

ODFAA Annual Report to the AGM March 2015

ODFAA works

- to promote, support and safeguard the welfare of Allotment Associations in Oxford;
- 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.

ODFAA / OCC and the Allotment Liaison Meeting

The ODFAA Committee met in May, August, November and March, the last three with OCC Officers.

We usually meet a few weeks before the Allotment Liaison Meetings (ALM). These are in September, January and April. We discuss concerns raised by associations and organise the ALM.

ODFAA prepare the paperwork, the agenda, do minutes and keep the web site updated. OCC Parks are responsible for the reactive maintenance budget and oversight of the lease and rules. We share chairing ALM. In 2014 ALM agreed that the main contact would be by email. One hard copy is posted to the nominated committee member of an association without email. 34 of the 35 operating sites in the city are ODFAA members.

Generally the Allotment Liaison Meetings (ALM) and ODFAA meetings run concurrently. ODFAA's AGM is to elect officers and the committee and is held prior to the April ALM meeting. Distinct Federation issues raised by members can be dealt with as agreed before or after ALM.

All of the operating Oxford City Council allotment sites, and most of those on other land, have devolved management. They are generally unincorporated associations with trustees who hold the lease. The associations are managed by an elected committee in accordance with the lease and agreed constitution/rules. Some sites have other landlords.

Oxford City Council Information Stuart Fitzsimmons is Head of Parks. They hold the reactive maintenance and grants budget and council responsibility for allotments. The budget is the rents from Allotment land so is generally a neutral item for OCC funding. Stuart and Tina, Mould, the Parks Operational Manager usually attend ALM meetings. The email contact for Parks is <parks@oxford.gov.uk> Tina Mould was recently appointed. Mark Lygo, <cllrmygo@oxford.gov.uk> is the City Councillor who holds the council allotment portfolio. He has attended 2 ALM meetings. Corporate Assets have responsibility for site rents and allotment leases. Ruth Whelan was responsible for managing the recent rent review. Your association should have a copy of your lease. If not or for lease queries contact WHELAN Ruth <rwhelan@oxford.gov.uk>

ODFAA databases are available for update at each ALM meeting. We keep the following databases: Allotment Association Contacts, Membership/Plot/Rent details, Site Facility and Condition survey. This data is available for use, on request, with our permission, by Oxford City Council. John Lardner is responsible for keeping this information updated. Please make sure your association lets ODFAA know of any changes of trustees, officers, committee members and site information.

Grants and Finances

2013/4 Allotment Budget was: £12000 for reactive maintenance; £978 ring fenced for the allotments competition; £3900 in grants. This money is generated by the rents paid for allotment land. It is only available to contributing associations. Expenditure is agreed at ALM so that finances are transparent. OCC will report fully in the 2013/14 reactive maintenance budget. The following information is already available.

2014 Grants ALM voted for the 2014/5 grant money to be used for inclusive access, improved signage and water harvesting, in that order of priority. Parks organises and distributes the grant forms which are available in May. They are returned in early August so that the grant awards are ratified by the September ALM meeting. This year the information posted on the OCC application form was not as agreed at the April meeting. Ian Haynes, the Parks Operational Manager apologised for this. ODFAA/OCC recommended to the meeting that we pay all the applications by using some

of the reactive maintenance budget which then had no demands. The ALM meeting agreed to this (26 for and 2 abstentions). Cheques were posted in October. During discussion it was clarified that the reactive maintenance budget money is there to meet OCC lease responsibilities for site emergencies. Any underspend identified in January is used for the grant projects as agreed by the members in April. In 2013/4 this totalled £512.36 and it was minuted that Ian Haynes would spend this on the design of a new allotment sign which could n be rolled out across all sites? We have yet to see this design? In 2014/5 the agreed focus was Inclusive Access (20 votes), signage (13) and water harvesting (6).

