

BIRMINGHAM AND DISTRICT ALLOTMENTS CONFEDERATION

Minutes of Executive Meeting held on 18th November 2023 at Bordesley Green Allotments 2.30pm

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, Dave Rawlings - Aldridge Rd; Yvonne Brookes – Pereira Rd; Keith Yardley – Station Road; Peter Thomas - May Lane, Ross White – Harborne Lane; Cheryl Butler – Thornbridge; Leslie Whittaker

Apologies; Stuart Guest, Luke Richards

Minutes of 9th October meeting accepted as a true record, with 1 amendment (Ross apologies not attended)

Secretary's Report from Hester Blewitt

Continuing steady flow of emails to deal with, and give advice/support on, but Clive Fenn is now dealing with plot enquiries as well. There are quite a number of complaints, difficult to handle so many with a shortage of advisors and no functional procedure in place. She is hoping to organise some training for potential & existing advisors. Committee/plotholder conflict is tricky: 1 mediation session has been organised but did not fully resolve matters and another one is yet to happen but the individual plotholder in that case is now in hospital, so it's had to be postponed.

Correspondence includes:

- Roots and Shoots training programme weekly on cultivation techniques, free because grant funded – this has been forwarded to Site Secretaries to pass on to members.
- Proposed visit by RHS 'experts' to Birmingham sites from 21st to 23rd June 2024; they would like to visit a cross-section of sites and can offer advice on various topics while on the visit. Sites interested can propose themselves and they will choose which ones to visit in the 3 days available
- An issue involving a committee refusing to accept rent from a plotholder, saying he didn't have an agreement, although he had receipts from previous year.

Treasurer's Report from Dave Rawlings

Amount carried forward	£19,855.78
Income : BCC grant	£4,750.00
Balance carried forward	£24,605.78
No change in the deposit account:	£10,713.33

Dave has contacted Santander Bank about mandate changes. The Bank says they need a copy of the AGM minutes covering the change of officers/signatories), and have given a 21 day deadline. Secretary to provide a copy of Minutes.

Show Account. No change. £6,752.59 balance

Peter Thomas said that a change of details also required for Show Account – to add Dave Hubball. Signature needed from a Committee member (Dave Rawlings).

Reports from Working Parties

IT/Communication:

Clive Fenn demonstrated the new enquiry system he has set up. Details of site location are on it and the option for sites to update their details (availability of plots etc). **Agreed** Clive to do a presentation at the Half Yearly Meeting on 25th November, with the laptop, to show how it works and ask for co-operation from associations in keeping information updated.

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Agreed we write to Bernie Wilson asking her to remove the '8 week delay' wording on the BCC website and create a link from that to the BDAC website.

Governance

Ross White referred to the report he has done on reviewing minutes of BDAC meetings 2022-23 including discussions, outcomes and follow-up on issues. The Report is 41 pages long including appendices. Observations and conclusions point to a recommendation for more effectiveness in decision-making and addressing governance issues: incorporation, membership models etc.

Report from the 14th November meeting with Liz Bunting, NAS Legal Officer, also attended by Colin Bedford and Tom Terrance (Regional NAS), Ross, David Read and Hester Blewitt. The BCC Agreement with BDAC (on managing allotments) is due to expire in March 2024, so time is of the essence. Strengths and weaknesses in current position were discussed, and trying to work out what BCC position will be. One major problem is the conflict of interest when individual ploholders are at loggerheads with committees/associations. This could be overcome by stipulating that BDAC's members are just associations, and ploholders are their members (who would need separate representation in a conflict situation).

If BDAC were to decide in favour of a Co-operative form of governance, this could enable it to take on leases for allotment land, and open up a range of ways of financing management and improvements as well as rental income.

The new-style BDAC could also then offer management options to associations depending on their size, capacity and preferences – 5 levels from direct management by BDAC (as now with 6 sites), up to almost full self-management where associations/committees take care of most functions. The % of rents allocated to associations would rise in line with the level of responsibilities they take on, and they could change this annually if they chose to do so. This way forward would need a lot of organisational improvement both for the BDAC and associations.

Having an incorporated BDAC would give it and its leadership more protection, because it would be the organisation taking on liabilities, not individual executive members. The NAS recommends Coops to both associations and umbrella bodies and is itself a Co-operative, and sponsors and advises organisations following that route. Bear in mind that Birmingham has the biggest portfolio of sites in the country, so it would be a new development compared to examples of allotment federations in other parts of the country. Liz Bunting has already spent time researching the way forward and can advise throughout.

