

## BIRMINGHAM AND DISTRICT ALLOTMENTS CONFEDERATION

### Minutes of Executive Meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2023 at Bordesley Green Allotments

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

**Apologies;** Peter Thomas - May Lane, Ross White – Harborne Lane

**Minutes of 4<sup>th</sup> September meeting** accepted as a true record,

#### Matters arising

- 1. Advert for Assistant Secretary BDAC.** Ross has prepared a draft, Hester to finish with aspects of the role which could be done by an Assistant or shared.
- 2. Coffee grounds offer from Conference Centre, for composting.** If these can be collected before each Exec, they can be distributed at least to Associations with Exec members.
- 3. Dave Taylor.** He has sadly died of cancer, and will be missed for all his work both with the BDAC and allotments he has been involved with. His Wake will be at Aylesford Hall on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1-5pm. Longmeadow Crescent Association will be putting up a plaque in memory of him and Brenda on the site.
- 4. First Aid training.** Final arrangements being made for sessions on 21<sup>st</sup> October, 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> November at Harborne Lane, Moor Green and Aldridge Rd sites, 11 or 12 (max) at each session. Many associations haven't responded at all, or can't get anyone interested, so everyone who's booked has got a place.
- 5. Allotments for Birmingham University Allotments Research Project Questionnaire.**

David Draycott reported on progress and next steps. He supplied latest & final copies of both surveys which are ready to go, and a proposed description of the project for the BDAC website

It was **agreed** that circulation and promotion of the two questionnaires (one for ploholders, one for site secretaries) be supported as follows:

- Via the BDAC website – possibly replacing the Birmingham Allotments Project button on the home page. DD to send details of the two URLs required to Clive Fenn
- Via the next Newsletter. DD to send copy to Barbara Smith
- Via a specific mailshot to secretaries. This to include an invitation to complete the secretary survey, details of the ploholder survey and an offer of help from DD/JB in completion of paper copies of either or both
- via the half yearly BDAC meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> November

We would be aiming for up to 1000 responses from ploholders (though anything over 30 would be acceptable) – in a trial run DD said the questionnaire can be completed in 6 minutes. The University will share Secretaries' responses with us, subject to their agreement. David Draycott was thanked for his work on this project.

- 6. Flo Pickering Fund update.** Initial hold up was because of needing to get Court Lane spec & contract amount approved which it is now; remaining sum will cover work on 13 other sites and architects dept preparing plans and costings and waiting for BCC housing dept to transfer the money. The bankruptcy process has slowed everything down, but statutory services (like allotments) have to be protected.
- 7. Newsletter.** Barbara Smith is happy to continue producing this. Items could include report on the Annual Show and an item from the Dahlia Society. Other contributions needed ASAP.
- 8. BDAC Show/competition** – prize money payments. These are being paid out mainly by bank transfer (£844 paid out so far with WEGA acting as intermediary because BDAC doesn't yet have that facility). £558 still to pay out which will include some cheques.

## Secretary's Report

Correspondance (email) since the previous meeting includes notice of the BOSF Conference on 7<sup>th</sup> October, the NSALG West Midlands region AGM on 4<sup>th</sup> November at Thornbridge Allotments, a promotional email about 'Vegetable plotter, and information about the Birmingham Food Revolution and Strategy. David Draycott said he was intending to log into their meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> October and was willing to represent the BDAC (Agreed).

Other correspondence includes enquiries about plots, various tenancy issues and complaints including about committees. She is responding to these and referring some to advisors to help associations that are struggling.

**Proposal to amalgamate Disputes Procedures/Complaints Working Group with Standards and Processes Working Group (\*\* see below)** is a recognition that we can't delay looking at what associations need to function effectively while firefighting on disputes procedures that aren't working. BDAC is supposed to give advice on constitutions etc (it was pointed out that draft constitutions were circulated some time ago) and this needs more work, and we also need more Advisors with a clear role. Having information available on the cloud storage system for all BDAC records will enable people to access any guidance eg examples of constitutions. Also Draft Association/site rules (circulated to Exec before) could be used by Associations when the Council Allotment Rules don't cover situations they are trying to deal with. Another suggestion was a Code of Conduct for committees and individuals on sites. Bad behaviour needs addressing as a priority, and a 'good practice guide' created.

The **proposal to amalgamate and call the amalgamated group Management of Site and Associations Working Group was agreed (further details in report to Exec 9<sup>th</sup> October\*)**, though it was pointed out that under the BDAC constitution, there should be a Complaints Committee (Appendix B).

## Finance Report

The proposed new rent levels for this October represent an increase of over 12%, and the increase was supposed to be capped at 5%, so as this has been exceeded, we should be arguing that rents should be frozen in October 2024, not increased again.

