

Cripley Meadow April Newsletter 2020

www.cripley Meadow.org.uk

COVID19

I am sure members are aware of how very fortunate we are to have a plot and are anxious to ensure that we keep this privilege.

Allotments could have been designed for social distancing with the allocated spaces defined by paths and with a strong collective and communitarian spirit. Michael Gove recently stated allotments are an acceptable form of exercise and we know that the National Allotment Society (NAS), of whom CMAA are a member, have been in consultation with government about this. As things currently stand allotment sites across the country remain open and we keep our fingers crossed that things will stay that way.

Please comply with social distancing and other measures as circulated here and on the noticeboard.

As Chair of ODFAA I have dealt with numerous enquiries from allotment sites across the city and all most have published information on the web site and the notice board about measures which members must comply with on site. Everyone must ensure our allotments remain a place of safety for all our members. We have a number of older members for whom social distancing and limited overall contact is critical and who are self-isolating but for their allotment use. We welcome younger members but given the circumstances they must adhere strictly to the instructions.

Member movement on site

We have not been able to publish on the noticeboard all the details of the NAS recommended measures regarding COVID-19. Please refer to their website which has been

updated since we started this newsletter.

<https://www.nsalg.org.uk/news/covid19-information/>

We want to emphasise that **members should not be walking around the site as a recreational activity**. I know walking round the site is a treat and we usually encourage you to look at other plots... but presently the site should be used just to manage your plot. Do not wander as we have kept some communal facilities open which already increases movement around the site. Other than movement to manage your plot stay on your own plot as much as possible. NEVER walk on others plot paths, even if they are not there.

Other reminders

- You must not bring anyone else on site who is not a member or a member of your household.
- The Green and other communal areas must not be used.
- The Government has stopped all public gatherings of more than two people. We ask that you observe this on site. Therefore, please do not gather together (more than two people) for a chat even if you are 2 metres apart.
- There are only exceptions to this social distancing rule for very limited purposes e.g. regarding members of the same household. Observe "social distancing" – have no physical contact and stay minimum 2 metres apart
- If you take your children to the plot, ensure that they stay within its confines and do not play on communal paths and spaces, walk around the site or go onto other plots.

Please note that you may hear members cough due to other health conditions. For example, some members have told us they cough due to allergies and they don't want other members to be anxious.

Members must follow these requirements to continue using the site. This is such an important resource to many in producing healthy food in an environment which supports their mental and physical health and we must do all we can to comply and keep it usable.

There may come a time where we are banned from access, so we advise everyone to mulch and cover wherever ground is not in use.

Please let us know if your situation has changed so much that that you cannot afford to pay all your membership, or if you cannot get to your plot on a temporary or longer basis.

We know some will be experiencing an extraordinary level of anxiety, not only through the virus but also with the consequences of the solution - closures, job losses, isolation, and family stress.

We also know that working on your plot can help with this anxiety and build up your immune system as long as we all stay safeand can be seen to stay safe. We will try help with **plot buddies** if we have volunteers, but this may not be possible. We could alert neighbouring members. NAS is recommending closing communal facilities but we hope to keep these open **safely** whilst following social distancing regulations. Please do not add to the use of site paths.

Shop

Thanks to Sarah who has organised how to use the shop safely. It will not open at its usual times but if you need something, you can email Sarah sarahjehome@aol.com to see whether it is available and whether you can agree an arrangement for safe payment and collection.

Skip

We will continue to use this service for as long as possible, but we will stop if there is any sign that it is

being used for imported waste. As recycling and waste centres are closed, we will all need to keep a careful eye out for misuse. Please do not bring waste onto the site and dispose of it in the skip. For example, there was a tyre on there on Sunday 5 April which will need to be disposed of elsewhere.

When using the skip, please use gloves and keep social distancing. Do not hang about to chat. and use the most direct route site path route.



Also, **please do not overfill the skip.** When it looks like this we have to reorganise this before the providers will take it which is a lot of additional work for committee volunteers.

Bonfire

We will try keep open this communal facility, as fires on plots are increasingly impossible to keep within the OCC rules. Everyone is rightly alert to respiratory issues and problems, so it is even more important that no one has SMOKY BONFIRES.



