

Cripley Meadow Allotment Association

March 2009 to 2010 Annual Report

2009 to 10 Officers/Trustees and Committee

Wendy Skinner Smith - Plot 40-41, is Chair and does Membership and Newsletters

John Sivell - Plot 46, is Vice Chair is Project Manager for Cripley Island, machinery and working party records

Sheila Allen - Plot 12, is Secretary and manages minutes, keys and queries re constructions and fruit trees

Alison Campbell - Plot 13, is Treasurer and manages subscriptions, the database and Cripley Island money
Your Committee members

Tony Clear - Plot 124, looks after the gate and advises about Association Buildings

Jamie Forbes - Plot 63, helps with transport, barbeques and makes notice boards

Alex Hollingsworth - Plot 81-82, advises us on council affairs and helps with minutes and audits.

Gaby Topliss - Plot 78, manages audit paperwork

Cathy Ferreira – Plot 8a, helps with audits, minutes and events and editing

Aja Hansen - Plot 80b was co-opted in April and helps with working parties and island work.

Gaby Topliss is standing down, so if anyone is interested in joining the committee please have a word with a committee member. We are looking for someone who would be interested in managing communal ordering but please be in touch if you have any ideas for the future of Cripley Meadow.

Working parties

At the 2009 AGM we agreed an additional hour of working party time per member per year to honour our commitment to Cripley Island. This was part of our application for Lottery funding for the Island. Working parties are held on the first Sunday in the month 10.30 to 12.30 and first Wednesday evenings 6 'til 8 during the summer months when the evenings are lighter. Working Party Dates for the year are on the notice board and we use our email distribution list for reminders. The work is recorded on the website, reported in the emailed newsletters and posted on the notice board. Anyone who cannot attend the working parties can make an annual donation instead. This will be £15 this year. With this income we have been able to increase Ady Podberry's paid work so that he now manages the annual spraying as well as mowing the site and Cripley Island. Gradually we aim to put the association on a more independent financial footing.

St Clare's have done two working party days this year. We provide community work opportunities for their Baccalaureate qualification and we get a day's help. The groups are accompanied by a teacher; this is generally Caroline Crook, who is one of our members.

There is a record of working party work on the web site. January's working party was cancelled because of snow. February saw us coppicing on the island and we put in an extra WP on February 21 to replace the January one and do tree planting on the island. It was still too wet so we continued with the clearing. We have one on March 7th Working Party and will aim to do tree planting and try to mend the path.

Waiting list and audits

Our waiting list fluctuates but has averaged 15 since Sept 2008. Most sites across the city are now full and waiting lists could be in the hundreds. The Federation is working with associations to clarify this but it is always a movable feast as people can be on more than one list. Audits are a vital part of our site management. Over the last year we have highlighted the increased demand for plots: there is no longer the slack in the system to allow for neglected, underused plots. For this reason, the committee published a clear requirement for 75% of all plots to be cultivated with fruit, flowers and vegetables and for buildings, headlands, trees and paths to be managed according to the rules to ensure growing space was kept at a maximum. We allow members one season, two at most, to bring plots into this working cultivation.

In 2009, the first audit took place on Sunday May 3. Generally by the time of the May audit, preparation needs to be underway for the growing season ahead and signs of cultivation are apparent. The second audit is in September when the growing year is generally still in full flow so we can see how much of the ground has been used. We understand that good intentions can get overtaken by events but it is also true that some plots are not cultivated sufficiently. If you are having difficulty maintaining your plot, please contact one of the committee.

We send out standard reminders, warnings or, very rarely, final notice letters if there seems to be a problem or lack of cultivation with a plot. Our rules and the standard letters are published on the web site.

As a result of this year's audits we have successfully organised a number of areas into smaller plots for sharing. In the past few years, the equivalent of 12x10 pole plots have been released due to audit work which have housed some 35 new members or existing members reallocating from smaller plots.

This year's audits revealed an increasing level of cultivation and far more variety of vegetable, fruit and flower growth. This cultivation is doing much to increase our insect, bird and animal population (although we know the latter causes some concern as well). Weeds and brambles are a problem on a very few plots. Unmanaged headlands are a more general concern so do remember to manage outside your fence up to where the monthly mowing begins.

