



## Cripsey Meadow Allotment Association Annual Report March 2016

### Administration

This annual report is sent out by email to all members on our distribution list, along with a copy of the invitation to the AGM and the agenda. When you receive it your invoice may have already been delivered with a paper copy of the invite and agenda. If there is more than one member on a plot the invoice goes to the lead member.

March 1st is designated on your invoice as the beginning of the new gardening year.

**Subscriptions should be paid between March 1<sup>st</sup> and the AGM.** Late fees incur an extra payment.

Last year 36 members attended the AGM evening at St Barnabas. The Draft AGM minutes from this meeting are attached. We aim to have papers on screen so only a few will be printed for the meeting.

**March 2015 to March 2016 officer/committee responsibilities were :** Wendy Skinner Smith, Plot 40-41 - Chair-membership visits, newsletter, web site, working party job lists; Alex Hollingsworth Plot 81-82 - Vice Chair -manages the audit and audit letters; Sara Jones, Plot 71 - Treasurer- manages finance, subscriptions, database and skip renewal; Claire Pike, Plot 48b - Secretary minutes, correspondence, keys, structure permissions, delivery requests. Wendy, Claire and Tony are Cripsey Meadow trustees. Sara has agreed to become a trustee if re-elected as treasurer.

**Committee member responsibilities were as follows:** Jamie Forbes, Plot 63 - machine maintenance, petrol, barbeques, building notice boards; Tony Clear, Plot 124 - site structures, shredder; Jeremy Hyde, Plot 91 - orchards, recycling and projects; Richard Haigh, Plot 15 - plot mowing, site spraying; Annalisa Cecchi, Plot 61b - audit paperwork, deliveries, Field Secretary following up audits; Sarah Edwards, Plot 120 - trading, deliveries, Field secretary following up audits; Emma Delap, Plot 1a - reorganised our information and logging details for WP machinery; Keith Holton, Plot 131 - Community Rehabilitation help, deliveries. Annalisa and Keith kindly accommodate our monthly committee meetings. All help with working parties and the audit. Rodney Smith was co-opted to the committee in June 2015 to help with the Orchards. He wishes to remain co-opted. Tony Clear is standing down from the committee and as a trustee and a member. Tony has been a member since about 1975, on the committee since 2007, Vice Chair from 2012 to 2015 and a trustee since 2009. His contribution will be celebrated at the beginning of the AGM.

**Subscriptions for 2016/2017** At the last AGM members we reminded members that the 2014 AGM noted that subscriptions had remained unchanged since 2007 and would need to increase for 2016. Key deposits and working party commitments remain the same. Although the 2016 rent review did not increase our OCC rent payment and other increased maintenance costs have built up. In 2015 the committee proposed to increase the membership fee for plots on Cripsey Meadow by 50% from March 2016 and the 2015 AGM unanimously agreed this proposed rent increase. Even with this increase our subscriptions remain very modest compared to many other authorities. The Association's policy of helping with any difficulty in paying will continue.

## Events

- In March we did our usual **OXCLEAN**. 12 Members cleared the car park, Port Meadow's willow walk and around boundary and re-organised our skip. Please join us at 10.30 on **Saturday 5th March** for this year's stint. We credit this as 2016 WP work.
- On March 9th BBC Radio 4's Gardeners' Question Time was hosted by ODFAA at Wolfson College. Tickets sold out and it was a good 'allotment gardening event' which was subsequently broadcast.
- In March and April we had the Thames Valley Community Rehabilitation Company working on site on a project to clear Fiddler's Stream.
- We got a grant from the OCC allotment budget to help build raised beds on plots 64/65. The beds have been completed with some paid labour and we hope to complete the soil fill ASAP. They are intended primarily for members who find mobility difficult.
- June saw us at our **9th year at Jericho Street Fair**, an important community event. Thanks to members we had a good selection of fruit bushes, garden annuals and perennials, potted cuttings and pricking out vegetable seedlings. We raised £217.
- **In October** the O&DFAA/OCC Allotment Competition Award Evening was held in the Town Hall in October. Richard and Jean Haigh on plot 15 and 16 won the over 70s class for best allotment. Killian and Emilie came 2nd in the Under 35s. Emilie and Killian only started the plot in early 2015. Miranda Carnegie, Anna Benn and Bel Crewe were awarded a Challenge Trophy Highly Commended certificate after just one year of rejuvenating plots 144/145. CMAA came 2nd in the site competition. We won £100 which was used to help with the labour costs of the raised bed project.
- In **November** members across the city were invited to O&DFAA's talk in the Old Library at Oxford Town Hall – "Understanding Your Soil: Formation, function & fertility" by Chris Bird, M. Hort (RHS) Lecturer in Horticulture Sparsholt College. 2015 was the United Nations Year of Soils and it was an interesting clarification of how to understand and work with your soil. It was also well related to our allotment experiences. We also held a bonfire night BBQ and a few members shared their fireworks.

