

# CRIPLEY MEADOW ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION ANNUAL REPORT MARCH 2006

*AGM ITEMS (BOLD ITALICS) will be taken after the election of officers*

## GRANTS / FUND RAISING

We received £500 from Coop Community Fund to clear land and encourage schools and happily St Barnabas School has taken a plot. We had a repair grant of £347 and a maintenance grant for £400 for black plastic, from OCC. We have sold the plastic on to members or reused it so it benefits all. Our fund raising event was the Jericho Street Fair on June 11 where we raised £350 from salad and plant sales. Next year we hope more members will be involved and contribute plants and /or salad ingredients. Thanks to Ken Jones, our Independent Examiner for his work on our accounts. (See accounts report)

**AGM ITEM. We recommend the Independent Examiner's advice to be used in 2006.**

## PLOTS 60-63

These plots were returned to the City Council because of major tenancy breaches. The City Council took action in the County Court to remove the ex-member and on December 9th he signed a repossession order and an undertaking not to enter Cripsey Meadow site, nor approach, assault or cause nuisance to any of its members. On December 13th the sheds on these plots were set on fire and the police are investigating this. Our thanks are due to J Thomas, J King and J Franklin of the City legal team who took this case forward. This was an unpleasant experience over a considerable time and we are pleased it has been resolved. It showed us that our constitution and rules were unwieldy and inconsistent. We hope this shorter, reorganised version makes them more memorable and usable.

**AGM ITEM. Vote on Draft Constitution and Members' rules.**

## WORKING PARTY DAYS

First Sunday in the month 10.30 am at the shed

See photos at AGM

Month	Committee members	members	jobs
April	7	7	Mowing and bramble cutting has been a constant occupation for every working party between May and October. Often this has needed 2 days per month.  Working parties have moved large quantities of metal, glass, plastic and bricks and covered plots with plastic. This is an easy job with many hands but difficult with just a few. We have burned and sorted waste piles of rubbish and made available materials for making plot number stakes.
May	6	2	
June	3	3	
July	7	2	
August	5		
September	6		
October	2		
November	4		
January	6	5	
February	5	3	

**AGM ITEM It has been suggested that everyone contributes 2 hours per year to site work in a working party as part of their membership. If they cannot do this they can make a donation of £10? *The committee cannot keep on top of the brambles!!***

## PATHS/HEDGES

The paths and brambles have been mowed and cut as above and the committee know they cannot sustain this without more machinery and help. This year we have done some levelling of paths but they need more maintenance. In January we made an agreement with the Parks department to allow use of our polluted sites (109, 49 and 90) for green waste. Members can use this as and when composted. This has the added benefit of keeping these plots free of rabbit cover! In return the Parks team did a January cut of paths, hedges, headlands and mowed some plots. Similar work cost us £500 in January 2005. The Parks Team will continue to bring green waste on site (which will be increasingly greener) and our thanks are due to Adrian, Trevor and Graham for this and for removing the fencing from plots 60-64. Last year the ISIS estimate for each mowing was £244 and we estimate we need 5/6 cuts over growing season? This will be less as members manage their headlands.

**AGM ITEM. We recommend contract mowing for 2006 with a budget of £1250 and a review at next AGM.**

## FENCES

We agreed at last AGM that internal fences should be 5ft max, using posts and wire netting. The legacy of construction fencing was agreed to be unsuitably harsh but we have agreed with those members who were given it and have it in situ that it can remain as long as it is reduced this year to the maximum height of 5 ft. No more will be allowed.

If funding is agreed (see item on Federation and Oxford City Council) we are due 'an effective security fence' in 2006 as part of a proposed OCC upgrade of all sites. We will try to negotiate some internal rabbit fencing as part of this, but it may not be possible within the OCC budget and criteria. If we do get a new boundary security fence we would hope to introduce some wildlife friendly mixed hedge planting of holly, hornbeam, beech and honeysuckle. This would need 3 year pruning.

**AGM ITEM** *We recommend: no more construction fencing; that members negotiate communal fencing and that members tell us their thoughts about an exterior fence. What are the priorities? Can we have an effective, maintainable rabbit fence as well as security fencing around exterior?*

## COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Items included in this report have been discussed at our monthly committee meetings. Minutes of these meetings are available. Thanks to Susanna Pressel, local councillor for Cripsey Meadow, who has attended 5 of our meetings as a non voting observer.

