point would need to be clarified.

2. Potential Transfer of the North Moors Site to GAS

Andrew advised that GAS had previously sought approximately £120,000 from GBC to take on responsibility for the North Moors site.

GAS had obtained indicative quotations of approximately £80,000–£100,000 to remedy the fencing issues. A suitably qualified electrician would also be required to address the electrical installation.

GAS's position is that GBC should meet all legal and consultancy costs associated with any transfer of the site.

It was noted that any proposed transfer would require further investigation and agreement regarding:

- The condition of the site and infrastructure.
- Responsibility for outstanding remedial works.
- The fencing and electrical installation.
- The drainage/septic tank arrangement.
- Solar panels and battery provision.
- EV charging and associated electricity costs.
- The unidentified pipes on the Royal Mail boundary.
- Soil sampling results.
- The precise extent of the land to be transferred.
- Legal and consultancy costs.
- Lease terms and responsibilities for boundaries and infrastructure.

3. GAS Charges and Site Income

Andrew outlined the current GAS charging structure.

The current rent is approximately £3.60 per rod, with an additional £3.60 per rod water charge.

The North Moors site contains approximately 705 lettable rods.

It was noted that, under the proposed arrangement, Plots 35 and A7 would be designated for parking.

GAS reported that water expenditure in 2026 is approximately 40% above normal levels, attributed to the exceptionally hot and dry summer.

An annual administration charge of £5 per person is payable. Of this, approximately £3.50 is paid to the National Allotment Society (NAS) to provide personal injury-related cover.

Each site has a warden. Wardens receive up to 10 rods rent-free through an honorarium, although they remain responsible for water and administration charges.

The GAS Committee comprises six volunteers. Committee members receive expenses.

4. GAS Operating Costs

Andrew outlined some of the Society's principal annual operating costs and administrative commitments.

These include:

- Annual audit costs of approximately £450, equating to around £50 per allotment site.
- Bank charges.
- Production and distribution of a printed newsletter twice a year.
- Allotment management software, Colony by MCPC Systems, costing approximately £1,200 per year across all of their sites currently managed using the system.
- Separate society and site liability insurance arrangements.
- Site machinery, including two push mowers which wardens may lend to tenants on request.
- Pigeon netting.
- First aid equipment and replacement of out-of-date items.

Andrew advised that Honda and Hawksworth were considered reliable mower brands and that, in his experience, purchasing very inexpensive machinery was not worthwhile. Maintenance costs were generally not budgeted for, as replacement was often more economical.

5. Allotment Occupancy and Waiting Lists

GAS currently has a waiting list of approximately 360 people across its sites.

However, Andrew advised that there is currently no waiting list for the remaining Bellfields allotment sites, which are the closest allotment sites to North Moors.

GAS has approximately 650 tenants across its sites.

Approximately 100 new tenants are dealt with each year across the 13 sites.

Andrew advised that an incentive could be considered to encourage the letting of currently vacant plots, such as offering the first 12 months' rent free, while still charging water and administration fees.

6. Plot Sizes and Cultivation Requirements

More than half of GAS's plots are divided into 5-rod plots, with some smaller plots of approximately 2.5 rods.

For the North Moors site plan:

- A plot with a number is a whole plot.
- A plot with an A-prefix is a part plot.

1 rod = approximately 25 square metres.

When measuring a plot, the measurement should extend to the halfway point across the adjoining path. This as the allotment-holder equivalent of riparian ownership.

GAS requires approximately 75% of each plot to be cultivated. This should not be interpreted as allowing the remainder simply to be landscaped.

Parking is not permitted on allotment plots.

7. Polytunnels, Sheds, Structures and Trees

Polytunnels are permitted provided that:

- They comply with the dimensions specified in the GAS documentation; and
- No more than 25% of the site is covered by structures.

Sprinklers are not permitted on any GAS site.

Dwarf fruit/stock trees are permitted, subject to height restrictions. Planting in pots is generally preferred.

8. Site Inspections and Non-Cultivation

GAS undertakes an annual site inspection in early June.

The expectation is that approximately 75% of each plot will be under cultivation.

Where this standard is not met, the tenant is given approximately one month to rectify the situation, after which the plot is reinspected.

Of approximately 650 tenants, GAS evicts around five or six tenants each year for persistent non-cultivation.

9. Invoicing and Payments

GAS invoices are issued on 1 September, with payment due by 1 October.

A 14-day grace period is normally allowed.

The Colony system does not automatically generate invoices or send reminders for unpaid invoices.

Pro-rata invoices for tenants taking on a plot part-way through the allotment year are generated manually. The GAS allotment year runs from 1 October to 30 September.

As at 7 October 2026, Andrew estimated that approximately 96 of the 650 plotholders had not yet paid their annual charges.

Andrew estimated that:

- Approximately 20 hours are required to generate the 650 annual invoices.
- A further 20 hours are required to reconcile payments and identify/chase unpaid invoices.
- A further approximately 3.5 hours are required to issue the final seven-day payment notice and copy invoice, based on an estimated hourly rate of £18.

If payment is still not received following the final seven-day notice, an eviction notice is issued.

