

**Cripley Meadow
Allotment Association
Newsletter
February 2019
www.cripleymeadow.org.uk**

The **next Working Party is on February 10th**. Please meet at the Green shed at 10:30 safely clothed and shod. This is the last Working Party that counts towards the 2018/19 membership year, so if you haven't yet come to a WP, this is your final chance to avoid the financial contribution requested in lieu.

February's WP work will include yet more plot clearance! We'll be reclaiming some plots (again). Rubbish and perennial weeds remain a problem on some, although rarely at the level we saw from 2004 until 2015/6, when we think we finally took out all the really long-term neglect.

We had a good turnout of 14 members for January's WP, with fine weather. They cleared bramble on plot 133, burnt off the accumulated bonfire pile, cleared an illicit tree house and pruned some of the fruit trees on the green.

March Working Party will be 3rd March ONLY (10th March cancelled)

We have registered to contribute to OxClean on Sunday March 3rd and have decided this will replace our scheduled 10th March WP. We will meet from 10.30 to 12.30 and split the time between litter picking, and WP work on our site.

Our **2019 AGM is on Monday March 11th at St Barnabas School, Hart Street, Jericho. The meeting starts at 8pm** and members of the Committee will be present from **7.30** to set up and for you to pay your subscription if you wish to do so in person. There will be nibbles /drinks /slides and you can chat to us and other members. Do come along if you can. You will get a formal invitation, agenda, annual report and budget and accounts shortly. Please let Secretary, Manda, know asap if you have an item you wish to raise.

As our **new membership year starts on March 1st** invoices for the new membership year are coming soon by email to the lead member for each plot (if you do not receive yours by mid-Feb, please email our Treasurer, Sara, allotment@qtq.org and include your plot number in the email.) If you are giving up your plot, please let Sara know asap.

Your **invoice must be paid on or before the AGM**. The 2018 AGM agreed the following: payment after the AGM (March 11th) will incur a £10 additional charge and membership will cease if the plot subscription is not paid on or before the last day of March. This should avoid a major problem we have encountered for some years where abandoned plots could sit unused to the end of May.

If anyone has difficulty paying their subscription, please be in touch with Sara.

We are looking for new committee members. We have a couple ready to stand but could do with more.

Committee Member Emilie and her partner Killian, both Castle Mill residents, are leaving us this year, moving to London (where they hope to get an allotment). Wherever they are we know they will be busy participating in a brighter future. They have helped enormously on the site as well as cultivating one of our beacon plots. They were among our youngest members and are certainly more productive gardeners than I was at their age. What a great portent for the future.

Sara, our current Treasurer, is keen for a change of role, after 5 years. She is happy to do this year's invoices but she is looking to hand over to (and continue to support as needed) a new Treasurer during the year. The Treasurer manages all payments from members and bills and keeps track of the Association's finances.

In another change to the Committee, Alex will be standing down as Audit lead after a really long spell, for which we are very grateful. It is thanks to his hard work and persistence that members are clearer about how to be good guardians of their plot. We know we will never keep everyone 'happy' but we work really hard to be fair. In 2003 Cripley Meadow was one of the most neglected and under-used sites in the city.

We have worked since 2004 to reclaim the site and bring it to its present excellent productivity. This has been possible due to careful financial management, lots of external

funding and most importantly through members' support for a level playing field so all can work confidently within the rules. It takes a delicate balance of support, encouragement and sometimes plain speaking to enable some members to use their plots and allow their neighbours their own enjoyment and productivity. This is probably one of the most difficult bits of allotment management, especially in self-managed sites where it can be all too easy to blame the Committee for being too harsh or too soft. Both accusations can occur at the same time!

Negotiations for **our new lease with landowner Oxford City Council in 2021** mean our responsibilities for maintaining our assets (such as buildings, gates, fences) are more clearly defined. In response, we need to develop an asset plans to cope with present and future maintenance. The Association's regular income does not cover our annual outgoings. This is not sustainable. Once the new lease terms are clearer, we will look at increasing subscriptions. Our present subscription is just above average for the City but far cheaper than the c.£75 national average.

If you think you could help with financial, audit, field work or other committee work please be in touch asap (cripleysecretary@cripleymeadow.org.uk or speak to Wendy, Sara or Manda). We are a large site and more hands are needed to serve our members, ensure the site's future productivity and make lighter work for all.

In January, Sylva Trees did more excellent work on Cripsey Island willow pollarding with work on willows adjacent to plots.



There is still OCC work to complete on South Field willows, the weeping willow and the tree outside the gate which blocks the view of the bridge.



Jeremy has put up a new smaller traffic viewing mirror on the lamp post here which we hope will serve less well as target practice.

