

2008 October Newsletter

Lunch on The Green 21 September 2008



Our recent Members' lunch, with over 60 people, was a wonderful celebration. Many thanks to David and Gabi and Michelle who were on barbeque duty and to John, who did most of the organising with the committee, those who brought splendid harvest baskets and all who brought delicious food. There are more photos on the web site. These include Tim's cabbage and John's pumpkin, both now famed! The Pumpkin went to be the centrepiece of Phil and Jim's Harvest festival and everyone had a slice. What was the fate of the cabbage Tim?

Cripley Island Orchard

We reported in July that we had applied for National Lottery Local Food funding to develop this. We got through the first round and have just completed the full application. Our National Lottery Advisor visited the island and was very supportive, but funding cannot be assured. We will hear in December and know if we have to look to other sources. We are now members of Mid Shires Orchard Group and the Heritage Fruit Tree Company will give us trade-priced local varieties. Local varieties include names like Oxford Sunset, Oxford Yeoman, Eynsham Dumpling, Blenheim Orange, Deddington Pippin, as well as Wastie's Peggy's Pride, Jennifer Wastie and many more!

We have already agreed the site rent/subscription increase for next year will be directly passed onto members but we have not yet had a firm figure from OCC. However the next subscription will include Cripley Island as part of the Allotment Association so it will belong to all our members.

Firstly we need to make the land accessible, safe and suitable for cultivating fruit trees. The main brief for the external funding is to manage the land, trees and streams and establish a bridge, paths and glades for planting. John Sivell, with his background in farming, forestry and Head Gardening and Tony Clear, a retired building surveyor are willing to be project managers for the funded project. They have helped Wendy write the application and Alison Campbell and Alex Hollingsworth have provided excellent assistance in editing and proofing. Obviously everyone will need to play their part. We anticipate an extra hour, per year, per member will be set aside specifically for Cripley Island Orchard. Members will be able to help clear, cultivate raised beds in glades for planting, choose varieties of local fruit, learn about planting, pruning, pollarding and coppicing as well as introduce bird, bat and bee boxes and eventually share the harvest. As now you will be able to make a donation if you cannot spare the time. We will have lots of ways members can contribute at the AGM.

We will also need to develop 'Island Rules'. All members will be able to use Cripley Island Orchard and be responsible for it the orchard so we need to make sure this is equitable. We hope the island will be a real asset as well as a place of quiet retreat. Members will be the primary beneficiaries however 'Local Food' funding is about sharing awareness of the benefits of local food so the funding means we need to share this with the wider community for planned visits. We have had a lot of interest and Phil and Jim, St Barnabas, St Clare's and The Cherwell as well as Jericho Community Centre all of whom would like to be able to visit and benefit from a local orchard. Susanna Pressel,

our local councillor and Lord Mayor has been a great support. If you have ideas about the orchard and have not already shared them do get in touch... by email or talk to committee member.

Our growing site

We are spending a lot of time bringing in new members. At the time of writing we have 169 members and we have been managing a waiting list for 3 months. Our September audit letters were posted in October and responses are coming in. The impetus of people waiting for a space to grow vegetables, fruit and flowers concentrates the mind as potential members want to know why they cannot have a plot when they can see plots that not being used in accordance with our rules. We have brought back into circulation as many as we can to date but some are just too low or damaged to be able to let. We know letters are never great to receive and they are not great to process either, but they are a vital part of managing the site responsibly and sustainably. We try to do this sensitively.

Increasingly members are joining in so that our community grows in more than just size. Working parties/events are the best way of meeting other members, and swapping ideas and problems. Remember everyone should do 2 hours working party work per year as part of their membership. If you cannot do this you can donate an additional sum (£5 an hour) with your next subscription.

