

Cripley Meadow Allotment Association 2017 Annual Report (for March 2018 AGM)

Administration

This annual report is sent by email to all members. When you receive it, the invoice for your plot should have been delivered to your lead member, with an invitation to the AGM and the agenda for the meeting. An invitation to the AGM and an agenda are also included in this emailing to all so everyone gets one.

- If you have not received your invoice, please contact our treasurer, Sara Jones (allotment@qtq.org).
- If you do not intend to renew your membership, please let our secretary, Manda Joyce (cripleysecretary@cripley Meadow.org.uk), know as soon as possible.

Our AGM is designated as the beginning of the gardening year and your subscription should be paid before or on this date.

Last year 35 members attended the AGM evening at St Barnabas School. Draft minutes from the 2017 AGM are attached. We aim to have all the AGM papers on screen as usual. Please read, and print if you want a paper copy at the meeting.

March 2017 to March 2018 officer/committee responsibilities were as follows:

- Wendy Skinner Smith, Plot 40-41 – Chair/Trustee - member tours, newsletter, web site, working party jobs
- Alex Hollingsworth Plot 81-82 - Vice Chair/Trustee - audit and audit correspondence
- Sara Jones, Plot 71 – Treasurer/Trustee - finance, bills, subscriptions
- Manda Joyce, Plot 72 – Secretary/Trustee - minutes, letters, keys, membership records, newsletter dist. delivery requests

Trustees are generally the elected officers of the association.

Committee member responsibilities were as follows:

- Anna Benn, Plot 144 - Orchard help
- Emilie Clauzier, Plot 97 - Castle Mill liaison and working parties
- Jamie Forbes, Plot 63 - machine maintenance and petrol provision
- Jeremy Hyde, Plot 91 – recycling, major projects, monthly paid site work
- Sarah Edwards, Plot 120 - trading, deliveries, field work to follow up audits
- Emma Delap, Plot 1a - machinery information data, tree and shed arrangements
- Keith Holton, Plot 131 - working party, skip renewal, deliveries. Keith also hosts our monthly committee meetings.

All committee members help with working parties and/or the audit.

Rodney and Kilian are co-opted to the committee to help with the orchards and paid plot clearance respectively.

Subscriptions for 2018/2019: Subscriptions, key deposits and working party commitments remain the same this year. The Association's policy of helping with any difficulty in paying continues. We ask all members to contribute to the site through working parties or monetary donation.

Changes to our present subscription/communication procedure: Members are invoiced in February for the membership year starting 1st March. Presently there is a late payment surcharge of £10 applied after 31st March and a non-payers' closure at the end of April. As our constitution states payment should be in advance of the applicable year, we would like to change the timetable so that a surcharge is applied after the AGM and bring forward the 'non-payers closure' to the end of March. Delaying the membership closure to the end of April damages the site and makes more work for the committee.

We have traditionally offered a Subscription Hour at the Shed, when members could pay in person. However, last year only one person attended, so we no longer intend to do this. We believe that our other arrangements (payment online, by cheque in the post or in person at the AGM) mean that members will not be disadvantaged.

Changes to invoice arrangements: Currently, we send annual invoices to all lead members on paper. While committee members hand-deliver locally, there is still the expense of paper, printing and envelopes, and considerable committee time. We also spend postage on further-flung addresses. Given the prevalence of email, from next year on, we propose to make email the default for sending our invoices. We intend to

offer paper invoice by request. **AGM item: Changing the timetable for subscriptions and using emails for all communications**

Events

- CMAA did not volunteer for OXCLEAN in **March** 2017 but we have renewed our participation for 2018.



- There was no St John's leaf mould on Plot 59 this year due to building work at St John's. They have retained their plots and we expect the leaf mould delivery will commence when the work is complete.
- **Manda Joyce** agreed to stand for the committee and by May she was co-opted to be our new association secretary. Over the year she has picked up the different aspects of the job with great speed and efficiency. Manda now manages our membership records and emails out

our monthly newsletter.

- We continued follow up work associated with installing the new badger fence.
- We had our first new members on the raised beds on Plots 64/65
- **Walton Well Road Car Park** was resurfaced.

- **June** saw us at our 10th 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 vegetable seedlings. We raised £172. We intend to do it again this year.



