

December 10th 2018

The minutes from the September ALM are on the web site and the ODFAA committee have met further to consider association returns and comments. This summary is where we are now and after taking into account lease discussions with OCC members on December 11th and 14th it will be the agenda item for the January ALM.

- The ODFAA committee is small and the workload has proved too onerous for its number so we anticipate ODFAA may need to change considerably in the future to continue to support allotments. This year has involved considerable extra work with regard to the demands of the Flood Alleviation Channel. To continue to support allotments in line with our constitution, and if associations have greater **actual** responsibilities, ODFAA will need more support from members and OCC's vision for allotments will need more transparency and clarity.
- Allotment law makes provision a council responsibility. OCC have a proud history in this and has worked with ODFAA for 100yrs to secure and support the management of sites.
- Allotment sites have been contentious and show great variability, with periodic increases, often led by privation (e.g. economic hardship or war) and overall decreases since the 1970s.
- While for some it is source of food supplement, evidence suggests it is recreational plot holders that have kept sites going.
- The sustainability of sites is dependent on having volunteers willing to manage them. This must be practically and financially achievable.
- The focus for successful allotment management today is less on the individual plot holder and more on encouraging the take-up of plots, the regeneration of sites and the engendering of democratic management and communal participation. Site management requires a subtle combination of adherence to rules and regulations (for a city-wide level playing field?) alongside personal persuasion.
- Despite OCC's longstanding approach, since before 1976, to write leases stating that Associations take all responsibilities, the council has not enacted this and our history shows OCC has continued to ask associations for programmes of work on their sites, responding to some but by no means all. The last OCC published survey was in 2005 and resulted in substantial capital funding for fencing.
- **ODFAA understands that plots are essentially a private benefit for allotment holders** whilst acting as important stewards of the land and environs. However, we acknowledge a wider context and approach which could provide greater community benefit: e.g. different forms of growing activities; communal plots; Little Growers; and gardening being part of learning, behavioural and recovery therapies, if supported.
- ODFAA believes the majority of council tax payers consider allotments to be a good thing, on the grounds of green spaces, bio-diversity and community cohesion.
- We know that:
 - they are increasingly valuable green spaces, often with more bio-diversity than parks and nature reserves.
 - they can be enjoyed by a wider community than plot holders alone
 - they contribute positive health benefits to participants;
 - they enable a wide cross section of people from local communities to meet and share common interests;
 - they contribute to carbon reduction via the short distance from plot to plate;
 - they contribute to genetic diversity and sustainability
- However, they are not overseen and managed by OCC as are other green spaces /community activities
- For some time there has been no apparent oversight, little or no appreciable councillor involvement in allotments which have disappeared from public accountability.
- Responsibility involving OCC officers has been shuffled from Estates to Parks to Leisure and now to Direct Services, as has the post of the councillor with allotment responsibility.

Allotment Strategy – OCC oversight:

- We need clear information about past & anticipated costs which have previously been ill- defined.
- The future of allotments should be clearly identified by a body of councillors and published in their plans.
- We need recognition within the OCC management structure, alongside other green spaces, as the sites occupy a significant land area.
- To continue with a large degree of devolved management we need:

- a clear statement of councillor intent and support from OCC
- a client officer and volunteer support for the 200+ committee members
- OCC to deliver on the Allotment Strategy promised for 2017
- the current allotment 'plan' to be updated and OCC intentions clarified
- an investigation and clarification of ODFAA insurance (set up by OCC in 2003)
- ODFAA will ask all associations to contact their local councillor for opinion on the future of allotments
- We want to know if OCC is asking for fully devolved management with leasehold rights/responsibilities, as suggested, but not enacted in the lease.
- We acknowledge that one of the main arguments for allotment self-management is to address conflict of interest arising from the fact that the body that owns allotment land is the body that profits from disposing of the same land. It is also important to establish and hold to the principle that proceeds from the unavoidable and agreed disposal should be invested in the longer term future of other sites.
- ODFAA has worked with OCC on the release of SR8 land at East Minchery Farm and Horspath.