AGM ITEM We feel our present process of audit letters is too labour intensive. We want members to be protected but not at the expense of the site and other members. We would like to hear members' views before proposing any changes.

Recycling

Skips We have had two metal skips and two general skips, in March and July. Glass is still one of the worst hazards on the site and members are asked NOT to BRING IT ON to the site. All waste (except metal which can go in the skip) should be sorted in bags (glass and plastic, etc) and **kept safely and tidily on your plot until the next skip. Please do not leave rubbish by the shed or put anything other than metal in the metal skip.** We have been hauling out a few other items of late! We will inform members when the next skip is due ...but first we will need to mend the path.

Soil, compost and manure. We continue to try to bring appropriate additional material onto the site to help sustain and raise soil levels. A lot of members now buy in additional soil, manure and compost to raise soil levels and to give their plots extra sustenance. In April 10 metres of soil reclaimed from green waste was delivered by MandM to plot 10 and another delivery in June was designated for particularly low plots. St John's Plot 57 had the usual leaf mould around February 2009 which disappeared very rapidly and it now has this year's load.. When the weather improves and the path is mended Alison Campbell will complete our AGM commitment to use the rent rebate money from the floods of 2007 to order some more manure for the site - which will be some £550 spent this year. Since we cannot monitor the distribution of free material we rely on members' good judgement and sense of fair play to share it out.

Deliveries If you are having a delivery in a van more than 2.1m high, you will need the OCC barrier open. We will publish contact lists of committee members with keys after the AGM. Committee members cannot give out the key or take responsibility for your delivery.

Wood chip The logs by the shed are for the island. There have been a number of deliveries of wood chip to green waste plots 109, 10 and 57. We try to get any locally sourced wood chip onto the site and have received the wood chip from the Cripsey Island and Port Meadow willow pollarding. Our thanks are due to Parks and the Tree and Countryside Teams, who are, as always, most helpful.

Water Tanks We are planning to install large water tanks to capture rain off the Association Shed so that we can conserve water. Tony Clear is managing this.

Arcadian Living Green Waste Trial We agreed to run a year's trial with 'Arcadian Living', a garden maintenance firm, on Plot 84. The trial seems to have been successful and has benefited both parties. They pay for and maintain the plot and use it for leaf mould, grass cuttings, shrub cuttings and leaves. Members can take this garden waste to supplement their own compost bins, dig in or use as mulch. It will not compost well on its own but we hope it will be useful and manageable. Arcadian Living has assured us they do not use harmful 'weed free' preparations. They are also making a monthly donation to the association funds. In December we wrote to Arcadian Living to ask them to do some housekeeping over the winter to aid the composting by shredding the larger branches. We have given them permission to use Plot 109 for leaves only and if the weather is suited to using the paths. We remind members that the green path adjacent to plot 84 should be kept clear and not used for vehicles when wet. Members cannot dump their own weeds anywhere other than their plot.

AGM item Review trial with a view to continuing our arrangements with Arcadian Living, St John's College, Parks and M and M skips.

Reclamation

Our site is one of a very few in the city with unused designated ground available. The land is on the south of the site beyond the fence; and it is in our lease so specifically designated for allotments. The land was originally fenced off by OCC in 1991 when the site was already neglected and overrun with rabbits. It could

provide about 20 more plots but at present it is mostly overgrown with crack willow and some old bottle digger pits. Waiting lists across the city are growing so, like all associations in the city, we were asked by OCC Parks to submit plans for clearing disused, designated land which will result in more plots. We have been awarded a grant of £1500 to begin this work and our own reclamation funds will double the money available for this. The willows here are over 30 years without pollarding so are beginning to crack and threaten our fence. We have already had to pollard one in order to save it crashing down the fence. Eventually the fence will be moved to the outer boundary to accommodate the new plots.

Hard Landscape stuff

Signs We have put up more signs and site plans around the site. There is a site plan with numbers on the notice board and on the web site. .

Notice boards Thanks are due to Jamie Forbes for the new boards by the gate and the island, to John Langsbury and Dave Sims for the painting and to Richard Newman for metal grinding.

Plot numbers It would help if all members could display plot numbers, in accordance with our rules. We will make an award for the most interesting one after the next May audit. All gates and entrances to plots should be identified.

Fence The 'non climb' paint was extended as a result of a reported intrusion. Do not try climbing in or out if you lose your keys! A few members have reported finding the gate open – it is important that everyone locks the gates at all times to keep the site secure.

