BIRMINGHAM AND DISTRICT ALLOTMENTS CONFEDERATION

Minutes of Executive Meeting held on 13th April 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; Cheryl Butler – Thornbridge; Stuart Guest – Tennal Lane; Andrew Large – Court Oak Road; Dave Reece – Gospel Lane; Tony Webb – Thornbridge; Kate Martin Smith -West Heath; Kerry McGahey – West Heath; Luke Richards – Thornbridge.

Apologies: None

Minutes of 2nd March Exec meeting accepted as a true record. Moved by Clive, seconded by Yvonne

Draft Minutes of AGM 23rd March accepted as a true record once below actions completed. These will need to be approved at the 2025 AGM of the BDAC. Moved by Len, seconded by Yvonne.

Actions: The names of the BDAC Executives to be noted separately on minutes, additional attendees can remain on signed attendance sheet. Tony Webb to be added to Exec members attendees list.

Welcome

Following the AGM and new members joining the committee, committee members gave a brief introduction of themselves

Introductions- Former & New Members

1. David Read, site treasurer for 8 yrs at WEGA. BDAC chair almost 12 months. Background – Finance and project management
2. Hester Blewitt, site secretary 10 yrs at WEGA. BDAC secretary almost 12 months. Background – Designing and delivering training
3. Clive Fenn, Birches Green. Background – webmaster and social media
4. Tony Webb, Vice Chair at Thornbridge
5. Stuart Guest, site secretary at Tennal Lane
6. Yvonne Brookes, site secretary Pereira Road. Background – Finance, operational, logistics, procurement. New treasurer BDAC
7. Dave Rawlings, Aldridge Road. Previous treasurer BDAC
8. Cheryl Butler, Thornbridge Road. Exec member BDAC 24 yrs, school governor
9. Keith Yardley, Treasurer at Station Road. Background – Finance & project management
10. Dave Reece. Background – Control management and engineering
11. Andrew Large, Secretary 12yrs at Court Oak Road. Background – Bio-chemistry
12. Kate Martin Smith, Secretary at West Heath. Background – Education & Insurance
13. Kerry McGahey, Chair at West Heath, 17 yrs on committee
14. Luke Richards, Court Lane. Background – Chemical Plant Operator
15. Dave Hubball, Thornbridge. Life Vice President 38yrs. Background – Green Keeper
16. Ross White, Harborne Lane Chair, previously Treasurer. Background: consultancy

Code of Conduct

The document had already been distributed by email. With a busy year ahead there will be many documents exchanged between the BDAC and BCC. The Chairperson highlighted the importance of

discretion as lots of sensitive information is being shared. A paper copy was handed out as there is an amendment under "protecting the organisations and individuals' reputations", point 5, the clause about social media. The Code is will need to be signed by all members by the next meeting.

Finance reports and annual accounts following AGM

1**. Annual Statement of Accounts**. Copies of the annual statement of accounts were distributed and Dave Rawlings gave his account of finance report as outgoing Treasurer. Queries raised:
What is the difference in the BCC management fee between 2023/2024? The reason why we have only received half the amount of the BCC management fee this year is due to an issue with the way BCC now processes payments. Last year they introduced a new working practice whereby invoices from the BDAC were required to support a "purchase request" for funds. The first invoice got overlooked and the last one was sent at the end of the financial year - this wasn't picked up as being unpaid because of issues with the bank. The balance of the funds will reach our account very soon.

- Miscellaneous spending was for flowers, donations to Marie Curie etc for members that have passed away.
- Travel costs are low as nobody seems to be visiting other sites.
- The closing balance of £22003.10 will be the starting balance for the new Treasurer.
- Question about NAS commission, BDAC should get 40p per member - this is based on the number of plotholders/site association members who take up NAS subs.. Commission doesn't reflect this so this needs to be queried. We got it this year because we asked for it, but not last year as it was not requested. It is felt that £205.60 is a very small amount and perhaps the BDAC could encourage site associations and their members to consider membership of the NAS in the future. It would be useful if we had some data to support a potential campaign

2. **Position with Santander Bank**

Alot of information has been provided to the Bank over the past few months following the change of BDAC officers (Chair and Secretary) at the AGM in May 2023, but the Bank is still asking for Meeting Minutes to confirm what's happened, and now we also have a change of Treasurer. Until the Bank has received all the necessary information, bank transactions cannot take place through the incoming Treasurer.
This meeting confirms the change of Treasurer from Dave Rawlings to Yvonne Brookes at the AGM on 23rd March 2024.
This meeting confirms that the cheque signatories in the future will be: Yvonne Brookes (Treasurer) and Hester Blewitt (Secretary).

3**. Accounts for previous year**. Yvonne Brookes, the incoming Treasurer, will approve the accounts once she has seen all supporting docs (bank statements and auditors report) and is happy with them.