CMAA is a member of The Oxford and District Federation of Allotment Associations. 34 of the 35 open sites in the city are members and work together with Oxford City Council for the benefit of Oxford Allotments. O&DFAA has a web site which is open to all plot holders. It has lots of photos of plots from around the city so do have a look.

<http://www.odfaa.com/>

## **Site Maintenance and Working parties**

**Doing your Working Party Work commitment or making a donation** remains a condition of membership. The number participating in 2015 varied from 5 to 17. From January 2015 we used **139 working party hours** on the site. Most find it enjoyable extra exercise with the good company of other members. 63 of these were contributed by the committee. We use Arcadian Living for some additional paid maintenance using working party 'donations'. Thanks are due to all. We are one of the biggest sites in Oxford city and without this time/money we could not manage the site as we do. The committee also do lots of work on site outside working party hours with member tours, reclamation, deliveries and trading.

**The paths.** Last year we could not afford any work on the paths but we hope to begin again this year. Please remember these are paths not roads so do use them judiciously. Keep to 5mph and **never use when wet and frosty**. Please use cars minimally.

**Pollarding and pruning** We have not yet managed to do our annual willow pruning on Cripsey Island but hope it will be done before the AGM. Our Castle Mill Stream willows, which were planned for pollarding in 2012 remain unpollarded. This is 'saving' Port Meadow at the expense of Cripsey Meadow i.e. our un-pollarded willows provide screening between Meadow and flats. It may be useful to point out that willows cannot remain un-pollarded. We have previously offered to allow replacement of some of our willows with trees that do not need pollarding.

**Reclamation continued on plots 64, 65,66,67,68 and 147.** We have been working on reorganising this area into small plots with some shed rights ASAP as well as provide some raised bed areas. This is ongoing and helped by using having some competition funds to pay for labour. 104, 128, 70 and 53 were plots left with large amounts of work in clearing and reclaiming. This is still consuming vast amounts of our working party time. It remains very frustrating that members leave us with so much rubbish and weeds to clear.

**Fiddler's stream Fiddler's stream Clearance.** In early March Parks dug a pit to manage the waste and delivered the welfare unit to the site. Teams from Community Rehabilitation started working once or twice a week for 6 weeks with grappling hooks, long and short draw forks, azada, spades, wheelbarrows and brute force to drag out the reeds. The stream is too silted up to work in but they pulled out enough to allow some flow to return. It was a very dirty and strenuous activity. Cripsey Meadow always had a committee member on site. Many thanks are due to all. The stream still needs dredging in order to transport water as it once did.

## **Audit**

As usual the Committee carried out two audit inspections during the year, in July and October. In the summer about half the plots had no issues at all and only thirteen had serious problems. Of these we were able to work with members to get things sorted out in the majority of cases, but unfortunately in two cases we had to issue notices to quit.

In October about a third of plots had no problems at all, and again about a dozen had serious issues. This time in most cases members who had been struggling to keep up with their plots for some time decided to resign, and three notices to quit were issued. Whenever a member resigns or has their membership ended, the Committee and helpers at the working parties work hard to quickly clear and either cover or relet the vacant plots.

The purpose of the audit process is to identify problems that might cause issues for neighbours or the site as a whole, and ask members to deal with them before they get out of hand. In the vast majority of cases this is what happens, but there are a few instances where the same issues are raised over and over again. It is very important to read the audit letters, and address any problems raised. If you think the audit group have got it wrong, please say so - we'd much rather discuss a potential problem than have it get worse because it's been ignored.

One simple thing that would reduce the number of audit issues is to make sure that your plot has a visible number on it. We've included this in the last ten audit letters over five years, but there are 19 plots as of October that still don't have one!

**Fences/Dangerous structures.** We continue to remove fences and structures on plots that come back to the association if they are weed infested or dangerous before passing the plot on. We can no longer recommend fences as they do not keep pests out and they have increased the transfer of perennial weed.

**Handling Complaints.** We try to talk to members where there is a problem. Unfortunately with so many members we will never please all of the people all of the time but we try hard.

**Harvesting, Re-using, Recycling and Trading.** We continue our commitment to managing the site sustainably and we try to bring useful material on site wherever we can.