There is also more work to do to replace the bridges to Cripsey Island. **The bridge by the path between plots 17 and 18 is closed as it is no longer safe.** The one by the green association shed also needs care. Both are due to be replaced as are the picnic tables on the Green.

Winter trading 2019

The shop does not open on a regular basis in January and February, but members are welcome to arrange one-off weekday or weekend sales with Sarah sarahjehome@aol.com.

Depending on weather and conditions, the shop will re-open in March. Please see notice board for updates.

Gate Lock problems We have mended the lock on the large gate yet again. Please always report problems and **do not oil the locks** as this actually contributes to problems. We think some keys may be damaged and you may need to replace yours if it has been bashed about – if so, contact Manda.

Wet and frost - Please **always leave vehicles in the car park when it is wet or frosty** as both conditions REALLY damage the paths.

Dogs must **always** be on a lead or on your plot. They **must never be allowed to wander on the site or go on other members plots.**

Castle Mill Flats work

Allotment News letter from Beard Construction:
We have obviously suffered like all of you in the last couple of weeks from the cold weather but have managed to erect most of the scaffolding to 4 blocks on the north end of the site, we have changed windows on one block and completed decorations prior to the bad weather on block 7 (K), we have also started works inside the building that are not visible to you all. Whilst the scaffolding is in place, we are carrying out some much-needed replacement of defective glass double glazed units, generally we are on programme with most of our works.

In the coming few months we will repeat the process of decorations and window replacement to the other 3

blocks and fit the Brise Soleil to the elevations which should provide the contrast and shadow effect the design team are expecting

Regular inspections of the badger run are continuing with the Eco consultants and we have to leave works in the run until April as required by law. Last indications are that the Badgers had been seen in the run but preferred to use the badger set at the southern end of the site, as is usual when we have no flooding. Eco inspection of the run takes place regularly.

Our electricians Dark & Taylor have had two of their vans broken into in the Walton Well carpark on Thursday Jan 31st between 8.00 and 11.00. If anyone noticed any suspicious activity it would be appreciated if they could contact us or the local police to report what they saw. Poor lads lost lots of personal tools that cannot be replaced.

*Happy 2019 to you all
Paul Renton-Rose
Project Manager*

Stored produce



If you have stored produce, like Margaret's prize specimen here, do check regularly. Remove any

damaged material, keep above freezing and safe from mice.

Outdoor Sowing and

Planting If you are going to plant out or direct sow into the

ground in early spring, try putting a cloche up or covering the ground with horticultural fleece a couple of weeks beforehand. It will warm the ground up a couple of degrees. If you are sowing early remember even if warm light levels are low until March 20th. You can help with foil-backed propagators on windowsills, but you still need to turn every day.

Broad Beans and Shallots If we have any cold weather and the rain keeps off you can start sowing your broad beans and put in shallots.

Chitting Potatoes



Not everyone thinks this is productive nowadays. It is often only recommended for earlies (and earlier crops can miss blight). If you are chitting your potatoes in a shed or garage, watch out for mice and very cold nights. If they get frosted at this stage your chances for a good crop are reduced. Covering with fleece or newspaper is usually enough for the frost but it will not deter mice!

Pruning and Clearing

January/February are the best months if you are still winter pruning apples and pears. Now is also the time to check for and remove any self-seeded saplings that have grown on boundaries. Next month the sap will start moving and before you know it, they'll be in leaf. It is also the time to cut autumn fruiting raspberries down to the ground to stimulate the new canes.

Soil work

Members that came to the ODFAA 2018 Charles Dowding talk will remember he stressed the importance of good soil to

good crops. Plenty of humus, home-made composts and manure applied either in or in the soil is a good starting point to improve the soil structure. Mr Dowding recommend a thick mulch and no dig in which case you will probably be sowing seeds and planting out. I still do a bit of digging as, even with our waste piles and my bumper composting, I do not have enough compost material for mulching everything.

It is also good to check acidity (pH) and major nutrients (N, P, K). The only accurate way to find out what your soil's acidity and nutrient levels is to use a test kit. These are relatively cheap to buy. The tests are easy to use but the important thing is to get the initial sampling right. If you have a three or four-part rotation, treat each section as a separate plot. On each plot, imagine a large W. Take a sample from the 3 top points and 2 bottom points to give 5 in all. The samples should be from about 10cm (4") below the surface. Make sure your trowel is wiped between samples to avoid cross-contamination. Once you know your soil, you can effectively improve it and, in turn, get much better crops. Not only more productive but more disease and pest resistant.

We are a thriving site but member numbers have dropped slightly since 2012 when we ceased to be visible from the busy cycle track. So **do let friends and family know we have plots available!**

Good gardening Wendy