Agreed that 1. The Exec recommends that we should investigate the Co-op option to people attending the Half Yearly meeting on 25th November, and encourage associations to join NAS if they are not already members so they are eligible for advice on their options (currently NAS membership is very low in Birmingham).

2. Paperwork should be circulated to all associations to explain the option and reasons for it and all should be encouraged to get involved in the planning.

3. The AGM should be brought forward from May (eg to February or March) when a new constitutional framework could be adopted.

Management of Sites and Associations Working Group

The Secretary reported about the First Aid training, last session is taking place today (18th Nov) at Aldridge Road Allotment Site. 34 people from 18 sites(15 associations) across the city attended. The other two sessions were in the premises of Harborne Lane and Moor Green Allotments. Positive feedback received about the trainer Natalie White and the organisation of the workshops. Questionnaires also sent out asking about other training needs,

In terms of the financing of this training, initially we were due to have the trainer's fee (£350 per session) paid for 3 sessions. However, Brandwood Centre which got the ESF grant then told her they had met all their output targets and as the funding period ended December, they would only finance one session.

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This decision came late in the day when all the courses had been advertised and commitments made. Natalie delivered the Saturday 18th November one free as a goodwill gesture but asked BDAC to pay for the Monday 13th November, a day when she would otherwise be able to earn income elsewhere. This meant that the BDAC didn't earn anything from organising the courses after charging £10 a head for attending, although the 3 host associations covered the costs of providing lunch/refreshments and made a small 'surplus' for their funds, out of the money we passed on from participants' fees.

Proposed and agreed: that the BDAC pay New Training (Natalie White) the £350 requested.

Association Rules: We now have available a set of 'Association Rules' developed initially at WEGA and supplemented in response to various queries from BDAC members since May. According to the Allotments Officer, these are 'allowed' by the Council, provided they don't conflict with the Council's official Allotment Rules and are consistent with them. She also said that they would not be legally enforceable in the way that Council Rules are (meaning that people can't be evicted if they only fail to keep Association Rules).

Agreed: Secretary to circulate the model Association Rules Draft

AGENDA FOR THE HALF YEARLY MEETING ON 25th NOVEMBER

Governance issues and presentation of new plot enquiry system (as above)

Allotment Survey. Jon Bloomfield from the Inst of Local Govt Studies(ILGS) is attending to promote the research. Proposal to have the prize draw after 31st December deadline for submitting forms. The ILGS says they will match any BDAC funding, also an RHS subscription. £50 contribution to site rental is the proposal – 5 prizes for individuals and 5 for Site Secretaries who complete the form about the whole site. Site Store/Shop vouchers and NAS individual membership are another option – as incentives to complete the survey.

Agreed: BDAC puts £250 into the prize draw kitty. With £250 from the ILGS, we can then award 10 prizes of £50 each plus any other donations of prizes

Proposed Rule change on corrugated iron sheeting for raised beds from Phil Zjalic. He is hoping to raise this issue at the Half Yearly meeting. Agreed to discuss but decision would need to be made at an AGM.

Proposed visit to Birmingham from RHS 21st to 23rd June 2024. The RHS 'experts' who are visiting wish to visit a sample of sites of different types and sizes so we can ask for 'expressions of interest' from sites and then leave it up to the RHS to make a choice, after providing information including travelling times between parts of the city.

Refreshments. Suggested that we do more than provide tea and biscuits if people are making an effort to attend all afternoon, and experience indicates this can attract more people. **Agreed to fund this and Cheryl Butler will coordinate with offers of help and contributions of food from others.**

Concern about traffic problems in Bordesley Green area because of Bham City football game on afternoon of 25th, so we need to warn people to give themselves extra time to get to the meeting.

Any other business

1. The **NAS Regional AGM** took place at Thornbridge Ave Allotments on 4th November: BDAC reps turned up to turn up and support this.
2. Printing problem for BDAC paperwork – Secretary's printer playing up. **Proposed and agreed to contribute £100 towards a new printer for BDAC work.**
3. **Sutton sites.** According to a report of a meeting in 2021, the BDAC no longer represents sites in Sutton Coldfield as they have formed their own group. However they are still managed by BCC and pay rents to BCC, so covered by the BCC/BDAC Agreement

Meeting closed 5.30pm

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