Old Chesterton Allotment Plot inspections

As we see the first signs of spring popping up across the allotment, we're all looking forward to a good growing season. To help ensure our allotment is a well-tended space for the whole community, we are introducing a new routine for plot inspections this year.

Here's some information about why we have plot inspections, when they take place, and what to expect.

What is the purpose of plot inspections?
Plot inspections help us ensure that the entire site is in good condition. They help to:

- Encourage plot holders to be active on their plots. In some cases, inspections can serve as a helpful "nudge".
- Ensure OCAS meets the requirements of the Lease Agreement with Cambridge City Council
- Avoid disputes between, and complaints of, plot holders because of unmanaged weeds and grasses
- Avoid significant and unnecessary work by the Committee in clearing vacated plots left in poor condition
- Avoid the Committee having to spend money (members rent money) on clearing plots

When are the inspections, and what is being inspected?
We will have three plot inspections per year, in spring, summer, and autumn.

- **Spring** (inspection around the end of March)
  By the end of March, plot holders should be well under way in preparing plots for cultivation. There should be evidence of weeds and self-seeded grasses being removed, compost areas prepared, the soil being prepared for seeds and plants.

- **Summer** (inspection around May/June)
  By now, plots should be in good condition with only new weeds and self-seeded grasses evident that only require hoeing. A minimum of 70% of the plot area should be under active cultivation. There should be no areas on a plot of dense, unmanaged grasses or weeds as these become harder to address and cause nuisance to neighbouring plot holders because of the spread of grass and weed seeds. The Committee regularly get complaints about this.

- **Autumn** (inspection around the end of October)
  By now crops should be almost all harvested. Plots should be in good order - free from weeds and self-seeded grasses - ahead of the winter. Sheds, greenhouses, poly-tunnels should be in good structural condition. Waste materials - any unused plastics, glass, metal, wood or other items - should be removed from the site.

What happens if plots fall below these expectations?
We will write to plot holders to explain that we have inspected their plot and consider it to be below the expectations for the time of year and will advise that the plot holder will have 4

weeks to make progress on their plot to meet the expectations. We are happy to meet with any plot holder to discuss their plot. We will then inspect the plot again after 4 weeks. If no progress has been made, we will follow the process set out in the tenancy agreement signed by all plot holders. In a very small number of cases this may lead to termination of a tenancy.

Why do we need three inspections per year?
Unfortunately, every year the Committee are left with a number of plots that require significant work by Committee members to clear and make good enough to re-let. Some plots are in such poor condition that the Committee incurs significant cost to make good - for instance, in 25/26 we spent over £300 in order to remove the considerable amount of waste material left behind on just one plot. Almost every plot that is vacated, is left in poor condition and requires waste to be removed. By having regular plot inspections, we can help prevent plots falling into such bad condition.

Plot inspections also help uphold the OCAS Membership Agreement for plot holders, which includes the following: *By the end of the first year of their tenancy subscription the Member(s) shall have at least 80% of their plot under active management throughout the main growing/harvesting season (April to October) and plots will be left in good order ahead of the winter. Active management comprises weed control and cultivation of fruits, vegetables and flowers. The maximum amount of a plot allowed for internal paths and hard landscaping e.g. shed, internal paths, greenhouses, composting area is 30%.*

Finally, we also have a lease agreement with Cambridge City Council to run our allotment site. Under the terms of this lease we must keep the site clean and free from unmanaged weeds and well manured and otherwise maintain it in a good state of cultivation.
The lease agreement also states that tenants will not put on the site any waste materials, refuse, tyres or trade refuse.

What if I am not sure how to manage my plot?
From time to time, and especially for new plot holders, managing a plot can seem overwhelming, but help is available!

- Chat to people on site - most people are only too happy to share advice and support!
- Explore the Growing Tips on our website.
- There also is an unofficial OCAS WhatsApp group where people share advice, share supplies, swap plants etc. If you would like to join please email: enquiries@oldchestertonallotments.org.uk stating your name and plot holder number and we can share the link.
- There are further details on the new website regarding the Membership Agreement and the main points to be aware of.