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2022 Autumn Newsletter

Dear Members

Apologies for the long silence, occasioned by a distinct lack of anything of substance to report.

We had hoped to schedule an ALM later this month or early October with a view to presenting the final version of the Lease for discussion and, hopefully, adoption. However, as a result of a singularly depressing meeting with OCC this last week, we will not do so now for reasons that will become apparent as you read on.



ODFAA/OCC meeting report

- As you will recall, we had refused to accept three sections of the draft Lease (and any corresponding sections in the Site Rules): the prohibition on sites cutting any trees except top fruit; the imposition of ODS as a monopoly supplier of future work on trees when needed; and, most important of all, the full future liability for replacing all fencing and gates.

In our conversation with OCC this week we were told that the `tree` issues have been resolved, but we wouldn't be able to see the revised text until the whole lease document was finalised. And there's the rub, as Hamlet mentioned, because we appear to be at stalemate over the `future capital spend` issue; we cannot accept the liability, OCC cannot or do not want to afford it. The Council cannot give any idea when this matter might be addressed, let alone settled; therefore, still no sign of the revised Lease & Rules.

- A bit of history, just in case - Denny Gardens, a 48 household development built on former Minchery Farm West allotments, was to have had a small area of about 20 plots fenced and retained as allotments in 2016. ODFAA had been involved initially in identifying possible committee members and plot holders but failure by OCC to provide a fixed water source led to the land remaining unoccupied and returning to nature. Renewed approaches to OCC in 2019 led to OCC clearing the ground and covering it in 2020, with a promise to have the water point installed. Spring of 2022, ground overgrown once more and still no water point – a sort of `long Covid` effect – we chased up once more and undertakings were given to remedy the situation asap. Summer of 2022, the site was broken into and two vehicles and occupants began squatting. The occupation has ended and once more nature is beginning to reclaim the ground. ODFAA lodged a formal complaint with the Council, subsequently escalated due to the non-response we first received. The second response, from Chris Bell, (Green and Blue Spaces Development Manager) has accepted our point that a formal apology should be made to the Denny Garden residents by OCC in the communications to follow when the site is finally `ready`.

At the meeting we asked when the water point would be installed and we could begin the process of trying to recruit plot holders and a committee. It appears the work is being held up because ODS and Thames haven't been able to agree a date they can both make. The one crumb of good news is that Thames Water have actually been paid to do the installation.

- As most, if not all, will recall, Minchery Farm East has been without a committee for some time and the site is under direct management of OCC. ODFAA has offered to take on interim management and recruit a new committee once outstanding disputes, that led to the resignation of the former committee, are addressed by OCC and settled. Inquiring as to when this might be, we were told that 'it's complicated' and could take well into next year before there was a likelihood of any movement. We don't know what, if any, support is being offered by the Council during this time.

It is doubly frustrating because we had hoped to discuss with residents of Denny gardens and plot holders of Minchery Farm, a proposal to merge management of the two sites under one committee, due to the small size of Denny Gardens and their physical proximity – an almost literal 'stone's throw' apart.

- We reminded OCC that the survey of all OCC-owned buildings across the sites had still not been completed and we expected a report on all of them when it was. This will be followed up by Caroline Chanides at OCC.
- We asked that notice is given before future tree surveys are scheduled, rather than entry made and being done without any contact or someone just turning up asking for entry. Logged, but no promises given.
- We asked for an update from Chris Bell on the review he has been doing of future development proposals and the provision of new allotments where significant housing is involved. Caroline will follow up.
- Oluyinka Awofisayo, who has been our 'OCC link' for lease and other legal matters, has now left. We await news of any replacement, but in the meantime Emma Gubbins, who many will know and who had previously been the main contact, will replace.
- We will share dates for a full schedule of OCC/ODFAA and ALM meetings in 2023, including our AGM in the spring. Covid and the frustrated expectation of the new lease has meant a long deferment, but we do need to reinstate normal business.

Ends.

Other issues

We will update Councillor Chewe Munkonge on the conversation, in his role as 'lead' for allotments.

As the Lease & Rules may not emerge before the year-end, we will schedule a short Zoom meeting in November so we can at least have a conversation and update each other. If the situation changes we will adjust plans accordingly.

If there are any immediate concerns about the on-going lack of the new lease, the run-on of the existing agreements continues unchanged; and a reminder that any change to incorporated status (Coop or Company) to remove the individual 'trustee' liabilities does not need to wait on the new lease.

We know some have been waiting on the outcome of our attempts to register a 'model' set of Coop Rules in place of the NAS set. On that, we have a bit of much needed good news as we recently heard our draft **has been largely accepted** and, after making minor modifications, we now await final confirmation by the FCA. We will update as soon as we hear.

Avoiding any hard sell - why not come and share the frustrations/joys and join the ODFAA Committee? We would be very pleased to hear from at least two people who would be willing to devote the extra bit of time to allotment business in Oxford. Please get in touch with either Phil – philbgood@hotmail.co.uk or Nick - najackson@btinternet.com

If any site needs to change the information that is posted about their association, either on the ODFAA website or on the OCC pages, we can effect both. If you use the address enquiry@odfaa.com you should expect to receive a response within the week.

Best wishes for a decent Autumn and a good harvest.

The ODFAA Committee