

Cripley Meadow Allotment Association Annual Report March 2013

SUMMARY and *AGM items*

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Administration

Last year 75 members attended the AGM evening at St Barnabas. Please try to come to the AGM so that there is a democratically elected committee, and good representation which is a necessity for a healthy site. As usual this annual report is sent out by email and notice board in February. Invoice and AGM letter and agenda are posted. **Subscriptions** should be paid before the end of March, preferably by the AGM on the 25th as this is the beginning of the new gardening year. There is a surcharge if members pay after 31st March. Details of payment are on the invoice. Your subscription is your agreement to our rules.

Our Subscription for 2013 is unchanged. All Oxford City Council sites are presently working with Oxford City Council on the rent review which comes into effect in March 2015. The plan is to have agreed this for 2014 AGM's. There **will inevitably be** notification of a rise in subscriptions in 2014. We also need to ensure that we continue to cover the cost of maintaining the site. In 2001 and 2007 the site rent increase was basically RPI-led so minimal but this basis is up for review.

2012 to 2013 Officers/Trustees are: Wendy Skinner Smith, Plot 40-41, is Chair (membership visits, newsletter, web site, audit); Tony Clear, Plot 124, is vice chair (site structures, audits); Alison Campbell, Plot 13, is Treasurer (finance, bids subscriptions, database, skip); Claire Pike, Plot 48b, is secretary (minutes, correspondence, audit). **Committee members are:** Jamie Forbes, Plot 63, (transport, machine maintenance, barbeques, building notice boards, audits); Alex Hollingsworth, Plot 81-82, (sends audit letters and advises on council affairs); Jeremy Hyde, Plot 91, (island management and site work); Richard Haigh, Plot 15, (field secretary, audits, machinery); Hannah Yeadon, Plot 90 (deliveries, audits); Mark Doran, Plot 142a, and Mark Tindal, Plot 53, both helped at the June Fair. All help with working parties.

Next year Wendy Skinner Smith, Tony Clear, Claire Pike, Alison Campbell, Jeremy Hyde, Richard Haigh Alex Hollingsworth, and Jamie Forbes have been nominated and seconded at the time of writing and are willing to stand. Hannah has stood down. Committee members need to be able to attend most meetings.

Events

We contributed to **OXCLEAN** in March. Members cleared the car park, boundary and re organised the skip. Please join us at **10.30 Saturday 2nd March** for this year's stint. We credit this as 2013 WP work.

Chelsea Flower Show with Architecture Sans Frontieres -is a charity based in Cowley Road. Andy Edwards was invited to the 2012 AGM to tell us about their environment stand in The RHS Chelsea Show. This was based on how to use reclamation to grow food in urban settings. Andy helps Mick Scott on plot SF4 and asked Cripely Meadow to get involved. Cripely Meadow vegetables and herbs appeared on their stand, "Open Doors, Open your Eyes". They won a silver medal. Wendy got an 'exhibitor' wrist band.

This was our 7th year at **Jericho Street Fair**, an important community event. Thanks to members we had our best selection of fruit bushes and trees, garden annuals and perennials, potted cuttings and pricking out vegetable seedlings. We raised £321 for our bee friendly planting in 2013 season.

Visit to building site in July. Longcross invited our members to view the site. We saw an impressive range of found bottles and jars and had a great view over Cripely Meadow. It was interesting to see the water retention methods they had used. We were made very welcome. Longcross have worked with us to carry out the fence work agreed as necessary by Planning and Oxford University. We are still working on this. Crisis (Charity for the Homeless) is running the site café and welcomes any spare crops! Sadly the bio tank project did not progress and nor did out attempt to source cheap well covers.

Our Open Day was, as usual, during National Allotment Week in August. We offered tours, talking to plot members and we offered vegetables, fruit and drinks on the Green. Sadly fewer members were on site on open plots and we had our lowest turnout of visitors with 32. Do join us in 2013.

