

Chair Wendy Skinner Smith wendy@wendyskinnersmith.co.uk Cripsey Meadow AA **Treasurer** John Lardner, johnlardner@hotmail.com Eden Drive AA **Minute Secretary** Nick Jackson najackson@btinternet.com OSTNB AA **Committee Members** Roy Leach Kestrel Crescent AA Phil Baker St Clements AA Alan Milosevic Court Place Farm AA

The Committee usually meet about 4/5 times, but, this year they met 15 times, in part or whole, including 4 meetings with OCC officers. The committee worked as follows-

- Wendy did agendas, updated the web site, managed disputes/ complaints, liaised with OCC and councillors, booked October speaker, helped with all centenary events, kept our archives and co- wrote ODFAAs Centenary book 'A Growing Concern', produced lease reports and summaries. She designed, the ODFAA banner, allotments display material, and the centenary book. Many of the photos are from her personal collection and ODFAA competitions. Wendy/ Phil submitted application for 2019 National Lottery Award.
- John kept our accounts, worked with associations and Zurich to renew association insurance, updated our databases, communicated with associations via email. John always helps with events.
- Nick did our minutes secretary, is GDPR controller, liaised with EA re OXFAS, advised associations on water harvesting, designed our informative ODFAA city allotment map and printed our display material.
- Phil researched 100 years of archives, OCC photos and printers, wrote the initial 16-page summary and the brief history of Oxford allotments for 'A Growing Concern'. He managed the Grenoble Liaison Link, helped organise OCCs Green Day and St Michael's Eco Fair. He has been a vital contributor to negotiations about our new agreement with OCC. Phil managed the latest revision of our OCC rules. He helped with all events.
- Roy helped with the attendance record and labels at ALMs and the Eco Fair.
- Alan Milosevic joined us briefly for lease discussions and to discuss Court Place Farms plans.

2020-2021 committee

The committee has had too few people doing too much. This concern has been reported to ALM for some years. The 2021 agreement with OCC needs to recognise ODFAA's role and this will probably need to change to support associations in what we anticipate will be a more secure and sustainable relationship with OCC. We recommend ODFAA needs c.10 committee members to move us forward. This year we have explored requiring larger sites to contribute an ODFAA committee member. We dismissed this as impractical, but it will be revisited if number drop again! The January ALM saw 4 members-Jenny Wright, Jane Millar, Leonard Bowora and Julie Brocklesby- offer to stand.

- Nick and Phil are willing to stand as **co-chairs**. This would facilitate continuity, but others can stand. Phil attended the most recent OCC Green Spaces Meeting.
- John Lardner is willing to stand again as **treasurer**. We would welcome assistance with insurance, and the other paperwork we anticipate will come with the new agreement.
- **Communication**- John manages our contact list and email distribution for ALMs and newsletters. Wendy writes **Newsletters** and this will need to be covered from April if it is to continue.
- ALM and ODFAA Committee meeting **Minute Secretary** – Jenny Wright (Barton Fields) nominated.
- **Association Disputes Resolution**. Disputes can take an inordinate amount of time, tact and information. Roy Leach is willing to stand again and manage this work.
- We need a database **manager**- John does this presently. It compiles association contacts/ condition surveys/ member and plot information. This informs all our work with associations.
- **Website manager**. Jane Millar (East Ward AA) nominated. We use WEBS.com and our domain was renewed in November 2019. Manager presently updates update minutes, papers, events, photos etc and re-directs correspondence. – these are usually problems in contacting associations or complaints.
- We need an **event's organiser**. Annual talks, Green events, Pennard Plants are established.
- **Allotment Competition** organiser may be a separate post? We have a file of existing paperwork and criteria which could be used as a base for a new celebration of allotments. It needs a fresh look.

Communication and working with Oxford City Council.. Client Officers

Stuart Fitzsimmons, previously Head of OxfordDS Parks and Emma Gubbins, Senior Surveyor, were our 2019 Oxford City Council Client Officers. Stuart has been our Client Officer since 2008. He attended and alternately chaired ALMs, managed the reactive maintenance/grant budget and was OCC's allotment contact for the past 3 yrs. Stuart changed His Oxford City Council job last summer and he no longer works for Parks. He will cease to be our allotment contact after March 10th. We will organise a thankyou card signing and gift at the April ALM. Emma Gubbins manages agreements and rent reviews and any matters arising. Both had responsibility for oversight of OCC's allotment provision. In December 2018 ODFAA requested that a Client Officer be part of the Communities team, given the allotment provision is managed by volunteers. We have been concerned about the public accountability of a Client Officer in OxfordDS. We met OCC officer, Ian Brookes, in 2018 and asked for clarity about the Client Officer's due diligence and the council's future commitment to allotments. We have been disappointed with his communication on this matter. We understand we will have a new Client Officer for our April 7th ALM?

