BIRMINGHAM AND DISTRICT ALLOTMENTS CONFEDERATION

Minutes of Executive Meeting held on 10th February 2024 at Bordesley Green Allotments 2.00pm

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; Cheryl Butler – Thornbridge; Leslie Whittaker; Stuart Guest – Tennal Lane, Luke Richards – Thornbridge *All present – no apologies*

Minutes of 6th January meeting accepted as a true record.

Matters Arising:

1. **Allotments Survey** – Responses to date number 939, approx. 14% of plot holders. The financial support from University now doubtful, Chair to follow up with Jon Bloomfield. He is compiling a report and is suggesting a launch event in June. Association Secretary's survey analysis still to be done.

Proposed and Agreed:

To do prize draw through random selection (via computer) at end of meeting

If Exec members' numbers come up, they will return them (like in commercial prize draws where employees of firm organising the draw are not allowed to take part)

Prize draw to include 5 x £50 contribution to 2024 plot rental for plot holders, 5 x £50 contribution to 2024 plot rental for secretaries. Also a total of 6 lower value vouchers donated by Associations for in-store purchases (Moor Green, WEGA, Longmeadow Crescent, Pereira/Westfield, Thornbridge, Dahlia Society).

2. **Report on Billesley Forum 15th January:**

H Blewitt and D Read attended the Billesley Ward On Line Forum Meeting which was also attended by Councillor Majid Mahmood, Cabinet Member responsible for Allotments. We informed Councillor Mahmood of the proposals for change currently under discussion by BDAC. He expressed a willingness to meet the Executive and was supportive of any proposal that would help the City Council. The Chairperson has drafted a letter to Majid Mahmood and new Parks/Allotments Manager (replacing Darren Share) to ask for 12 months extension on the current agreements with BDAC and associations so all aspects of managing allotments can be reviewed.

3. **RHS Visits to Birmingham:**

Jim Arbury of RHS is proposing visits from 6 members of Fruit, Veg & Herb Committee on 21st – 23rd June. Two Q and A sessions are suggested for the 2 evenings, one in the North/East and one in the South of the city. Information will be put on the website asking Associations to express their willingness to be visited. RHS will choose a selection from information provided. BDAC to help with recommendations, arranging visits, taking into account time available and logistics of getting from site to site.

4. **Freedom of Information Requests:**

Keith Yardley updated the Executive on the current status of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. Information in reports provided of doubtful accuracy, or incomplete.

Proposed and Agreed:

Keith to obtain missing survey reports and subsequent asbestos surveys, confirm completed and outstanding tasks, identify priorities. Keith offered to continue collating information. While at the moment BCC carry responsibilities, issues would need to be resolved prior to any BDAC takeover.

Currently that FOI requests be limited for a period as their request created additional work for the Allotments Officer, causing delays in her site management duties.
Approval needed for Clive Fenn to publish information: **agreed**.
The Building Survey reports were to be made available on-line to Association Secretaries, with a request that they update the Executive on what work had or hadn't been completed, establish tasks to be done and by who, and prioritise works.

Treasurer's Report from Dave Rawlings

General Accounts

Balance brought forward	£24,605.78
No cheques issued	
Balance carried forward	£24,605.78
No change in the deposit account:	£10,713.33

Dave has experienced further delays with documentation demanded by Santander. It is hoped the new signatories will be approved by time of March meeting.

Proposed and Agreed:
It was Proposed and Agreed that the Executive write to Santander to make a formal complaint and express their dissatisfaction with the manner in which recent requests had been handled, and to seek compensation for problems caused by being unable to write cheques for several months

Show Account.

Balance brought forward	£6,752.69
Show Income	£ 170.00
Payment to Show Judge	(£ 50.00)
Balance carried forward	£6,872.59

David Rawlings reported that he was planning to issue cheque payments for Retainers and Gifts as soon as Santander authorised new signatories. David Read expressed a view that, whilst happy to accept payment for legitimate and authorised expenses, he was opposed to the suggested Honorarium of £300 for the Chairperson. This view was echoed by the Secretary.

Proposed and Agreed:
A clear expenses and Honorarium Policy be drawn up by the Finance Working Party in time for the March Executive meeting. No Honorariums, Gifts or Retainers to be paid before that policy had been debated.
Outstanding payments to be paid to members owed money by BDAC (WEGA & individuals)
Show Account: Joe Brown's family has agreed to forward a copy of Joe's death certificate.