In September 52 members celebrated the allotment year **at Lunch on the Green**. We provided barbeque and some food and drink and, as always, members brought a great collection of allotment goodies. Thanks to Jamie for providing the BBQ and the shopping and to his parents Bob and Heather, who were great BBQ cooks. The band played and ate well. Some members said they would really like to meet more members. Let us know if something would tempt you to join in.

All Members were invited to BBC Gardeners Question Time in October, hosted by the Royal Oxfordshire Horticultural Society. Wendy was invited as Chair of ODFAA and met many plotholders from across the city. There were plenty of allotment questions including one on flooding.

The Allotment Competition Award Evening was held in the Town Hall in October. Val Bourne, The Oxford Times gardening correspondent, presented the awards. Nicole Milligan received a certificate in the New Plot holder's category for outstanding work on SF1. She shares this plot with Lydia, Ben and Chris. Richard and Jean Haigh on Plot 15/16 were placed 4th in the Challenge Trophy and Mikal Mast on Plot 2b also got a highly commended certificate. Congratulations to Ria and Jake Snaddon who won The Standingford Shield for the best plot in the Under 35s Category.

Working parties –and site maintenance

Working Party Work and donations are the way members contribute to managing the site. Many hands always make for lighter, livelier work and members report they enjoy working together. This commitment is a necessary part of our membership. This year we have done a rough estimate of how the time was used. Member's voluntary work means we can reclaim and manage the site and forge a supportive allotment community. Without this we would have to increase subscriptions. The number participating each month varied from 3 to 24. In 2012 working party work of c.215 hours included:

- 65 hours island maintenance weeding and new stakes, guards and mulch mats; 15 hours coppicing and pollarding; 50 hours on plot problems ; 20 work on sheds and gates; 5 on bonfire management; 20 trench digging; 20 levelling and seeding new paths. At minimum wage rates this is worth over £1,290.
- This include St Claire's students who have done sterling work helping with coppicing and clearing on the island and site. They work 10 until 2 with a committee member when outside working party times. We hope to see more of them in 2013. Ian Gill is a very supportive team leader.

On top of this committee members have spent at least another 150 hours on site apart from working parties. This has included managing/installing new shed and water butt, gate work, notice board work, signs, open days, potting/managing Jericho stall work, on site meetings and events. Membership work is ongoing throughout the year. All members have to do a tour of the site. Wendy does offers, Alison does payment and Claire does keys. This is apart from committee meetings, newsletters, emails and membership admin throughout the year. Wendy does visits and offers, Alison payment and Claire keys. Ady Podbery and his brother, our mowing team have done 8 site cuts this year as the grass just kept growing! They did a week of path maintenance. 6 days of tractor/digger/dumper work were used to manage the gate, paths, and compost heaps and trenches. It is a big site!

Continuing improvement of the paths

So far we have spent £3,000 and maintenance is an ongoing commitment. We have allocated another £1500 for work this year which may have started when we meet. Please remember these are paths not roads so members must use them judiciously. When these paths were made there was little traffic on site. Members obviously need cars for delivery but we encourage all to use as little as possible. We have had two accidents this year and members report stones thrown up by cars onto adjacent plots. We brought in the 5mph sign for the safety of all. **Please do your bit.**

- Leave your car at home whenever you can or use the car park. Members can apply for a special permit.
- Sometimes members need to deliver stuff but do use a dry day (difficult this year we know)
- Never park on paths except briefly for delivering.
- Drive your car at 5mph so stones are not thrown up and all on the site are safe.
- **Never bring** cars on site in wet or frosty weather. The latter just peels up the path surface.

A finite number of allotment plots/Audits

Oxford is a popular place to live and it has particular problems with space for housing. Whilst the population is set to increase, the allotment allocation is not. Presently there are still some plots available across the city. Oxford City Council's Draft **Green Spaces Strategy** sets out the context for their allotments until 2026. The latest draft suggests OCC will take more of monitoring role in ensuring sites are well used and in matters such as multiple plot occupancy so that the existing stock of plots is used fairly.

