

Cripley Meadow Allotment Association AGM
Tuesday 10 March 2009 at 7pm
(6.30-7pm to pay subscriptions)

Annual Report March 2008/March 2009

Officers and Committee are

Sheila Plot 12; Alison Plot 13; Wendy Plot 41/42; John Plot 46; Bernie Plot 62; Jamie Plot 63; James Plot 73; Alex Plot 81/82; Tony Plot 124; Donna Plot 105. Wendy does new member visits and plot offers and she and John represent us at ODFAA. With Tony they manage working parties and field work. Alison and Sheila, deal with money, paperwork, keys and records. John books and organises the mower, tools, machinery and spraying. Tony looks after the gate fence and wells. Alex supports Sheila with minutes and letters and Jamie helps with transport. Like everyone else James helps with working parties and clear thinking in our monthly meetings. Most of us do most working parties and step in for one another when needed. Bernie and Donna have not had time to help as much as they hoped and are standing down. The rest of the officers and committee are willing to stand again. We know we need help with some site work but if you think you can spare the time we would like to accommodate particular interests. We like to have at least one new member as a fresh perspective is always useful.

Working Parties and Reclamation

Every member is expected to help with at least one working party of two hours* per year or pay a donation of £10*. These are on the First Sunday in the Month and John keeps records. The dates are on the board, newsletters and the web site. Members turn up at 10.30 by the shed. In 2008 we acted on an AGM decision of 2007 to ensure this site work is more fairly distributed so this is specified on all invoices. We have put in some extra working party dates this year for St Clare's students to do 'green' community work as Caroline Crook is a member here and a teacher there. Obviously all benefit and John or Wendy oversee the work for the association. We completed all of the proposed reclamation for 2008-9. This included reclaiming plots 18,19, 21,66,67, 74 75,76,77,78,80,97,126,+ adjacent corner, 129, 159 and by the shed. We established some areas for recycling stones/bricks and usable metal poles by the shed. We allocated a patch of ground behind plot 126 for organic waste to be burnt and cleared the area by the gate ready to bring in the Notice Board (NB). We helped with clearing on Plots 1, 2, 106, 107 and 129 and cleared Fiddlers Drain and did some work clearing willow and strimming 10ft nettles from Cripley Island although our access here has been limited by our bid. *See AGM ITEM 4

Skips

We have had 3 skips this year. We are getting to the end of the rubbish after over £9,500 of removal! Waste is a highly emotive, expensive issue and members are asked to exercise proper restraint in bringing stuff on site. We commend recycling but not at the cost of more rubbish piles. Broken glass is a real problem and members are advised not to bring it on site. Sadly last year over half of our skip space was repeatedly taken up by imported 'builders waste'. If this continues we will not be able to hire them and members will have to take rubbish to Redbridge. Members must store waste on their plots 'til the skip arrives. Please do not dump by the shed.

Jericho Street Fair

We had more seedlings from members last year and hope to build on this. Most of the 500+ plants/seedlings were grown, potted and donated by committee members.... who also run the stall. We happily shared our space with St Barnabas Gardening Club and the stall now has many return visitors. We made a profit of £133 and represented the site at this important community event. Why not sow a few seeds for the stall and/or come and buy!

Flooding and Ditches

All flooded sites were promised a 50% rent rebate early in 2008. At the time of writing this has not been paid. The Environment Agency is due to submit an Oxford Flood Plan early in 2009 and

part of Fiddlers Stream was cleared by them this year. Castle Mill stream is blocked by the willows which fell years ago.

Lunch on The Green September 21

This was a great occasion and attended by over 65 members. Many thanks to David and Gabi (Plots 77/78) and Michelle and Jamie (Plot 63) for the barbeque and to John, who did most of the organising. We had a selection of 'harvest baskets' and a positive feast brought by members. The Green is now very easy to use and members brought seats, tables and umbrellas from plots.

The Association Shed

Many thanks to John Langford (Plot 101) and Dave Simms (Plot 102) who did a great paint job and replaced gutters and drainpipes. This work and large water storage tanks were due to be funded by OCC grant money but this was withdrawn at a late stage due to OCC financial difficulties.

Open day

Our first Open Day was a great success with 60 visitors on the basis of simple local advertising. Some had known Cripsey Meadow in the past and were amazed at its transformation into a working allotment site. We also welcomed visitors from other associations as the Federation has been working hard at cooperation between sites. Everyone was interested in talking to members and we hope we will have more members on their open plots next year.

Dogs

We have had a number of issues with dogs off lead. We find the rule is clear and apt. All dogs on sites must belong to members and be on a lead unless contained on a plot. This is a simple but effective way of ensuring no member or plot is damaged, soiled or frightened. It gives security to dog owners and non dog owners alike. No member is exempt and no one should have to ask.