In **October** around 50 members joined together for **Harvest BBQ on The Green**. All contributed great food and company and we had surprisingly good weather. Jamie managed the BBQ. We now have

two new shelters for events on The Green.

- **In November** Jeremy started installing the BBQ Base on The Green.



ODFAA members across the city were invited to O&DFAA's talk in the West Oxford Community Centre on Companion Planting in November. This was an excellent talk by **Chris Bird, M Hort.(RHS)**, Lecturer in Horticulture at Sparsholt College, Hampshire.



- We have had several piles of **wood chip** delivered which usually disappears very fast. As we cannot readily deliver to other part of the site we ask that members who have plots close to The Green leave a fair share for other members.

CMAA is a member of The Oxford and District Federation of Allotment Associations (ODFAA)

along with 33 of the other 34 open allotment sites in Oxford city. ODFAA works with Oxford City Council for the benefit of Oxford Allotments. It organised and paid for new allotment signs across the city. At three meetings a year representatives from association committees work together. ODFAA has run an allotment competition for the past 10 years (it's having a break this year, but will run a similar celebration of allotments in 2019, ODFAA's centenary). ODFAA organise one allotment talk a year open to all plot holders and friends. The ODFAA web site has lots of photos of plots on sites across the city. Do look - <http://www.odfaa.com/>

Cripley Meadow shop/trading report for 2017

This spring it will be 5 years since we first opened the 'shop' at Cripley. We started with just bags of horse manure, then expanded to a small range of products. The main aim has been to supply things that are hard to buy without a car or cheaper bought in bulk. In addition to the items on the price list, we sell second hand tools and equipment – things left or donated by members, or surplus Association equipment. Members also donate spare seeds, which are given away free.

Sarah Edwards manages the project, assisted by a small team. Our thanks are due to everyone involved this year. Alessandra Nolasco helped with deliveries and Sara Jones, Manda Joyce and Sheryn Simpson provided cover when Sarah was unavailable. Jeremy Hyde and others helped by bringing second hand items to the shop.

After the shop's usual winter closure, we re-opened in March for regular Sunday sessions. As usual, we closed for the quiet month of August. Throughout the year, members were also able to buy by making an appointment. This year there were a total of 103 visits to the shop. Our total income, including a few donations, was £1,776 – slightly higher than in 2016. Taking account of purchases and the value of our stock, the 'net income' (or estimate of profit) for the year was £400. This was lower than the previous year, mainly as we had fewer 2nd hand items available to sell. The aim is to provide a service, not make money, but the funds make a contribution towards site maintenance.

Sadly, our useful green trolley broke and we have been unable to get it fixed. We still have an ancient trolley, which may have been liberated from a garden centre a few decades ago. This is better than nothing, but we hope to invest in a suitable alternative soon.

Finally, we would like to thank everyone who used the shop, making the project worthwhile, and all those who donated tools, equipment and seeds. These low cost and free items are much appreciated, especially as some members have very tight budgets.

Site Maintenance, Development and Working parties

Members' Working Party commitment and donations remain an important part of our membership and community. The number participating in each working party in 2017 varied from 5 to 18. Since January 2017, we have benefited from 180 **members' working party hours** on site work. Most find it enjoyable extra exercise with the good company of other members. We are one of the biggest sites in Oxford city and without member engagement we could not manage it.

An increasing proportion of members are choosing to make a donation of money (equivalent to £5 per hour), rather than time, to fulfil their working party commitment. The number of members contributing time to working parties has dropped to just over 20% this year. In theory, this is fine as we can use the money to pay for site maintenance. Over 2017, we continued to pay our mowing team, Arcadian Living, for some additional site maintenance and two members, Francesco and Killian, did some paid clearance work. We have also paid Jeremy for a working day each month. A lot of this time is spent in clearing the recycling yard and managing waste. He has also refilled the communal water butts once, built the rubble store, a fire bin and installed our petrol store. The arrangement of using committee members or co-opted members to do paid work is successful because they are good plot-holders who know and understand the site.

However, it is proving difficult to get enough skilled, paid people on site, who can work safely and reliably without committee supervision, at £5 per hour. This is putting pressure on committee members, who already do a disproportionate number of working party hours as well as member tours, subscriptions, site work, bill payment, audit work, membership administration, reclamation, deliveries, trading operating... It is important to all that the committee is not burnt out by too much work when it can be shared.