Please do not overload the burning area. This last year the committee have had to dismantle the bonfire many times before we could burn it safely. **Jeremy will manage the communal bonfire,**

but this will only be done if members show more member awareness about overloading. We never know when the next favourable wind will be.



After the last burn members continued to add material to hot ashes so it continued to burn after supervision had left the site.

Please use your common sense and check if there is space on the burning area before you take more material from your plot. Do not put any green material onto the burning area!

Water butts

Please use your own water supply as much as possible rather than communal supplies. Some plots cannot have wells or sheds so need to use the communal supplies. We want to reduce others having to keep them filled as, again, this involves more work for the committee and volunteer members.

Cars and parking

The AGM discussion and car survey conclusions have been somewhat replaced by the COVID-19 restrictions. The site only has a handful of parking places. Thank you so much to those who have already changed their usage. No one should be parking on the tracks except where they have mobility problems or need direct access for a short period to collect or deliver heavy items. If you must use a car to deliver **necessities** you should never park on tracks of green areas except for loading and unloading. Please limit deliveries. If you need access through the barrier (in the car park) please contact Christine, Sarah or Iulia to arrange a mutually convenient time before you make a booking. Contacts are on the web site.

Some members at the AGM thought that a few people were not clear about our normal parking rules. We will amend the site map asap.

There is anyway room for only a small number of parked cars! 1 by the gate and 2 when the grass has grown back) 1 or 2 by the green association shed (do not block the door) and about 5 on plot 54 which is adjacent to the path by the green. We will keep stressing that use of the car park permit (available from the council) would resolve most of these issues most of the time, especially for those who have chosen to start or continue with plots when they live some distance away.

Our tracks are unstable when we have surface water. Apart from two members who have reported mobility issues, we know a small number of regular car users are causing nuisance to other members by speeding (5m per hour is fast walking pace), parking on the tracks and green spaces and who continued to drive in through the winter when there was standing water or frost.

The costs of repairing the structure is way beyond our capabilities so we must limit the amount of access and damage.

We intend to continue to work together using the information from the car survey. The view of those at the AGM was that any unacceptable behaviour with respect to driving and parking should be noted. This of course can become divisive and we want at all costs to avoid this. Please be aware that there are strongly differing points of view and be considerate. We will continue to ask people to follow the rules and behave responsibly. The committee will monitor the situation, including complaints from members affected by inconsiderate car use, and if the problem continues the committee will act.

Working parties



Working parties are cancelled until further notice. We had intended to publish jobs and assign people to do them but on reflection we have decided not to do so because this unusual movement about the site does not fit with social distancing rules and may unsettle people.

OCC are unable to pick up plot clearance, so Jeremy Hyde (plot 91) and Arthur Bruce (plot sf19) are contract working on plot clearance and site maintenance. Jeremy's experience in site matters is as always a boon and Arthur has good personal knowledge of the site.

Working party payment

You should be aware that the payment in lieu of working parties may need to be paid next March if we cannot reinstate working parties as it seems certain that will need more contracted work this year. Unfortunately, the clearance of plots that have returned to us means we have already filled 2 skips which means that those plot owners have made a monetary profit on having an allotment given the cost of skips!

Our waiting list is growing

There will be no new members until restrictions are lifted as we cannot process tours and membership. Consequently, our waiting list is growing apace. We think it likely the present emergency will result in more awareness of the fragility of food resources and the benefits of working with the land and nature.

Meanwhile released plots will be cleared and covered, as far as working time allows possible so that

they do not become a problem for neighbours.

Permissions

The committee members will continue to pick up queries and permissions for trees and structures (see web site for contact details). We will consult by email and video conferencing as needed and notify members of decisions by emails as usual.

Tree work

We have not had our usual tree work due to flooding. We now know that Sylva trees will not pick up orchard work until after restrictions are lifted. The weeping willow has again been dropping large branches so please stay away. We are waiting to hear from OCC about their site tree work but after April this will certainly be deferred. Obviously everything is affected by this emergency and worker availability.