In January we heard that Miranda Worthen had resigned after returning from a spell in Canada. In February 9th we heard that Jeremy Meigh had died after being ill for much of the year. Jeremy had been a committee member since 2004. He was very supportive at a critical time for the Association and we have sent our appreciation and sympathy to his family.

## WELLS

We have not had time to continue the survey of wells started last year. We know more have been unearthed during clearance. We must continue to stress the need for safety so please check the plan and mark any wells on your plot.

**AGM ITEM** *We would be grateful to know of anyone who could help with plans for a well head that members could easily construct to box in well heads to make them secure?*

## UNWORKED PLOTS

We know the sensitivities involved in questioning members' use of plots use but we have tried to reclaim plots which have been let but unworked for a long time. In May we sent out letters of concern/enquiry where plots had showed no evidence of working over more than one season. In July we had a waiting list for the first time in our memory, for usable plots. We now have a form to complete so that plots can be let fairly as they become available. We recommend that new members have 1 plot in the first instance. Further plots are available only as and when plots are managed. We would be grateful if current members who have taken on more than they can manage let us know asap so the plots do not get out of control. In August 3 committee members did an audit of all the plots on site recording their condition. On this basis we agreed another letter to members where no progress had been made.

This process has released 16 unworked plots.

We know there is a need for more half-plots

Plots 60-64 will be let as halves plots.

Plot 18 and Plot 7 will be used in 2006 for access to tree line to complete pollarding.

Plots 109/111/90 will have green waste /clearance during 2006.

Plots 85/86 are unavailable until we have cleared Plots 147/8.

## RENTS

2006 Subscription increases to £2 per pole as agreed at AGM of 2005. Members experiencing difficulty with this should write to the committee. Please be aware that any concessions will only apply to one plot. We think they are still excellent value.

## SHEDS

At the moment members must write to the committee asking permission for any shed/ greenhouse stating size, location and materials and we have agreed this can only be decided by a minimum of 3 committee members. There have been a number of problems with this and the committee would benefit from members' thoughts before we give any clearer direction. We have removed a number of dangerous sheds and ask that members with inherited or dangerous sheds do the same.

**AGM ITEM.** *We recommend that 6'x8' as a maximum size for sheds. These should follow shed lines and use guttering if possible. We do not think the association can have a free-for-all policy given the problems on Plots 148 and 60-64. Are these reasonable parameters and expectations?*

## **EQUIPMENT**

This year we used a power scythe (these are basically hand tractors with attachments) for cutting bramble that could not be mowed and found it successful but quite difficult. We found the individual member's strimmer was generally not suited to brambles. We think a wheeled strimmer might be better some time in the future and another larger mower is necessary if we do not use contract mowing. However there are serious issues about insurance, liability, maintenance and repair which need to be discussed with members.

**AGM ITEM If and when we have the resources, what equipment would be useful and how would it be used?**

## **WASTE (PLOTS 147/148)**

These plots were barricaded for many years and we have an agreement, in principle, that City Waste will clear the site. The practice and funding of this removal is proving difficult to arrange. We were advised by the Allotment Officer to accumulate all rubbish here and until it is cleared members can continue to do this providing they stay well within perimeter. The amount of rubbish is more than he anticipated and it seems we have been left with 107 years of rubbish to remove! When we have resolved this problem we aim to have a skip when we can afford it. In between members must manage their (inherited) rubbish on their own plots and not dump it elsewhere. Hidden rubbish is a nightmare to clear! Apologies for the eyesore.

**STOP PRESS we are negotiating with Berkeley Homes about removal. It does mean heavy machinery on site again and adjacent plots and paths may suffer some damage as there is a vast amount.**

## **GATES**

The gates are an improvement after initial problems but the lock has proved a nightmare. Stuart Thorpe, the council officer responsible, and the company have replaced it 4 times. If your key sticks, stop using it and contact Carolyn.

