

Cripley Meadow Allotment Association Annual Report March 2014

Content and *AGM items*

Page 1 Administration/ *Subscriptions*/ 2013 Committee/2014 Election details/ Oxclean/ Street Fair

Page 2 Working Party/ Paths/ Audit report/ Harvesting recycling/

Page 3 *Water Wells Flooding/ Skips and Plot Clearance /Shredder update*

Page 4 *Trading/ Fences/ OU and OCC site work*

..... or continue to read more

Administration

Last year 54 members attended the AGM evening at St Barnabas. As usual this annual report is sent out by email and put on the notice board in February. Your invoice and AGM letter and agenda have probably arrived by now but they do not go to every member if a plot is shared so copies of the invitation to the AGM and the agenda are included here. **Subscriptions** can be paid between March 1st and the AGM. March 1st is designated on your invoice as the beginning of the new gardening year. There is a surcharge if members pay after 31st March. Details of payment are on the invoice. Paying your subscription is your agreement to our current rules.

Our Subscription for 2014 is unchanged. All Oxford City Council sites are presently working with Oxford City Council and ODFAA on the rent review which comes into effect for payment in March 2016. OCC plan is to have this agreed so that associations can **set a new subscription at the 2015 AGM for 2016**. We have been told this 'unlikely to be a surprising increase'. Last time in was in line with RPI. We have held the present subscription since the 2007 rent review. Our subscription rate will increase to cover the rent increase from OCC and the increased cost of services. This needs to be agreed in principle.

2013 to 2014 Officers/Trustees: Wendy Skinner Smith, Plot 40-41, is Chair and does membership visits, newsletter, web site, audits. Tony Clear, Plot 124, is vice chair and does site structures, audits; Alison Campbell, Plot 13, is Treasurer and manages finance, bids subscriptions, database, skip. Claire Pike, Plot 48b, is secretary and does minutes, correspondence, and audit. **Committee members are:** Jamie Forbes, Plot 63, (transport, machine maintenance, barbeques, building notice boards, audits); Alex Hollingsworth, Plot 81-82, (audit letters and advises on council affairs); Jeremy Hyde, Plot 91, (island management and site work); Richard Haigh, Plot 15, (field secretary, audits, machinery); Annalisa Cecchi (deliveries, audit Field secretary assistant work) Sarah Edwards was co-opted May 2013 (deliveries, trading, audit, Field secretary assistant) and Mark Doran, Plot 142a. All do working parties.

For 2014 Wendy Skinner Smith, Tony Clear, Claire Pike, Alison Campbell, Jeremy Hyde, Richard Haigh Alex Hollingsworth, and Jamie Forbes, Annalisa Cecchi and Sarah Edwards have been nominated for their present posts and seconded at the time of writing and they are willing to stand. Committee members need to be able to attend most meetings. This will be Alison's last Year as treasurer/trustee so we are looking for someone to replace this post next year. Please be in touch if you have time for voluntary work and are interested in joining the committee.

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 8th March** for this year's stint. We credit this as 2014 WP work.

This was our 8th 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 £ for our bee friendly planting. We have had such a busy year this is yet to be done!

ODFAA

All Members were invited to ODFAA Gardeners Question Time in October in the Town Hall. There were plenty of allotment questions including one on flooding. There will be another GQT next year. **The ODFAA/OCC Allotment Competition Award Evening** was held in the Town Hall in October. Martin Stott of Garden Organic presented the awards. We came second in the site competition... Richard and Jean Haigh on Plot 15/16 were first in the Over 70s category and won the Senior Trophy and came third in the polytunnel class. **ODFAA's new web site open to all association members** www.ODFAA.com

Working parties –and site maintenance

Working Party Work and donations are the way members contribute to 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. Member's voluntary work helps manage the site and forges a supportive allotment community. Without this we would have to increase subscriptions. The number participating each month varied from 5 to 24. In 2013 members did 322 working party hours from Jan to Nov. Members of the committee often work on site outside working party hours as well as spending time organising new members and with committee work. The mowing team also take on some additional work. We estimate this 322 hours is about half the voluntary time used to manage the site. If you can help with committee work please contact us ASAP. Meanwhile many thanks to all.

Site Mowing This year we negotiated a new site mowing contract with Barnaby who also brings on the green waste that eventually provides free compost rough for members. Barnaby does the communal areas and communal plot paths. They must be kept free of equipment, and rubbish like stones and glass. Member have reported how much better it is to have the grass collected and put on the green waste plots. We hope eventually this will reduce the growth rate.

Continuing improvement of the paths Over the past few years we have spent £4,500 on maintaining our site paths. Maintenance is an ongoing commitment and we plan to do more this year. We still have some areas without additional gravel and one section of path with no hard core at all. 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. Please do your bit.

- Leave your car at home whenever you can or use the car park.
- Members can apply for an OCC permit to use only when on the allotment.
- Sometimes members need to deliver stuff but do use a dry day (difficult this year we know)
- Never park on paths except when delivering.
- Observe the limit of 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.