Allotment Funding:

- Since 2007 ODFAA has encouraged all associations to take more financial responsibility and asset planning.
- There is still an official allotment budget. The Budget is greater than £23,000, of which we contribute about £11,500. Additional income is from? Possibly gas regulator, substations etc. on allotment land?
- **If fully devolved - What is the allotment budget for?**
- **If shared the OCC role must be explicit - What is the allotment budget for?**
- For financial planning purposes we need:
 - clear information about historical and anticipated costs, both those incurred by associations and OCC, which have been ill-defined in the past
 - clarity on the income stream
 - clarity that any additional allotment money (e.g. substation rent) be counted as allotment budget
- What subsidy/support etc. can be expected from OCC in the future. What else might OCC use the allotment budget for? Any (historical) demands on it must be explicit.
- The present system of more of the budget going to grants (even if with focus as decided by ALM) can (and has) lead to unfairness if there is no explicit oversight?
- Do we go for rents with streaming or a flat arrangement?
- OCC need to complete work, started in the 2015 rent review, to ensure there is an equitable rent per hectare
- At the January ALM we will discuss possible management models with associations.
- Nationally most authorities have both authority managed sites and self-managed sites.

Allotment Provision:

- ODFAA has not been able to identify a better level of allotment provision anywhere else in the country. There are few 'waiting lists,' if any, in ODFAA member associations.
- We need clear OCC statements on plans for **ongoing** and **future allotment provision**. In 2016 ODFAA received assurances from Nick Twigg, OCC's Major Projects & Development Manager about released SR8 land and allotment gains. He stated *"Oxford City Council supports this high level of cooperation with ODFAA and confirms that if demand for allotments rises in the future, we will work with ODFAA to consider whether there is appropriate land to address this demand"* We are disappointed there was no plan for allotments in the green spaces for the new development in North Oxford?
- What are OCC plans for a rising population? ODFAA aim to maintain the ratio and ideally build on it.
- The Green Spaces document separates Oxford into smaller sub-divisions. We would like to see allotment provision per capita broken down in each of these localities, or by ward, linking equity of provision to greater councillor involvement?

Allotment Maintenance:

- We understand that Community centres are the closest analogue to Allotments in terms of organisation and understand their leases have OCC as responsible for outside of buildings and Community Associations responsible for inside etc.

- What did OCC pay for the last condition survey? **To enable associations to plan they need a condition survey.** Were the copies sent indicative of all, as Botley Meadow thinks they did actually come on site?
- Many sites have been reclaimed and improved over the past 10 years with external funding and self help and this needs to be recognised and attributed
- We want a proper assessment/measurement of our boundaries, as promised in 2007.
- Site surveys – ODFAA circulated this document to all associations in September. The 15 returns are attached and the remainder need OCC to chase.
- ODFAA has stressed the importance of asset management being built into association plans for funding by members contributions. This may now for the first time actually include fences and gates?
- **We need present Tree Survey information** – insurance issues. Allotments are a public good – why are those with trees asked to meet the costs? Attached are the Google Earth maps and it can be seen the trees in issue are mostly boundary trees, thus serving the public realm as well as allotments.
- **Ditches** – are beyond the means and capabilities of allotment associations – where OCC have not looked after them Allotment Associations cannot be expected to pick up this back log?
- We need a realistic **agreement on shared maintenance with OCC** – specifically, **OCC management plans for trees and ditches, paid for from the allotment budget, instead of using grants.**
- **Associations need to look at the financial implications of their** other site responsibilities in the light of condition surveys?
- If we continue with allotment rent there is further work to do on making all rent levels equitable per hectare.

Further :

- We have sent OCC the APSE report highlighting the relevant statistics.
- Future scenarios: any possibility for smaller nearby sites to come together for critical mass for maintenance purposes?
- The web site states OCC manage allotments with ODFAA. Our view is that we cannot recommend our members **sign a lease** that does not clarify OCC's share and responsibility.
- ODFAA intends to continue offering membership to non-OCC sites but it will have to be on a different basis. They are presently included in the overall insurance package (£80 per site) which is paid for by the allotment budget, to which they do not all contribute. Unless sites contribute on a similar rent level to other sites to the allotment budget, they will not be able to access this support. Bartlemas and Pullen's Lane have sub leases and pay rent into the budget.
- We need to have a discussion concerning rules – reconciling OCC and Association rules.