Report from Treasurer Dave Rawlings:	Amount carried forward	£20,213.64
	Income :	Nil
	Expenditure:	£357.86
1st October balance		£19,855.78
No change in the deposit account:		£10,713.33
£4,750 should have been paid into the BDAC account from BCC in September		

## Finance Working Group

It was agreed at September Exec to consolidate monies and invest into deposit accounts – rates of interest vary. Proposed to close show account, transfer to fixed rate deposit, top up deposit account into 12 months deposit account. Ethical investments: you need to look beyond where the money is being put. Proposed that £25,000 is put into a fixed rate deposit account. Also Treasurer and a rep find out interest rewards of £15-£20,000 into a current account. Dave Rawlings: the Show Committee is independent and only the last 3 years given financial reports and accounts. BCC funding dropped from £3000 to nothing. Combination of general and deposit fund – need a balance in general fund of around £13,000; eg because of retainers and gifts to officer etc in April/May.

**Proposal Agreed.** Proposed K Yardley, seconded by Y Brookes.

Show balance also mandate forms also add Dave Hubball as a signatory.

Excel spreadsheet passed round but all 2023 transactions need to be entered in. K.Yardley happy to assist D.Rawlings inputting income and expenditure. Show Account in a similar way. NB BDAC expenses separated from BCC City Services (ESC)

## Communications Working Group

**Enquiries and Lettings. Proposal for setting up an on-line enquiry system (details in written report).**

The written report explained the context for this – that the current process is not working well for enquirers and it is time consuming for the BDAC Secretary trying to handle enquiries for sites with vacancies and those with waiting lists. David Read and Clive Fenn have been working on developing an IT-based system using database fields and on-line forms which should make it much easier to locate a site with plots available, and save time for the BDAC as well as Secretaries of Associations.

It doesn't rely on the Council website page on allotments, but we are requesting info from Allotments Dept on rent rolls and vacant plots list to put on the database.

## **BDAC response to Birmingham Bankruptcy financial recovery proposals**

After the BDAC was contacted by a local journalist on the Erdington Observer, Hester Blewitt prepared a response (circulated to Exec). Agreed we should use this to highlight the importance of allotments. It will go on our website for a start, and can be used when approaching councillors, MPs etc.

## **Half Yearly meeting of BDAC**

proposed and agreed for **Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> November 2.30 Bordesley Green Allotments.**

Also **agreed:** that we would have daytime/weekend meetings of the Exec during the winter months:

**Next Exec is on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> November at 2.30pm**

*Agenda items carried forward to next meeting through lack of time:*

- *Section 8 (Wyrley Birch, West Heath) – report of meeting with Liz Bunting, Tom Terrance & Colin Bedford on 29<sup>th</sup> September: implications and what to do next*
- *Directly managed sites*
- *Role of Life Vice-president*

## **\*\* Revision to Working Group terms of reference Management of Site and Associations Working Group**

### **Proposed Aims:**

- To develop and maintain good practice in management of allotment sites and allotment associations, by working with and supporting association committees
- To oversee arrangements for BDAC's handling of issues, problems and complaints at site/association level
- To coordinate the recruitment, allocation of cases, support for and training of BDAC Advisors and
- To ensure directly management sites are appropriately supported and advised
- To feed in ideas about all the above into any Management Agreement discussions with Birmingham City Council, including the provision of resources to support changes

### **Proposed Objectives over the next few months**

- To develop and agree principles and working practices for BDAC Advisors and a Code of Conduct
- To recruit new BDAC Advisors to cover all areas of the city
- To set up ways of developing and supporting BDAC Advisors such as meetings/workshops, an on-line Forum, WhatsApp group, mentoring, training sessions
- To agree processes, reporting and accountability for handling complaints referred to the BDAC
- To agree reporting and accountability protocols for handling complaints referred to the BDAC – in relation to the Exec, the BDAC membership and BCC/Allotments Dept
- To develop and agree, with NAS guidance some of the following:
  - Model constitutions suitable for different sizes of association/site,
  - Role descriptions for Association officers,

- Guidelines for Committees in running meetings, taking decisions at site level and handling common issues and problems (eg plot allocation, site inspections, non-cultivation, flouting rules, boundary disputes etc)
- Policies suitable for allotment associations, including ones which funders require before they will award grants
- Site/Association rules to supplement/complement Council Allotment Rules
- To clarify arrangements for BDAC's role in directly managed sites, including who will be involved in this and how they will support the development of site-based management and associations.

This Group should be open to not only Exec members but other people with relevant experience, including association committee members who can contribute ideas but don't have the time or inclination to join the Exec or become an Advisor. Hopefully some of these contributors may decide later they do wish to join the Exec or become an Advisor.