

## BIRMINGHAM AND DISTRICT ALLOTMENTS CONFEDERATION

### Minutes of Executive Meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> August 2023 at Bordesley Green Allotments

**Attendance:** Hester Blewitt - Ward End Gardeners, Clive Fenn- Birches Green, Dave Hubball - Thornbridge, David Read - Ward End Gardeners, Peter Thomas - May Lane, Len Tubbs - The Brambles, Ross White - Harborne Lane, Cheryl Butler - Thornbridge, Luke Richards - Thornbridge, Keith Yardley - Station Road, Dave Rawlings - Aldridge Rd; Yvonne Brookes - Pereira Rd

**Apologies;** Sue Griffith - Harborne Hill, Joe Brown - May Lane

**Invitee:** David Draycott - Moor Lane

#### 1. Interim Chairing of meeting

The Secretary reminded everyone that as this was the third meeting of the Executive since the AGM when it was decided we would have an Interim Chair for 3 months, we needed to elect a replacement. For the next 3. At the end of the meeting, it was **agreed**, for the sake of continuity to continue with David Read as Interim Chairperson for the next 3 meetings, then review again.

2. **Minutes of 3<sup>rd</sup> July meeting** accepted as a true record

#### 3. Matters arising

**Water Plus.** A key account manager has been appointed by Water Plus and delegated to check VAT on bills to BCC sites, whether agricultural rates and sewage charges are being levied. Len reported their first VAT free bill of £500 (Brambles site), and they are owed £200 rebate on previous bills Ross queried whether all BCC sites were with Water Plus. Possibly Sutton sites may not be. We need to check whether the new appointment at Water Plus has any impact on the continuing problems some associations are experiencing.

**First Aid courses:** The Secretary is setting up 4 one-day courses in different parts of the city, using suitable sites and buildings with a large room eg South - Moor Lane Allotments. Courses will be held in October and November, as European money to pay the trainer runs out in December. Bookings have started coming in.

**Bank mandate changes.** Dave Rawlings has now got forms to be signed by H.Blewitt & P.Thomas as new signatories.

#### 4. Report of meetings with Allotments Officer Bernadette Wilson and Anthony Down (Architect - Flo Pickering work)

On 2<sup>nd</sup> August the Secretary and Interim Chairperson attended a meeting at Kings Heath House with the Allotments Officer (AO) at the AO's request, Secretary's written report emailed to Exec in advance. This meeting was firstly to make BDAC aware that proposed rent increases have to be notified to tenants 12 months ahead and therefore a 12 month consultation with BDAC needs to start now. Highlights from the report of the full meeting

- The AO said that one school of thought in the Council is that a 30% plot **rental increase** would be needed "to maintain the existing service". Previously the BDAC agreed with BCC that rent

rises should be in line with the Retail Price Index, not the Retail Consumer Index. At the moment, increases should not be above the rate of inflation

- **Site reports** eg asbestos, state of buildings. The AO said that only urgent issues would be dealt with (financial reasons). The BDAC and sites are supposed to be getting all relevant reports and follow-ups, but still delays. **Agreed: BDAC to formally ask for all reports.** Keith Yardley agreed to collate them.
- **Changes of rules.** The AO said that minor changes of rule could happen without the Management Agreement changes having to be agreed first. Examples: Eg no sleeping overnight on sites (not in current Rules, it only says no cars overnight), and specifying the size of plot for 6 dwarf trees (fewer for smaller plots). Other rules could also be amended, as well as additions made in respect of provision for people with disabilities. Also associations could have their own site rules covering security or health and safety issues such as keeping gates locked, speed limits etc, as long as they don't conflict with Council Allotment Rules, but AO said these would not be legally enforceable and could be challenged legally, unlike Council Allotment Rules which are covered by the Legal Agreement signed by tenants. Legal Services will be looking at wording in the Management Agreement.
- **Grounds Maintenance.** The AO agreed that some sites appear to have had little or no grounds maintenance carried out during the growing season – maybe just spraying, but no grass cutting. She agreed to find out what the Parks Dept are claiming they have completed and the reasons for not doing those that haven't yet been done.
- **Flo Pickering funded work.** Anthony Down from Architects Dept gave information and answered queries when the Secretary/Chairperson met him on 5<sup>th</sup> August when last year's Flo Pickering funded work at WEGA sites was being 'signed off' with the Contractor Haystoun. Apparently the quote for the work for the new building at Court Lane site came in at twice what was expected; now the exercise of reducing costs is complete and what is left will go into the Fund to cover work on the other 13 sites in the current (delayed) round of work. This will be evaluated within 4-6 weeks, and BDAC will need to recommend the priorities if it is not sufficient to cover the cost of all the items on the list – see below in "", as supplied by Anthony Down. Len Tubbs confirmed that the BDAC had assessed priorities, and the items were not just a wish list.