Cllr Louise Upton has been our **allotment councillor** since June 2018. She has responsibility for 'Healthy Oxford'. She has attended 4 meetings with ODFAA /OCC committees and 1 ALM. In the Minutes of a full council meeting on Monday 27 January 2020 Alistair Morris, who is standing as a green party candidate in the County Council elections for Marston and Northway, asked a question on Climate Change and Allotments. This received a verbal response from Councillor Upton. mycouncil.oxford.gov.uk/documents/g5188/Public%20minutes%20Monday%2027-Jan-2020%2017.00%20Council.pdf?T=11 P54

ODFAA and the devolved management of allotments by associations has a long history so it we are sorry that this neither showed any recognition of who has the lion's share of managing sites. OCC is taking on more specific responsibilities as a result of ODFAA negotiations for the 2020 agreement but in the 2018 APSE report Oxford fell into one of the lowest categories for local authority financing of allotments. We do not yet know what / or even if OCC is contributing funding to these 'new responsibilities. We know that the present allotment budget of c. £21,000, is made up entirely from allotment land / site rents and it will not stretch far. We also know that Allotment Association's increase in **actual** responsibilities for the maintenance and development of sites will mean that members' plot costs will inevitably increase. ODFAA is aware that allotments are a complex mix of public and private realm and it has been explicit in its understanding of the increasing demands and limited funding for local authority budgets. It has been actively working with associations for over 10 years to increase their practical and financial independence. Ian Brookes praised us for this in 2008 in his one visit to the ALM.

Association's and the Tenancy Agreement and Rules. ALM representatives have been repeatedly advised to ensure that the committee fulfils the responsibilities agreed in OCCs present tenancy agreement and rules. If the paperwork is not available, as can happen with committee changeover, copies are available from OCC officer, Emma Gubbins. All associations must have a document (constitution and /or rules) which explains how they will manage the site and members in accordance with the terms of the agreement. The ALM agreed in September 2018 that these would be copied to ODFAA. We have not had all copies in.

ODFAA Membership fee

In April 2018 plot holders numbered 2414 and surprisingly the April 2019 return show a drop to 2093? This is surprising as most associations have commented on an increase in numbers and younger members. We should include some diversity monitoring in our sheets in the ODFAA annual returns. This year the ODFAA membership fee increases to 50p from 40p, the first increase since 2009. Associations have been made aware that this would probably need to change again once the agreement is fixed. ODFAA has needed access to professional legal opinion over the past few years and we need a budget for this.

Allotment Association Public Liability Insurance

Only members of ODFAA can benefit from this joint insurance renewal. ODFAA prepares the papers for association returns to ODFAA. ODFAA pays the premium which is reimbursed from the allotment budget. ODFAA cannot give insurance advice and associations are advised that they are responsible for the interpretation of the public liability policy. They also need to keep plot holders informed. Some associations still have the false impression that their ODFAA subscription (50p) pays for the insurance. It does not. It means the association is an ODFAA member and

can partake in this insurance which is paid from the Allotment Budget. In this way large associations support smaller ones. This is not plot holder insurance – it is public / employer's liability which protects the association. NAS plot holder / association membership does come with plot holder's personal liability insurance. NAS Chief executive Liz Bunting has offered to come to a future ALM meeting to talk to associations about the benefits of NAS membership

Grants

In March 2019 £3626 remained in the reactive maintenance budget 2018 -2019. As usual this was released to associations to fulfil the commitment to spend our allotment budget unless something else needs the money before the end of Financial year. Details of awards can be found in the [April ALM minutes](#). OCC/ODFAA recommended and ALM agreed the criteria for the 2019-2020 grants should be security, sustainability, accessibility, composting and water harvesting. There were six applications and successful awards are reported in the [September ALM minutes](#). All applications met with grant conditions and criteria. After the 2014 rent review OCC agreed to ODFAAs request that the Allotment Budget would be ring-fenced, and any unused reactive maintenance grant be returned to associations. The future reactive maintenance is planned for tree management, but we are looking to have this principal of ringfencing confirmed and continued.

ODFAA Databases

ODFAA initiated data collection from associations in 2007 as we could find no record of an OCC database of allotment provision, plot availability, membership, waiting lists, and site facilities and condition. We needed information to move forward and identify problems and solutions. We do not **monitor** allotments; we record the data given to us by associations. We do not assess it. OCC c/would not commit to a condition survey as part of the allotment agreement and rent review negotiations and since 2007 we have been willing to share this confidentially to OCC- but we have never seen any positive evidence of its use. A couple of associations do not complete annual returns as required and ODFAA needs to show more diligence in following these up. Association Annual Returns and Condition surveys prior to rent and agreement renewals are part of our agreement discussions with OCC. OCC need to show due diligence in their legal responsibilities as a landlord.