Mowing

We contract our mowing to Ady Podbury who does paths, headlands (where they are clear and accessible) and The Green. He keeps green waste and damaged plots clear until their problems can be resolved. The wet weather meant we needed more mowing so this was more expensive. It remains vital that headlands, fences and vacant plots are kept clear of any hard materials and members are reminded they are responsible for 2ft around their plot and for ensuring headlands and fences are kept clear of weeds. No bramble is allowed on adjoining fences and must be kept carefully managed if on headlands so the verge and path can be cut.

Fence and animals

We have much better cooperation with university agents next door in managing the fence. The badger takes the work along here in its stride and the set is growing. There has been some invasion of plots but there is no way we could, even if we wished to, exclude them. A dead muntjak was reported on the path adjoining the railway last year but with no obvious sign of death. A member queried if this could be poison? We know many members (necessarily) use rat poison and urge all to use in accordance with safety instructions.

Disused Ground

As you know we `are in charge of our security & the council has stressed the need for all members to lock the gates properly. Failure to do so could have disastrous consequences if travellers or other such trespassers decide to enter & remain on the land. If a legal eviction were needed to get trespassers to leave'.....'it is anticipated that the individual Associations will want to remove the squatters & will do so at their expense albeit with technical help from the City. This is a worry with regard to this fenced off area. It is out of our sight and care and potholed, unclear and unfenced. We were informed by the local police that two squatters were evicted from here by police in November and that access/egress from here was noted in the December shed damage. We have informed the council that we cannot take responsibility for its security but we wish to retain it for future use as allotments and are awaiting council clearance.

Gates

Last year the hinges cracked due to the strain of over opening. We managed to get the council yet again to re-set the gates. When this was done stop posts were installed and we added new blocks which seems to have solved that problem. The addition of anti-climb paint has worked to stop intruders and this will be extended to the bridge railing. Clearly most members lock the gate every time but it is reported open occasionally and this compromises us all. It has to be left open for some site work involving machinery but then there is always a responsible person present.

Subscription increases

The AGM 2006 agreed the expected site rent increase from OCC would be passed onto members. Our new OCC rent includes Cripsey Island as part of the allotment land and we applied the increase to the whole subscription to sustain our maintenance budget. In these difficult financial times we need to recognise this is a subsidised cost and we rely on every member making some contribution to the site as a whole through working party work/donation. All members pay a required federation membership fee of 40p and our site membership of ODFAA provides our public liability insurance. A limited survey of plot costs (by Elder Stubbs Association) revealed a variation of £1 to £4.50 per pole. Ours is £2.50 but we have beds on communal plots. These have been clumped to just 2 sizes. They are small (approx 3'to 4'wide) at £15 or large (7'+ wide) at £25.

Draft Policies

We needed policies on Environmental Sustainability, First Aid, Equal Opportunities and Health and Safety to comply with funding applications. The drafts were made reference to in the October newsletter and opinion canvassed and no problems were received. Members need to be aware of their content which builds on the duty of care all have to act responsibly and comply with the Members Rules. Allotments can never be fully secure but we know that keeping sites tidy and attractive is one of the best ways of deterring anti-social activity and promoting a healthy and safe environment for all. We had a nasty accident at a working party with a large piece of broken glass and we have since advised all members not to bring glass on site and ensure any here is safe.

Plot audits and new members

We have two audits a year. Although these are time consuming they have helped to improve the site, plot cultivation and promote the fair use of resources. Where there is persistent refusal to abide by agreed rules we will reclaim plots as is clearly stated in our members' rules. This gives security to all if there are problems. However sometimes events overtake us all and we try to help if informed of difficulties. The standard letters are available here. We have had over 50 new members this year and we have been managing a waiting list for 4 months. The impetus of people waiting for a space to grow vegetables, fruit and flowers concentrates the mind. They want to know why they cannot have what appear to be 'uncultivated plots'. We explain that we allow members a reasonable time to reclaim plots but expect significant progress at each audit. If there is not we take action. Our expectation is that once a plot is reclaimed it should be at least $\frac{3}{4}$ cultivated by the May audit. As we all know a plot left untended for more than few weeks easily reverts to wilderness and we are all dependent on our neighbours. Weeds rapidly spread and seed themselves far and wide, which is against our rules as unfair on other members. We have brought most plots back into cultivation but some are as yet too low or too damaged and these will stay as green waste plots. We know letters are never great to receiveand they are not great to process but they are a vital part of managing the site responsibly and sustainably. We try to do this sensitively. Sometimes a letter is what is needed for a member to realise that they really do not have the time to work a plot. This is a pre requisite as one cannot have a plot 'in theory'. We now have some very grateful new members who owe their plot to this re evaluation and older members who are no longer fighting back neighbours' weeds. Thank you to all. We will have our usual photo record at the AGM which celebrates our members efforts.

