**EWAA Committee Meeting Minutes**

**10th September 2020, 7.30pm**

**Zoom videoconference**

Chair: Chris Clifford

Minutes: Meryl Wilford

Present: Jon Willis, Pat Mansfield, Jane Miller, Renata Rettalak, Dan Thorpe, Mike Yeadon, Tony Flett, Simon Bazley, Sarah Pollard

Apologies: Louise Evans (Clare Ferguson by email after the meeting)

1. **Minutes of last meeting and matters arising**

Minutes from July to be approved by email.

1. **Chair’s report (Sent by email before meeting)** Summary:
* Rent collection: Chris, Sarah and Jon agree that collection of rent this year will take place electronically because of the need for social distancing and in the context of an COVID Amber alert in Oxford.
* AGM: This cannot take place as normal in the shop so alternative arrangement required e.g. outdoors in the social area with gazebo and PA equipment. Main agenda items are the new lease and election of officers/committee/trustees.
* Bonfires: ODFAA and the City Council have removed the ban on bonfires. Need to clarify the situation for the benefit of our membership through our website.
* Maintenance: The soap dispenser in the toilet block now working again. Direct Services have given new lower quote for the drive-over inspection chamber cover.  Work can be scheduled, and notice given to membership.
* Lease matters (discussed as agenda item).
1. **Treasurer’s report**
* P&L circulated by email
* Proposal to keep rent at the current prices is agreed unanimously. [Full plot = £25, half plot = £12.50, Third = £9.00, concession on first plot - full £10 / half £5]
* Proposal to continue running the shop on the cashless system which was introduced as part of COVID measures. Discussion about whether this would mean that some members would be excluded. Agreement to stop all cash payments and accept either card payment through iZettle or bank transfer.

**Action point:** Jon to send out notification of cashless shop system to all members.

1. **Membership report**
* Inspection carried out on Saturday 5th September by Mike Yeadon assisted by Dan, Jane and Meryl.
* Approx 20 plots or half plots have cause for concern re level of cultivation
* Over 50 plots or half plots have no visible or legible number
* Current waiting list is over 30 and requests for plots arrive almost on daily basis.
* There are two parallel waiting lists of members and non-members. The criteria for plot allocation between the two to be discussed at future meeting however, for the time being, priority will be given to non-members because of the general shortage of available new plots across the whole of Oxford on all sites.

**Action point:** Mike sending “Reminder” letters and inviting 4 new members to view plots which are currently available.

1. **Shop report**
* The shop was closed in August.
* Simon confident that the shop can continue to open on Sundays and observe social distancing by using a system with two people (one behind the counter and one person taking products to the steps)
* Suggestion that an awning is put up by the door in case of bad weather.
* Discussion about whether the shop should continue to stock fresh produce (onions, potatoes, beans) when so much stock is left unsold and wasted. Decision????
* Big thank you to Simon for keeping the shop functioning during lockdown and even delivering to plots: everyone grateful for his effort and dedication. Thanks also to his “helpers”

**Action point:** Members need to be informed about whether there are fresh products available in the shop. Simon to inform about stock on website.

1. **AGM and rent days**
* The latest Government guidelines for COVID-19 forbid gatherings of more that 6 people from Monday 14th September. This means that AGM cannot take place in the normal way. Discussion about how this might be done. Decision to hold the AGM as Zoom meeting.
* Rent to be paid by bank transfer. Date of rent day tbc
* Date for the AGM to be confirmed (not discussed). Previous suggested dates Sunday 4th or Sunday 11th of October at 11.00

Standing for officer posts:

* + Chair – Chris Clifford
	+ Vice-Chair - VACANT
	+ Treasurer – Jon Willis
	+ Membership Secretary – Mike Yeadon
	+ Shop – Simon Bazley
	+ Digital Communications – Jane Millar

Meryl Wilford agreed to minute committee meetings over the coming financial year.

**Action points**:

* Further work needed setting up the AGM and informing membership of the changes to the way the rent needs to be paid on rent days:
* Jon to decide best way for making rent payment requests to members.
* Firm nominations for vacant officer posts and committee members are needed.
1. **Lease negotiations**
* The new lease with Oxford City Council will probably be signed in October 2021 and will need to be registered with the Land Registry.
* ODFAA has organized information-sharing meetings on Zoom to discuss possible new legal frameworks for Associations to adopt. (attended by Chris, Jon and Meryl)
* EWAA needs to change the legal structure of its organization because at present we are an informal, unincorporated association which means that Trustees are personally liable for any breaches of lease terms or third party claims.
* Because of the need to limit the personal liability of officers and trustees (or whatever office holders are created in the future), one of the following two structures needs to be chosen. Either,

- a coop under the new coop legislation (Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014), or

- a company limited by guarantee

* ODFAA are very willing to help advise and support but will not recommend one structure over another.
* Some discussion took place, about what coop or limited company organization might entail e.g. need for filing of statutory accounts but the committee as a whole did not feel able to make a choice between new organizational models without further information about the pros and cons of each.
* ODFAA are expecting to receive a draft lease sometime soon. They will review it and send comments back to the Council and hopefully have a final version before Xmas.
* Alice Hemming sent a useful presentation about coops and has offered to give advice.
* Chris Clifford (Chair) stressed to the committee the vital importance of starting preparatory work as soon as possible given there are several different timelines involved before a new lease can be signed: (i) agreeing a new organizational structure (ii) incorporating new lease rules into any new draft governing instrument (iii) agreeing a new constitution (iv) finding members who may be willing to become directors of any new organization and (v) entering into direct negotiations with the landlord regarding lease commitments to neighbouring land owners and reviewing our control over our second car park not currently part of leasehold land.

**Action point**: At the AGM we need to notify members about the new lease requirements and that:

* we cannot keep current informal organizational structure
* more research is needed before the committee can make a recommendation about which structure to choose (either coop or limited company)
* there is a proposed timeline for decision-making and outline of process leading up to signing the new lease in October 2021.
1. Proposal from Mo Leen: Groundwater Pilot Scheme

Several concerns were raised with the draft proposal for a groundwater pilot scheme including the need for a proper financial case to be made, the likely need to involve professional expertise in assessing risks involved (probably the input of a hydrologist) and importantly the likely pressure it would place on committee, officer and membership time over the next year when the association will be focusing on lease negotiations.

Actions agreed:

* Chair to write to Mo Lee with an update of the decision which is to defer any agreement on a way forward whilst lease negotiations are underway.
* Chair to include the issue of water use and potential need for greater use of water as part of direct negotiations with the landlord.

**Next Committee Meeting Thursday October 8th**