

Chair Wendy Skinner Smith 48 Helen Road OX2 0DE wendy@wendyskinnersmith.co.uk CMAA
Treasurer John Lardner 8 Snowden Mede, OX3 7TQ johnlardner@hotmail.com Eden Drive AA
Secretary Nick Jackson 68 Edwin Court Binsey Lane OX20QT najackson@btinternet.com OSTNB
Committee Members Roy Leach Blackbird Leys Kestrel Crescent AA Phil Baker St Clements AA

The Committee

met in full or in part more times than usual this as a result of lease, OxFAS and Centenary preparation and planning. 2018 April ALM, May 9th, 24th, June 19th, July 9th., August 1st and 14th (with OCC), Sep 17th, Sep 25 (ALM) Oct 30, Nov 26th Dec 11th and 14th with OCC officers. January 22 (ALM) and March 12 with OCC. The committee work as follows.

- Wendy does the agenda, updates the web site, manages problems / complaints, liaises with councillors, planning and asset management.
- John keeps accounts, renews insurance, updates databases, communications and events.
- Nick is our GDPR manager, does minutes, liaises with EA re. OXFAS, The Flood Alleviation scheme and advises associations on water harvesting. He edited the 2019 AGM paperwork.
- Phil is supporting our Centenary celebrations in researching ODFAA's and OCC's archive for the centenary book, printers and photographs, the submission to the Awards for All National Lottery, liaised with OCC re Grenoble Liaison Link.
- Roy has helped with attendance record and labels at ALMs.
- All contributed to lease preparation, reports, Pennard Plant Fair and Charles Dowding talk.
 - Mike Halliwell (HDAA) was elected to help with lease paperwork. He made an excellent start on the analysis of leases for which we thank him. Unfortunately, he was unable make the committee meetings and stood down.

Oxford City Council Information

Stuart Fitzsimmons, Head of Parks parks@oxford.gov.uk and Emma Taylor TAYLOR Emma <ETAYLOR@oxford.gov.uk> Senior Surveyor, Regeneration & Major Projects, are our responsible officers. OCC Parks manage the reactive maintenance/grant budget and have responsibility for management of the 29 Allotment sites owned/leased by Oxford City Council and operated by Allotment Associations in partnership with the Oxford and District Federation of Allotment Associations (ODFAA). Emma manages rents, lease and rent issues. Stuart attends ALM meetings and is the Parks allotment contact. Do remember your association must **hold a copy of your lease**. Please plan to ensure this is passed on when committee members change.

Allotment Councillor

In June 2018 the chair contacted our then allotment councillor, Cllr Linda Smith, to learn that a new member has been assigned. Linda attended no ALM meetings in 2017 but she met with ODFAA committee last year regarding a waste issue. Cllr Louise Upton is our new councillor. She also has responsibility for 'Healthy Oxford' which OCC describes as "creating a healthy community with greater participation in sports, cycling and use of the Council's parks and open spaces for active pursuits". She met with the chair in June for a 'where are we now' session and has attended 2 lease meetings and one ALM. In preparation for new leases ODFAA is looking for more clarity in the council's future commitment to allotments.

April AGM

30 people represented 21 associations at the 2018 April AGM. The Annual Report was circulated as usual and the treasurer's report and accounts were accepted. A balance of £4,099 allows ODFAA to run events and cover the initial insurance bill before being reimbursed by the Council. Membership numbers remain similar and we proposed the same membership fee of 40p per plot holder for the 10th, and possibly final year.

New General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

meant that all associations needed to update their data protection. Nick Jackson agreed to be ODFAA's Data Controller. The vast amount of information and advice on GDPR seemed to make

this yet another opportunity for consultants to illuminate a few and bewilder many! ODFAA used models developed by two associations, CMAA and OSTNB, to provide a GDPR model if needed.