Please help us to make our allotment site an attractive, safe place for all

- always show consideration for your plot neighbours and visitors to the site
- you must keep pets under control at all times. Dogs **must be on a lead** if not contained on your plot and you must ensure your dog does not foul the site.
- your allotment garden needs regular attention to keep it tidy and productive and you must use it in accordance with the conditions of your membership
- you need to keep the area around your allotment tidy and weed free and ensure bramble is not on adjoining boundaries. It can be on external boundaries if not invading the path.

Do let the committee know

- if you change your address, phone number or e-mail address. You risk losing your allotment if we are unable to contact you.
- If you are thinking of planting fruit trees, or building you must obtain the committee's agreement
- if you are finding your plot takes too much time do tell us. Maybe a smaller plot would help.
- if you are prevented from gardening, for a month or more, by illness, incapacity or family circumstances or if you will be working away from home and won't be able to look after your plot, let us know what plans you have made for maintenance before you go.
- if you need advice on allotment gardening problems

This year we have 40 new members so here are our top tips for getting started

- we will tell you if we know there is a problem with your plot which needs attention
- but there still may be hidden rubbish/glass so take care. Bag up rubbish and store on your plot until skip time or, if you can, take it to Redbridge.
- A 'metal only' skip donated by 'M&M' is on site by the shed.
- do not allow any self seeded trees to grow.
- a petrol brushcutter can be hired (with safety equipment) for a day for one off clearance
- don't rotovate if there is a weed problem like bramble, bindweed, thistles, nettles, or comfrey
- cover or use glyphosate twice or regular mowing. Cover will take a year or so if kept down, glyphosate will take a few weeks (but don't use again?) and mowing a season.
- plan ahead, draw a map of what is there and plan what you are going to do first
- think about fencing, compost, tools, storage and water collection.
- look at our web site for monthly jobs and other advice
- check you can identify annual and perennial weeds. Don't compost perennials. Dry and burn.

- mark out and dig some beds thoroughly, removing all weeds. Buy a hoe and use it regularly to keep free of weeds
- keep the rest of the plot mown, strimmed or mulched. Weeds should not seed on neighbours.
- little and often is better than all day occasionally. A few hours every week will make progress.
- Sow something as soon as possible. The taste of fresh food says it all

Monday October 27 is our next Committee meeting

Sunday November 2 our next working party

Monday November 24 is our last committee meeting for this year

In December the Committee take a holiday

Jan 4th is the first working party date for 2009

Walton Well Bridge

Well done everyone. Our councillors noted your many comments. The present plan is to go for a single lane option not a weight limit. Network Rail need to confirm this but thanks to all who wrote.

Environmental Health Department and Site testing

When Karen Seal (Environmental Health Officer) came to our AGM in 2006 she explained the nature of the site contamination and how to live with it safely. She also reported that she had applied for funding to do more testing on Cripely Meadow and Trap grounds. This is to understand the behaviour of the known contaminants better. Sampling will be random across the site and the new consultants aim to be on site during the week beginning 17th November. Karen will let us know which plots fall within the sampling area during the preceding week. We will notify members by email and post a list on the notice board to advise members where access to their plot will be needed. Further info is on NB

[http://www.cripelymeadow.org.uk/Advice/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20Karen%20Seal%20and%20newsletter%20re%20testing%20%20Letter.pdfweb site.](http://www.cripelymeadow.org.uk/Advice/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20Karen%20Seal%20and%20newsletter%20re%20testing%20%20Letter.pdfweb%20site)

Draft Policies

We need some stated policies to comply with funding application requirements. The drafts are on the web site and will need discussion before adoption at AGM. Hopefully they are common sense. They refer to Environmental Sustainability, First Aid, Equal Opportunities and Health and Safety. They have been a joy to complete!

Wells

What is a joy is the work Harry Schoetz on Plot 48 has done on his well. If you are interested in technology he is happy to talk with others about pumps and panels or look on the web site.