The following grant applications totalling £3,900 and £4,384 of the Reactive maintenance budget were agreed by the September ALM: (Association /Project Area /Grant Amount)

- East Ward /Plot restoration and raised beds /£1376
- Barton Fields /New raised plots /£1000
- Thompson Terrace/Plot Clearances/£1350;
- South Ward /Gate sign/ £145;
- St Clements & District /Gate repair and 25m fencing/£1000;
- Minchery Farm West /Plot Clearance and replacement keys /£606.54
- Risinghurst /Plot Clearances/ £614
- Bartlemas /Boundary Maintenance /£492;
- Lenthall Road /New gate lock and keys £700;

In early March 2015 we were informed that there was 6,500 in the reactive maintenance budget and this could not be spent by Parks on the focussed areas. This was corrected as being 5,500. We agreed to circulate another round of grant application keeping the previous format. The following awards were made

Inclusive access:	Cripley Meadow/6 raised beds/1,772 Eden Drive/ /£300
Signage	Old Marston Mill Lane/Sign/ £150 Eden Drive/ Sign/ £225 Barracks Lane/ Sign/£866 East Ward/Sign/ £461 ODFAA/Sign/£500 (to repeat sign design suitable to roll out to associations)
Water Harvesting	Eden Drive/ water butts/ £423 Lenthall Road/butts/£608
Plot clearance	Lenthall Road /Plot clearance/£234

At the ODFAA/OCC committee meeting in March we agreed the following future timetable

- April report on budget allocation and spend for previous and present year
- April ALM decide on Grant focus
- May Grant forms issued by OCC
- August Grant forms returned prior to meeting of ODFAA/OCC Committee
- September ALM Meeting ratifies Grant awards
- January ALM Reactive Maintenance Budget released for grant allocations
- This would be agreed at March Committee meeting if not needed for emergencies.

External Funding. Over the past seven years a number of associations have successfully applied for external funding for projects. We estimate this has contributed £60,000+ additional allotment site funding to Oxford since 2008. In 2014 Cripley Meadow had an 'Awards for All' Lottery Grant of 2,900 to help fund a shredder, a large water butt and some heavy cover for reclaiming plots. Do let us know if you have been successful with a grant application so that we can update our figures. Members are usually happy to share experiences and information about grant applications.

The Council Budget 2015 agreed the following for allotments : Revenue budget was 2014/15 -25,000 and 2015/16 -27,000 Capital Budget for B0078 Allotments was B2015/6 – 34,500,2016/2017 – 10,000.

We have asked Parks and Mark Lygo for clarification of these figures.

The ALM meeting will agree the direction for the 2015 - 2016 grants and budget. ODFAA /OCC recommend Green Waste Management and Water Harvesting.

Oxford City Council Planning and Allotments- a review of allotment provision

ODFAA received a request on 28 January 2015 from OCCs Planning Policy Team led by Mrs Laura J Higgins.

"In the Planning Policy team here at the Council, we are undertaking an assessment of sites across the City, and have been pointed in your direction to understand the latest position regarding the use of allotment sites

*across the City. The assessment that we're doing (called the 'strategic housing land availability assessment') is a government requirement that we carry out approximately annually. It reviews sites for their potential to deliver housing in the future, but I would emphasise that it **does not mean a site is being allocated or will necessarily be developed for housing even if it is assessed, we are however required to show that we have considered it even if the conclusion is that its current use should remain.***

*We would not normally include allotment sites in the assessment but **are under pressure to now assess them, so we would very much welcome your assistance in understanding the latest position regarding occupancy and use of the sites across Oxford.** We've looked on the allotment websites but most do not specify whether any of the plots are available or whether the sites are used to capacity with a waiting list. Are you able to provide this information please to help us demonstrate that the sites are in use and in demand. I look forward to hearing from you, if possible by 4th February please."*

We agreed that we would consult our members and share the return from our April update. We all need to ensure our good allotment provision is well used and well managed to sustain it.

