

Oxford and District Federation of Allotment Associations

Founded 1919 - Centenary Year 2019

working together for Oxford allotments

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Committee Members: Phil Baker St Clements Pullens Lane AA, Roy Leach Blackbird Leys Kestrel Crescent AA

March 25th, 2020

Dear Members,

I am sure you will not be surprised to know that we are cancelling ODFAA's AGM and the following ALM scheduled for Tuesday 7th April in the Town Hall, St Aldates, Oxford in line with advice on Covid-19.

I have had numerous enquiries asking for advice on **Covid-19** and I spoke to Liz Bunting, Legal and Operations Manager of NAS about this on March 17th. They [published their COVID-19 guidelines](#) and Liz drafted a letter to Simon Clarke MP Minister of State – Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. (MHCLG)- the department responsible for allotments. After the Prime Minister's instructions of 23rd of March, Michael Gove has specifically included allotments in the exercise regime, but it is vital associations reinforce guidelines for their members. It is vital that only one person, or two if they live together, are on their allotment and everyone else **keeps their distance**. No one can invite visitors or children who are not immediate members of their household to the allotment and the maximum number is two together.

ODFAA will continue to negotiate the **2021-2042 Agreement with OCC** with OCC and consult and keep you informed. We have made good progress with this following the association returns to the February consultation paper which were due in on March 3rd. Thank you for these. The majority of returns are in favour of a lease and incorporation, but 8 associations have not responded? It is clearly in everyone's interest to participate. We will report shortly but presently we are working with OCC on adapting NAS documentation – a OCC to Association Lease, a Service Level Agreement and an Association to Member Agreement. ODFAA will be working hard through the year to support associations as best we can, given the possible restrictions..

You need to complete ODFAA's annual return, insurance paperwork and member's payment before April 7 to comply with ODFAA membership and to benefit from grants (if you have an OCC lease) and or insurance. Returns must reach John before this date so that he can process the paperwork before the renewal on May 1st. Associations that do not have OCC leases and do not contribute to the allotment budget will have to pay their insurance fee. All associations who were successful in the March Grant applications should have been contacted about arrangements for payment.

ODFAA Committee Elections are a necessity and we will circulate a voting form to be returned by April 7th. Information on nominations will be on the form which will reference the AGM agenda items - i.e. the Annual Report, Treasurer's Report and Constitutional Changes. These were circulated last week. We will also give room for comments on the ALM Agenda items as proposed meetings and training will have to await COVID-19 advice. Each association has one vote for its first 100 members or part thereof, plus another for each additional 100 members or part thereof so your form will indicate will be aligned to your paid association fee members. Only paid up members will have voting rights. Mike Nunn, who inspects our accounts, has agreed to have independent oversight of the ballot returns given this will not be done 'in sight'. The present committee have recently met and corresponded with the proposed new members.

The ODFAA committee were introduced to our **new Client Officer, Michael Woods, a Green Spaces Development Officer in the Communities Team**, at the ODFAA/OCC liaison meeting on March 10th. We are pleased at this positive response to OCC officers and ODFAA's request to move to communities. This will hopefully ensure Oxford allotments have a firm place in OCC's structure, responsibility and accountability. Michael can be contacted on MWoods@oxford.gov.uk. We will ask Michael to circulate a summary of his brief as a client officer. At this meeting we were informed that £2000 of the reactive maintenance budget will be transferred to the communities team in order to cover any costs that may be incurred by Michael but that this will not reduce the committed spending on tree work will be managed by ODS who will undertake inspections

and any works required. We await details of the OCC survey of buildings but again it is possible this will be delayed by the present restrictions. It is likely that tree work and the OCC building maintenance will be clarified in the 'Service Level Agreement' .All queries relating to leases, land ownership, boundaries etc. should still be directed to **Emma Gubbins egubbins@oxford.gov.uk** within the Corporate Asset Team..

Association committees, the ODFAA committee and OCC officers will not be able to meet in person for some time and committees need to make **plans for continued communication and site notices**. **The present restrictions** will delay some changeovers and progress, but the new committee will let you know how ODFAA will be managing consultation, communication and decision making asap. We know that if there is a delay in the schedule of the new agreement, the present lease will hold until a new one takes its place.

2019 was an unusual year for growing with long periods of drought and rain and 2020 is proving uniquely demanding for many. The present day seems to be more akin to a war footing and we need to ensure that 'Allotments for Health' can continue safely. Members' allotments are important in keeping healthy and growing food. 40% of our members have plots in the Flood Plain so have been partially under water 4 and 5 times this winter and will only just have had access back to their plots. We all need to continue adapting to the Climate Emergency.

The strap line for the ODFAA web site is '**working together for Oxford allotments**'. I have had an unexpected, demanding and rewarding 14 years working with you all as your Chair and I have learnt a lot. Oxford has a thriving allotment provision which is improving year on year thanks to the hard work of our c.150 committee volunteers and members. I trust that your continued working together with a new committee, a new agreement, despite the present disturbing times will result in as many as possible enjoying a healthy and productive future. The committee know they can consult me as needed but this will be my last letter to you all. Keep up the good work and 'Dig for Health'.

Yours sincerely,

Wendy Skinner Smith

John Lardner, Nick Jackson, Phil Baker, Roy Leach

The April 2019-April 2020 Federation Committee