Grants

There were nine applications for grants in September, totalling £7,469.55. Seven totalling £3201.05. were approved by ODFAA/OCC for ratification by ALM. These were: Brasenose for solar panel lighting for an allotment shed; Cripsey Meadow for solar-powered trickle-feed for water tanks; Cutteslowe for a solar powered intruder alarm; Eden Drive for Compost and a solar panel and water pump; John Garne Way for a water harvesting shelter and St Clement's for mulching. These were ratified. ODFAA noted that over the past 10 years all 35 open allotment sites had been able to apply for grants, including non-OCC sites that did not pay rent to OCC so did not contribute to the allotment budget. ODFAA had review this and these would pay in 2019.

Grants in March 2019 There was c. £3,500 for grants (unless something else needs the money before the end of FY). In March ODFAA and OCC met for another planning meeting. We had apologies from Cllr Louise Upton. The meeting considered the Grant applications. £3626 remained in reactive maintenance pot. 7 applications were approved by OCC/ODFAA for ratification by the ALM: Barns Court for solar security lighting; Barracks Lane, polytunnel Phase 2; Fairacres Road Trees for Bees project; John Garne Way Trading shed security & solar alarm; OSTNB for Path restoration for accessibility; St Clements & District for rainwater harvesting for; West Minchery Farm Solar security project. This totalled £2,882.74. The remaining £.800 would be used to purchase garden vouchers to contribute to the increased Allotment Competition prizes. OCC/ODFAA recommend the criteria for the next round of grants should be security, sustainability, accessibility, composting and water harvesting.

Site Asset Management Plans and September Facility Asset/Condition Survey

Associations have been reminded through the year to develop them to ensure future site costs were realistic. Site survey sheets were circulated in August for return by the September ALM and these were organised to help associations with site asset plans. Some remain to be returned.

Water

Many associations reported problems with their new water service provider. A new company now managed the 'business provision' for Thames Water and sites were receiving bills with estimates for a year in advance. Headington and District Association (HDAA) treasurer investigated, and his useful action report was circulated in the ODFAA June newsletter. Advance billing was giving sites a headache about cash-flow and HDAA's investigation advised how to switch to another retailer with a more reasonable billing approach. Nick Jackson had worked with several associations on improving water harvesting.

Lease renewal work towards September 2021

All were reminded that as 'Unincorporated Associations' they were advised to refer to 'members and fees' not 'tenants and rents. It was the association that was the tenant.

Our new committee member made an excellent start on the analysis of leases. However, he could not make the committee meetings and he stood down. The work reverted to the chair, helped initially by an Elder Stubbs trustee. Apart from associations who had not, for one reason or another renewed their lease, all the OCC site leases were almost the same word for word.

In our August Planning meeting the ODFAA committee, Parks, Corporate Affairs and Cllr Upton met and discussed lease issues as follows: the whereabouts of the 2016 Condition Survey and the OCC map of statutory land; the long-awaited confirmation of correct site areas; and confirmation that 2015 rent adjustments have resolved the rent/per hectare disparities. Long standing concerns about trustees were recognised by OCC who offered to use the term signatory and cap liability to a limit equal to the assets of the Association. OCC would also include a lease information pack with appropriate contacts. All agreed to recommend that senior elected officers should be signatories.

OCC stressed that they intended to continue with devolved allotment associations. ODFAA thought the level of devolvement and OCC responsibility needed clarification. If associations were to be fully devolved and manage **all** maintenance the rent must be peppercorn. If not and rents made up the allotment budget, as now, the income stream must be clearer and the guarantee of reinvesting this income be clearly stated. ODFAA recommended that OCC's current rent discount for flooding, started in 1951, be continued

Parks suggested differential site rents but ODFAA thought past investments had run their course. They thought that tree maintenance and ditch clearance were unfeasible for associations to manage given their complexity and possible conflicts of interest between allotments and public realm. ODFAA asked about the parks tree survey and OCC responded that this was not up to date.

ODFAA offered to collect more site information with an extended version of the site facilities and condition survey which they collected annually. It would be for OCC to pursue this information from associations if not forthcoming. These were circulated to associations to be returned by The September meeting. 15 have been returned, but a few lacked any detail and 14 were overdue. ODFAA noted for the record that their database records information from Associations but they do not verify it. It is OCCs job to monitor their allotment provision.