The adopted Strategy should be online before the meeting. Oxford has also produced a "Foodprinting" study as part of its Low Carbon work which includes reference to allotments and local food.

Allotments remain popular and all audit in some way to make sure the space is fit for function. We still have some uncultivated land on The Green and by Castle Mill but both these areas would need considerable work to be brought back into plots and we would always aim to keep communal space.

Please make sure you have Cripsey Meadow names in your email box so you get allotment/audit information. This year we sent 43 audit reminders in amongst the predominant thanks. Only 14 plots contained a serious request for audit action in one or more areas (at levels 2,3 and 4) Reminders included: plots with ongoing concerns; wells that needed to be made safe; tree concerns; missing or faded numbers; concerns re buildings, paths, headlands, paths, adjacent boundaries. Our Field Secretary tours the site regularly and reports to the committee. **If you need temporary help on your plot** to solve a plot problem or to tide you over a busy/difficult patch or to water and cut the grass while you are on holiday, do contact Richard on plot 15 or Victor on Plot 130. Both charge £10 per hour.

Handling Complaints We try to talk to members where there is a problem. This is not always practicable nor 100% successful. If you think we or other members are acting outside the constitution and rules do write to us. The 2011 AGM voted that our complaint procedure was appropriate. Oxford City Council and Parks do not accept complaints unless our procedure has been used. We have had one complaint this year.

Harvesting, Re-using and Recycling

We continue to bring useful material on site. In Spring Phil Shefford will deliver the **St John's College leaf mould to Plot 56**. Arcadian Living green waste plots were turned this year and there is **rough compost available on Plot 109 and 84 (when not too wet)**. Please **only** use wheelbarrows to collect. The top path by 109 became rutted and covered in mud by cars being used. Parks charge associations for their rough compost now and a load is expected. We encourage all members to use composting and indigenous hazel and stripped willow for bean/pea poles. Longcross hydrated is due to be stored on the headland of Plot 129. It will be covered it can be dangerous so ensure you use it safely.

Water/Flooding Last year you may recall we were encouraging members to harvest water after 2 very dry years. Difficult to believe now after so much rain. It seems both conditions are likely to recur so we need to be prepared for all. There was site flooding in April, November and December, followed by a spell of freezing. The level is rising again now! The site was already waterlogged by August so any heavy rain will result in 'puddling' until we have some significant sun. It was a miserable year.

Cripsey, like Trap Grounds and Osney St Thomas, is 'Flood Plain'. Most of the site has seen some flooding. Our environment agency map shows a very small area of 3 to 4 plots out of flood plain. The rise in the groundwater level effects most plots eventually although timing and depth vary considerably. Members should never go into flood water, especially on cultivated ground as it can be **very** soft. If the water comes and goes down rapidly the plants will often survive. It is generally ok to walk on the main paths when out of water. **Please never drive on site when wet or frozen**. Many members found it useful to mark the flood level so that they know where to aim in raising their level with the free rough compost and wood chip from the green waste plots. This is a very tall task but many have made progress using their own compost and bought in additional manure and bagged compost. It takes a lot of effort to raise levels by a small amount. It is always depressing when your hard work and crops go under water but many plots have developed useful strategies.

AGM item 1 *Members queries and strategies to mitigate our flood plain status.*

We had 4 **Skips** this year which is one less than last. We are making progress with managing waste but this is still more skips than any other site's use. We remind members not to use these for external or barbeque waste and this has been better this year. If you cannot take it home please put food waste in Walton Well Car Park bins which are emptied daily. New landfill rules means skips can only be used for plastic and metal. Wood, rubber, paint, stones etc. are not allowed and incur additional charges.