**Mowing and Arcadian Green Waste Plots 84 and 109.** We now have some strimmer work alongside the monthly summer mowing. We need this additional work more often. Arcadian Living cuts and collects our communal areas and paths and strims communal plot paths and brings on the green waste that eventually provides free compost rough for members. We had to do quite a lot of small plot mowing to keep seeding weeds down this year and will have to charge for this if it continues. We turned both 109 and 84 this year and the rough compost is now being used. Members are asked to remove any woody bits and rubbish and put these tidily aside and only to use wheelbarrows. No cars please. Please do not use these plots for your green/brown waste nor bring any green waste from home to them. Please keep all headlands and site areas free of equipment, compost bins etc. and all rubbish like

stones and glass which damage the cutters. We aim to develop some site meadow stretches.

**A generous load of leaf mould arrived in early 2015 and was quickly used.** It usually lands sometime during February/March. **Woodchip:** We had very little woodchip this year. Only 2 small piles this year which went within a very short time. Unfortunately one wood chip lorry came on site when too wet and took out some of the path. This will be mended by Sylva trees ASAP.

Do try to use **indigenous hazel and stripped willow for bean/pea poles when available.** See Jeremy, before the sap rises, and he will identify sources you can use to cut. Always strip willow as it will root if the bark is in contact with soil. Willow/Bamboo and other invasive plants are not allowed on plots.

**Compost.** We are keen to encourage everyone to make as much use of composting as possible. Amazingly many plots still do not have working compost bins. A compost bin growing weeds or a pile of growing weeds is not composting! Compost bins can be readily made. You can also store any material for shredding and bring it to a working party. Your OCC green waste buckets are much the best way of managing any cooked food, meat, fish or dairy stuff as this will be properly heat treated. Any cooked food on site increases our already over prevalent rat population. We have had fewer reports of these this year and we hope it is because we have cleared some very long standing rubbish piles.

**Shredder.** This has been used at 4 working parties and Rodney and Wendy have done 2 additional days of clearing with it but we have yet to establish a routine or team of trained members to manage it. We hope to make progress with this in 2016. It is a potentially dangerous bit of kit so we are progressing with caution and working on gaining experience and operational details so that we are confident in managing it safely. We are logging its operation more readily now Emma has reorganised all our safety information. We are working to the principle that for anyone to manage it at a working party they must have been trained and had experience using it beforehand.

**Recycling and Upcycling.** We made a start on establishing and reorganising some recycling bays by the green shed. This needs regular work. Jeremy manages this and you should talk to him before putting or removing anything from here. Tools and equipment left on site continue to be recycled to our trading shed.

**Skips and Plot Clearance** We have 6 **Skips** this year. This is 5 more than any other site we know of but one less than last year. There was less inappropriate use of skips for external or barbeque waste this year so we are making progress. However it seems we Cripsey Members bring far too much stuff onto the site! **We must all make more progress in limiting the storage of 'things that end up being left for others to clear'.** Please remember glass panes are not allowed on site. We estimate at least 3 of these skips have again had to be used to clear plots that have been left with rubbish. This is a very high cost.

**Water, Wells and testing.** The OCC legal agreement with Oxford University for an 18 month groundwater monitoring programme finished in 2015. This was to ensure that the diesel spill incident of 2013 did not cause unacceptable groundwater contamination at our site. Agreed plots were tested, regular groundwater samples were taken at

specified intervals and analysed for hydrocarbon contamination and the tester was always accompanied by a committee member. No exceedances above the trigger level were recorded in any of the allotment wells since testing started. The results to date indicate that there was no significant impact from the diesel spill on allotment water quality. We continue to recommend that members follow the usual precautions of washing their produce and hands etc. in line with recommendations from the environment dept. on our notice board and web site.

**Proposed Flood Channel.** Cripsey, like Trap Grounds, Osney St Thomas, Upper Wolvercote, Cowmead and Spragglesea Mead allotments are all in the Thames 'Flood Plain'. Any rise in the groundwater level eventually effects most plots, although these change from year to year! Cripsey Island went briefly under water this year for a few days in January but subsided after a few days. The Environment Agency did presentations of The Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme in January. If you missed them the information is available at:

[www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/sites/default/files/folders/documents/environmentandplanning/flooding/Oxford%20FAS%20Public%20Consultation%20boards%20-%20Final.pdf](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/sites/default/files/folders/documents/environmentandplanning/flooding/Oxford%20FAS%20Public%20Consultation%20boards%20-%20Final.pdf)

ODFAA committee members are meeting in the first instance with Penny Birnie, an environment officer in the EA team to further understand this for allotments, particularly those like Cripsey in the Flood Plain. If appropriate they will organise other meeting with individual committees. This is a major project and needs government approval and security of full funding. The approval process is important and will take some time. EA are aiming for final approval in 2018 and for construction to begin later that year.