Keys The demand for replacement keys has increased dramatically. Some people lose their keys and some do not return their keys when they leave the association. If the number of keys in circulation continues to build up our security will be compromised, so we are asking everyone to take greater care of keys and we will be suggesting that we increase the key deposit to £25.

AGM Item. Members views on raising the key deposit to £25. (Sheila)

Plot Paths 'Your' path is the one on the left when you are standing looking out from the shed end. The path is your responsibility even if it is, as is necessarily the case, outside your fence. Please keep it cut and prevent weeds from going to seed on paths, fences and headlands.

Site paths Graham Dixon from Parks spent a day and a half in March 2009 scraping back our paths to reduce the ruts and make them more manageable. The soil, which is no good for plots, has been used to build up the bank by plot 84. Ady Podberry started his monthly mowing of the site, including Cripely Island in March. Please keep your verges and headland cut. Bramble/blackberry is not allowed on internal boundaries, only managed on headlands or trained well inside.

It is now urgent we repair paths after such a harsh winter and Tony is exploring using recycled tyres and hoggin to shore up some banks. Members are asked to always drive slowly and avoid using paths when the weather is wet and frosty as this destroys the surface. These are fairweather paths at best. The main path by plot 1-6 is now in a fragile state as the bank has given way and we advise members not to use it except with extreme care until repaired. We certainly cannot move skips until it is repaired. The railway path is not too bad but remember the top central and Fiddlers Drain path have no hard core.

Car parking Free timed tickets for the Car Park started in April. We hope members will use this car park whenever they can as this is environmentally best for our site. It is free for 4 hours with a ticket. Please never park in the area outside the entrance gates to the allotment site. Inside the site, members should not park on the paths, on Green waste areas or The Green, or in front of the association shed. Some plots have a pull-in area, and there are some areas marked on the site map for temporary parking for deliveries - most of these areas are grass and not roads so must be used with caution. Stanley (Plot 1a) has special permission to park just inside the gate.

Local
Food

Cripely Island Orchard

Cripely Island is part of our Allotment lease to develop into a managed, heritage orchard with native coppicing. We have Big Lottery 'Local Food' funding for this. Alison keeps the accounts, John manages the work, and Wendy takes photos and records the project. We all report regularly to the committee and The Lottery. We are more or less on schedule. Cripely Island,

like much of Cripely Meadow, is surrounded by crack willow. In March 2009, OCC Tree Officers decided which trees were to be pollarded and those on Fiddlers and Castle Mill Stream were pollarded low so we can manage them in future. Pollarded crack willows can live hundreds of years whereas those left unpollarded will survive only 30-40 years. This work meant that light returned for the healthy native trees.

The removal of fallen trees from Castle Mill Stream was delayed until the autumn and has been started but is not yet complete. In June, Sylva Trees built two new bridges from locally sourced and milled wood. We bought two all terrain trimmers with Lottery money.

Members' contribution to work on the island:

The development of the island has progressed really well with over 350 hours of members' voluntary work.

In April, members raked up willow debris, filled holes, demolished the shed, cleared rubbish and barbed wire, and removed and recycled corrugated sheeting. We had our first island mow to cut back the nettles. **In May**, we cleared the stream, removed more barbed wire, burnt wormy rubbish, raked wood chip, cleared nettles from the flags in the pond, and stacked more wood chip. This has been left to rot down for the tumps. **June saw** us clearing around the new bridge entrances, removing the rubbish, removing ballast from the shed and removing yet more barbed wire. **July** brought another 25 hours of voluntary members work - the path was levelled, some tree stumps and rubbish removed, more wood chip stacked and comfrey cut. In **August**, we removed yet more sprouting willow twigs, the 'toilet', the drop hole and holes left by the stump grinder as well as 'cutting and stripping the willow'. These rods are for marking out. We removed bricks from the edge of the old shed and started levelling and had our first Open Day display. In **September**, we were again cutting nettles and willow and built 13 "tumps" for the apple trees. These are raised mounds which will protect the new tree roots from the worst of the wet 'til established. At the beginning of **October** the WP built another 10 tumps. At the end of **November** the island was beginning to show surface water and it was largely flooded by the beginning of December. Reassuringly the tump tops remained out of water! Members should not go on the island when it has surface water as there are too many hidden pitfalls. By early **February** the water had receded and we were able to start some coppicing and in **March** we hope to complete the first tree planting. The willows have now been mostly removed from Castle Mill stream by the island bank

The island was opened up to all members for quiet walks in June. Children must be directly supervised at all times while on the island. We don't feel we need rules for the island but please let us know if you think otherwise.