Site Asset registers, Maintenance Management Plans

A question about what to do if a fence or gate was damaged was raised at the January ALM? This showed that some associations have not made progress with asset registers as advised in early 2018. Allotment Associations cash holding is crucial to associations' ability to maintain the site and survive cash crises and fund improvements. A shortage of cash is the biggest single threat to the success of devolved management, particularly in small sites. In every society the first call is on money needed to operate the site i.e. annual running costs and payment for – site rent, water (if piped), minor repairs, mowing, internal tree work, key deposits. Another call on cash is for maintenance and renewal over the term of the agreement, – a sinking fund for large items like machinery, fences, ditches with both banks in the site, gates, hedges pipes or water harvesting. An asset register and maintenance plan are needed to work out potential costs over 21 years. An example of an association asset register was circulated in September 2019. Since then an association has reported it has worked on asset register, maintenance plans and depreciation costs, contingency and a sinking fund. It anticipates they will need to taper an 80% increase in plot fees over 2 years. The 2018 Apse State of the Market Survey of Allotments noted "In 2018 38% of respondents now state that they will be continuing to increase allotment costs over the next five years and a further 30% replied that they were currently reviewing allotment costs.

Water

Nick and others from Botley Meadow (OSTNB) hosted visits and answered enquiries from several associations keen to emulate their solar powered water harvesting scheme. These included Spragglesea Mead & Deans Ham, Court Place Farm, Trap Grounds, and Cripsey Meadow. Several similar schemes are now up and

running or will be shortly. It is reassuring that associations have heeded warnings about the future effects of climate change and the demands on water supply. Many associations have used grants for improving water harvesting, particularly rainwater harvesting.

Centenary Events

May 1 Poterne Garden, Grenoble. Visit to Pullen's Lane AA and Seed Swap. The Oxford-Grenoble link was celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2019. The theme was 'Lets Grow' and ODFAA was invited to participate. Phil Baker organised this with a visit to Pullen's Lane, and a seed swap.

May 10 At 12.00 midday at Elder Stubbs Allotments and 13.00 local time at Poterne Gardens in Grenoble, crab apple trees were planted, and plaques were erected to mark both the 30th Anniversary of the Oxford-Grenoble Link and the ODFAA Centenary. [ODFAA tree planting with Oxford's twin city, Grenoble.](#)

May 17 12 allotment associations and 70 allotment holders entered Centenary Allotments' Competition.

June 8 Cripsey Meadow Plant stall at Jericho Street Fair raised c.£400 for the association

June 8 ODFAA booked a stall at the **Big Green Day Out on Broad St**, Oxford. Wendy designed a new pop-up banner; Nick designed a new Oxford Allotment Map and Phil and Wendy packed with display material ready for the day BUT it was cancelled the day before. Storms were forecast. Next year we should be there.

June 17 Competition Unfortunately Tina Mould was unable to help with Judging. Tim Treacher judged with Mike Kent, Ian Sheppard recorded results and Wendy took the photos. For committee information competition judging days are one of the [best ways to see lots of allotment sites](#) across the city in a day.

July A Growing Concern went to print. In writing the history of ODFAA we understand that we are possibly the oldest federation in the country, and it has been rewarding to note that in our centenary year all of the 35 working allotment sites in the city were members, possibly for the first time? From a mainly trading starting point the Federation's overall aim nowadays is strong and sustainable Oxford allotments. Its practical job is to represent, inform, support and encourage all its associations and, through them, ploholders. We had anticipated a 'green printing' but the quality of support, reprographics, binding and cost meant that we went back to Kalkwik, who produced a Limited Edition of 250. [Thanks to all for site contributions.](#)

Aug 11 Open day Lenthall Rd Centenary Day celebration.

Aug 19 Elder Stubbs Festival and competition. [ODFAA borrowed Cripsey Meadows event shelters for their stall](#) at the Festival. This is a wonderful city allotment event which deserves its many supporters.

Aug 21 [ODFAAs 100th Birthday](#) was celebrated by 70+ attendees from ODFAA members and special guests on Wendy's plot on Cripsey Meadow. We celebrated the publication in style with some going onto the late evening around a bonfire! [There are more photos on the web site](#)

Aug 24 - Open day and BBQ at South Ward allotments

September 16 [The final competition judging day.](#) The results were agreed by the competition committee.

September 23 ODFAA ALM representatives were invited to [Lord Mayors reception in the Lord Mayor's Parlour](#). Many thanks are due to Craig Simmons and Louise Upton for OCC's celebration of ODFAA.