"The list of 13 sites and the shortlisted works that were looked at last October.

Site Visits (\*priority works)

1. Bleak Hill Allotments	B23 7BN	Fencing – 20 metres
2. School Lane Allotments	B34 6SP	Fencing – 50 metres and road surface 60m.
3. Brambles/ Hall Hayes Allotments	B34 7LJ	Road Surface throughout site
4. Pool Lane Allotments	B33 8HD	Fencing – 50 metres
5. Francis Road Allotments	B33 8ST	Road surface – 90 metres
6. Coventry Road Allotments	B26 3PP	Road surface at entrance and around building
7. Uffculme / Highbury Park	B13 8QY	Fencing – 10 metres
8. Greenleigh Road Allotments	B14 4JL	Fencing – 5 metres
9. *Henlow Road Allotments	B14 5JQ	Road Surface by main gate *
10. Woodthorpe Road Allotments	B14 6EQ	Road surface – 100 metres
11. Strawberry Dene / Selly Oak Rd	B30 1HS	Road surface – 120 metres

12. Coney Green Drive/ Mill Walk                      B31 4HL                      Road surface – 390 metres
13. Pereira Road Allotments                              B17 9JB                      Road surface – 75 metres + gate
- Plus visit to Shaftsbury Rd Allotments as an additional site - surfacing roadway plus base for planned building.”

Discussion about Flo Pickering Fund which is supposed to get 25% of the value of sales of allotment land, how decisions get made about priorities across the city or on individual sites, and the fact that allotments could be provided when new estates are built. This is an issue which needs to be addressed in Working Group discussions and the whole Section 8 process needs considering at a future Exec meeting.

Other items discussed at the meeting with the Allotments Officer were

- Warning letters and evictions and non-cultivation procedures
- Non-compliance with rules – procedure and evictions
- The complaints and investigation process
- Vetting of prospective tenants
- Paths on plots – what they are for
- Training
- Funding opportunities and restrictions

## 5. Secretary’s Report/Correspondence

Email Correspondence and follow-up that she is dealing with: enquiries about plots, objections to Notices of Re-entry, other types of complaints and offers such as wool (shoddy) compost. She is following up on objections/complaints and referring some to Advisors. All time-consuming. Ross White suggested advertising for an Assistant Secretary – **agreed**.

## 6. Insurance for this year

The Secretary has received queries about where the Public and Employers Liability certificates are for this year and she has sent them out by email. It was thought that the previous Secretary sent them out in April.

## 7. Working Group Reports (Governance, Complaints, Finance, Website and Marketing)

Documents were distributed by email in advance of the meeting.

### **Governance.**

Meeting via Zoom; analysis and gathering information. A way forward suggested which will involve survey work with stakeholders.

### **Complaints working group**

Things moving forward. One of the things which came out of the meeting with Bernadette Wilson was that rules could be changed without changing the Management Agreement eg in relation to non-cultivation issues, if it can make managing the process easier.

Discussion in this group about the difficulties when BDAC is expected to intervene to advise/support both sides in a dispute and where the dispute is between a tenant and a committee. David Draycott suggested that if BDAC’s role was to advise/support committees,

maybe the NAS could be asked to advise/support the tenant.

Training in handling disputes and mediation is needed for existing BDAC Advisors and to help recruit new ones. Ross White added that Liz Bunting, NAS Legal Officer could offer advice and BDAC could pass on good practice to associations.

## 8. Allotment Show Working Group & Report

Cheryl Butler has joined this and is happy to be part of it.

In relation to the Show being organised for the 19<sup>th</sup> August, a request had been circulated prior to the Exec, about a proposed entry from a non-BCC site tenant at Bournville.