Jamie made a notice board for the island entrance for the Open Day, and John Lansbury painted it. This will be developed further with more info on wildlife.

We have ordered the first fruit trees for the first stage of planting in February (weather permitting).

Mr Douglas de-Lastic, who has been to open days and visited us at the June Fair kindly made a donation of £50 to fruit trees for Cripsey Island Orchard.

City Allotment Competition

The competition was managed by the Federation. There were prizes for the best kept site and for each category within the individual plot competition.

This year we entered the site for the city allotment competition and 13 members entered the individual competition. If anyone would like to have their score, Wendy has the marks. Higher points are gained for the number and variety of crops. We had good feedback from the judges and we hope more members will enter next year.

Cripsey Meadow came second in the Alderman Knight Award for best site. We were delighted to have done so well and Aja collected our certificate. Well done everyone! We did well in our environmental management of the site, our site composting and recycling facilities, our reclamation and management of plots and our notice boards and fences. We did less well with maintenance of headlands, weeds (we did well in the first judging but not so well in the September one), lack of plot numbers and rubbish on plots.

In the individual competition **Reneth Mackenzie on Plot 46a** was awarded a certificate in the newcomer section. There were only 3 awarded across the city. **John Sivell on Plot 46** was second in the over 70 class of the Challenge Trophy. **Wendy on plot 40/41 won the Challenge Shield** for the best plot. *"I was 'chuffed' as the newspaper reported. The Shield is enormous and I am proud to have my name on it."*

Events

March OXCLEAN John reported on a large and enthusiastic band of litter pickers. The car parks and surrounding areas, the edge of Port Meadow and the area between the fence and the railway track were picked spotless.

We have volunteered to join OXCLEAN again this year, Saturday 6 March, 10-12. We aim to clean up the car park and vacant land outside our gate. Contributing members will be able to remove rubbish from their plots using OXCLEAN bags. OCC will remove this bagged rubbish from the Port Meadow

gates during these times. If you can help, please contact Wendy on 07752033370 or email wendy@wendyskinnersmith.co.uk or just turn up

June Jericho Street Fair We had two stalls selling plants, seedlings, fresh veg, flowers and homemade cakes and took £248. £30 went on stall fees. Many members contributed and bought items and it was a great day for meeting people. The wheelbarrow crammed with freshly picked lettuce and John's 'dig your own potatoes' from the bucket attracted much attention. We will attend the fair again this year so think about doing some early sowing for cropping on the day and selling on the stall.

July The Big Lunch was actually pretty small given the extreme weather of rain and shine. This project was the idea of Tim Smit (of the Eden Project) to get groups lunching together across the country with food they had grown, cooked or created themselves. Great food, including allotment grown chilled pea soup, zucchini and garlic soup, mixed leaves and flowers salad, (the nasturtiums and borage were colourful and spicy), and Sam's home brewed strawberry beer were greatly enjoyed.

August Cripsey Meadow Open Day Our Open Day remains a simple affair - we open the gates and committee members give out information sheets and maps. Plot holders are encouraged to be on their plot to welcome visitors. We had vegetables for sale on The Green and drinks and shelter under our newly bought gazebo and we opened the island to visitors - it attracted much positive comment and some donations for the vegetables made available. Please consider taking part this year - visitors very much enjoy talking to members on their plots.

September Lunch on the Green A wonderful feast of home-brew, gazpacho, roasted vegetable salads, allotment salads in glorious colour, wheelbarrows celebrating produce, Salsas, Quinoa with veg, spinach and feta pastries, Cripsey Meadow pear and blue cheese oatcakes, barbequed burgers and sausages and chocolate and courgette cake as a great finale! We christened the new picnic benches and said thank you to those who have helped so much with the Island and the site. Many thanks to Sheila, John, Patsy and Tim who helped set up and to Jamie and Michelle for doing the shopping and bringing and managing the barbeque. Lunch on the Green is now an established part of the allotment year. If anyone would like to organise an event or contribute ideas to the present ones, please contact Cathy Ferreira.

