

Minutes of Cripsey Meadow Allotment Association Annual General Meeting Monday 11th March 2019 at 8pm, St Barnabas School Hall, Hart Street, Oxford OX2 6BN

This version approved at 2020 AGM.

Present: Phyllis Starkey (plot SF7), Manda Joyce (72), Wendy Skinner Smith (Chair, plot 40), Keith Holton (131), Sara Jones (71), Jamie Forbes (63), Jeremy Hyde (91/92B), Emma Delap (1A), Richard Sims (102), Christine Melia (5a), Giovanni Abarno (156 etc), Steve Cork (87), Henry Bailey (SF6), Tia Sedley (32), Alison Campbell (13), Godfrey Cole (13), Sarah Edwards (120), Ngaio Girdlestone (SF9), Tom Wells (SF8), Laurence Smith 52A, Virgil Clarke (111), Sheila Allan (12) Hugh Starkey (SF7), Louse Bruce (SF19/20), Philippa Scoones (96), Toby Buxton (25), Sarah Hendriks (78), Anna Benn (144), Richard Haigh (15/16) and Cllr. Susanna Pressel (guest).

1. Welcome by Chair - Wendy introduced the evening by showing some slides of images provided by Oxford University of Castle Mill, illustrating (summer and winter) the proposed end result of the work currently in progress. She highlighted that the exterior paint would be darker (some have already been done), all the windows were to be changed, the lightwells would have louvres, with larch cladding on the exterior of the stairwells. She explained that Wendy and Manda have been to monthly liaison meetings with the Council (Cripsey Meadow landowner), University (client), and Beard (contractor); soon £20,000 will be paid to us by the University on account of the inconvenience. In addition, the water butts, which were long supposed to be filled with rainwater from Castle Mill roofs, have been acknowledged to be broken. Now the University will pay to have them fixed. With one or two exceptions, the response from the floor was positive, i.e. that they looked better - and definitely an improvement when viewed from Port Meadow.

2. Apologies for Absence - Apologies were received from Godfrey and Dot Stone (plot 46), Sarah Sheldon (plot 9b), Magda Marekova (plot 126a, moving to plot SF15), Diana Parker (plots 22/23), Bill Johnston (plot 127b), Nicola Harvey (plot 61a), Ada Grabowska-Zhang (plot SF1), Konstantina Isidoros (plot 74), Claire Pike (plot 47), Toby Jones (plot 71), Jean Haigh (plot 15/16), David Edwards (plot 120).

3. Minutes of the 2018 Annual General Meeting and Matters Arising – Wendy summarised the key points from the minutes of last year's AGM, showing them page by page on the projector. No objections were raised so last year's minutes were passed as an accurate record. Sarah took the opportunity to say that we are hoping to get some more second-hand Council rubbish bins to use as water butts this year.

4. Annual Accounts, Report from Treasurer – Sara told the meeting that the accounts for last year have been independently signed off. She noted that we are selling more black plastic on plots (rather than in the shop), we have used fewer skips, and still have not managed to carry out the repairs to the paths for which there was provision in the budget.

With regard to the current year's Budget, the £20k from Castle Mill is not yet included, as we have not yet signed the agreement with the University. As we are currently re-negotiating our lease with the Council (our landowner), we are planning to create a maintenance plan so that we understand

what we are going to have to spend money on maintaining, over the 21 years of the new lease, as we expect that more of the maintenance will be the responsibility of the Association (in theory it has always been, but with local government finances as tight as they are now, it is going to be implemented). No one had any questions about the accounts or budget.

Sara invited members to report any problems with the new invoice process – there were none.

5. 2018 Annual Report, Questions where not covered under item 7. Wendy summarised the key points from this year's Annual Report, showing it page by page on the projector: Committee member Emilie and partner Kilian have gone, three new committee members are standing tonight. Sara is looking to change roles so we need a new Treasurer.

Alison asked if it be possible to stock an alternative to plastic; Wendy sought information from the floor. It was acknowledged that individuals could use cardboard for weed suppression, but this was not practical for Working Parties where there can be several large plots to cover in a limited time. It was agreed that plastic be raised as an issue in the newsletter – re-use of plastic, use cardboard on individual plots, weigh plastic down to stop it going in the River (a source of marine pollution), use green manure (consider stocking a green manure seed mix in the shop, as Wendy recommends a mixture for more reliable germination).

Wendy noted that we will be moving the website to a new platform later this year.