Report of Meeting with Bernadette Wilson

Attended by Chairperson, Secretary and Yvonne Brookes. Written report sent out in advance of meeting-see below

Direct Sites
There are 8 direct Sites which the BDAC are responsible for. Any costs incurred on these sites for maintenance etc comes out of the 9.5K management fees received by BDAC from BCC. Allotment officer is responsible for rent collection, BDAC has to do everything out of the management fees £9,500 received annually by BDAC from BCC

8 Sites are Pembroke Croft (currently unoccupied), Kingstanding, Hunton Hill, Trinity Road, Chester Road, Gibson Road, Eastern Road and Matthew Boulton (also known as North Western Terrace). Matthew Bolton site is looked after by Peter Ward.

Agreements

Site management agreements and BDAC agreement with BCC expire end of March 2024. BW says she is uncertain about a provision to roll agreements over, possibly for another 12 months. She will be asked to do various reports; Equality Impact Assessment, Cabinet report, work with Legal Service and Finance – all very time-consuming. Only 9 or 10 associations signed the agreement which BCC sent out in 2021.

Leased Sites

BW says there are various leased sites in Birmingham, some expiring this year and due for renewal: Eastern Road, Harborne Hill, Guinea Gardens – leased from Calthorpe Estates. Others – rolling annual renewal: Billesley Lane (leased from Moseley Golf Course); Springfield Road (leased from Yardley Great Trust); Fairholme Road (Ward End Gardeners Association site)

West Heath & Wyrley Birch

There is no further progress with the issues at the above two sites which have lost land through proposal to sell off land for redevelopment (Section 8)

Re West Heath current issue with an extremely large water bill over £3k due to a leak on the fenced off unoccupied land, the problem is that a stop cock was never fitted when the land was split 5 years ago (STWA refused to move it); it was assumed according to BW that a housing developer taking over the land would do all that but everything has been delayed

Contacts at the Council and who to contact about BDAC plans

Updates from BW about who is now dealing with allotment business:

- Val Lecky is still her line manager
- Joe Hayden is still Parks Service Manager joehayden@birmingham.gov.uk (contact for NAS)
- Andy Vaughan is the new head of Parks & Leisure, Andrew.vaughan@birmingham.gov.uk replacing Darren Share who's left Birmingham/gone to London
- Craig Cooper is the new Strategic Director of City Operations over Parks, Culture, Sport and Leisure Services.

Issues from Sites/Associations

Oldford Farm

Association Secretary Janice Jeffers has been in contact (over a period) with BW about 3 issues:

1. Oldford Farm's roof is about to collapse. A quote of £13K has been obtained to fit a new roof. BW says all expenditure is being queried and has advised that BCC would not consider the cost of replacement.
2. Oldford Farm also have fly tipping issues due to the local recycling plant (next door) being closed for refurbishment. Secretary said previous Allotments Officer used to contact Veolia.
3. Security cameras, BW has previously told Association the cameras should not be used.

BW is to check the council's position on sites having cameras and forward a statement of policy to BDAC and the Secretary Janice Jeffers.

1. **Lime Tree Road WEGA site.** There is a security and flytipping issue which could be sorted now WEGA has installed a roadside gate in front of track/ driveway that leads to site gate and runs down the back of residential houses and the perimeter of the site. Resident involvement is needed as some have right of access, Nigel Oliver of Estates Dept is retiring in March, says BW, but she will find out what's happening as he is not responding to WEGA.
2. **Chadsmoor**. YB reports that the evicted tenant is still on site, probably turning up in the evening when she isn't there. He still has a key. BW reports that he has taken on a plot on another site and

that Val Lecky says that an eviction notice for a tenant cannot apply to other sites unless it is for a very serious issue

Exec Discussion on Meeting with B.Wilson: useful meeting, apparent that Allotments Officer snowed under with 300 unread emails, and hasn't got the power to action some of what BDAC/associations request. But also we are not getting answers on items like plot statistics which we are told change regularly so difficult to tell us even rough estimates. One of problems is unlettable plots which should not be part of calculation of total numbers but that info not readily available.
List of site secretaries also a problem (eg some don't have 3 officers) or changes not notified to BW.
BCC's records varies from inadequate to non-existent. BCC website still not modified re 8 week delay in following up enquiries.
BDAC needs to use its own resources. **Proposal** for 8 direct sites managed by BDAC: to have a connection between each site and an Exec member to look after (currently Secretary with Kingstanding, Clive Fenn has offered to look after Chester Rd).
BDAC needs to take control as soon as possible: systems need to be improved, and BDAC team member site lists should be reviewed.
No response from BW to information that BDAC is going to be incorporated.