Track work

We had booked more surface track work this spring as some tracks were still badly damaged in the winter, but this will probably be delayed.

Wood chip

More wood chip has been and gone (rapidly) from the green and we hope we can continue to receive this, but much tree work is being deferred. If we get some please be considerate and share.

Plot 159

Plot 159, which is the only plot next to Castle Mill, is vacant and it will not be used as a plot again. The adjacent covered plots await decisions about their next site function.

New benches and bridges

We have replaced the benches on The Green but sadly this is now out of use until further notice.

Therefore, the new benches must not be used until further notice.

We are working on replacing the bridge between plot 17 and 18. The orchard is closed as a communal space, except for maintenance, until further notice. The new bridge by the green shed buckled and floated off in the floods so we are learning how to restrain it!

March 2021-2042 new lease

Importantly for the future ODFAA have made strides in negotiating the 2021-2042 agreement with OCC. Oxford Allotment Association Committee returns to the February ODFAA consultation paper came back in March. These show a clear majority in favour of associations having a lease (rather than a licence) with the council and for the associations to become incorporated, hopefully as a Co-operatives. This will reduce trustee liability but retain a similar democratic form. We will report on what this means for our association but meanwhile ODFAA will continue to work with OCC to develop and agree an OCC to Association Lease, a Service Level Agreement and an Association to Member Agreement. ODFAA will support associations and is presently processing Association committee insurance but the present emergency will inevitably delay the new agreement. Our present agreement runs out in March 2021, but we know that it will continue until the new one is in place. I cease to be ODFAA chair on April 7th after 14 years.

OCC site grass cutting

OCC started doing our site grass cutting in March.

A wild area on the green

We have marked out a strip on the Green for the grass to grow longer. We could not get on the island but will do so asap. We will cut the paths

on small plots 64, 65 68, 69, 86, 10,106, 107, 146, 147 but we will not do this if there are stones, waste and objects on the paths. **Please do not use adjacent green areas or paths** to store plot materials.



This is Josh on OCC's new mower which was having its first outing. They managed really well considering the site had been waterlogged for so long.

Composting and water Harvesting

We now have more water butts and working compost bins on plots so well done those members who are ahead of the game. As we may have to close communal facilities this is a good time to work on how to compost all your green waste on your plot and improve your water harvesting. There are information sheets on the web site. This was always about sustaining our site through the impacts of climate change and reported future water shortages.

Growing notes

Some things are normal - we passed the Vernal Equinox and the clocks have gone forward! In spite of all the problems it is so good to see that members are managing to continue to use their plots responsibly, although the bitter cold wind after the flood subsided delayed work. This is an important point in the growing year for sowing and planting. My sowing timetable is

about a month later than usual but last year's great crops mean we are still eating parsnip, carrots and celeriac recently released from storage in the ground...they were about water level! We still have a few potatoes and onions and enough passata to keep us going for a while, providing we can find pasta. I have mulched some beds and am looking out for the first sign of an asparagus spear. Broad beans have finally broken ground and my autumn garlic and onions survived out of the water level. We still have fresh white sprouting, sorrel and some, albeit rather tough, lettuce. Yesterday we picked the first of the forced pink rhubarb



And an amazing cauliflower...



...which had weathered above the floodwater. The forsythia, daffodils, tulips and increasing plot cultivation are a delight as are the blackbird and thrush that mark their territory by the gate. We have shared overwintered parsnip, celeriac and beetroot with

our street who are supporting us amazingly with shopping and good humour.

Stay Safe and enjoy your productive exercise.

Best wishes from your 2020 committee as elected on March 15th, 2020.. the day before lockdown!

- Christine Melia
- Emma Delap
- Iulia Popescu
- Jamie Forbes
- Jeremy Hyde
- Keith Holton
- Manda Joyce
- Phyllis Starkey
- Sarah Edwards
- Tia Sedley
- Wendy Skinner Smith

NEWS Flash

A friend has just informed me that a ring ouzel was spotted on Cripsey Meadow Green this morning.. Wednesday 8th.



Apparently this is a mega rarity for Oxford. I am told 'twitchers' attempted access to the site but found our gates locked. Phew!