By raising awareness of this issue, we are hoping that more members will come along to working parties. We really would rather have your time than your money! We are also flagging up that we may need to raise the monetary donation in future, so that we can find and pay for the right skills to manage our site.

AGM item: Working party contributions and donations

Site paths. In 2016 we bought in a load of aggregate ready for use on site. Members were asked not to use it for personal projects. The additional work on site in 2016/7 meant the paths came in for more use so we built this into our costings for the project. The bags are distributed around the site, but we have been unable to find a suitable person to mend and tamp down the paths at a cost we can afford. We did use working party time in January and this worked well at filling potholes, but the paths do need more work. Please remember these are not roads so vehicles must use them judiciously. Keep to 5mph and never use when very wet. We ask all members to bring cars on site as little as possible.

Pollarding and pruning. The Castle Mill Stream willows, behind plots 1 to 9, finally had some pollarding in March 2017, completed in November 2017. They had already begun to crack! We have agreed a tree management plan with Oxford City Council and we hope this will keep trees manageable. The plan takes screening the flats (when viewed from Port Meadow) into account; we trust this is not at an unacceptable cost to the allotments. There are 3 sets of trees involved in screening and if they are sensibly managed in rotation they will provide some degree of cover, as shown in the last few years. Ours were in desperate need of work. More work on willows on our Castle Mill and Fiddlers Stream boundaries was completed in

November along with some work on the very large willow in Badgerland. There is some willow wood by the recycling area which is available for members to use for wood burners. This is NOT suitable for building anything on plots as willow bark in contact with the soil will sprout and root. No willow is allowed on plots for this reason.

Plot changes. Plots 64 and 65 now have 4 of our new raised beds in use. They are intended for people with some mobility restrictions and/or with small children. There is a communal shed with a ramp. The orchard area on these plots will continue to be managed by the association and provides pleasant shade. Arcadian Living will still use it for grass cuttings. **Plot 67** will have small plots with small shed rights when the soil pile has been used and or redistributed and **Plots 52 and 53** have been covered and will be divided up into smaller plots as needed in 2018.

Audit Report from Alex. As usual the Committee carried out two audit inspections during the year, in May and October. In the summer about a third of the plots had no issues at all and only a few had serious problems. We were able to work with members to get things sorted out in all but one case, with only one notice to quit issued for an abandoned plot. In the autumn the numbers were about the same, with about half a dozen plots with serious problems, and in the majority of cases this was down to members who had quit but not told us.

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 clear majority of cases this is what happens, but there are a few instances where the same issues are raised repeatedly. It is very important for members to read the audit letters, and address any problems raised. If you think the audit group have got things wrong, please let us know; we would much rather discuss a potential problem than have it get worse because it's been ignored.

In 2018 we are going to slightly change our procedures to deal with the problem of abandoned and unmanaged plots. Cripsey is a very fertile place, which is good for crops but also good for weeds. This means that a plot that is acceptable in May can be covered with weeds several feet high by August, for example, if the member has left but not told us or appropriate maintenance has not been carried out on a plot. Our rules require a set process that the Committee must follow before we can issue a notice to quit and reclaim an abandoned plot, and in that time neighbours of the plot will have had to put up with a whole growing season, or more, of weeds seeding onto their plots.

Therefore, we will **introduce a third 'spot-check' audit in midsummer**, to pick up these sorts of problems. This will mean that we can identify plots that have been abandoned or severely neglected much more quickly, and get them cleared and covered, and re-let to new members, before they cause real problems to neighbouring members and the site. **AGM item: Introduction of a short summer audit**

Plot Fences The audit in 2018 will continue to focus on boundaries between plots. The removal of many of the fences between plots across the site has made a huge difference to keeping weeds under control. Most fences were put up to keep out rabbits, a pest we no longer have on the site. More plot fences have been, or are being, removed. We strongly recommend that you remove them. If a plot comes back to us with an unmanaged fence, we remove the fence to limit the spread of perennial and pernicious weed along the site path lines. Also, each pair of plots must have a clear path between them and taking out the fences makes it much easier to see where it should be and keep it maintained.

