

## ODFAA Annual Report to the AGM March 2014

### ODFAA works

- to promote, support and safeguard the welfare of Allotment Associations in Oxford and those Associations approved by the Executive Committee;
- to provide links to administrative advice and support;
- to act as an invited arbitrator where necessary on any internal allotment disputes;
- to represent Associations and offer support if necessary in any dealings with Oxford City Council and other public bodies.

### Meetings for the year

The Executive Committee has met 4 times during the year. May, August, December and March. We meet a few weeks before the Allotment Liaison Meetings (ALM) and deal with concerns raised by associations and Oxford City Council. We also organise ALM with OCC. The Allotment Liaison Meeting met 3 times April 23rd, September 24th, January 21st. Stuart Fitzsimmons, Head of Parks and/or Ian Haynes, Parks Operational Manager generally attends these meetings and those of the committee. Mark Lygo, City Councillor responsible for allotments, has attended 1 ALM and 1 committee meeting.

### Federation Membership and Liaison Meeting Representation

32 of the 35 operating sites in the city are ODFAA members. The Allotment Liaison Meeting is open to all recognised allotment association in Oxford and District. It is demonstrably representative of allotments across the city as members from 32 sites have attended at least once.

### ODFAA /OCC Allotment database

We update our data sheets at each ALM meeting. These are available for use with our permission, by Oxford City Council. We have the following information on databases: Allotment Association Contacts, Membership/Plot/Rent details, Site Facility and Condition survey. John Lardner, our treasurer presently holds the responsibility of keeping this information updated. Associations are asked to update the sheets at every meeting. Please make sure your association lets ODFAA know of any changes of trustees, officers, committee members and site information.

### ODFAA and Allotment Liaison Meeting

For most of the year the Allotment Liaison Meetings (ALM) and ODFAA meetings run concurrently. ODFAA's AGM to elect officers and the committee is held prior to the April ALM meeting. Since 2008 the Federation has had responsibility, as requested by Parks and the ALM, for working with OCC to organise the meetings, prepare the paperwork, agendas and take the minutes. Parks do the mailing and we share the chair. Most contacts are by email with one hard copy to the secretary or a nominated committee member who attends the meeting. Distinct Federation issues raised by members can be dealt with as agreed before or after ALM.

### Oxford City Council and Allotments

All of the operating Oxford City Council allotment sites have devolved management. This means they have trustees who hold the lease and the site is managed by an elected committee in accordance with their lease and agreed constitution/rules. 6 sites have other landlords.

### Oxford City Council contacts

Councillor Mark Lygo holds the council allotment portfolio. Stuart Fitzsimmons is Head of Parks and Countryside which has responsibility for allotments. Ian Haynes is the Parks Operating Manager and has direct responsibility for allotments. All are invited to ALMs. Corporate Assets have responsibility for rents/allotment leases and Ruth Whelan is responsible for managing the present rent review. If your association does not have a current copy of your lease please contact Ruth.

## Meetings discussed....

### Grants and Finances

2012/13 Allotment Budget was: £12000 for reactive maintenance; £928 for the allotments competition; £3900 in grants. This money is largely generated by rents paid by associations so it is primarily a neutral budget and only available to contributing associations. Expenditure is agreed at ALM so that finances are transparent. ALM voted for the 2013/4 grant money to be used firstly for plot clearance and secondly for site security. This is the 5th year we have used the grant money for clearance. Our priority is to accommodate most of the comparatively small waiting lists across the city by ensuring all open sites are fully used. There are a few longer waiting lists on some smaller sites but there are plots available on other existing sites. One site now has most of the uncleared plots in the city. As it has not applied for grant money Parks will address this as lease issue as we now need to move on.

The committee/OCC have discussed some ideas for grant priorities at our meeting and suggest that **improving inclusive access** and **signage** would be a positive way forward. If associations develop projects in these areas Parks **may** be able to supplement the grant money from other funds.

Parks organises the grant forms which should be available at the April meeting to be returned by early August. This year that process was delayed by paternity leave (congratulations to Ian Haynes and his wife on the birth of their little boy, Finlay). The awards were reported to the January ALM. This year we hope again to have the grant awards ratified by the September ALM meeting. The following awards were confirmed in the January 2014 meeting.

*South Ward - £192 for Skip Hire, /Upper Wolvercote - £750 for Plot Clearance plus new watering station, /Cutteslowe - £360 for gate security improvements, /Lenthall Road - £100 for security hedging plants, /Headington & District Allotment Association (Eden Drive) - £1120 for Fence repairs /Links (Cumberland Road) – £500 for security Hedging & Plot Clearance/ Minchery Road West - £375.04 for Plot Clearance and security improvements.*

The total value for the seven applications above is £3397.04 and the grant budget is £3910.