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 about any plans. In 2014 ODFAA continued to support meetings with OCC for the Barton area development. Previously we did the same with East Minchery Farm. In these days of serious budgetary and housing shortage we are working to make the most of Oxford's good allotment provision. These developments have resulted in bringing 0.3ha (8+ plots) at Barton Fields back in allotment use and the East Minchery Farm plan has retained statutory allotment land for 0.292ha (8 plots) where there were previously no working plots. These changes were agreed with OCC's Regeneration and Major Projects team (Rob Kindon and Jane Winfield) on the basis that Oxford City Council would keep a written record, shared with ODFAA, of these changes in statutory allotment land (statutory loss/usable plot gain). Should waiting lists become an issue across the city due to increase in population/demand this would be recognised by OCC. This written assurance has not as yet been forthcoming but is being pursued.

We have just heard from David Ashworth that OCC is applying to remove the Horspath site's statutory allotment designation. Please see appendix on OCC plot provision.

Lease / Rent review

We have worked successfully with OCC parks and with Ruth Whelan of Corporate Assets (now called Regeneration & Major Projects) since 2012 to ensure the rent review addressed allotment association issues outstanding from the previous review in 2007. ODFAA have ensured that allotment associations' greater exercise of devolved management is recognised. This includes: more financial independence; greater member contributions to site management; more working together; greater use of external funding and no allotment officer as there was in 2007.

In April Richard Hawkes reported to ALM on the progress 'without prejudice' of the review discussions. His proposal confirmed our request that the increase would be made up of retrospective RPI since 2008. This was to be adjusted by averaging which would resolve the outstanding issue of ensuring comparative rents per hectare. Flooded sites were given a 10% reduction. The proposal protected the principle that all revenue should be reinvested in allotments. It was stated Parks and Corporate Assets would follow up any disputes about land measurements but in the event it was stated the historic figures cannot be changed unless/until leases/assignments are changed. If this is at the request of the association rather than a problem for OCC, associations will be charged. Members were reminded they can use Google Planimeter if they wanted to check areas etc. <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 (e.g. Natural England).

Some illustrative figures of changes were available at the September meeting for further discussion.

This motion was unanimously accepted at the ODFAA AGM IN April and ratified again by the ALM. We completed this process with the agreement at the ALM meeting in January 2015, ahead of schedule, and memoranda were distributed. All but 3 were returned within the time allowed. Ruth is working with two sites to resolve assignment issues. We encourage all committees to have a copy of their lease so they work with knowledge of their current lease and OCC Allotment rules. We will continue to work with associations to develop the use of budgets and share

experiences of cost. Our budget discussion was cut short in our January due to lack of time. Thanks are due to all associations who worked so well together to achieve this excellent result. There is an appendix of some additional figures and information about national plot prices that you may find useful and we need to decide when/how to re run the budget discussion. We could make this a separate session?

Insurance

Associations are asked to ensure that their Federation membership is up to date before May 1st this year if they wish to benefit from the insurance held in the name of the Federation. This will now take place on May 1st to be aligned with ODFAA membership renewal. All OCC sites must have cover as part of their lease and the named vehicle for Zurich Public Liability is Federation membership. Presently we also have Employer Liability.

A revised certificate was circulated for the first half of the year i.e. 11th October to 30th April 2015 so that we could align the duration of the insurance with that of ODFAA membership renewal. Members of the ODFAA committee met with OCC Parks and had a teleconference with Zurich in October. This raised some issues. It is now necessary for each ODFAA member to be listed on the schedule and this cannot change in the intervening period. This dialogue with the insurer raised an issue with employer liability. The insurers have noted we had a NIL return for employees. For 3 years Employer Liability has needed an ERN form to be filled in and it seems we are covered for any claim from members working as volunteers in the third party section of our public liability insurance. In discussion with Zurich it seems they have changed their policies after more experience of working with voluntary bodies. An ERN Nil return should have alerted Zurich previously but this has only just come to light. We agreed with OCC to include employer liability as we were advised some years ago we needed this to ensure our volunteers were covered. Zurich now include their volunteer insurance in with Public Liability. We obviously need to ensure volunteers are protected and we will be checking this with OCC before we make any changes. We asked Parks/Mark Lygo to find this out and we await information. After a lengthy discussion in January members agreed we needed more clarification on EL, including a firm opinion from OCC. The policy is held and paid for by ODFAA's but it is re paid for by OCC, as required by many leases. It means that non-OCC sites that are Federation members can use it and because Oxford City Council have a larger insurance package with Zurich we get a good deal from this liaison.

