

Minutes of Cripsey Meadow Allotment Association Annual General Meeting Sunday 15th March 2020 at 4:30pm, St Barnabas School Hall, Hart Street, Oxford OX2 6BN

This is the final version as approved by the 2021 AGM.

Present: Angela Tapping (SF10), Jamie Forbes (63), Emma Delap (1A), Rodney Smith (40-42), Wendy Skinner Smith (Chair, 40-42), John Clarke (72), Manda Joyce (72,70B, minute taker), Keith Holton (131-2), Tina Roushannafas (128) Phyllis Starkey (SF7), Sarah Edwards (120), Godfrey Stone (46), Tia Sedley (32), Jane Mollison (122-3,42), Stuart Faulkner (17), Jeremy Hyde (91,92A), Jean Haigh (15-16), Richard Haigh (15-16), Louise Bruce (SF19/20), Rob Bruce (SF19/20), Alejandra Crosta (126B), Tom Milner (62A), Chrstine Milner (60), David Edwards (SF12/13), Alison Campbell (13), Godfrey Cole (13), Sam Woor (106B), Joely Kellard (147B), Konstantina Isidoros (74AB), Tim Bone (99/100), Ian Barry (50A), Christina Milner (60), Luke Bryden (147C).

1. Welcome by Chair – Wendy thanked everyone for coming despite the unusual circumstances (Covid-19). She added that we were trying out having our regular venue on a Sunday as weekday evenings were not available to us, being booked by regular events.
2. Apologies for Absence – received from Nicola Williams (61A), Christine Melia (5A,10B), Alison Scott (51), Sara Jones (71,70A), Julia Popescu (127), Claire Pike (47,48B), Dot Stone (46), Simon Mollison (122-3,42), Steve Carr (87), Kath Roberts (14), Sheila Allen (12).
3. Minutes of the 2019 Annual General Meeting and Matters Arising – Wendy explained that the draft minutes from our 2019 AGM had been up on the website for the last 11 months. There were no questions or corrections, therefore approved.
4. Annual Accounts, Report from Treasurer – Sara Jones would have given a narrative but she was absent with a cold. Wendy talked through the items and associated notes. She said that if anyone had any questions on the accounts, they could be referred to incoming treasurer, Jamie Forbes; no questions were raised.
5. 2019 Annual Report – Wendy summarised items in the Report that were not already covered elsewhere on the agenda. With regard to flooding, she said it was not always the same plots going under and that is to do with the shifting gravels that lie under our site. She asked if there were any questions or comments about the audit; Tia, new Field Secretary, added that it was an evolving process.

Wendy said we should have been saying ‘goodbye’ to Sara in person, but she was unwell, so a card was circulated to say thank-you for her five years as treasurer. Julia is our Castle Mill rep but is leaving Castle Mill in July. She will stay on the Committee, but we could do with a new Castle Mill rep, and also help with orchard management, and with (paid) plot clearance work.

Arcadian coming to the end of their contract prompted us to convert old communal compost to plots. Communal composting had not been very successful but there were members who had excellent use of the rough compost and it will be missed. We probably won't try to find another source as waste

certificates are proving more difficult. Oxford Direct Services have taken over mowing contract, and have also done work on clearing the compost plots and repairing the tracks. They are coming more frequently, every two weeks, to cut the grass, but do less per visit and leave the mowings (so no difference in overall cost). We have also decided to leave a circle of the green to grow long, thanks to prompt from a member (it was noted that the RHS's own allotments are mown).

With regard to external events, Phyllis led OxClean this year and our members did well in the ODFAA allotment competition – all the winners being in the room, they were given a round of applause. There was an ODFAA/CMAA party on Wendy's plot, which was a great success.

The shop continues to serve members; shop lead Sarah mentioned the new two-wheeler barrow, and asked for spare seeds to be donated to the shop for giving away to members.