Audit

We carried out the two annual audits slightly later than usual in 2013, to take account of the slow start to the growing year after the coldest March in decades. The vast majority of letters we send out raise only minor points or nothing at all, and that's what we're aiming for. These are things like asking people to put visible numbers on their plots and making sure that boundaries and paths on communal plots are kept clear. This year we did have a slightly higher number of letters raising the more serious sort of concerns - 11 in July and 9 in November - but that's only 20 out of more than 320 letters that were sent out this year.

Do look out for the letters, which go to the email address we have on record for you (or by post if we don't have an email or they are final notices). They do contain important information, and it would be nice not to have to send out quite so many repeated reminders about numbers for example! In particular though we sometimes pick up serious safety concerns, like wells that aren't covered properly or dangerous structures. These need to be acted on immediately.

Finally, in almost every case where we wrote to members whose plots seemed as they weren't being looked after it turned out that either the member was about to give up and hadn't told us yet, or there was a temporary issue that had prevented them working. In cases like these it's really important to get in touch with the Committee and let us know as soon as you can. If you're moving away, we can let the plot to someone else before it gets covered in weeds. If you're ill or looking after a relative, we can try to arrange help with short-term maintenance to stop your plot getting out of control before you can work it again. Early communication can make all the difference between returning to a bare but cultivatable plot, or to a jungle. Your plot neighbours will definitely prefer the former, and so will you!

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. At the time of writing we have received no formal complaints this year.

Harvesting, Re-using and Recycling

The committee is committed to managing the site sustainably and we try to bring useful material on site as much as possible. 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 will be grass cuttings and **rough compost available on Plot 109 and 84. We used the Arcadian rough compost from Plot 84 to raise a new plot in this area. We have had small deliveries of woodchip on plots 109 and 58 throughout the year. It generally goes very quickly.** Please **only** use wheelbarrows to collect... AS usual Parks charge us for a delivery of their rough compost and a load is expected when the flood waters recede and the site is more accessible. It will as usual be on Plot 56. If you have had some before please leave for others to share. We encourage all members to compost as much as possible to use indigenous hazel and **stripped** willow for bean/pea poles when available. Please remember not to use unstripped willow as it will root and willow is not allowed to grow on plots.

Water, Wells and Flooding

Cripley, like Trap Grounds, Osney St Thomas and Upper Wolvercote allotment sites are all in the Thames 'Flood Plain'. All of these sites have had some flooding during 2013 but also benefit from being close to water table during periods of drought. 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 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 Report and member feedback on 2014 Flooding](#)

Skips and Plot Clearance

We have 4 **Skips** this year and we are making progress with managing our waste. This year we have had almost no inappropriate use of skips for external or barbeque waste. 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 glass, plastic and metal. Wood, rubber, paint, stones etc. are not allowed and incur additional charges. This year at least 2 skips have had to be used to clear plots that have been left with rubbish and this is now costing the association a considerable sum. Allotment law allows us to charge for this but we have not done this to date.

[AGM item. Some associations have deposits which are only returned if the plot is left in accordance with the rules. Should we charge members who leave weeds/rubbish?](#)

Chipper/shredder update

We have had some committee illness this year which has mean we have had not made progress with this project but the 2013 AGM supported it and we hope to make progress with it in 2014. Members can have bonfires but must always follow Oxford City Council's bonfire code which is on the notice board and web site. The new building along our boundary means bonfires on that side can only be had with the right wind and even then many plots now find it practically impossible to adhere to the 'no nuisance' clause. Most perennial weeds can be managed by drowning in a water tub or better still keeping them in sealed in plastic bags. The latter does not smell as bad 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.

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 will investigate using a shredder. Jeremy continues to organise 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? Sites with shredders find they compost more.

We have costing and specifications of shredders for rent and purchase and we have also given some thought to training, use and storage and to putting in a lottery application. 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.

AGM Item Tony and Alison will report on progress

Trading shop

At the last AGM there was a presentation from Vibeke Mannion about the shop she manages for Trap Grounds Allotments and our members discussed the possibility of a similar venture at Cripsey Meadow. Following an appeal for someone to take responsibility for some trading at Cripsey, Sarah Edwards volunteered and was co-opted onto the committee. The committee decided to focus on a small number of products which may be difficult to buy without a car or which are much cheaper bought in bulk. The concrete shed on the South Field was adopted as the trading shed and we started in the autumn by selling bags of composted manure. We now also have second hand tools for sale and from the spring we will be offering canes, Enviromesh and plastic ground cover. Up to now Sarah has been running the 'shop' on her own, but she hopes to build a small team of volunteers, if there are people willing to help. Jamie Forbes kindly gave his spare shed to the Association, and with the help of other members has installed it next to the trading shed, creating more storage space.

AGM item Sarah will report on the start of Cripsey Trading.

Fences

Some fences have been removed this year and members report much easier to manage boundaries and clear/ keep invasive weeds managed. Some on the main site needed to contain for children and dogs but must still be kept weed free so they do not contribute to the spread of perennial weed.

Oxford University site work /OCC planting

No one can have failed to note how controversial this became and it has meant a huge amount of additional work for the committee in trying to steer a proper course for the association. We have had to work hard to keep up with the amount of paperwork and reports OU, OCC, the building site and protest movement produced as well as manage the backlash from erroneous reporting and commentary. We are pleased to report we are still on good working terms with our neighbour OU and our landlord OCC.

AGM item Report on progress of site work and planting