The mower is no more to go a mowing...

In May the association mower was badly damaged, its repair used up our maintenance budget for the year. We were always ambivalent about members using the mower as our insurance only covers members doing association work on the site at working parties. By October the mower needed servicing again and with regret the committee decided that, due to the insurance restrictions, it can now only be used on working parties for site work.

Stolen Fruit

Sadly we have had a few reports of fruit going missing. Members are reminded that no one has a right to enter any other plot. An 'open' fruit tree may be a tempting thing but this is stealing and the penalty is immediate withdrawal of membership.

Birds and bees and two legged pests

Bees In May, Diane reported a delay in bringing bees on site, it is likely it will now be April before this gets underway. I hope Diane will be at the AGM to report any further news.

Birds Many people noticed the flock of starlings that visited early in the year and gave great joy with their cheeky and noisy behaviour, flitting from plot to plot. They left but the jackdaws remained and bullfinches arrived. In September people saw the heron, green woodpeckers, long tailed tits, bull finches and goldfinches, and thrushes returned to the site. The fox can be seen most days sunning on the island and badgers are causing quite a lot of damage and eating sweetcorn and carrots. Please try leaving a last bit of wood chip on the green waste sites as the badgers might grub this up rather than getting into your. There is no way we can keep out the badgers so we have to go for damage limitation instead. The badgers appear to be increasing at an alarming rate and are not making many friends on our site!

Ink caps on The Green There is a little clump of these this year and a few more types as yet to be identified on the Island.

Two-legged intruders We had one reported bonfire group on the island (sadly with our notice board material). They seem to have come over the fence and we found evidence of grease soiled cloths. For such determined entrance we have no defence.

Environmental testing

The City's Environmental Health Department still cannot advise us about the outcome of the results as they await revised guidelines from the Environment Agency who determine the evaluation of the figures. We await their decisions.

Environment Agency

The Environment Agency contacted us in February to gain access to assess Fiddlers Drain. It is registered with them for maintenance but this will only occur if it has sufficient weighting and is within their budget. Nevertheless at least it has now been registered as being full of 3ft of mud... which should of course be space for water. We will keep you informed of any action.

Fruit Survey

At the last AGM we agreed it would be useful to pool information about fruit trees on the site. It would be useful to have the following information about the trees on your plot:

Your name-----

Your plot-----

Type of fruit tree-----

Name-----

Root stock -----Characteristics-----

Cropping time -----

AV. Yield -----

Any other comments -----

Please give, this information to John on Plot 46 or post to 42 Ryders Close OXFORD OX2 7DQ or email sivelljohn@aol.com

OADFAA

Cripley Meadow is a member of The Oxford and District Federation of Allotment Associations. Wendy chairs the Federation. Oxford City Council organises Oxford City Allotments Public Liability and Employer liability insurance and this insurance is held in the name of the Federation. This insurance covers Cripley Meadow. This year a major concern across the city has been a shortage of plots and the increasing need for associations to be financially viable and accountable. Here are some of the items brought to the meeting for discussion this year: Allotments competition/Site Rents /Budgets and grants / Insurance / Fencing / Flooding / Auditing plot condition and rule enforcement/ Machinery loan and insurance issues/ Disused sites/ Pullen's Lane Site.

Subscriptions

In January the committee started preparing for the AGM and for the New Year's **membership**. This is now a huge task with a membership of nearly 250, especially for Alison and Sheila in raising invoices. The best thank you that members could give is to participate in working parties and come to the AGM to show your support and interest. Invoices and notice about the AGM were posted in mid February. **Payment has to be made within one month to sustain membership**. You can pay online and by cheque and details are on the invoice. Please pay before the meeting, online or by cheque if you can as this will help the meeting to start on time. There is still a subscription payment at the Shed on **Sunday, 21st March between 11 am and 1 pm**. By paying your annual membership you agree to the current rules of the Association.

This annual report is emailed and on the notice board.

It has been an unusually wet and cold winter with less opportunity for winter work than I have known in many years. I look forward to seeing you at the AGM on Mar 16 at St Barnabas and that it will be a good gardening year for all.

Wendy Skinner Smith
Chair Cripley Meadow Allotment Association