It was initially agreed the remaining £512.96 would be used to pay for the design of a new allotment sign to be rolled out across all sites. However it emerged that the Pullen's Lane application had gone astray and this will be considered before the money is allocated outside the agreed criteria.

The reactive maintenance budget expenditure for 2012 to 2013 will be circulated at the April meeting. This is so that works are planned, agreed and the allocation of money is recorded so that it is seen by all to be fair. Over the past few years a number of associations have successfully applied for external funding for projects. Presently we estimate this has contributed some £60,000+ additional allotment site funding to Oxford since 2008.

***The Council Budget Book for 2014 agreed a budget of 25,000 for allotments with the same proposed annually through to 2018.***

***Ian will report on the 2013-14 reactive maintenance budget  
ALM meeting will vote on directions for the 2014 /2015 grant.  
Grant forms for 2014 will be available at the meeting.***

### Planning Issues

Through 2013 ODFAA has supported both East Minchery Farm and Barton Fields in meetings with OCC. We encourage all associations to be aware of developments and participate in planning consultations. We recommend all associations have a committee member signed up to the Oxford Planning Finder service so that they receive automatic email notifications when planning applications near their allotment site are published. In these present days of budgetary restraint we are working to retain good allotment provision as:

- it provides a sustainable food supply
- it means fewer food miles as food grown locally
- sites provide a focus for a community, and improve community cohesion
- growing one's own food is an important part of a healthy-eating programme
- it offers a productive activity for the unemployed and are good for the local economy
- local and national government reports consistently promote the benefits of allotments
- local authorities have a statutory duty to provide sufficient allotments

- many sites have been allotments for many years and have important heritage benefits Barton Fields now has more land back in allotment use. East Minchery Farm site has statutory allotment land for 8 plots within a development for social housing. Both have a future where more plots can come back into use.

## Green Spaces Strategy 2012-2026

The Strategy which includes allotment plans is available online at presently as part of the CEB Agenda. It was approved in February 2013. As of March 2013 ODFAA was invited to attend **OCCs Green and Blue Space Network Meeting**. This meeting is attended by ODFAA. It aims to improve communications between groups concerned with green and blue spaces, work together where possible and share good practice. The following groups are invited

Head of Service Leisure, Parks and Communities, Oxford City Council, Head of Education and Conservation, BBOWT, Parks Development Officer, Oxford City Council, Oxford Preservation Trust, Oxford and District Federation of Allotments Association, Environmental Policy Team Leader, Oxford City Council, Director Campaign to Protect Rural England Oxfordshire Enterprise Manager, Canal & Rivers Trust Parks Operational Manager Historic and Natural Environment Manager, Oxfordshire County Council Parks and Open Spaces Manager, Oxford City Council Director, Oxford Preservation Trust (OPT) Local Nature Partnership Oxfordshire Oxford City District of CPRE.

The group meets quarterly. The purpose is to enable partners to work more collaboratively to improve Oxford's Green and Blue Spaces. The commitment is to share good practice, develop joined up projects, and work collaboratively. Main areas of work are: Identifying and advocating local needs, accessing and coordinating new resources, providing opportunities for networking and sharing good practice, supporting and training volunteers, improving the workforce and skills, linking with other agencies such as health and community safety. Improving Biodiversity, Improving access to Green Spaces, and Promoting and supporting Volunteering have been the most recent discussions.

***A copy of the Green Spaces Strategy will be available for reference at the April Meeting.***

### An excerpt From OCC's Oxford People July 2013



Do you live in Oxford and want some extra space to grow your own fruit, vegetables or flowers? [Oxford City Council](#) has allotment plots available at several locations across the Oxford including; South Ward, near Redbridge, Cow Mead, Abingdon Road and West Minchery Farm, Littlemore and Cripley Meadow, Walton Well Road and court Place Farm, Marston. Plots costs vary but across the city the average is £25 per year (for 250m<sup>2</sup>). Smaller sized plots are available at some sites. Why not share one with friends or relations, bring your kids along, or team up with neighbours to grow salads, potatoes, herbs or root vegetables?

Councillor Mark Lygo. Board Member for Parks, Sports and Events, says: "Using an allotment is a great way to grow flowers or vegetables, gives you a bit of exercise and you can meet new friends." "We have some allotment plots available across the city so if you are keen to grow your own, get in touch with the allotments or parks team."