6. Welcome from Susanna Pressel and Election of Officers and Committee Members.

Susanna took the chair briefly as the current Committee stood down. She commented "Thank goodness for the wonderful committee and especially to Wendy", and led a round of applause. She noted that allotments were among the best ways to keep sane and healthy. Only one nomination, Wendy, had been received for Chair, and, after show of hands, Wendy was unanimously re-elected.

Manda, as Secretary and Vice-Chair, and Jamie Forbes, as Treasurer, were also separately elected unanimously, as was the rest of the continuing Committee (Emma Delap, Sarah Edwards, Keith Holton, Jeremy Hyde, Christine Melia, Tia Sedley and Phyllis Starkey). Finally Julia Popescu, who was co-opted onto the Committee in October 2019, was unanimously elected.

Erratum: Alex Hollingsworth's name was put forward in error, apologies.

7. Annual Report items for discussion

- Lease renewal – Wendy explained that she would shortly be standing down as chair of ODFAA (the umbrella group for Oxford allotments). As ODFAA Chair, she has been working on lease renewal with our landlord, Oxford City Council, for the last two years: delving into problems with the current paperwork, negotiating with the Council and getting legal advice from Freeth's (at 'mates' rates' thanks to a Committee member) and from the National Allotment Society's top legal person. She said that we would be looking to become an incorporated society, as a co-op or limited company, so that trustees are not open to personal liability. She expects that OCC will take on responsibility for their buildings, which includes our green association shed (that has an asbestos roof), and for the health and safety of trees, and ditches unless they have both sides on the allotment (we only have one of those, between the main site and Cripsey Island, so we would keep responsibility for that).

There was a question from the floor about whether the Council will deal with the silting boundary ditches/streams that might soon allow people to walk across and compromise our security. Wendy has had some correspondence with the Environment Agency about this in the past, with vague promises forthcoming but as yet no action.

Wendy added that the allotment budget will purely be Association land/site rents, and, above that, OCC would contribute officer time. We trust that OCC will pay for maintaining their building and managing its asbestos roof, and any ditch work, but this is as yet uncertain.

- Asset management approach and proposed increase in plot rates – Manda presented the case for increasing plot fees. She highlighted the great success that the association had had over the last 15 or so years in bringing in external income for new things, but we were now in an a different phase where it was about maintaining and replacing what we have. As signalled at last year’s AGM, the new lease is making it clear we must stand on our own two feet with regard to maintenance and replacement of our assets. The Committee carried out a piece of work to identify all our assets (some £70k’s worth at most recent estimate), and their associated depreciation/maintenance costs over time. She explained that a pot of money, or ‘sinking fund’ needed to be set up to cover future costs. This averaged out to £6,100 a year, with the proposal to use current surplus to prime the fund. The annual report contained all the details, but Manda showed an example of a 10 pole plot. For comparison she showed ODFAA figures for sites in other cities, where, even after proposed increases, CMAA plots would be amongst the cheapest.

A question was asked about how other sized plots would be affected – in particular communal plots. The answer was that they would go up in similar proportion (but not amount, annual report has all the details).

There was a comment from the floor expressing resentment of car users who disproportionately wear out the tracks. This question was deferred until the item on cars and parking.

A question was asked about how our plot fees and proposed increases compared with others in Oxford. Wendy answered was that we were currently about average in the City. Manda elaborated that other Oxford allotment committees were all trying to cope with the changes happening at the moment, especially smaller sites, and were looking to follow the lead of larger sites such as ours. We are the first to do an asset register. In response to a question from the floor, it was confirmed that our orchard trees are included as assets.

In response to a further question from the floor, our policy of helping anyone struggling financially was re-iterated.

Unanimous support was given to the proposals for the establishment of a sinking fund and increases in plot fees.

- Time limit on key deposit return – Manda (covering for Sara). Manda explained that, currently, we have an open-ended liability for key deposit return. The committee proposed six months should be allowed in which departing members may get their deposit back when returning keys. There was a view from the floor that this was too generous, and the period was amended to three months by show of hands.