October 28th [ODFAAs Competition Award Evening](#) was held at West Oxford Community. See [November Newsletter](#) A centenary competition was a fitting part of our centenary celebration given its persistent part in our history. We re-structured so that administration was shared between ODFAA and associations and this proved much more efficient. Thanks are due to Tim Treacher and Ian Sheppard, who were the Allotments Competition Sub-Committee and to Mike Kent for judging and Wendy for photos and certificates. [Final results and awards](#) Due to reporting on the web site ODFAA was contacted by [the Stone family who have donated a cup](#) with an annual award to ODFAA. ODFAA holds [a competition information file](#) for future reference.

November 23rd ODFAA were invited to have a stall at An ECO fair 'How to do Climate Change' St Michael & All Angels Church Lonsdale Rd. . Phil, Roy and Wendy managed the stall between 11.00-14.30

November 30th Val Bourne 'The Natural Gardener' had been booked for our Autumn talk at WOCC. Unfortunately, she had to cancel at the last minutes as for personal reasons. John returned tickets.

2020 January 5th 10am - 1.30pm, our [third Pennard Potato and Plants Fair](#) at WOCC. We shortened the time available and it was very busy. We are awaiting confirmation of numbers, but John took down lots of information from visitors and Wendy sold books and answered queries. Next year we need to make sure we have a clicker for numbers. ODFAA are paid a small % on the number of sales which offsets our hall costs.

2021-2042 Allotment Agreement

Negotiations for our new Tenancy Agreement from March 2021 with Oxford City Council continue. ODFAA is mandated in its constitution to negotiate with OCC on behalf of their members. All Oxford City allotments are members of ODFAA. The process has thrown up many issues about the future of allotments which have required more information and research. Oxford City Council was unwilling to commit to a condition survey of each site or develop an allotment strategy, as requested by ODFAA and as stated in The Green Spaces document for 2017 and advised in Local Government advice on allotments. In these days of rapidly changing political times and housing shortage ODFAA decided that we must make the agreement more secure. Since March 2018 ODFAA's committee has met on 8 different occasions with OCC Client Officers: a senior surveyor and the (now ex) Head of Parks, OxfordDS. We are awaiting news from OCCs Ian Brookes about our replacement Client Officer. ODFAA have requested they be in the Communities team, given that Allotment Associations and Oxford's allotment provision is managed by volunteers. Councillor Louise Upton, our allotment Councillor, has supported this request.

In September 2019 the Council solicitor produced a first draft Agreement based on the current model. This was followed by proposed revisions to the OCC Allotment Rules. After discussion with Members, on-line and at ALM, ODFAA made initial comment on the content and implications of the draft documents at the end of 2019. ODFAA has explored more options in order to plan for the next 21 years and the ODFAA committee decided they needed to access further information and legal guidance, encouraged by OCC, in order to be sure that the options were understood fully and that the most appropriate recommendation could be made to the Member Associations. From the beginning, there has been a stated willingness by OCC and the ODFAA to find a positive way forward for the next 21 years, but continuing uncertainty and lack of clarity over key issues such as current/future budget allocations, the management of trees, ditches, council owned buildings, asbestos rooves, insurance and the pros & cons of 'lease' or 'licence', have meant that matters are behind schedule as we go into the final year of the existing Agreement.

To pursue advice two members of the executive committee, Wendy Skinner Smith and Phil Baker, met first with Freeth's solicitors in January 2020, on a 'mates rates' basis, organised by Cripsey Meadow. Manda Joyce and Wendy Skinner Smith of Cripsey Meadow/ODFAA chair, accompanied by Phil Baker of ODFAA then met with NAS Legal and Operations Manager, Liz Bunting. Both proved extremely useful and we are making progress.

We know that there will be more financial responsibility on allotment associations for the maintenance of their assets, including large items like fences, gates, and tracks and any development and associations have been asked to plan for this and **must** develop an asset register and maintenance plans to ensure they have the income to manage this expenditure. More groups are applying for external funding, so money is tighter.

The committee concluded that sufficient evidence was now available to draft a recommendation to the Members on the nature and content of the new Agreement we would like to see. A briefing went to associations in mid-February for response by March 3rd. - See **February ODFAA Briefings for 'ODFAA recommendations on the new Allotment Agreement, Allotment Rules 2021- 2042 and implications for Allotment Associations'**.

By the time this report was sent out we had received 20/28 returns from committees with a with overwhelming support for a lease, with land registry registration and incorporation. We await returns from Barns Court, Bartholomew, Brasenose, JGW, Bartlemas, Ramsay Road, Town Furze, Upper Wolvercote. ODFAA committee met OCC officers on March 10th and set in train this change of direction. We also met Michael Woods, a member of the Communities team who will be our new Client Officer and will attend our ALM on March 17th. Michael will be introduced by Stuart Fitzsimmons so we will have an opportunity to say goodbye and thanks. We have met with nominated committee members and look forward to seeing you all at the AGM on April 7th. At this vital time for the future of Oxford Allotments future please ensure you make it to the AGM and ALM.

[...A Farewell from Wendy..](#)