Wendy Skinner Smith, Chair of Oxford and District Federation of Allotment Associations, says: "Our aim is to bring the open allotment sites back into full, productive use so that the generous statutory allotment land across the city accommodates as many members as possible." "I have had a plot for some 35 years and we eat fresh, seasonal food almost all the year. "The exercise, working with the land, working together with other members and some of the tastiest fruit and vegetables ever awaits you when you get a plot."

If you would like to find out more contact the allotments direct, or call Oxford City Council's parks and open spaces team on 01865 252437 email [parks@oxford.gov.uk](mailto:parks@oxford.gov.uk) or visit Oxford City Council's [allotments page](#)

## Lease / Rent review

Chris Wood, (Head of Corporate Assets) appointed Ruth Whelan in 2012 to manage the next rent review. ODFAA shared their datasheets and a proposed framework and this framework was accepted and circulated to all. All association committees on OCC land should have a copy of their lease. If they do not they should apply to Ruth at Corporate Assets for a copy. We recommend no association trustees/committees should work without knowledge of their current lease and OCC Allotment rules. Ruth came to our September 2012 ALM and associations shared their perceptions about the parameters of rent review. All associations agreed to work towards ensuring they are ready for the rent review and are preparing by checking their sites, leases and queries.

It was noted: since 2007 many associations have exercised a greater degree of devolved management including: more financial independence; greater member contributions to site management; work together for the benefit of Oxford allotments. Some associations have applied successfully for Lottery and other funding. Also there is no longer an allotment officer as there was in 2007.

Richard Hawkes came to the January ALM meeting and reported they were still in consultation to agree a proposal so the timetable was a little delayed but he stated that he did not think the increase would be 'surprising' to associations. The 2007 rent increase was in line with RPI.

Parks and Corporate assets will follow up any disputes about land measurements but we were informed that the leases with historic figures which have been subject to much change cannot be

changed unless/until leases are renewed. If this is done at the request of the association a charge will be incurred. Allotment associations have been advised to use Google Planimeter so that they can assess their use of their land. <http://acme.com/planimeter>. Most contributory parts of the allotment including any special designated areas (like orchards, ponds, communal composting) are considered to contribute to the function of the allotment site as a place to grow food unless a limitation has been put on their use as such by an external authority (such as Natural England).

### **AGM and ALM agenda item**

*The Federation Committee/Parks discussed OCC's Asset Management's proposal with regard to the new rent at our liaison committee meeting on March 5<sup>th</sup>. ODFAA has just received the attached proposal letter. The committee recommend this approach to resolving the disparity issue. We need to look at illustrative figures to check how this works out across the sites. In principle it takes into account the contributions made by elected allotment associations to allotment provision, maintenance and management. Inevitably in levelling there are winners and losers. Figures will be available at the AGM meeting. **AGM will vote on whether this is an acceptable approach.***

### **Insurance**

Associations are asked to ensure that their Federation membership is up to date **in April** if they wish to benefit from the insurance held in the name of the Federation. All OCC sites must have cover as part of their lease and the named vehicle for OCC Zurich Public Liability and Employer Liability is Federation membership. Details of the policies are available on the web site and from the treasurer.

### **Allotment Competition**

There were fewer entries this year, probably because of the very difficult growing conditions during the cold spring. The first judging was delayed until July

- 74 individual plots (97 in 2012) on 12 different sites
- 7 associations in the best kept allotment site section
- only 4 polytunnels. It has been decided to discontinue this section in 2014

The competition sub-committee consisted of Tim Treacher, Reg Curnock (Kestrel Crescent), David Meade (Links-Cumberland Road) and Jennie Rudman (Thompson Terrace).

The award presentation in October, to which all entrants were invited, offers a chance for allotment holders from different sites to meet. The awards were presented by Martin Stott who made an interesting speech about composting. The judges John Alcock and Mike Kent, made brief comments on their experience of the competition and we presented a small cake to John as it was his birthday. A slide show of photos of the allotment sites and plots taken by Wendy was shown throughout the evening and Bernard Clarke took photos of the competitors which were then posted on the web site. Stuart Fitzsimmons, Head of Parks, Councillor Mark Lygo and Ian Haynes attended. For the second year we were able to run our own bar, which resulted in cheaper and better drinks. Richard Barrett and Tracy Crossman (Bartlemas Close) were thanked for looking after the bar on the night.