Plot paths. We have been regularising the situation about paths between plots, as required in our rules. The rules say that each member is responsible for a path running between their plot and their neighbour's plot. We know that when fences were put in originally, some plots were islands in a sea of bramble, and so a few paths ended up inside fences, or disappeared altogether. **The important thing is to have a managed path between each plot.** The South Field and new plots have been marked out with paths in place and this helps to show what we are aiming at. We have made good progress on reclaiming missing paths by a gradual and careful process, achieved one path at a time. Long-standing members might remember that when the site was originally laid out there were hard-core paths running right the way through between the tracks - you can see the remains of one of these under the grass on the picnic area if you look closely. **AGM Item: Fence rules and path update**

Given the need to focus on managing our own waste and harvesting we will now identify compost management on the audit check list and recognise water butts. Hopefully this will remind people to do as much as they can to harvest, recycle and re use.

Harvesting and Recycling

We continue our commitment to managing the site sustainably and continue to bring useful material on site wherever we can and recycle. **57, 66, 84 and 109 are Green Waste Plots for authorised members to bring on useful materials like wood chip, grass mowing and hedge trimmings which will rot down.** Arcadian Living mows our communal areas and paths and strims communal plot paths. They bring on the green waste that eventually provides free compost rough for members. They are the members on 84 and 109. They also use plot 66 which was a woodchip plot. 57 remains a woodchip plot. We need to turn both 109 and 84 asap. When turned members are asked to remove any woody bits and rubbish and put these aside tidily. Plot 66 was opened for a while last year to members for the disposal of green waste. However, it has now turned into a problem as it was much too heavily used. As it is a pit we cannot turn it and it also developed a rat problem. We now need to cover it to assist rotting down and therefore it is now closed to members. Our rules are clear (at rule 6.2.8) that members are responsible for composting their green waste on their plot. Therefore we have no current plans for any communal plots for general green waste. **AGM item: A-Z of Waste**

Compost We encourage everyone to make as much use of composting as possible. Surprisingly some plots do not have working compost bins. Compost bins can be readily made and by rotting down you **can use everything that comes off the plot. No cooked food waste should be brought on site as this increases our rat population.** Your OCC food compost buckets (which are collected from your home) are much the best way of managing any cooked food, meat, fish or dairy stuff **from home** as this will be properly heat treated. **AGM Item: Composting all your green waste on your plot**

The OCC Pest Control Officer, Mike Humble, gave ODFAA the following advice about rats.

- Infection with Weil's Disease on allotments is most unlikely.
- Rats need a source of food and they need to drink every day and they don't like change.
- The key to their control is to be careful with food in compost bins. Tops and peelings are OK but take care with whole, large, fleshy parts of fruit or veg. These should be chopped so they rot quickly.
- You need to cover water to prevent them from drinking on the site.
- Frequent turning of compost helps certainly reduces their activity, as they don't like change.
- They are attracted by bone meal as it contains animal fat.
- They also eat hard plastic as they need to gnaw.
- Live trapping needs humane disposal.
- Rat poison can be used on plots. Follow the manufacturer instructions. This can affect the food chain.

Water Harvesting. We have placed communal water butts around the site but these are not intended to be used by members for everyday watering. The butts which harvest water from the streams take a day to fill so we are investigating how to use solar power to further develop our harvested water supply from this source. Also, Wendy is working with Nick Jackson early in 2018. Nick is an ODFAA officer and a hydrologist. He has managed the Bullstake Close allotment site change from piped water to harvested water. However, we wish **to encourage members to take all practical steps themselves to harvest water on their own plots.** A new member on a tour noted that we supplied communal water butts which were surrounded by sheds with little or no water harvesting. **AGM item: Water harvesting on plots**

Woodchip: We have eventually managed to get a supply of wood chip back on site and we have had 5 piles in the last few months of 2017. We harvest **indigenous hazel for bean/pea poles where we can.** As we use working party and committee time to harvest it there will be a small cost. It will be in the shop for sale when available. Always strip any cut willow poles before using any on plots as it will root if the bark is in contact with soil. Growing willow/bamboo and other invasive plants are not allowed on plots.

Equipment. The site shredder has been out 6 times this year but outside of working party time. A few more committee members are willing to be trained to use it in 2018 so we may be able to make it more available to members to bring their dry, mixed green and brown waste and take away shredding. It certainly speeds up composting. In 2017 Rodney and Wendy used it on separate days to clear bags of shredding pulled off at WPs. The material for shredding needs to be dry and mixed green and brown. This year we also purchased a strimmer with hedge trimmer and chain saw attachments for committee use in managing the site. Members will not be asked to use these at WPs unless they have had prior training.

