

Minutes: Osney, St Thomas & New Botley Allotments Association committee

7 October 2018

Attending: Anne, Sue, Jude, Nick, Pol, Elizabeth, Phil, Verity, Janet

Apologies: Sheila, Pierre, Cathy

1. **Minutes from 19 August** agreed as correct.

2. **Matters arising** from 19 August that are not covered in the agenda:

- **Taking forward ideas from AGM.** Nick needs others to take this on as he is fully occupied with issues linked to the lease and to liaison with the Environment Agency about the planned flood alleviation scheme. Anne and Verity agreed to take the two issues on and will work with the TPM group on developing a proposal.
- **Health & Safety best practice** – Nick was not able to identify best practice recommendations via the Federation but will continue to seek national advice. Local discussion of Health and Safety issues continue - for example, the TPM group had a complaint about wasps, checked on insurance requirements, and then informed the complainant this was a matter for individual plot holders.

3. **TPM & BM Rent renewal process review**

In general, rent renewal went well. Thanks to providing signs to plot holders, many plots are now correctly numbered with neighbours doing so, too. BM people did attend in person (rather than, as had happened previously, sending lump sum rentals for several plot holders). However, generating TPM lists was complex and slow, with the final list still to be agreed and about 25 people (c. 10% of the membership) still unaccounted. As there are 10 people on the TPM waiting list, allocating plots remains a problem. **Action: Jude** to write to TPM list of names listed as nonpayers, setting 20 October as the final cut-off date; Nick to summarise and update the final master list as soon as possible after 20 October. [Master list completed] Because of the level and time demands (see above), the committee discussed and agreed to levy a late-payment fine of £10 which can be waived at the committee's discretion. [Note: rules state that cut-off date for renewal is end of September.]

On rental Sundays, many people did not present rent cards, meaning there is no 'receipt' for payment, should disputes arise. On the day, Sheila had noted people who did not present books and asked if they agreed with her records.

4. **Financial matters and current accounts**

We did not formally review the finances, post-rent, but Nick (Association Secretary) saw no cause for concern. He noted several outstanding receipts and in particular, the as-yet uncollected grant from Thames Water. He expected all documents with the Treasurer would be processed in the near future.

There followed an informal report/discussion on the TPM water project, managed by Pete Feenan with the help of a growing number of TPM members. Pete was commended for his efforts to communicate and consult as decisions arose, and to monitor costs. One recent suggestion was to reduce the number of barrels from 3 to 2. **Action: Nick, Pol and Phil** to meet with Pete and agree revisions to his plans and to reinforce the decision to not exceed the agreed £1500 contribution to the project from Association funds, which will supplement the Thames Water grant. – Action completed

The Association recently purchased an event shelter. It is kept at the shop and available for both sites – currently being kept on Botley Meadow site. Contact Nick or Pól for access

A card reader is in use in the shop and its availability is publicised on the website. The card reader is for shop purchases only, not for on-line payments.

5. Feedback from Oxford and District Federation of Allotment Associations

The review and preparations for the 2021 Oxford Allotments Council Rent Review have begun with negotiations expected to take two years. Discussions will cover rents for sites (likely to rise but not by much); responsibility for infrastructure (for example, for trees, fences, ditches, hedges, and so on.); and allocation of allotment-specific funding (i.e. ways to ensure the Council is ring-fencing money designated for allotments and only releasing it to associations and/or for allotment-specific grants).

Several issues were identified and/or clarified. Lease negotiations have been 100% devolved to Oxford City Council, a unique situation in the UK. The negotiations are about a license to occupy allotment sites rather than a lease, meaning allotment associations have fewer rights than would be the case if they were tenants. Although many Associations have designated trustees, this is not a legal entity and designated signatories will sign the final agreement. Finally, all discussions take place in a context of very tight resources, meaning associations need to carefully review and if possible, reduce their expenditure.

One issue was trees and the necessity to feed back to the Council on the number on our boundaries, how many are outside boundaries but cause problems such as shading or potential health and safety concerns, the impact of external trees shading plots and thereby making them unrentable, and how many trees, overall, the association is managing. **Action: Jude and Janet** to conduct an audit on TPM; Nick to supply aerial photos and preliminary tree counts. – Action completed – aerial photos supplied

The ODFAA celebrates its centenary in 2019. Each association is asked for a one-page potted history, which will be combined into a publication to be issued at an event in the Town Hall, alongside prizes and competitions. For TPM & BM, Elizabeth suggested a book based on history, photos, children's stories/drawings, and perhaps recipes. It could be issued at an Open Day in late 2019. **Action: Elizabeth** to produce a proposal at the next committee meeting with costs and dates.

The OxFas (Flood alleviation strategy) has now generated maps of proposed changes, although timings are unknown. There will be minimal disruption to TPM due to making a small bund behind the gates, meaning cars drive over the 'hump'. Gates may or may not need replacement. Bund construction may include topsoil removal on the TPM top field, thereby aiding the proposed instatement of a wildflower meadow. **Action: Nick** to keep wildflower project informed.

On BM, a permanent flood wall 1.5 metres high is proposed, requiring revisiting the car park resurfacing of a few years ago, plus the creation of three new plots to replace land lost to the flood wall. On behalf of the Trustees Nick will sign an agreement with the Environment Agency after the Fed engaged a solicitor to review the proposal (note: the EA will pay all legal costs) and the agreement states that the EA will ensure reinstatement as agreed. Trustees now need to meet and agree that Nick can act on their behalf in these proceedings and can sign the agreement **Action: Nick**.

Finally, Nick stated he planned to take on a broader ODFAA role in future as the current chair has indicated she plans to step down once the lease negotiations with OCC are complete. This is likely to be in 2020 and at that point Nick would then stand down from Association Secretary duties. The

committee needs to consider issues of longer term succession planning and also noted several other resignations, meaning the committee is now low on skills and low in numbers. **Action:** All to seek out new people who might be co-opted.

6. **Twenty Pound Meadow report (TPM sub-committee)**

The TPM subgroup met in September. Issues discussed which are of wider concern including the current Field Secretary is stepping down, so an alternative needs to be found, and cancellation the end-of-year event due to bad weather. The pruning course is fully booked and Sheila will offer a master course on composting at an unspecified future date.

Discussions at the 7 October (full committee) meeting covered

- Plot rentals. **Action:** Jude to ask Gus to 'push' BM plots, as there are vacancies there.
- Bonfires. They continue to cause occasional problems. Some feel entitled to setting fires because there were work party fires earlier in the year. TPM asked to continue to review the situation.
- A written complaint about stealing identified neither the complainant nor alleged thieves, so no further action was taken.
- The toilets. TPM was asked to investigate how the new water system will impact on plumbing for the toilet. **Action:** Verity to source a new lock and to lock the toilets with a key when the water is turned off.
- The assessment management plan. This is on going.

7. **Botley Meadow report (Nick/Pól/Phil)**

BM reports 'all is quiet'. The plot recovery scheme continues, with the help of Community Payback, and the Council has not yet responded to a notification of fallen willows needing attention. The water supply continues to work well.

8. **AOB**

Anne will investigate the impact for the TPM site of a local academic study on pollinators, undertaken as a citizens' project. She will report back to the next meeting. **Action:** Anne.

9. **Date and place of the next meeting**

Given the colder temperatures Jude will investigate room availability at WOCA and provide dates for Nick to do a Doodle poll for the best time – an evening but not Friday. The committee asks for a budget update to be circulated before the next meeting to facilitate discussion – **Action:** Sheila.