ALM item Associations will bring any remaining questions and their forms to the ALM Meeting. ODFAA and OCC will organise another telephone meeting with Zurich after the meeting to resolve any further issues.

Allotment Competition 2014

There were fewer entries in 2014, 51 individual plots (74 in 2013) on 10 different sites (12 in 2013) and 9 of these sites entered the best kept allotment site section. The section for polytunnels was discontinued because of the small number of entries in 2014. This enabled us to reduce the judging to a single day in June and in September, instead of the 2 days that has been required in previous years.

The competition sub-committee consisted of Tim Treacher (Spragglesea Mead and Dean's Ham), David Meade (Links-Cumberland Road) and Jennie Rudman (Thompson Terrace). The judges this year were Mike Kent and Alan Drake. The overall marks in 2014 were slightly lower than in the previous year, in spite of the good growing conditions in spring and summer, possibly reflecting the effects of the very wet winter and long period of flooding on some of the sites.

The award presentation on 30 October, to which all entrants are invited plus a member of all the association committees, offers a good opportunity for allotment holders from all over the city to meet. The awards were presented by John Alcock, who has been one of the competition judges for more years than anyone can remember, but he felt he had to retire this year. After presenting the awards John spoke about his long experience as a judge. Mike Kent briefly commented on the judges' experience in a strange growing year that changed from a terrible winter to being one of the best vegetable growing seasons in memory.

The Challenge Trophy was won by David Porter from John Garne Way. Eight plotholders were also highly commended. The winners in the age sections were 35 – 59 years Louise and Rob Bruce (Cripsey Meadow), Senior Citizen 60-69 years Johann Guschtsca (Elder Stubbs), and Senior Citizen

70+ years Diana Cox (South Ward). The Alderman Knight Shield for the Best Kept Allotment Site was won by the first time entrants Eden Drive.

The total cost of the competition was £1022, which includes the honoraria for the judges, expenses on the 2 judging days, the prize cheques, the printing of the certificates and the cost of the bar and the free drinks at the award presentation. The grant from Oxford City Council was £978.

The January 2015 ALM decided, by a show of hands, to hold a competition in 2015 and allocated a provisional ODFAA budget. This decision enables the sub-committee to organise the information and entry forms to be sent out with the mailing for the AGM.

The Competition was discussed at the ODFAA committee meeting on 10 March. The value of the prizes was reviewed and it was decided to recommend that the value of the prizes for 1st, 2nd and 3rd in the site competition should be increased to £150, £100 and £50 respectively, to recognise the effort made by site committee members. In addition it was proposed to introduce an award for the most improved site with a value of £50. These proposals will be put at the AGM and would result in an increase of £300 in the cost of the competition.

In going through the archive material in preparation for our centenary in 1919 we find that ODFAA was historically much more involved. We have accounts going back to 1919 but "In 1973 the June meeting was in the Council Chamber. ODFAA sent a letter to associations asking whether 'it was advisable to proceed with the competition' 'due to a lack of interest and other troubles also the difficulty of obtaining judges' 'They agreed to continue and had 90 entries. In September the quarterly meeting presented prizes. They consisted of a pair of secateurs from Selfridges and a large shield and 4 smaller ones from Garden News'.

We were in a similar position this year and we feel now that ODFAA is on a firmer financial footing we would like to support associations by supporting a rise in the site prizes so that associations could benefit their sites. The competition is one of only a few 'public faces' of allotments and we think it fitting ODFAA make the following proposal of a change to the prizes.

ODFAA AGM Item -As ODFAA are now financially sound the committee propose ODFAA contribute site prizes of £150, £100 and £50 and a prize of £50 for the most improved site. The criteria will recognise reclamation, innovation and enterprise.