Bartholomew Allotment Association and SOIL OFFER

The Chair of Bartholomew Allotments writes that 'he enjoyed visiting Cripely Meadow's open day. We are going to organise our own at the next committee meeting. Raised bed gardening is clearly the way forward for wet ground. If any of your members want top soil they are welcome to dig and bag it up to take away from our soil mound, rather than buy any from the garden centre. If you are interested please contact Richard Barrett on Richard Barrett [richard.barrett@tinyworld.co.uk] Bartholomew Road is in Cowley. He also recommends 'On a bigger scale you can buy supasoil from M&M. This is our M&M <http://www.wortonfarms.co.uk/compost-11.html?p=,11>

Application to keep Bees on from Diane Newell on Plot 151/152

Many of you will be aware of the current crisis in bee numbers, and the potential impact on pollination. One of the best ways that we can meet this threat is by encouraging responsible beekeeping, and as a result I have asked the Allotment Committee to allow me to keep a hive

(potentially 2 hives in a year or two's time if all goes well) on my allotment (nos 151 and 2 – the one with the blue shed!). I'm sure you might have questions, so I've tried to anticipate a few:

Will the bees be a nuisance on neighbouring allotments?

In order to ensure that the bees don't fly in low over neighbouring allotments we will site the hive with its entrance facing a hedgerow in the centre of our allotment (just in front of the blue shed). This means that the bees will have a steep flight path in and out of the hive, which will keep them from 'buzzing' our neighbours. We will also be adding a pond so that they have a water source on our allotment – again to keep them from descending to one on a neighbouring allotment.

What happens when you open the hive up?

Bees don't like to be disturbed too often, we'll be inspecting the hive once or twice a week in the active season, much less than that in the cold months when we will only check to see that they have enough food. You'll see us in our suits with smokers taking the lid off of the hive and looking at the frames one by one to inspect for colony health and honey production. The bees generally take not too much notice – house bees get on with their jobs and the bees out foraging come and go as normal provided we don't obstruct their entrance to the hive. They might buzz around a bit more than normal having a look at us but the hive will be situated more or less in the middle of our allotment away from all our boundaries.

Will the bees swarm?

We'll be doing everything we can to make sure they don't as it means we'd lose most of our honey production! Bees swarm when they think that they have 'filled' their current hive and the queen sets off with most of the adult population to found a new colony, leaving a new queen and some workers to maintain the old one. We prevent this in a variety of ways – ensuring there is enough space for the colony is the main issue. We will make sure that the telephone numbers to call for swarm removal are on the notice board – if you do see a swarm it is just as likely to be 'visiting' bees as ours – but do call and a member of the Oxfordshire Beekeepers Association's swarm collection team will come and deal with it. Swarms aren't dangerous, or angry in any way, just on the move to a new home. But they are best handled by an expert so don't try to collect them yourself.

Do you know what you are doing?

I have completed a course in Beekeeping at the OBKA (Oxfordshire Beekeepers Association) of which I am a member. Through the OBKA I will have guidance from some very experienced beekeepers in the local area. My Allotment Partner Caro has also attended some OBKA meetings, and is intending to follow the course right through next year so that we will have ongoing support for our first year as apiarists.

If you have other questions do e-mail us on: dfn05.new001@ntlworld.com –

Diane Newell

The committee has discussed Diane's request and taken advice from other associations. We asked John Sivell, who was a beekeeper for many years, to talk with Diane about some reservations we received. He talked with Diane and is confident she has done her homework and training. He is willing to act as additional support on site and recommends we support this. The committee is in favour providing the association membership is aware and supportive and it is clear to all what steps will be taken to deal with any problems.

Immediate plot neighbours have been contacted but these can and will change. Everyone (including Diane) is in agreement that members will come before bees and if members have problems the bees will go.

Please contact Diane and/or the committee with your questions and / or comments. Any comments received will be brought to the AGM when the final decision will be taken. If agreed the plan will be to introduce the bees in April.

With every best wish for a continued gentle autumn and a dry winter, Wendy Skinner Smith