There are normally no refunds where a tenant leaves part-way through the allotment year, except in exceptional circumstances.

Key deposits are £20 per key.

GAS processes approximately 350 additional payments per year across its 13 sites, primarily relating to water charges.

Annual accounts take approximately three hours to prepare.

Andrew estimates that general administration takes approximately 3–4 hours per week, in addition to dealing with new tenants and other site matters.

10. Administration and Governance

GAS Committee meetings take place approximately every six weeks.

Warden meetings take place approximately every three months.

WPC would need to become a member of the National Allotment Society if it took on the allotment management arrangements, at a current cost of approximately £84 per year, plus a £1 non-refundable share contribution.

11. Bee-Keeping

Up to four hives may be located together on one allotment plot. Andrew explained that this would typically comprise two active hives and two empty hives, allowing for swarming.

There is currently no restriction on the overall size of an apiary within the GAS rules.

It was noted that the existing bee plots at North Moors do not have 6-foot-high fencing, despite the allotment manager having repeatedly requested that GBC provide this.

Bee plots do not pay a water charge.

12. Sheds, Equipment and Security

Andrew advised that the original North Moors sheds were provided with water butts and guttering, but these installations were incorrectly fitted. The sheds were also not properly anchored.

The existing sheds could therefore be regarded as an additional benefit to any organisation taking on the site.

Future tenants could provide their own sheds at their own expense.

Tenants generally do not lock their sheds because forced entry can cause more damage than theft.

Petrol is not permitted to be stored in individual sheds. Petrol for communal machinery is stored in a shipping container.

Backsaver spades were purchased for one site but have reportedly not been used.

In general, tenants tend to bring their own tools to and from the site because of concerns about theft.

13. Water Infrastructure

Andrew advised that GAS is about to commence installation of 13 new standpipes and associated pipework at one of its sites because low water pressure has resulted from significant leaks.

The estimated cost, based on 2026 prices, is approximately £8,500.

This was cited as an example of the potential infrastructure costs associated with running an allotment site.

14. Bonfires and Green Waste

GAS's current bonfire rules permit bonfires only between 1 and 15 November.

Bonfires may be lit at dusk but must be completely extinguished by the time it becomes dark.

The possibility of providing a communal bonfire/green waste pile was discussed, with Burpham and Clandon cited as examples of sites where this approach is used.

15. Charitable Plots

Charity plots are charged on the basis of double occupancy, comprising:

- Two administration fees;
 - Site rent; and
 - Water charge.
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16. Lease and Boundary Responsibilities

GAS advised that its long-term leases generally cover the land between the fences.

GAS does not take responsibility for the fences themselves.

This distinction would need to be carefully considered if WPC were to take on responsibility for the North Moors site, including the condition, ownership and maintenance obligations relating to the site's boundary fencing.

17. Key Issues for Further Investigation

The meeting identified a number of matters which would need to be clarified before WPC could consider any transfer or management arrangement in detail:

1. The exact condition and ownership of the existing fencing.
2. The estimated cost and responsibility for bringing the fencing up to the required standard i.e. installed to a depth of 60cm before ground-level to minimise rabbit ingress.
3. The safety and compliance of the electrical installations.
4. Responsibility for the cost of remedial electrical works.
5. The status and specification of the drainage/septic tank system.
6. The outstanding soil sampling results and whether these should be provided to WPC/GAS.
7. The purpose and ownership of the two unidentified green pipes.
8. Whether solar panels and battery storage were required by the planning permission or approved scheme. If they were, why have they not been provided?
9. The electricity costs recharge facility for those who use either the EV/bike charging points.
10. The original specification and obligations relating to the North Moors site.
11. The condition and ownership of the existing sheds and other site infrastructure.
12. The precise land included within any proposed transfer.
13. The proposed lease/transfer terms and length of tenure.
14. Responsibility for boundary fencing and other infrastructure.
15. The financial implications for WPC of managing the site.
16. The likely costs of remedial works before any transfer.
17. The legal and consultancy costs associated with any transfer, which WPC and GAS consider should be met by GBC.
18. The arrangements for allocating and managing North Moors plots, including how prospective tenants would apply.
19. Responsibility for ongoing insurance and health and safety compliance.

18. Funding and GBC Grant

GAS currently receives approximately £17,000 per annum from GBC to support the operation of its 13 sites.

Andrew advised that approximately half of this funding is used to cover operating costs, as income from the sites does not fully cover expenditure. The remaining funding is used for site improvements.

Andrew stated that if the GBC grant were withdrawn, GAS would need to increase allotment charges by approximately 50%.

The implications of this funding arrangement for any future North Moors management arrangement would need to be considered.

19. Summary

The meeting provided WPC with an overview of GAS's experience in managing allotment sites and the potential operational and financial implications of taking on responsibility for North Moors.

GAS highlighted a number of unresolved issues with the construction and infrastructure of the North Moors site, particularly the fencing, electrical installation, drainage arrangements and outstanding site information.

No decision was taken at the meeting regarding any transfer of the North Moors allotment site to WPC or GAS.

Further information and clarification would be required from GBC, together with a detailed assessment of the financial, legal, operational and health and safety implications, before WPC could consider any proposed transfer or management arrangement.