Contact details and www.cripseymeadow.org.uk

The web site was launched and developed during 2008 and is now widely used by many members and non members alike. The vast majority of our members use email and this and the notice

board are our primary means of communication, although the notice board still attracts some interference! Audit letters are always posted or hand delivered so members must provide postal addresses. You are responsible for keeping contact details up to date and a lack of due attention to this can be costly as Audit letters require timed responses.

ODFAA Oxford District Federation of Allotment Associations

Wendy was elected as Chair of the ODFAA and has been working with all 36 allotment sites across the city to increase inter-site cooperation, support and negotiation between the 3,000 allotment members, associations, city council and officers.

The Car Parks

The scheme to have a free timed ticket system for Port and Cripsey Meadow Car Parks is ongoing! It was imminent at the last AGM and Andrew Bradfield-Barnes is now dealing with the issue. The aim is to try and address this site for the enforcement to start at the end of March. It continues to be an area that attracts vandalism. Access improved for a while but blockages are recurring.

Walton Well Road Railway Bridge

Well done everyone who wrote. Our councillors noted your many comments about problems with the weight limit. The present plan is to go for a single lane option if Network Rail confirms this.

Oxford City Allotment Competition

We had no prizes this year. Wendy went round all the city sites with the judges as Chair of the Federation but played no part in marking. Next year the competition will change as it was funded primarily by OCC and The Federation but OCC has said they will not support the present cost as they no longer have the staffing. ODFAA intend to work with OCC to keep it.

Oxclean

We have volunteered the association to contribute to OXCLEAN from 10-12 am Sunday 7th March so we hope by now members will have cleaned up the car park and vacant land outside the gate and got rid of some stuff from their own plots. We feel we should contribute to the area not just our own good so one hour car park clearance is the requirement for one hour personal plot rubbish removal. The rubbish will be collected by OCC if bagged properly and put by Port Meadow gates for THAT HOUR ONLY. If you can help this great initiative contact John Sivell.

Environmental Health

LQM have finished their initial testing. The sample list was published by email and on the NB. Karen contacted me on Jan 28 to ask for details of members to do a 10% random follow up on member's use of their plots. I left messages wherever I could before giving her these but obviously it is in all our interests to cooperate. The report is sadly not ready for our meeting but Karen Seal; the Environmental Health Officer will be in touch to arrange an information evening.

Vodafone mast

This went up by the bridge. The council turned it down but Vodafone went to appeal and won.

December 19th Break in

Lots of open gates and shed door swinging at 9am on Friday 19th were evidence of a break in. At of sheds were broken into with some limited damage and broken fences. Only one member reported any lost items. This was reported to the police. They visited the site twice and the local police now hold a key so they can, if needed, be seen on site and there were signs to advise of police surveillance. Members are always advised contact the police and let the secretary know of any break-ins so we can monitor the situation. The tel. no is 0845 8 505 505 (non emergency number) and our local contact is PCSO Ben Howes C9959 (tel. mob 07800 702525) who has also helped follow up some further security issues re tents and boats. PC 3356 Steve Gibbens is our Neighbourhood Specialist officer. He has is sending us some crime reduction material and he has an engraver we can borrow to mark tools. We will organise for this to be available at a working party if members think this would be useful.

AGM Items

Sheds

led by Jamie

At the last AGM item the rule about sheds was amended to 8'x6'x6'max. We think this was right and do not seek to change this again. However problems do arise if members do not apply to the committee for permission and/or stick to the agreed plan! . We moderate all requests so that we can keep a balance on the amount of growing land given over to buildings. Buildings cause shade, take up growing land and cannot easily be removed by the next user and this stewardship is a necessary part of our lease with Oxford City Council and our responsibility to future users. The committee agrees permission where the information is clear and within the limits. We will make decisions on proposals for porches or raisers which must stay within the spirit of the required foot print and height. 'My neighbour does not mind' can never be a reason for breaking the limit which protect all and members will be asked to remove any unauthorised building. Plans must specify overall height, width and location as well as any planned stilts or porches. The committee will work to ensure individual needs do not compromise the site or other members.

Trees AGM ITEM

led by John Sivell

Similarly some trees have been planted without permission and we have had to contact members. Our rule of thumb is that a few dwarf fruit trees are good as part of a balanced planting plan across a plot. We keep a record of permissions. We have for some years advised individuals against a large proportion of a plot being used for trees unless it is unsuitable for other produce. We recognise there are a few exceptions to this from the past where whole plots were planted with fruit trees. However then the site was so neglected we could not give plots away. Also these plots have all brought the trees within the 10ft rule and almost all are now also cultivating other food as well so the land is used. Cripsey Island Orchard will obviously add to the facilities for all, particularly our increasing number of communal plot holders who cannot have permanent planting. Now dwarf fruit trees and bushes are readily available and productive using a small space we feel they have a place on allotments as a valuable food providing the plot is managed cultivated and reclaimable. However we feel we should make explicit our expectation to limit the amount of ground that can be given over to fruit trees. Otherwise the site could become inundated and would not be able to fulfil its primary role. We have been working on the premise that the maximum amount of a 10 plot which can be used for fruit trees is 30% and the rest must be cultivated. This would be proportional for other plot sizes except small and communal plots where permanent planting is not allowed.