Our new lease was the major item at the September ALM. As renewal had not happened for almost 21 years and many committee members were unfamiliar with the history and terms ODFAA had previously circulated an ALM Lease Background Paper back ODFAA met twice In November to discuss lease issues. Relationship between OCC and ODFAA should be viewed as healthy – although OCC viewed the most recent position statement from ODFAA as indicating we were further apart than expected following the meeting in September. The September ALM was chaired by ODFAA, with OCC's Stuart Fitzsimmons for Parks, Emma Taylor for City Estates, Cllr. Louise Upton and 34 representatives from 26 sites. Our new lease was the major item and ODFAA had previously circulated an extensive background paper.

. As reported in April the OCC leases were almost identical. Site Survey sheets had been circulated by ODFAA previously to be returned to the meeting. Only 15 had been returned leaving 15 for OCC to chase as we also included the non-OCC sites, so that we had an overall view of provision. 30 minutes of Q and R were minuted. Members had discussion time and completed Flip chart questions based on the background paper. The City Estate officer's contact was shared for further enquiries.

The committee met twice in November and produced a further paper for OCC before two meetings in December.

As renewal had not happened for 21 years many members were unfamiliar with the lease, history and terms. Thanks are due to Manda Joyce Of Cripsey Meadow who edited this.

ODFAA met to discuss lease issues twice In November to discuss lease issues. Relationship between OCC and ODFAA should be viewed as healthy – although OCC viewed the most recent position statement from ODFAA as indicating we were further apart than expected following the meeting in September.

December 11th ODFAA committee met with Stuart Fitzsimmons Emma Taylor and again 2 days later with – Ian Brooke, OCC Head of Communities and leisure, Councillor Louise Upton and Stuart Fitzsimmons. The outcome of these meetings was summarised in a Lease Update Paper prior to the January ALM meeting.

The January ALM was chaired by Parks. Emma Taylor attended for estates as did 27 site reps represented 22 sites. We discussed our new 21-year Leases. There was general agreement from last time that leases would be a similar format with needed tweaks regarding: Insurance where there might be more autonomy for associations as what was covered; Trees where OCC were looking at 'service charge' to replace a straight rental uplift so that it can be used to manage the on-site trees and possibly ditches. Uplift would vary between 3% and 6%. In addition, Parks will use the reactive maintenance grant to service the trees. The proposed service charge would cover all trees on site, and maybe some boundary trees but OCC need to do some further costings and they would report back in April. The priority for tree work would be based on safety conditions but Parks would look at how this might be adapted so that associations can sustain growing land. All

Association leases would be the same and Associations will be responsible for everything else, e.g. fences, tracks gates, buildings etc. The meeting once again urged Associations to ensure they developed Site Asset Management Plans before they agreed leases. There was unanimous support for the proposal by those present.

ODFAA had circulated the most recent APSE report on allotments which compared local authority spending and site rents with national averages. Oxford site rents are low as one would expect given the level of devolvement, but OCC's financial support of allotments is amongst the lowest 7%. Again, we had twenty-minutes for collecting written views on issues surrounding the renegotiation of the leases.

ODFAA and OCC met for further lease work. We started with a query on area measurement. OCC asked for info on where there might be problems as ODFAA agreed to pass on concerns from 2007.

Court Place Farm had had a change of management and wished to join the Federation and ODFAA committee as they were keen to make a start on their reclamation. We agreed that this needed a special issue meeting, after they have joined ODFAA and the committee. This was a very welcome change. Rents per hectare was proposed at c. £208 which would be flood discounted as agreed since 195. There were still missing asset surveys – no extra ones have been returned. ODFAA asked that it be a term of the lease that these must be completed and returned for each rent review and renewal. The last meeting agreed a process for how trees will be managed. We discussed ditches being one of 3 categories. Issue now is ditches: 3 categories i.e.: Ditches entirely within allotment boundaries – entirely Association responsibility; Ditches along boundaries with Council land – joint responsibility but OCC unlikely to be able to offer anything beyond statutory defined work (e.g. EA requirements); Ditches along boundaries with non-Council land – joint responsibility with landowner.