ODFAA took on managing the Allotment Competition in 2009 when the city could no longer support it. A dedicated grant from OCC pays for the prizes, engraving of the cups and shields, and the basic cost of the bar and one free drink for contributors. Our estimate of the costs paid by Parks under their competition budget is £950, about a third of the pre 2009 costing. The net cost of the competition to ODFAA was £241.63, mainly for expenses for the judging days and certificates. The latter are printed by Wendy at no cost other than materials. ODFAA contributed £200 to the competition when it was run by OCC and this was the target budget set in 2009. Considering inflation we have done well to retain such an inexpensive administration, thanks, of course, to the volunteer work of the committee and judges.

The January 2014 ALM made the decision (20 for, 1 against and 5 abstentions) to hold a competition in 2014 and allocated an ODFAA budget. This decision enabled the sub-committee to organise the information and entry forms to be sent out in this mailing for the AGM. After 5 years Reg Curnock is standing down from this sub-committee and John Alcock, who has been a judge for as long as anyone can remember, has also decided to retire. Many associations have known and admired John's horticultural knowledge over many years and we wish him the best in the future. Please sign the thank you card that will circulate. We are presently looking for a second external judge.

**AGM Item To confirm dates and arrangements for the competition. To discuss prize money**

## The Allotment Charter

The amended version should be on the OCC web site Allotment Page. The Charter was developed by OCC and ODFAA in 2011 /2012 to clarify the relationship of ploholders, associations and OCC. It was reviewed in 2013. The Charter does not replace the Rules and Constitutions of Associations, nor the Council's own rules but is intended to be a support for all. ALM voted in 2012 and 2013 to adopt this. All Associations can use the Charter.

## ODFAA Development plan

We have made good progress with the plan we set ourselves in May 2013

**Web site** After some years of deliberation Wendy finally managed the space and time to develop an ODFAA web site. The costs are very moderate as we use a free web site but pay in order to have limited email contact and not to have adverts. Wendy will try to keep it updated. It has photos, minutes, reports, contacts etc. It does not have a forum or members web page as this needs a further commitment of time. We published the site at the end of October. Latest visitor figures are ...

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|--------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>2038</b> TOTAL<br>PAGEVIEWS | <b>408</b> MONTHLY<br>AVG | <b>589</b> BEST<br>MONTH | <b>93</b> WEEKLY<br>AVG | <b>224</b> BEST<br>WEEK | <b>13</b> DAILY<br>AVG | <b>114</b> BEST<br>DAY |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|

**Allotment visits there** have been visits to 3 sites in the year. Cutteslowe, Eden Drive and Barton Fields. Visits are open to all committee members **and members of associations** and are advertised at meetings and on the web site. Please let your members know. John Lardner has been organising these and reporting back to meetings. All the committee who have done it find visiting other sites to be really helpful and often quite inspiring.

**Gardeners Question Time** We held our first GQT in November and had a small but lively turn out. We agreed to do this again and it was suggested we also had a keynote speaker. We will follow do this again and aim for November when it is not in prime allotment working months.

### Training sessions

In May 2013 the committee agreed to trial a different format for the ALM meeting to enable more people to contribute and share ideas.

In September we asked members to start this process by identifying their main concerns. These were summarised and circulated and are on the web site. We asked members to split into small groups comprised of members from different associations and ask them to discuss and then agree a series of statements. These were summarised by Wendy and circulated with the minutes to all committee members on our email list. We have followed this format in examining various allotment management issues and report the findings to associations with the minutes so that they can take this onto further work in their committees. We aim to keep circulating members in different combinations so all meet more committee members from different associations. This will enable a wide circulation of ideas and approaches. In January we took as our focus one of the major concerns (cultivation of plots/site audits). John Lardner summarised these and the results are circulated with the minutes and posted on the web site. If we have time in April we will be looking at developing role definitions/job descriptions.

*The following ALM dates are proposed for 2014/15.*

- April 22 Tues 6-7 pm O&DFAA AGM /7.30 Allotment Liaison meeting
- May 6<sup>th</sup> ODFAA committee planning meeting 7pm Chair's house.
- May 16<sup>th</sup> Allotment Competition entries in
- Monday June 9 & Thursday June 12 First plot Competition Judging
- Aug 20 Weds 8.30am OCC /Fed Committee
- Sep 23 Tues Allotment Liaison meeting 7 for 7.30pm
- Sept 4<sup>th</sup> and Sept 5<sup>th</sup> Thurs & Fri Second plot Competition judging/Site judging
- October 11<sup>th</sup> O&DFAA members insurance renewal
- Dec 9 Tues 8.30am OCC /Fed Committee
- 2015 Jan 20 Tues Allotment Liaison meeting 7pm for 7.30pm
- March 10 Weds 8.30am OCC /Fed Committee
- April 21 Tues 6-7 pm O&DFAA AGM /7.30 Allotment Liaison meeting