- Change in Working Party arrangements – Manda set out the case for changing the current 3 hour WP commitment to 2 hours (as this is how long a WP lasts), but to increase the payment-in-lieu from £5 an hour to a more realistic £10 an hour, so that those not doing a WP would pay £20 instead of the current £15. She also said that the Committee felt that a contribution, either in time or cash, should be expected, not optional as it is today (although most people do already do one or the other). She emphasised that it is much better for CMAA for people to give their time. The proposals were unanimously agreed by show of hands.

- Probationary period for new members – Wendy explained the context: we have had new members take on a plot and done nothing. We would like a probationary period to be introduced, linked to the first audit after new membership (unless very hot on the heels of a new membership). The proposal was unanimously supported. Details to be worked up and published in a forthcoming newsletter.

- New/replacement sheds and rainwater harvesting – Wendy counted the number of sheds without rainwater harvesting arrangements, about half a year or two ago. It has improved since then. The proposal was that a new rule be introduced to mandate that all new/replacement sheds have rainwater harvesting on them.

A member pointed out that he had two wells, and over his 12 years of membership, he had never run out of water. He said he thought we should encourage, but not make it a rule. Wendy explained the rationale for preferring rainwater to wells: wells reduce water level for all. Another member said she has no well and harvesting has been much better than relying on river water.

A discussion followed where the following points were made: Could there be some stock at the shop, plus help and advice? Could there be a bulk order for butts? Could we have a WP or special day to help people? All noted.

What would the sanction be if we made it a rule and the rule was not followed? Would we really want people to lose their membership?

By show of hands, the majority supported encouragement but not a rule.

- Tracks, vehicles and parking – Jamie gave the background, referring to last year's AGM when the matter was discussed and the Committee was asked to do more research. He issued a questionnaire, asking how much people used the tracks, and why. He reminded us that we put in £4,000 to repair tracks last year and we will need to put more in in the future.

We had 114 responses to the questionnaire, just over half of members. Jamie talked through some of the data (all was published in the annual report) on screen. He said he had also looked at the distance people live to see if any correlation; people who live further away do come in the car, but there are also those who live much closer who also drive a lot. He highlighted that 74% of respondents have a car, the main reason for car used is to transport heavy things on, and take crops off. There are some with mobility issues also.

Wendy said that some associations limit membership according to where people live. CMAA does not, but Wendy tells new members who live further away that they must get a permit for the car park permit (they promise to but don't always do so).

Strong views were expressed with regard to the few members who speed, and park in the wrong places. The need for change, given the climate emergency, was also referred to. Manda said that the Committee themselves find it frustrating that, despite regular re-iteration of key messages about reducing car visits, parking in the right place and protecting the tracks, there are still a few people who don't do as they are asked. There was further anecdotal evidence from the floor of 'serial offenders'.

There was an understanding from the meeting that this was not something the Committee could resolve on its own; it was more of a collective problem. It was suggested that members themselves

talk to members if they saw them acting irresponsibly by driving too fast, or when there was standing water or frost on site, and they could report registration numbers to that, if repeated, this could be followed up. The ultimate sanction would be loss of membership. On the other hand, there were reservations about being too judgemental (who would decide what was a fair ration, and how would it be measured?), and that it would be impossible to police.

Wendy said that the Committee needed to take the balance of views expressed in the questionnaire, and all the views expressed at the AGM, into account.

8. Any Other Business – Coronavirus. Wendy said that she had thought of two issues a) if you had to stay at home, your plot may not be in condition you would like it to be, so please let us know and b) we can go to the allotment when self-isolating, but bring gloves for the gate, or sanitise hands. She asked if anyone could think of any other impact; none forthcoming.

A member asked if there could be anywhere nearer the South Field to burn wood. Wendy said no, because it is too near the flats. Stuart, new member on plot 17 introduced himself, said he was happy to help and asked for any donations of plants.

Meeting closed 18:15.