Areas for further work include a possible demise clause e.g. to register the leases and to cover any future boundary issues. Exploration of the Land Registry position for leases over 7 years for unincorporated Associations and a possible break clause. All of these will be referred to OCC legal.

Committee agreed that Sites/Associations that don't pay into the allotment budget must now be informed that they will no longer be covered by insurance unless they pay the insurance costs. They will only be eligible for any future OCC allotment grants if they pay into the allotment budget. We are very keen to continue to work with non-OCC sites to remain, but they now need to pick up insurance costs. The sites would need to pay their insurance costs and ODFAA subscription costs. Similarly, there would not be access to the Allotment Grants unless they entered a separate lease with OCC, or they contributed to the allotment budget.

Insurance

The insurance renewal process was even slower than usual as the company did not send a quote until late June! John Lardner proved tireless in contacting them and on a brighter note he reported that associations were more prompt with returns with more of better quality. All agreed the present insurance set up was unwieldy, inflexible and unsatisfactory and we needed to meet with OCC insurance and move this forward. The committee agreed that Non-OCC sites will need to contribute to the budget in future in order to benefit from insurance and grants. Insurance is a further element that needs to be agreed as part of the lease. Cover has been getting more and more expensive (albeit from an artificially low base), heading for £3-£3.5K, and renewal is problematic every year.

Current lease says OCC 'provides insurance' through ODFAA membership but we are exploring how this can be transferred to sites' responsibility. Cllr Upton thought OCC should still finance which would need a trade-off reduction in rent to compensate for insurance increases. ODFAA are about to renew the present insurance and this needs further work for the new lease period. ODFAA thought there must be a direct relationship with the insurers as Associations seeking additional insurance for their council-owned Association sheds (and their contents) are posing problems regarding ownership when seeking insurance.

Emma Taylor discussed this with OCC's Insurance Officer. We recently heard that OCC propose that the new lease from 2021 will re-assign all the allotment buildings/structures owned by Oxford City Council to ODFAA. So, in effect ODFAA will be the owner for the duration of the lease. They

think This should assist in resolving any insurance restrictions for the equipment cover. This will mean that all insurance arrangements from 2021 will be for ODFAA to obtain full liability cover from a provider of their own choosing and confirmation of cover to be provided to Oxford City Council each year.

ODFAA will need to do much further work with insurers before accepting such responsibility and check that it enables associations to add to insurance. The clause in the lease will need further work. The options seem to be www.swcaa.co.uk Park Insurance Shield Insurance Vantage Zurich RHS

Events

Suggestions for 2018 talks were: No-dig and organic pest control. ODFAA had booked a second Pennard Plants Day at West Oxford Community Centre for Jan 6th, 2019.

Charles Dowding gave our annual talk on "No Dig, how to extend the season". There was a full house at West Oxford Community Centre. It was expensive but he was an excellent speaker and our costs were covered by ticket prices which included drinks and nibbles. Some gardening 'myths were bust' and all were encouraged to mulch whenever possible for an easier, more productive plot. Many commented that they had heard something new to take away and try.

Attendees also complemented the seasonal vegetarian food prepared by Tom and Vladmira from The Tumbling Bay Café. In January ODFAA hosted our second **Pennard Potato and Plants Fair** at the West Oxford Community Centre. The shorter duration of 3 hours attracted over 450 visitors and there is a real allotment buzz about the event. ODFAA agreed to NSALG's request for an information stall and had some discussions with them about insurance.

Centenary

Phil Baker reported progress with our centenary history with reading and research in minutes from ODFAA and OCC back to 1919. Unfortunately, we heard that our Lottery bid to fund publication and printing was unsuccessful. Our councillor suggested associations asked local ward councillors for a financial contribution from their annual grants. The hard copy might be 'illustration-light' but we could add to the electronic copies for the website. 4 affiliated associations did not contribute a written history for their site.

