

Cripley Meadow Allotment Association (CMAA) – Audit October 2020

Why do we do audits?

We carry our regular audits for two reasons:

- Firstly, to comply with our lease with Oxford City Council. Under the terms of the lease, CMAA must ensure that our allotments are used and occupied “as allotment gardens only; that they are not used for trade or business except for the sale of surplus products; they are clean, free from weeds, well manured and in a good state of cultivation and fertility”. By ensuring that members are compliant with our rules, we can work together to use the land well for growing fruit and vegetables and secure it for future use.
- Secondly, the audit aims to promote plot-neighbourliness, so that, for example, trees do not overhang and shade, weeds do not spread and plots do not get to the point of needing expensive covering and reclaiming – in other words, nuisances are headed off before they become a real problem.

If your personal circumstances (illness etc.) mean you are having problems maintaining your plot, the Committee would far rather understand in advance, so please get in touch with us in confidence.

Who does the audits?

At least five committee members tour the whole site, looking at every plot. The outcomes from the audit (including letters sent to members) are agreed by the whole Committee.

The committee is elected annually at the AGM, and all members have a chance to influence the management of the site by standing for election.

How often do we do audits?

There are usually two full audits per year (usually in May and October) and one “mini” audit during the summer.

What do we check during the audit?

This is a summary of the rules – the [definitive document is on the website](#).

1. Visible plot number

Please ensure you have a **visible number on your plot**, preferably at the entrance. This is for health and safety reasons. In the case of accident or illness it will assist emergency services to find particular plots.

2. Cultivation

The rules and our lease specify that you must keep your plot cultivated in a proper and husband-like manner i.e 75% is either in readiness for growing, well stocked with produce (depending on the time of year), being made ready for crops or prepared for the following season. If you are reclaiming a plot after previous neglect, one season’s allowance is generally given for this. You may grow any kind of vegetables, flowers, soft fruit or herbs. Invasive plants like bamboo are not permitted. Blackberry is restricted to headland or on plots if pruned and 5 ft from any boundary.

3. Weed control

As well as cultivation, the most important thing we look for is how well your plot is maintained. A badly maintained plot causes problems for your neighbours. You must take steps to eradicate pernicious weeds (e.g. bindweed, thistles, ground elder and nettles) and ensure they do not spread to other plots. Also, you must not cause a nuisance to other plot holders by allowing weeds to seed.

4. **Trees**

You may only grow fruit or nut trees, only with permission of the committee and these must be on dwarf stock. No other trees are permitted. The maximum height is 10ft and trees must be at least 5 ft from any boundary. Fruit/nut trees and bushes should be sited only where they will not create an obstacle or nuisance to others as they grow. If you have permission to cultivate a number of trees you must ensure that the surrounding areas are kept weed free and cut to avoid seeding. We limit trees to no more than 25% of the larger plot holder's total or 30% if they are under-planted with productive crops.

5. **Plot boundary paths**

All plots should have a pathway between them of a minimum of 2 to 2.5ft, and managed headlands. Some of the paths got lost in clearing and fencing but they are a necessary buffer between plots and must be re-established if missing. Traditionally each plot-holder managed the path to the left when standing on the plots (old) shed line looking out. The main thing is that members cooperate and keep paths between them managed. We no longer recommend plot fencing and removal may be a condition when plots change hands. If you do have fencing, it must be kept to a maximum height of 5ft on headlands. **If you have a fence it must be managed so that it does not harbour perennial weeds.** Fences between plots must be kept clear of blackberry and no plants can shade more than the path width.

6. **Headland**

You must maintain the headland of your plot as well as the plot itself. The headland must be kept clear of weeds and rubbish.

7. **Structures**

You must obtain permission from the committee for all structures, like sheds and polytunnels. These must be kept well maintained, be secured adequately and must not shade adjacent plots. See below regarding storage on your plot.

8. **Well**

If you have a well on their plot you are responsible for its safe maintenance. You must also provide and maintain a strong, raised well surround and cover. No barbed wire or razor wire is allowed. New wells may be dug but please notify the committee as we keep their positions logged for safety.

9. **Storage, safety and waste**

You may only store on your plot (or in structures on it) material harvested from or to be used on your plot. No rubbish may be dumped on any part of the site. **We commend recycling but plots cannot be used to store or accumulate material.** Unwanted vegetable matter must be burnt or composted on your plot. Other rubbish must be disposed of according to our Good Waste Guide on the website. (The skip on site is only for waste that cannot be processed or disposed of in any other way).

What is the outcome to the audit?

If you are working your plot well and within our rules, you will not receive any communication from us after the audit has taken place.

If there are any issues with your plot we will write to you. The intention is to remind plot-holders about certain rules and/or alert members to any specific problem and ask for it to be rectified within a specified time period. If there are serious and/or ongoing issues, the ultimate sanction is loss of membership. In the vast majority of cases however, matters are resolved.