Flo Pickering Fund work: Progress report

The Chairman has been in touch with Antony Downes, City Architects Dept and reports:

Court Lane: building work due to start. 13 sites on list to have work done £322,349 in fund to cover these, less management expenses, so not enough to cover all the listed work, so BDAC is asked to prioritise. Example of costs of 1 site - £150,000 for drives at Coney Green. For next meeting, we should have an itemised site list to prioritise exactly what will be done where. Keith Yardley noted that one site didn't get funds following land sale at Yardley Green. He had done a FoI to get sets of meetings and had not had a reply yet. Len Tubbs noted that if a site lost land, 50% of receipts is supposed to go to the site losing land. Proposed that the Finance Working Group should discuss above and try to progress.

Reports from Working Parties

Management of Site and Associations Working Group, introduced by the Secretary

Up till now, work has been going on partly through dealing with issues and complaints, visiting sites, developing and providing materials, and organising a training survey following the 3 First Aid training workshops in Oct/Nov 2023.
Many of the issues at site level were to do with inconsistency in interpreting BCC Rules and Handbook. Secretary presented a list of issues to do with one of them and said BDAC has a role to play in assisting Committees

Cultivation and non-cultivation

What is cultivation? Defining it, Interpreting the definition at site level, Taking account of other factors eg environmental impact, biodiversity
Promoting good cultivation: Communicating with plotholders what's expected, Sharing good practice
Inspections: Agreed criteria, procedure & recording methods, Briefing inspectors, Consistency in assessment
Follow-up and Enforcement: Communicating with plotholders, Options if non-compliant eg downsize; Consistency in taking enforcement action and evicting for non-cultivation

For the future, while BDAC/BCC arrangements are uncertain and changing, the aspirations and plans are to:

- Develop, promote and provide written materials to establish consistent and best practice in interpreting rules
- Follow up on the Training Needs Survey of Associations/Committees
- Run pilot workshops aimed at Committees and Officers
- Set up arrangements for developing and training Advisors and their roles
- Draft and agree a workable Complaints Procedure

Exec discussion: 1. Cultivation. The 1922 Allotment Act Rule 22.1 says mainly cultivated for veg and fruit crops for tenant's family 2. Finance is an issue on a number of sites. We need to promote a managing finances procedure with basic good practice 3. Previously the complaints procedure involved an Advisor, Exec member, 6 members of the Exec at the next stage and finally the whole of the Exec. This needs reviewing and good, workable procedures, and policies should be adopted. 4. Devolved budgets Schedule 7: some sites are not completing so missing out on funding. 5. Advisor numbers low and if Association Committee numbers have also fallen, we need to work out how to get more involvement.

Proposed and Agreed:

That the Working group continues their development work as outlined and that they be empowered to co-opt non-Executive Members as they felt necessary.

Governance Working Party

Copies of the proposed Coop Constitution and Amended BDAC Constitution were circulated before the meeting. Liz Bunting NAS Legal Officer has endorsed them and said they will serve the purpose of getting BDAC incorporated. Further amendments to the new constitution will need to be made when agreement is reached about BDAC take-over of management responsibilities. The Chair also tabled a proposed letter to Councillor Majid Mahmood and Andrew Vaughan giving a brief summary of the proposed BDAC Roadmap to Self Management.

Proposed and Agreed:

That the proposed Constitutions be accepted and formally issued to Associations for adoption. AGM set for March 23rd 2024 at Bordesley Green Allotments, 2pm. That the proposed letter to Councillor Mahmood and Andrew Vaughan be sent.

IT Development & Website Working Party

Clive Fenn tabled a request to produce a Monthly Newsheet, in lieu of the Quarterly Newsletter. This would have distribution limited to Members with Email addresses.

Proposed and Agreed:

That the monthly news-sheet be introduced and that the future of the Monthly Newsletter be discussed at a future meeting.

Prize Draw for Allotment Survey. Electronic selection from 900 plus numbered entries. Agreed to select 11 - £50 rent vouchers for plotholders, also 5 Stores vouchers (Moor Green, Ward End, Longmeadow, Pereira Rd, Thornbridge Ave and a membership of the Dahlia Society voucher.

Any other business:

1. David Draycott at Moor Green Allotments has provided a letter he suggested should be sent to all MP's from their local Associations and/or a general one from the BDAC.
2. NSALG AGM notification to be on next meeting agenda

Next Meeting: 2.00pm Saturday 2nd March at Northleigh Road Allotments NB Bordesley Green pavilion already booked.

Meeting closed 5.15pm