A Draft of 'Centenary Publication' was available for inspection at the January meeting and an updated will be available at the April meeting. Some photos and illustrations have been added and we will also be developing an online version for sites to add to their section. Publication is likely to be in the autumn ready for the August 21st. The Committee await ideas or support for a good title. We think every site is mentioned in the publication and there are probably some surprises in store.

Phil reports on what we have on the table at present.

- First up, and probably not dependent on anyone going to Grenoble, May 10th would be a tree planting somewhere on one of the sites - unless it's felt 'neutral' ground would be more politic - to mark the 30-yr. anniversary of this twinning arrangement. We would need to buy the tree as well.
- Second, we have an offer of a street stall (free + small gazebo) during the Big Green Day Out on Sat 8th June to promote allotments in general and the centenary. We would need to provide table and materials to display - the latter needing some further thought - and bodies to staff it.
- Third, publication of the centenary booklet - which could be tied to the Aug date or before.
- Fourth, the anniversary date and event(s) on Aug 21.
- Fifth, the allotments' competition.
- There may other things individual associations are planning but not aware of anything other than the possible Fairacres 'link' to the Grenoble visit.

In all, that sounds quite a good mix and probably enough to be going on with - assuming the AGM supports 2 and 4.

We will put a short media brief together so once the list is confirmed the local 'outlets' have the list for their forward diary of events. We can then do any further targeted release(s) as needed - and I'm assuming OCC would want at least one to be joint with them.

Centenary Allotment Competition

Tim Treacher reported on details of the reviewed categories and prizes and members for supported having the 2019 centenary competition. The best site winner would receive the Alderman Knight Shield with £300 and runner up £100. The Challenge Trophy winner would receive £100 and runner up £50. Other categories would have a £50 winner with a 25 runner up. Highly Commended and New Allotment holder certificates will continue.

The committee pursued aims to have a with centenary prizes, given this has been a persistent part of our history! The chair suggests a re-structure, akin to one proposed by a judge some years back, which would share administration more fairly between the committee and associations. Associations would select and submit 1 entry per category in at least three of the five categories. Each category will have a winner and a runner-up, bigger prizes and the competition have a cycle of 3-5 yrs., had agreed to be judges. An Allotments Competition Sub-Committee was formed of Tim Treacher and Ian Sheppard, with Mike Kent and Tina Mould as judges and they would make recommendations to the September ALM. The chair will do photos as usual. Associations need to return trophies.

Tim Treacher recapped on competition information In January and asked for advice about whether to continue including new plot holders. The competition sub-committee wondered how to apply this if competition is only run every three years and concluded they would like to include these with certificates, as these were always well received. The draft Competition paperwork (invitation letter, details and forms) will come to the next ALM meeting with the intention to send it out to Associations afterwards. The deadline for entries will be around 24th May and judging dates in June and September will be published. Judges will Mike Kent and Tina Mould assess the site category on both visits.

The Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme (OxFAS)

was ongoing and ODFAA was supporting 3 sites in joint meetings with a solicitor and at times OCC, to ensure associations and sites were protected. The Environment Agency would cover all legal costs but much of the work is confidential. ODFAA reminded EA of their commitment to explore ditch and drain work north of the channel as 40% of plots in the city were in the flood plain. The scheme may impact several allotment sites by taking longer for flood water to dissipate and drain away.

Oxford-Grenoble link

Oxford City Council informed us that they will celebrate its 30th anniversary in 2019. Since 1989 there have been regular exchanges between Oxford and Grenoble and in 2019, Oxford be running a host of activities under the headline of 'Let's GROW'. ODFAA were asked to join in and we proposed visiting the Botanic gardens and/or the Harcourt Arboretum; presenting the visitors with some 'Oxfordshire' heritage apple maidens (assuming these can travel 'cross border'); and allotment site visits. Grenoble proposed they would like someone to travel over for the 10th May when they propose a visit to one of the gardens, a tree planting (Malus Evereste) with small commemorative plaque, lunch, seeds exchange (they would particularly like some sage and runner beans) and general socialising. We will update at the meeting. Fairview has been involved in this in the past.