Application to keep Bees Diane Newell on Plot 151/152 led by Alex Hollingsworth

The committee discussed Diane's request which was published in the July newsletter. We took advice from other associations and we asked John Sivell, who was a beekeeper for many years, to talk with Diane about some reservations we received. He is confident Diane has done her homework and training and is willing to act as additional support on site. He recommends we support this. Immediate plot neighbours have been contacted ...but these can and will change. Everyone (including Diane) is in agreement that members will come before bees and if members have problems the bees will go. The committee has received no questions / comments / problems on this matter. If agreed the plan will be to introduce the bees in April. The committee recommends this project to the members providing the association membership is fully supportive and welcome Diane's statement that members will always come before bees. We recommend that Diane puts up information sheets about the hives on her site so that everyone is aware of them and what to do if there is a problem. If this trial is successful we will amend our rules accordingly next year

Cripsey Island

led by John and Wendy

We have reported on this to members throughout the year and consulted through newsletters and working parties. We have received negative comments from 3 members on this issue since the AGM. Otherwise the project has been met excitement and interest from all who have visited and heard of it. As we reported we were offered the Island to develop as an orchard (only) in March.

This was in order to comply with the terms of our lease and insurance. In compliance with the majority vote at the last AGM, we accepted and signed Heads of Terms in June and applied for National Lottery Local Food funding in July. We got through the first stage and our National Lottery Advisor visited in September and was very supportive. We heard in December that we have got conditional funding of £10,000 to support a 2 year development project, subject to contracts and estimates. We cannot advertise or publish this conditional offer outside of our membership until we have met the conditions. The most important of these was our lease and there is a matter of urgency with regard to the sprouted willow and tree management which means we need to start the major work in mid March. We are now members of Mid Shires Orchard Group and the Heritage Fruit Tree Company has offered us trade-priced local varieties.

As we have reported previously firstly we need to make the land accessible, safe and suitable for cultivating fruit trees. The main brief for the external funding is to manage the land and streams and establish a bridge. As required by our lease Parks have give permission for the work required to establish the orchard. The initial funding will remove, pollard and coppice trees to establish glades for planting through mowing and make paths for access. This external work will then be sustained by our voluntary work in working parties and the island will be used for educational visits. John Sivell, with his background in farming, forestry and Head Gardening and Tony Clear, a retired building surveyor, have agreed to be project managers for the 2 year funded project and Wendy will record it. The Island is now part of the Allotment site thus complying with our insurance and aims and objectives and it is included in everyone's membership. The new lease is a repeat of our previous one with the boundary extended to include the island and direction re the Island. The term is 14yrs.

*We hope the island will be a real asset and a place of quiet retreat for all our members as well as sustain our commitment to growing food. The Lottery funding is for projects that encourage growing food locally and are able to sustain the project by voluntary action. **We have estimated that one hour, per year, per member will be required specifically for developing and managing Cripsey Island Orchard. This will be on top of the present commitment of 2 hours and as now you will be able to make a donation if you cannot spare the time.** When the initial land work is done members will be needed to manage the sprouted willow, cultivate raised beds in glades for planting, choose varieties of local fruit, learn about planting, pruning, pollarding and coppicing as well as introduce bird, bat and bee boxes and eventually share the harvest. Also we have some specific jobs and if members could help with any of these specifically they should let John know. We need help with: making notice Boards / school visits , orchard information sheets /risk assessment sheets/ publicity / making bird and bat boxes / making bee stores.*

Next year we anticipate we will be ready to discuss the 'Island Rules' to make sure it's use is equitable. Meanwhile members must follow directions as to use. 25 members were on there for the February 1st Working Party and we managed a huge amount of work, removing some of the barbed wire from the trees, some rubbish and piled a load of sprouting willow logs. The intention is that all members will be responsible for and use Cripsey Island Orchard for quiet recreation. We will keep members abreast of developments and requirements through newsletters and emails and will be able to discuss plans and thoughts at working parties.

Members will obviously be the primary beneficiaries however 'Local Food' funding requires we share the benefits and our interested partners are Phil and Jim, St Barnabas, St Clare's and The Cherwell School as well as Jericho Community Centre. They all supported our application as did Susanna Pressell, our local councillor and Lord Mayor was extremely active in supporting the project.

The Allotment Committee