## **MEETINGS OF FEDERATION OF OXFORD CITY ALLOTMENTS AND OXFORD CITY COUNCIL OFFICERS**

In April 2005 all Oxford City Allotment Association were invited to send representatives to a meeting chaired by Mike Gass, the Allotment Officer. At this meeting there was general recognition of the 30 years of neglect in repairs, maintenance and funding by OCC. Over subsequent meetings we have discussed this and an Allotment Condition Survey was completed in October. This was submitted as evidence for a bid for £520,000 over 5 years for all City Allotment Associations. The Chair has spoken in support of this at two Area Committee Meetings and at the Executive Council Meeting in January and we have encouraged everyone to write to their local councillors in support of this. We will know what the funding is after the Council Meeting on February 13th. The federation meeting has also contributed to Oxford City Council's Green Spaces document with regard to making them more positive about allotments. The OCC documents are available here. Many thanks are due to John Wade of the Parks Department for all his work, and to Mike Gass who has been a great support.

**AGM ITEM Discuss OCC plans for upgrading Cripsey Meadow. What are our priorities?**

## **ADVICE/INFORMATION/ MATERIAL AVAILABLE TO MEMBERS**

We have sent 3 newsletters this year as well as posting regular "What to do" notices on the board. Ed Todd has found a source of cheap fence posts in France (5cm width/2m height @2.75 euros) which you may be able to order at AGM. We will also have a copy of the 1996 Soil Sample report available. The main recommendations of the report are that: you wash your hands after working; do not ingest soil; wash and peel produce; take care young children do not eat soil. Report is available at AGM. We are reminded by our local councillor to advise everyone to report any fly tipping on 0845 7831957

**AGM ITEM Is this useful?**

## **DISUSED GROUND**

This was fenced off by the council, apparently at our request in 1991, and has not been used by the association since although we have continued to pay paid rent for it. Anthony Roberts of the Countryside Department has looked at it and his advice is that it is not suited as a managed nature reserve as too fertile. He is concerned about the rubbish, bottle digger holes and rough sleepers. It is due to remain fenced off and whilst this is so we have discussed it with John Kulasek of Estates. He has agreed, in principle, to reduce our rent to reflect this unavailable 15%. Anthony Roberts also advised Plots 58-59 would need a mowing for 2 seasons to control brambles.

**AGM ITEM Does this sound sensible?**

## **ST JOHN'S LEAF MOULD**

We have negotiated a new agreement with Richard Downing, the Head Gardener, and his deputy, Phil. St John's is now a member and their plot (no 57, next to central area) will contain leaf mould which is available for members' use. Plot 57 has better access for the lorry and

members and is unsuitable for cultivation. This arrangement is mutually beneficial as we get leaf mould and suppressed brambles and they do not have to drive many miles to an out-of-town site.

## **2005-6 CLEARANCE**

The internal tree removal/willow pollarding was agreed at AGM of 2005 in order to reduce the competition for light, nutrients and water and to limit roosts for magpies, rooks and pigeons. This tree work was started in December by the Parks Department. It was a big task to manoeuvre around the site with very large rented machinery to use this effectively they started with larger internal trees and then moved to the willows. There are piles of wood chippings around the site and, where on communal ground, this is available for member use. We apologise for the inconvenience to members whilst recognising our debt to the Parks Dept. This job is our responsibility in terms of our lease so we are very grateful to Shaun Gibson, Senior arboriculturalist and his team and to Parks for funding of this. It will be completed in late 2006. We hope to encourage good gardening practice so that songbirds continue to find us a favourable environment and some small trees (under 15ft) will be left for recreational use where they can contribute to the site without inhibiting cultivation.

We allocated funding for 2 days 'Digger work' to move rubbish piles from last year's clearance, to make safe plots 60-63, clear and reclaim Plot 54, 64, 129,130, and 133-137. A tall order but Mike Gass added funding for another day to help clear Plots 60-63 and fill in the dangerous pond. We have used another day on top of this thanks to a donation from a member. Thanks to Pat & John from Sheehans who are such skilful earthmovers.

***AGM ITEM. We recommend we develop a communal area with dwarf fruit planting on the central area after 2 years mowing. (This area is not suitable for cultivation as plots). We hope this will develop into a pleasant area for members to take a well earned rest and where we might hold association social events in the future.***