Bonfires

Parks had a few complaints about Bonfires on allotment sites in February and ODFAA were asked to send out a reminder about the Code of Practice. As the complaints had been received by OCC it seemed more appropriate they should issue the reminder. Environmental Health commented that 'the we prefer them to compost it or send to garden waste'.

Like all we are subject to the law but we felt it would be good if there was some awareness of the necessities of allotments. There will always be a need to burn some things. Whilst allotments would like to compost everything or send it to green waste but there are other considerations. Many associations are surrounded by trees and hedges which have to be managed and a bonfire **in the right conditions** is a good way of producing ash and charcoal, which can be used on site. Whilst two associations have bought shredders to help with waste and composting, using a shredder is obviously more of a time consuming task. Also due to the dangerous nature of the machinery its use is limited to a few trained members. Diseased material must be burned. Also many members have been able to burn on some sites for over a hundred years and are only now surrounded by buildings...it would be good if there was some encouragement for them to adapt. Hence our recommendation to include waste management in the grant criteria for 2015. Most associations have no waste collection let alone green waste and so have to pay to take anything off the site. We do however have to do something about waste as many associations are spending a lot of time clearing and paying to move other people's waste. This in no way disputes the need to protect residents and other members from smoke. Maybe we should have a discussion with EH about the waste problems of allotments sites. **ALM item -How can associations use bonfires successfully and within the code and manage site waste more effectively.**

ODFAA Development plan

We have made good progress with our annual plan. **ODFAA's Web site is now in its second year.** The costs are very moderate as we use a free web site but pay in order to have email contact

and not to have adverts. Wendy has tried to keep it updated. It has minutes, reports, contacts and photos. It does not have a forum or members web page as this needs a further commitment of time which is not available. We published the site at the end of October 2013 and the visitors up to Feb 2014 and 2015 were as follows.

2038 TOTAL PAGEVIEWS	408 MONTHLY AVG	589 BEST MONTH	93 WEEKLY AVG	242 BEST WEEK	13 DAILY AVG	114 BEST DAY
5471 TOTAL PAGEVIEWS	342 MONTHLY AVG	836 BEST MONTH	79 WEEKLY AVG	289 BEST WEEK	11 DAILY AVG	114 BEST DAY

Home-1812-46%/Photos-937-24%/Members441-11%/News-321 8%/Allotment Liaison Meeting-255-7%/Competition 146-4%

Allotment visits There have been visits to 2 sites, Cripsey Meadow and Spragglesea Mead. Both had a small but interested attendance. Site visits are open to both committee members and all members of associations so please try advertise them. Visiting other sites can be really helpful in developing new ideas about managing sires and plots.

Gardeners Question Time We held our second local one in November and following the advice from last year we had a keynote speaker. Steve Brooks proved to be an entertaining and informative choice. John Lardner organised this and the visits so many thanks to him. Shortly after this Wendy received an invitation to host

BBC's Radio 4's Gardeners Question Time. This took place on March 9 at Wolfson College. Thanks are due to Tim Treacher in organising this and to Louise Gordon at Wolfson for their excellent service and hospitality which was above and beyond our expectations. This recording was broadcast on March 20th and 22nd. The tickets sold out in Mid-February and it was an enjoyable and informative occasion for all.

Discussion sessions We have continued to use the a format for the ALM meeting to enable more people to contribute and share ideas by dividing the time between the agenda and training sessions. In September 2013 we asked members to start this process by identifying their main concerns and we are working our way through these. 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 back to their committees and in particular as a resource for new committee members. We aim to keep circulating members in different combinations so all meet committee members from different associations. This enables a wide circulation of ideas and approaches.

- January 2014 - cultivation of plots/site audits.
- September - developing roles definitions/job descriptions. Bank now on web site.
- January – Association budgets - deferred to a date in 2015 to be decided.

ALM Meeting Are members finding these sessions useful. Please let us have any other areas we should use as a focus to share experience and ideas.