

Eynsham Allotment Association AGM 2022

Chair's Report

Leaving aside the serious matter of the summer drought, 2021-22 has seen a return to something like normality in the life of the Eynsham Allotment Association. Regular committee meetings have been held, working parties have undertaken some site maintenance, two newsletters have been published, the 'Best Kept Plot' competition was held, and the waiting list has been slightly reduced. More importantly a community of probably around 200 people have had the experience and the pleasure of growing their own food and tending their own plots at a time when we are all realizing the importance of food, soil and the natural environment.

More specifically, the committee met on six occasions. In the course of the year Chris Potts, who has held the brief for site maintenance, and Margaret Key who looked after lettings and the general management of Field 2 had to resign from the committee for health reasons. We are grateful to both for their work. Peter Taylor stepped up to take on oversight of maintenance of our common areas and Bridget Pitcher took over the role of general management of Field 2. Rachel Yuen, newly elected to the committee in 2021, has taken on management of our database and records, Deb Arrowsmith edited the newsletters which had been in abeyance for some time. All this was going on alongside the general day to day work of the committee and its officers, to all of whom we are grateful for their work.

Meanwhile the quarterly Review Group met and reviewed all plots in February, May, June and October. This procedure which was established in the previous year has made a significant contribution to the quality of our estate as well as supporting the work of individual members. We are grateful to Christine Cox who convenes and organizes this group as well as managing the annual 'Best Kept Plot' competition. This year the competition was again judged by Lucy and Jonathan Bowden (proprietors of *The Market Garden* in Mill Street and themselves organic horticulturalists) who undertook their task with great care and attention. In addition to giving attention to individual plots they noted the continued improvement and quality of Field 1. Many thanks to both of them.

Michael Green has continued to serve as association treasurer and you will find his annual report elsewhere. This year he undertook the additional, unexpected and unwanted task of managing a complex insurance claim following a large-scale break in and raid on Field 1 in April. The insurance claim was successful and resulted in members who had lost tools and equipment being able to gain some recompense for their loss. Congratulations and thanks to Michael as our treasurer.

Over the last couple of years, partly on account of the COVID pandemic, the Association has seen a considerable increase in the number of people applying for a plot. As concern about the epidemic has eased there has been a slight reduction in the rate of application but the waiting list still stands at 25. This year we were able to let 11 plots, the implication of which is that anyone joining the waiting list now is likely to have to wait at least a couple of years before getting within sight of becoming a plot holder. The existence and persistence of this waiting list (which is typical of many if not most allotment associations) underlines the responsibility all current plot holders have to engage with the active cultivation of their plots.

Two working parties have been held this year which have resulted in the ongoing maintenance of tracks and fences as well as providing opportunities for plant and equipment swaps. They have also turned out to be great occasions for BBQs and getting to know our allotment neighbours. Both

working parties were overseen by members who were not members of the committee and we are grateful to them and to all who shared in the work. A considerable amount of work on common areas within the allotments is quietly undertaken by individuals using their own initiative, time and equipment. For the most part they do this with no request for acknowledgement or recognition. This is splendid, we are most grateful.

Freed from some of the anxieties and constraints of the COVID epidemic the Committee has been able to give some time to thinking ahead and engage with some dreams and plans for the future. The desirability and feasibility of two such projects are currently being researched. Deb Arrowsmith is leading on the research as to the desirability and feasibility of a composting toilet on site, whilst Michael Green is leading on the rationalization and renumbering of plots. It is good that we are beginning to think ahead and plan for the future.

The extended drought this summer was felt acutely felt on the allotments. Many crops were late and some failed completely. The ground was very hard to work. Some of us were left with potatoes baked into ground which seemed like fired clay. The watering was relentless. Rabbits and other herbivores seem to have been a particular problem this year. There is some indication that the summer drought made our cultivated produce particularly attractive when there was a shortage of food to forage elsewhere. Only the grass needed less attention and the weeds did not grow quite so fast. Allotmenters, like farmers and gardeners are made very aware of climate change and its implications for the production of food – the basis of life for all. The small-scale production of food, the care and cultivation of our plots, the maintenance and sustenance of the soil on our plots is not only a matter of pleasure for our members but is a matter of significance for the whole of our community as we face uncertain times.

Martin Groves (Chair)
October 2022