BIRMINGHAM AND DISTRICT ALLOTMENTS CONFEDERATION

Draft Minutes of Executive Meeting held on 2nd March 2024 at Northleigh Road 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.

Minutes of 10th February meeting accepted as a true record.

Matters Arising:

1. **Allotments Survey** – Responses number 942, approx. 14% of plot holders. 'Association Secretary' survey analysis still to be done, Clive Fenn to chase David Draycott. Plotholder draw completed at February meeting, eleven winners identified (5 for £50 and Stores vouchers) and notified. Vouchers to be issued.
2. **RHS Visits to Birmingham:**
   Jim Arbury of RHS is proposing visits from 6 members of Fruit, Veg & Herb Committee on 21st – 23rd June. Clive Fenn to post site questionnaire on Website and advise Associations to complete by 30th March if they wish to be considered, so choices can be made in April.
3. **Allotment Officers Queries from BDAC**
   B Wilson advised she is nor aware of City Council policy re cameras on site, but will investigate further.
   The City Council decision to cancel weed control spraying applies across the city. Japanese Knotweed will still be dealt with, Allotments Officer to be advised of any new outbreaks.
   The Bills of Quantities issued by the City Council, relating to grounds maintenance were discussed. Very little of the proposed work had been carried out. The Executive wish to be advised what now happens to the £150K plus paid out of the Allotment Budget for work not done.
   The Secretary tabled a schedule of sites and occupancy rates sent by B Wilson. Examination of the schedule highlighted several major discrepancies between the schedule and previous information provided under FoI requests. Also some associations have combined sites or have more than one name. The schedule covers tenanted and vacant plots plus facilities on sites. – 7289 plots in all, but no contact details (secretaries etc). The Secretary will continue to try and produce a more up to date and complete list.
   Keith Yardley updated the Executive on the current status of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. Information in reports provided of doubtful accuracy, or incomplete.

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

The Treasurer has received verbal confirmation that new signatories are now approved by Santander. All outstanding payments from General Account can now be actioned. With regard to the payment of Gifts to Executive Members, the Chair and Secretary both advised they do not intend to claim honorarium. All other Executive Members were asked to confirm their wish to receive an honorarium, to the Secretary, by 10th March. Secretary to contact Sue Griffith re expenses she could have claimed in 2023 before she resigned.

Show Account.

Balance brought forward	£6,752.69
Balance carried forward	£6,872.59

Peter Thomas is still awaiting J Brown's death certificate.
A proposed Expenses Policy has been forwarded to Executive Members, inviting comment and feedback before March 23rd AGM.

David Rawlings informed the meeting that, partly due to the move toward Incorporation and computerized accounting, he will be standing down as Treasurer at the AGM as he feels a more computer literate person needs to step into the role. The Chairperson expressed the appreciation of all members for David's 43 years dedicated service and expressed the wish that David continue in a shadowing role whilst a new Treasurer was elected and new systems are introduced. New forms for the next Treasurer will need to be completed. Peter Thomas will also be standing down as Exec member at the AGM.

Flo Pickering Fund work: Progress report

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

Building work has started at Court Lane, but the City Architects Department failed to send costings for the 14 sites currently awaiting work. Total budget for all work is £328,000. With BCC costs taken off (usually 15%) this leaves £280,000 which we have been advised will not cover all the work approved previously.

Given the upcoming AGM, the Executive workload envisaged if Incorporation is approved and the general tardiness of information from the City Council, the Chair expressed concern that works could be delayed until 2025 if the usual format of getting approved work started was followed.

Concern expressed that the criteria for assessing and deciding Flo Pickering funded work were not explained and unclear, and these need to be reviewed before the next 'round' goes ahead.

Proposed and Agreed:

That priority be given to security measures on the affected sites, i.e. fencing, the 135 metres requested can be met in full, remaining work on access drives to be reconsidered. A sub group consisting of Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and Len Tubbs, ascertain the balance of funds then available and allocate roadworks in a fair and equitable manner. Sub group to report actions to the Executive at the earliest possible meeting.