Bonfires and Chipper. Members must always follow Oxford City Council's bonfire code which is on the notice board and web site. The new building along our boundary may mean greater tension and we anticipate it will be increasingly difficult, even with the 'right' wind, to adhere to the 'no nuisance' clause. Most perennial weeds can be managed by drowning in a water tub or keeping them in sealed in plastic bags. But beware it stinks! They can also be dried thoroughly and then quickly burn. There is a burning site as far away from buildings as possible by the island. Members should not leave stuff here for others to burn. The committee have not been able to keep this clear this year as it was just not dry enough.

Some stuff like diseased material will **always** need to be burned, but thick plant stalks and fruit pruning could be composted more readily so we have been investigating using a shredder. Also Jeremy has been organising some members in reclaiming low communal areas by using waste. Most plots should be able to manage all of their own weeds by composting and renewing soil levels but some plots do not seem to have any composting facilities? Shredding should help us all to compost more.

Trap Grounds and Spragglesea Mead have used this successfully to reduce bonfires and manage waste. Tony has visited these sites and has reported to the committee. We think this should be explored further. Tony has costing and specifications of these for rent and purchase and we have also given some thought to use and storage. Given our insurance it is likely the shredder would only be available for members during working party times when they could bring their waste and participate in the working party. We think the machine could only be used by or supervised by trained committee member? Members would take away the resultant material for use on their plot. Tony will present information on specifications, renting, purchasing, and possible storage to the meeting. As we are a successful and prompt deliverer of allotment projects we could apply to The National Lottery for assistance with funding and Alison is happy to put in a bid for this. **AGM item 2** *What are member's views on using a shredder to help with organic waste management?*

Trading shop Another way we could reduce 'food miles' would be the development of a trading shop. Materials could be delivered to the site in bulk instead of many individual trips. Alison has visited Trap Grounds and Osney/St Thomas as both these sites have trading shops. Both of these shops are available to our members. Presently we have no one on the committee interested in managing trading but we would welcome someone joining the committee to develop this project. Alison will report to the AGM on her findings and Vbeke Mannion, who manages Trap Grounds Trading, will give a short talk. Recently one allotment association in the city ceased trading but generally these are a useful to members and most make some profit to support the site. Either way they take considerable voluntary work to organise and we would need to consider suitable secure storage, access for deliveries and content? Also the project must be financially sound. Presently we have two local providers who bring compost and manure to site/plots.

AGM item 3 Is anyone interested in joining the committee to develop this as a service to our members. What are member's views on this?

The South Field

The addition of a new association shed and water butt completed this reclamation. These were funded by our previous Lottery bid. Installation was organised by Tony and Jeremy. We will continue to manage the trough on Plot 119 for rubbish as this area has limited use for cultivation due the adjacent ash tree. It will eventually form a hard standing area for more water butts. The new field was fully occupied this year. It seems these unfenced plots have not experienced any more animal damage than the fenced plots. The committee are concerned that unmanaged plot fences are exacerbating the spread of weeds like ground elder and horsetail and wonder what member's think of not replacing them as they deteriorate.

AGM item 4 Most plot fences were installed as rabbit fencing and they do not exclude either badgers or muntjak. We think they may be contributing to the spread of perennial weed. What do members think?

Phase 2 of building

John Mitri who is managing the development for Oxford University came to the 2012 AGM and answered questions. Longcross started groundwork in October and the completion of the badger run was an early construction tasks. We were offered the short fence posts from the old cycle track and these were quickly taken for use. In April started the badger proofing work agreed by OCC Planning and Oxford University. This is ongoing. We have put a huge amount of effort into ensuring the protection of the badger sett which was moved onto our then disused land by previous building works. We trust the badger sett on our land will remain protected, as the law requires, with access south and north. We continue to work on the allotment not being 'the bit in between' as badgers are not compatible with growing food! We plan to plant a few fruit trees in the patch in front of the new buildings. These will be within our rules and will not prevent future development of this area as plots if needed to meet demand. This area and The Green will also be used for some blocks of bee friendly planting.

AGM item The adjacent building has turned into a very controversial scheme. We will report on the present situation.