

## Fairacres Road Allotment Association Annual General Meeting

7. 30 p.m.      29<sup>th</sup> February 2024, Gladiators' Club, Iffley Road, Oxford.

### Present:

**Committee:** Rosemary Cameron, Margaret Thompson, Jo Burch, Paul Knox-Clarke, Jason Downing, Rachel Wheatley, Christopher Upton, Kris Allan. Apologies, David Morris.

**Members:** Liz Hodgson, Anne Carter, Susanne Gimson, Marc Thompson, Tim Wolstenholme, Clive Lindley – Jones, Cathy Ferreira, Niki Sporrang, Connie McDermott, Jane Fisher, Simon Fisher, Rodas Irving, Janet Hall (at 8.25pm).

**Apologies:** Sue Clark, Adrian Teunissen, Melissa Rodd, Jamie Castell, Julia Hollander, Paul Hopkins, Polly Woolstone, Jane King, Anna Barnett, Brian Hills

**Welcome:** Paul Knox-Clarke introduced the Committee members and welcomed the attendees before:

**Review of Minutes** and actions arising from AGM held 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2023. There were no corrections. Matters arising: The proposed Whatsapp group was set up by Jo Burch and is flourishing – anyone wanting to join should speak to Jo.

Bees – Chris Upton reported that two colonies have formed but died- substantial number of cones were removed. A new colony should form in May.

Buying a shredder – subject of a later discussion.

### Membership Secretary Report – Rosemary Cameron

Over the last year, six plots have been re-let. There are no vacant plots coming up.

The waiting list is now down to 24 people. Several people who were offered plots in 2023 turned them down or did not respond. The wait time is around three years.

The committee discussed the terminology and decided that 'plot check' was less daunting than 'inspection.' We started a simple traffic light system to simplify the process:

- Green – good condition – this applies to the majority of plots
- Amber – minor improvements needed, the precursor to a warning
- Red – in need of serious work, a warning

The committee emailed anyone in the amber and red categories and follow-up inspections were carried out a month or so later.

Working parties have been well-attended and very friendly and enjoyable.

The WhatsApp group has been very useful for informal communication between members.

Discussion: Unfortunately, one or two plot holders only seem to work on their plot if there is a plot check planned – that is frustrating when we have a waiting list. Tim W was in favour of tougher action. Paul said that there is a difficulty in that the Rules and the Constitution are inconsistent and need to be re-aligned. There is hesitation about this because of likely future constitutional issues to be discussed later.

### Treasurer's Report - Jason Downing

Our bank balance stands at £10,471.74 with rent of £2,055 collected so far. We have 23 plot holders who have not yet paid their rent with a reminder scheduled to go out in mid-March. The outstanding value is worth £620 which would leave our account at £11,091.74. This compares favourably with the end of March 2023 (after rents were paid) where the account stood at £9,231.52 (+ £1,860.22).

Last year our water bill came in lower than expected at around £250 and we retain an excess in our account of £160 with the water company (Castles Water). We paid ODFAA £75 for insurance (150 members x 50p), around £150 to the council as rent and £48 for indemnity insurance for our trustees. Small amounts covered incidentals of the day to day running of the site. Polly made £86 for the association through the usual seed order with Kings. Although discussed, no major work was undertaken and nor large equipment purchased. On a cash basis, after all rents are paid, the running of the site will have cost around £900.

As an allotment association with smaller plot sizes we continue to plan to hold a £5,000 surplus in case of accidents or emergencies. In addition, we hold a liability for plot deposits of £1,600. After the usual running costs in the coming year, this leaves us with disposable cash funds of around £3,000.

**Discussion:** As we do collect a substantial quantity of timber and brash the question of buying a shredder, or hiring one, was discussed. £750 to buy, £200 to hire approximately. About half those present believed in leaving material to benefit the habitat, half would shred and so use it for soil improvement and other purposes - clearly a balance of both is possible. It was agreed to leave the current pile to continue decomposing, but start a new pile near the gate for eventual chipping. The Committee will seek to hire a chipper once a substantial amount of material has accumulated.

**Rent** – no change is needed as we have sufficient funds, but we are aware of a hold-over figure from the 2022 AGM and this will be implemented in 2025.

#### **Boundary Hedges and Fences:**

It should be possible to have walking access to all the boundaries, but many plot-holders pile matter, often heavy items, against the fence which will be damaged by them. The expensive chain-link fence was provided by the council. A reminder will be sent to ask people not to use the fence in this way and to be aware that everyone is responsible for maintaining their own boundary (internally.)

#### **Oxford and District Federation of Allotment Associations (ODFAA) update**

A report was circulated to all members by Rosemary, who had attended the most recent meeting.

Some time ago, Oxford City Council proposed a new 21-year lease and site rules to commence in 2021. ODFAA started work on this in 2018 so that leases would be ready to sign in 2021 - but so far, they are not. The sticking point has been responsibility for fencing and gates repair and replacement. ODFAA had thought this was resolved after a meeting with OCC in December but the outcome of that meeting has still not emerged from the Town Hall.

In future in order to comply with the new lease all allotments will either need to incorporate as a company or become co-operatives. If they don't then two trustees have to be willing to stand considerable financial risk in the event of something happening on site that causes a legal claim against them.

Eden Drive Allotments took the decision to become a co-operative using the ODFAA template a year ago. They have submitted the first round of accounts to the FCA and got a couple of further rule changes passed by the FCA. Their chair is very happy to offer advice on the whole process. Further information can be seen on the ODFAA website and Rosemary suggested we appoint a sub-committee to take this further.

**Discussion:** this has been an issue for some years now. It was agreed that we ask one or two members to work together to put a fact sheet/proposal for circulation to all members, and that an

Extraordinary General Meeting is called later this year to agree action. As no-one present was able to take this on, we will email all members to ask for help.

There were no **Members' Submissions**.

**Election of Officers.**

Rachel, Margaret, Jo, Rosemary and Kris are willing to continue. Paul and Jason are standing down.

**Nominations –**

Paul Hopkins had expressed a willingness to come back to the Chair position for a year. He was nominated by Marc Thompson, seconded by Jo Burch.

Anne Kitson had agreed to be nominated to be Treasurer. She was nominated by Marc Thompson, seconded by Rosemary Cameron.

Trustee position – As Christopher Upton is to leave Britain in the autumn he needs to give up the Trusteeship he has held for many years. We must have more than one – David Morris – and the meeting was asked for volunteers. None were forthcoming- Christopher kindly agreed to continue while he can but Members will be asked to consider taking on this responsibility which is not onerous. The Committee was given the authority to appoint a Trustee,

**Any Other Business.**

Orchard oversight – David Morris is to step back from this and we are discussing his replacement. We are all very grateful for David's work.

Seeds are to be found in the shed- they are for everyone to take.

The business meeting closed at about 9p.m but members stayed on while Christopher talked on the benefits of the natural management of pests in the soil and above.