**Bonfires.** Members can have bonfires but **must always** follow Oxford City Council's bonfire code. **Bonfires must not cause any 'nuisance'**. Most plots now find it practically impossible to adhere to this 'no nuisance' clause as when the wind is blowing away from the buildings it is blowing across other plots. We have noted fewer bonfires and had fewer complaints this year so many thanks to all. Please make sure you compost (and shred) as much as possible and only burn diseased dry material when you are confident this will not disturb residents or other plot holders. We maintain a burning space in the far corner of the site by the green association shed. This became almost impossibly large in late 2015 as the wind and weather were against us burning it. Jeremy finally managed it with the judicious use of fire breaks and it is again manageable. However a Christmas tree has arrived! Please do not use the committee/site as a waste disposal service.

**Cripsey Meadow shop.** Sarah Edwards manages our trading project, which started in October 2013. The shop is based on the South Field, in two of the association's sheds. Our main focus is on supplying things that are difficult to buy without a car or cheaper bought in bulk. We aim to make a small profit to contribute to site maintenance. The shop re-opened in mid-February for regular Sunday morning sessions and closed for the quiet months of August and December. Throughout the year, members could also ask for a one-off sale outside normal hours. There were 165 visits to the shop, compared to 105 in 2014.

Sales were up substantially on the previous year and total income, including some small donations, was £2,470 compared to £1,407 in 2014. Taking account of purchases and the amount of stock held, our 'net income' or trading profit for 2015 is

estimated to be £756. For 2014 the figure was £456. This increase was partly due to sales of more second hand tools and equipment. These are items left or donated by members or surplus owned by CMAA, so their availability fluctuates. As before, we also encouraged seed sharing at the shop, with members donating spares that others could take for free.

A big 'thank you' is due to everyone involved. A small team of members helped Sarah to staff the shop: Emma Delap, Sara Jones and Niharika Gurram. Annalisa Cecchi also volunteered and had her induction session. Jeremy Hyde again undertook the sorting and some mending of second hand items and transported them to the shop, and Alessandra Nolasco assisted with deliveries. Finally, we would like to thank members who used the shop, making the venture worthwhile.

**Badger fencing and Castle Mill developments.** The controversy about Castle Mill continues to be a time consuming part of trying to steer a proper course for the association. There has been yet more reading of reports and submissions, the outcome of which tends to be a 'determined' misunderstanding of the history. The number of members responding to the many consultations remained very small (less than 3%). Natural England made clear in 2012 that there was enough access for foraging land for badgers without them having access to the allotments and that we can use fencing to exclude them. We continue to work with OU and OCC in managing the badger access which was clearly exacerbated by building on the embankment. This was clearly identified in the pre-planning needs. We have worked hard to live **alongside** setts. This year we have benefitted from the help of Nigel Fisher, the conservator of Wytham Woods. His support for our view that we cannot allow badgers to have unrestricted access to Cripley Meadow has been invaluable. OU has remained committed to helping finance a solution and the parameters of this were agreed by the AGM in 2015. After many trials and trials we hope to have agreed a settlement for the fences that work will begin soon. We will report further on this and any other related matters at the meeting. Meanwhile we have welcome 31 members who live in the flats. Our priority, as always, has been to ensure any Castle Mill screening plans do not compromise allotment land.

## **STOP PRESS**

*After 4 long years we have arrived at a solution with OU that the Environment Agency accepts and we are now signing the agreement with OU for funding for badger proof fencing as agreed at the last AGM. This was our only remaining solution. As soon as the water recedes we will aim for all systems go ASAP so we can get the clearance in before April if possible. Jeremy will be managing the moving and shed stuff with members and later installing the water butts and pumps, Walter Sawyer and the OU Parks team will be doing the clearance (they did the clearance and planted our second orchard) and Archer and Bishop will be doing the badger proof fencing.*

*On February 9<sup>th</sup> West Area Planning Committee accepted the EA, signed off the remaining planning conditions, accepted Option 1 mitigation and voted down discontinuance so some mitigation will now be possible. We will continue to work to ensure mitigation does not sacrifice Cripley Meadow. Presently we need to pay attention to possible tree planting in the badger run and our unpollarded willows!*