Recycling and Upcycling. Jeremy has been working his way through removing most of the accumulated material in the recycling year including the last set of Heras fencing! Given the increasing problem with waste we aim to keep as little stored material as possible. Useful tools and equipment left on site continue to be recycled to our trading shed.

Skips and Plot Clearance. We have had another 7 Skips this year. Most of this waste is no longer historical and it is not acceptable that members appear to be using the skips for waste which has been brought on site. It makes us very determined to not let rubbish pile on plots. We must all try harder to limit storage on plots. Our rules are clear that stuff must be brought on for use within a limited time and for a specific purpose. NO glass panes have been allowed on site for some 10 years now! This year there were two plots which cost us about over £500 in skip and equivalent labour costs to clear! Our rules (ref 5.3) permit us to make a charge for clearance to a member if they are given a notice to quit due to excessive materials on their plot.

CCTV: We presently use cameras to monitor badgers and pest activity on site. Images are recorded and reviewed by committee members as necessary. We propose to extend the use of CCTV to monitor any site areas deemed necessary to prevent crime or control anti-social behaviour. **AGM item: CCTV on the site**

Bonfires. We have had more complaints this year from our neighbours about bonfires on plots. Members may have bonfires on their plots but must 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 often blowing across other plots. Some associations (Osney) have now banned all plot bonfires and they only use a communal site. 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 local residents or other plot holders. We maintain a burning space in the far corner of the site by the green association shed. However, this can become impossibly large if members dump stuff here without having their own fire on the burning space to dispose of their waste. We now also have a fire bin and members can burn material here if the weather and wind are ok. If not, the material must be kept on your plot until it is. There will also soon be an incinerator here for members to use in this corner in accordance with bonfire rules. **AGM item: Bonfires, how to sustain them?**

2018 Developments

Improve Water harvesting, composting and reduce waste on site. As above.

Monitor the progress and impact of 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. Cripsey Island was only under partially for a few days in January last year and again this January. The Environment Agency (EA) continue to do presentations of The Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme. You can stay updated by following <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/oxford-flood-alleviation-scheme-community>. The EA are aiming for final approval in 2018 and for construction to begin later that year. We have been working with OCC and the EA this year to find a way to clear Castle Mill and Fiddlers Stream. This is now so overgrown in places it is possible to wade across from Fiddlers Island. There were a camper or two on Fiddlers Island this year and they clearly accessed our site across the stream, so it now compromises our security. The towpath has been inundated with anti-social problems this year, so we need to keep a careful eye on this boundary. OCC and EA have Fiddlers Stream on a list to see if funds can be found to dredge it?

Badger fencing Project We continue to work hard to live **alongside** badgers. The population is now reportedly reduced. The Reimbursement Agreement we had with Oxford University to fund for our badger proof fencing has had an impact.

The 2016 badger fence on our Fiddlers and Castle Mill stream boundaries was a huge upheaval for some. The project ran from March 2016 to October 2016 with some follow up through to March 2017. We were very fortunate that Jeremy was available to do the work as we would have been hard pressed to find a contractor to remove the rubbish/fence clearance and move and build the replacement sheds and install the water butts and pumps working with and around members.

We know at least one badger can climb the old badger fence, hence you will see some metal sheets against the fencing. This tends to be where they have had access before via bins against the fence but in

some cases, they have found new ways of entering. We are gradually closing these off. Badger land was visited by Eco Consult in October and we still have resident badgers, although possibly just a couple. Badgers have it seems moved further down the embankment

Castle Mill Mitigation

The plans for mitigating the impact of Castle Mill are now all agreed. We are awaiting papers detailing a formal agreement between Oxford University and Cripsey Meadow about maintenance of the badger run, once changes are complete. This work was due last August but delayed and should start soon. It will affect members directly as we will have a construction site alongside us until about August 2019. The most invasive work will be removing our palisade fence and replacing it with the partially-enclosed badger run with planters and bicycle stands above. The badgers will be less exposed but much of the side will still be wire so open to the air and light. Castle Mill site will effectively move closer, but it will be greener. We will have some drawings and plans at the AGM, available to look at between 6pm and 7pm. We await detailed information about the programme of work and methodology.

AGM item: Information on Castle Mill Flats work schedule.