Discussion about whether eligibility rules should be adhered to, the fact that BDAC stands for Birmingham *and District* Allotments Confederation and that the Sutton Coldfield sites in the process of being transferred out of BCC management to Sutton Coldfield Council are still being allowed to take part in the competition.

Dave Rawlings proposed this Bournville entry be allowed. **Proposal agreed** by majority vote.

Dave Hubball reported that there were 37 individual entrants to the 19<sup>th</sup> August competition taking place at Bordesley Green site. This number includes 5 children, and people from 7 associations (The Hill, The Leys, Lower Tinkers Farm, Thornbridge Avenue, Walmley Ash, Walsall Rd, Ward End). There are 299 classes in the Show, 5 associations have entered for the veg and 5 for the flowers. 5 have entered the Novice Class aimed at encouraging new people to get involved. Participation higher than 2022 when there were no entries in the children's competition.

## 9. 'Allotments for Birmingham' research proposal – Birmingham University

David Draycott introduced this item by saying that the BDAC is minor in the list of BCC priorities, allotments as an asset are not appreciated and they are happy as long as there is full cost recovery in relation to allotments. Also if you look at the Council's Food or Open Spaces strategies, allotments rarely get a mention. Allotments are crucial for mental well being and as part of the answer to the health crisis. We also need to promote healthy organically produced food and sustain nature on sites.

Study 4 elements

1. Group practices local authorities' actions and investments
2. We need data about food produced through forms being completed
3. Sustainability and diversity
4. Personalised case studies covering health and wellbeing.

David Draycott is fully committed to undertake the study on behalf of the BDAC with help and assistance. Discussion: BDAC should get involved, funders will be interested and evidence from the study will assist in funding applications from associations.

**Agreed** that BDAC will support the research proposal and that Ross White will be BDAC liaison officer with David D and researchers.

## 10. Finance Report

Dave Rawlings reported a balance in the General Fund on 1

<sup>st</sup> July of £20,141.18 Income figures are £172.46 and Expenditure of £35.07. Balance carried forward £20,313.64

Show Account. Balance £7,852.05; Expenditure £900 for the marquee, Balance £6,952.05

Deposit account £10,713.33 (1<sup>st</sup> April 2023) – no change from previous month

Query about whether we could finance training for advisors from the funds i.e. to hire a trainer, pay for room hire and refreshments. **Agreed** that a costed proposal should be put to an Exec meeting.

Suggestion that £1000 be allocated for training annually (AGM could agree).

Training was discussed at meeting with B.Wilson who had offered training when asked and it wasn't followed up. BCC uses on-line training for staff, but she had found problems in getting potential training developers to understand the needs of allotment people who are volunteers not staff. It was pointed out that the NAS can provide seminars and good information for its members – this can keep down costs of training.

## 11. Section 8 – reports on West Heath and Wyrley Birch sites (NAS involvement)

The Secretary reported on requests from the NAS to set up meetings with Committee members on two sites where the Council started a Section 8 process of selling off some of their land some years ago. Liz Bunting and 2 Regional Officers Tom Terrance and Colin Bedford have visited both and she and David Read attended the Wyrley Birch meeting and spoken with Committee reps. The NAS is looking at whether there is enough provision of plots in Bham, whether there are waiting lists and active promotion to recruit new plotheholders to sites which are not full: BCC has to make the case and their data is now out of date, so will have to be resubmitted. On the other hand, committees on both sites are keen to get thing speeded up on the sales as they are hoping for and negotiating improvements for the parts of their sites which are not being disposed of. So can the BDAC support them at the same time as resisting pressure for sales of allotment land as a way of financing improvements?

This links with the more general problem of the mismatch between demand for plots and provision across the city, with inadequate promotion and recruitment processes.

## 12. Any Other Business

1. Query about what happens when a plotheholder dies
2. Report from Ross White who attended quarterly regional NSALG Meeting at Kidsgrove, Stoke. Proposal that BDAC joins National Volunteer Council of NCVO - carried forward to another meeting.
3. Monday 21<sup>st</sup> August 11.30 am Sutton Crem – funeral of Councillor Brenda Clarke who was a long-time friend of the allotment movement in Birmingham. **Agreed** to donate £100 to charity chosen by her family. Some Exec members are attending funeral.