The work at Castle Mill, and the re-negotiation of the leases of Oxford allotment associations with Oxford City Council were already referred to earlier. Wendy added that it is the 100th anniversary of the Oxford and District Federation of Allotment Associations this year, to be marked with a competition and an Oxford allotments history book.

6. Welcome from Susanna Pressel and Election of Officers and Committee Members – Susanna asked if there was anyone, aside from Wendy, who wanted to stand as chair. No-one else came forward and the meeting elected Wendy unanimously. Wendy thanked Susanna and resumed chairing the meeting. The other Trustees standing for re-election - Alex, Sara and Manda - were also unanimously re-elected. Then continuing committee members – Emma, Sarah, Jamie, Keith, Jeremy – were unanimously re-elected, and finally new committee members - Tia (32), Phyllis (SF7), Christine (5A) – were unanimously elected.

7. Annual Report items for discussion - Cars and parking – Wendy introduced this item, recapping on the issue as outlined in the Annual Report. The site tracks concern the Committee as they are wearing out and mending them ourselves has proved difficult to do. Steve recommended that, in any case, the “type 1” material we already have in bags around the site be underneath, with shingle on top. Wendy explained that the estimate we had had so far for professional repair had come to some £60-90k. She reckoned that around 45 cars come on site, of which about 16 come regularly. Most sites have a place for cars by the gate. David shared his experience as a subscriber (using the £20 subsidised annual season ticket scheme, available through the City Council to CMAA members) to Walton Well car park for the last few years – one annoyance being that the Council don't send a reminder of permit expiry, and another being that the permit is too large to leave permanently on display – both of which have led to a ticket and substantial fines and/or argument.

Wendy emphasised that the aim is not to prevent people driving onsite, but to reduce traffic as much as possible so as to preserve the tracks.

Phyllis stated that one element of the problem is people who drive fast. They are effectively disproportionately wearing out the path. In response to a question from Tom, Wendy said that driving when wet or frosty also rips up the track.

One suggestion was to charge driving members more, perhaps with the use of a different gate key for the vehicular and pedestrian gates (so that only those who pay extra can access the site with a vehicle). Another suggestion was to provide on-site parking near the gate, with wheelbarrows to enable the carrying of materials back and forth to plots. There is a spot by the gate that could be used, now the plot-holder of the one remaining plot on that side has given up membership.

Wendy invited a show of hands to indicate whether the meeting felt it would help to have car park by gate – the indication was evenly matched at 11 vs 11.

Virgil asked if it would help to spread parking around the site. Steve earlier suggested using some of the Green for parking (as had historically been the case). However, the worst wear is by the gate so those proposals unlikely to help preserve the worst bits.

The Committee will do some more work setting out the issue and options: it was helpful to have this range of views from the floor to inform that work.

8. The Anton Chekhov Garden Project

Wendy introduced CMAA member and professional garden designer Anna Benn, who made an RHS silver medal-winning show garden at Hampton Court last year. Anna explained that the Anton Chekhov foundation asked her to make a garden to launch their project – a healing garden. Work began with fundraising of about £50k. Chekhov is Russia's greatest playwright, also a humanitarian and gardener. Anna's show garden was modelled one of his two gardens, just outside Moscow (he had another in Crimea). In Russian, the word garden and orchard are the same word. Anna's garden was also modelled on a dacha – a country estate, like an allotment that you can sleep on, with a mix of vegetables and flowers, and including tomatoes, pickling cucumbers, and herbs. The herbs were used medicinally, e.g. willow herb was dried for tea. On Anna's research trip, she gained inspiration from Chekhov's home (seed catalogue, writer's desk, straw rick (used for roofing in the village)...). Back in UK, as she began work with the contractors on the site, the heatwave began. Anna showed pictures of the evolution of the garden onsite: planting, press day and reviews in the national press. The garden was opened by Anna Chancellor, an actress who had been in Chekhov's play, *The Seagull*. A Russian TV film crew came, as the Russian ambassador was a visitor, and it was also on *Gardener's World*. Anna told us that the dill in the show garden was grown in her Cripsey polytunnel, and that the allotments had been a great source of inspiration for the garden. She gave us a summary of planting, included comfrey, silver birch, vinca, buckwheat and phlox. After Hampton Court show was over, the garden was taken apart and driven to [Culm Valley Integrated Centre for Health](#) in Devon where, over a day and a half, it was re-sited. Anna finished her talk with the observation 'we have so much in common with Russia, inspite of our differences.'

Wendy thanked Anna for her excellent talk.

9. Any Other Business – none. The Committee was thanked for its work with a round of applause.

Meeting closed at 21:15.