Reports from Working Parties

Management of Site and Associations (MOSA) Working Group

The Secretary advised that work was progressing on a number of policy proposals, including a Code of Conduct and Complaints Procedure (for BDAC and associations). Wording of Code of Conduct important so to be considered after the AGM.
There is to be a meeting of the Working Group, with people outside of the Exec also invited, at May Lane Allotments on 6th March at 2.00pm. It is hoped to recruit some new people to assist with the work of this Group.

Governance Working Group

The Chairperson advised of two resolutions submitted to the AGM relating to incorporation from the Secretary of Court Oak Road Association. The first seeks to bar the BDAC from changing its constitution or adopting incorporation until it receives approval for its proposed Allotment Management plans from Associations. The second seeks to ensure that all future plans are discussed with and agreed by membership before any negotiation takes place with the City Council. The Chairperson suggested that adoption of these could entail a 10 year delay to plans to reform allotment management and a cost running into thousands of pounds.

Discussion on the proposed Constitution with some Executive Members concerned at the dropping of plot-holders from BDAC membership. The Chairperson said that the proposed Complaints Policy gave

individual plot-holders greater protection and representation than existed in the current system where they would have to engage their own lawyer privately if the first 3 steps were unsuccessful; with the new system, they would get free legal advice from the NAS. The Secretary said that committees need to work properly and be accountable to plotholders and they need help in working towards running effectively.

Ross White expressed the view that he accepted the reasoning behind Association-only membership, but felt it was essential for the AGM to present the proposed changes clearly, in order that Associations/plot-holders would understand exactly what they were voting for.

It was accepted that at this juncture, the important issue was approval for incorporation. It was always envisaged that consultation with Associations would be necessary during any BDAC/BCC negotiations, and we can't set out exact proposals to consult on until we are further forward with talking to BCC.

Discussion about the agenda for the AGM and order of business eg elections before main items or after;

Proposed and Agreed:

That the AGM Agenda be re-written to set out the individual changes that were being asked for, with each change being voted on independently.

IT Development & Website Working Group

Clive Fenn reported that the proposed Monthly Newsheet has now been successfully launched. This goes to plotholders, site secretaries and local councillors. Contributions for next issue welcome. The Chairperson commented on how much the website was improving.
Clive also reported that, following discussions with the Chairperson, it had been agreed to migrate BDAC files to a Google Package. This gives increased security, better facilities to interrogate data and removes the chances of BDAC files being mixed up with personal files. Given BDAC moves toward a greater digital presence such a move was inevitable and better done sooner rather than later.
Other suggestions for future:
Keith Yardley: BDAC could provide financial incentive to encourage sites/associations to publish details to their members eg £20
BDAC Secretary: there is an organisation called Smartlyte which organises IT literacy surgeries/workshops (currently aimed at health service users who need to contact health centres etc): could BDAC ask them to organise ones for association officers (secretaries/treasurers etc)?

Show Working Group

No decision yet on date of 2024 BDAC Show.

Expenses Draft Policy/procedure

Brief discussion. Keith Yardley offered to reword/redraft

Any other business:

1. The Treasurer noted that the BDAC Insurance Policies run out soon, and asked if there was any information on BCC paying the premium. David Read advised that Chris Nott Insurance had been in contact as they are now required to issue individual policies to each site. A further Zoom meeting is being held next week to obtain full details.
2. NSALG AGM notification to be on next meeting agenda. Cheryl Butler expressed a wish to attend. Other potential delegates to advise the Secretary by 15th March.
3. Organsing the AGM; The Secretary advised that two plotholders (who work in catering trade) at Longmeadow Crescent site were happy to provide refreshments for the AGM. A budget of £125 was agreed. Also proposed that Exec members (current) and new people being nominated should make a brief presentation about their reasons for being on the Executive in the future.

Date of Next Meeting: TO BE CONFIRMED

Meeting closed 4.30pm