Update on Progress since AGM;

BCC requested a meeting for the 26th March to introduce the new officers of the BDAC to both Val Lecky & Bernie Wilson as a pre cursor to a meeting with Councillor Mahmood, Cabinet Member for Environment & Andrew Vaughan Interim Director of Street Scene.

Meeting with the Council

At the meeting the Chairperson requested a 12-month extension to the current contracts BCC have with the BDAC and Associations. He also shared a broad proposal document of the future management of the sites. The Allotments Officer Bernie Wilson was asked by Val Lecky (Line Manager) if there were any aspects to her role she might wish to be relieved of. The meeting was extremely cordial and proposals very well received. The same day the Chairperson formally sent the request about the extension period, the following day Bernadette respond saying that "Legal" had approved.
However, on 10th April Bernie sent an email,

"Andy Vaughan (Interim Director Street Scene) has asked me to discuss "The extension request" at a Parks Management Team meeting (I have no dates), then discuss at Street Scene MT meeting (again no dates) and discuss with a Cabinet Member.
I need to write a briefing/options paper (?)
I need to work with finance and clearly set out any financial issues addressing funding gaps.
As you can see this will not be a quick job.
This means until the extension is agreed it is unlikely I'll be able to submit spending forms for any payments to Associations or the BDAC or anywhere else as the letter will need to go with the spend request along with spreadsheets with exact breakdowns of fees.
However, I do think you should continue with progressing the BDAC proposals."

The Chairperson has sent a letter to Councillor Mahmood, indicating his concern about the insurance policy and the urgency of making decisions about an extension of the BCC/BDAC Agreement.

An email arrived three days later from Bernie advising us that she has been told to raise purchase spending forms for site commissions and budgets. To raise with some urgency, purchase spending forms to pay the BDAC for the management fee and the public liability insurance.
There is an umbrella body in Coventry that run sites in a similar way to the BDAC proposal. It has a total of 43 sites with approx. 3,000 tenants. The contact there indicated they would be very happy to organise a visit and talk about the way the sites are run. Arrange for Cllr Mahmood and Andrew Vaughan to attend along with BDAC representatives.

The meeting noted that the Flo Pickering Fund had been operating on the basis that money could only be spent on fencing, roads and new toilet facilities. There appeared to be nothing in the original document signed by the Secretary of State that set such limits. BCC and BDAC agreed that this matter should be investigated with the possibility of lifting these restrictions before the next round of applications.

Working Groups

Proposal on 6 Working Groups distributed before meeting. No detailed discussion about Terms of Reference, proposed objectives and the way they could operate, but they would all have some leadership and report on progress at each Exec meeting. They would also engage other people not on Exec to widen the range of expertise and experience available to help in progressing BDAC plans and work. All Exec members were asked to indicate which they think how they can best contribute to work of Executive by being on at least one Working Group. Members not limited to one group. Chair and Secretary would have an input to all.

- Governance – Ross White to lead, Keith Yardley, Dave Rawlings, Andrew Large
- Finance – Treasurer to lead, Keith Yardley, Dave Rawlings
- MOSA – Kate Martin Smith to lead, Kerry McGahey, Stuart Guest, Cheryl Butler, Yvonne Brookes
- Communication, Website & Marketing Clive Fenn to lead, Andrew Large, Ross White
- Infrastructure – Dave Reece to lead, Len Tubbs
- Shows and events (to include RHS visit June) – Kerry McGahey, Dave Hubball, Cheryl Butler, Clive Fenn, Luke Richards

Tony Webb didn't say which one he will be involved in as he wants to learn more as it was his first Exec meeting

Allotment survey feedback

Update by Jon Bloomfield on Survey

Purpose of the survey was to quantify the benefits from allotments e.g. yields, well being etc.

876 returns from possible 7,000 plot holders, approx. 14%

57 returns from different sites of a possible 112, half the site secretaries responded

25 sites no response, either secretaries or plot holders

Findings:

There are 3 cultivation levels which have emerged:

- 'Serious cultivators' 16%, produce approx.150Kg yield or more
- 'Keen gardeners' 44%
- 'Leisure gardeners' 38%

Benefits listed by plotholders (can choose more than one);

- Regular physical exercise 17%
- Supply of fresh veg 31%
- Peace of mind & relaxation 32%

Other findings

- Black & Asian gardeners are generally higher producers
- Women now just about out-number men. (no longer old men in sheds)
- Husbands/Males names are used on tenancy agreements as they're probably nearer the age at which you can get a discount on the rent
- Turnover rate low at 9%
- 41 of the secretary's responses state 90% occupancy
- 80% of sites keep waiting list – 425 people on list
- A third of sites have links to schools
- 40% have nonstandard tenants on their site (groups/organisations)
- Active sites involved in fund raising
- Majority of plot holders under 65 years old

Conclusions and Recommendations

Allotment sites are neglected assets and hidden gems – No signs - No publicity

- Lift occupancy on all sites- which would lead to 300/400 more tenants
- NHS Social prescribing – Public Health
- BCC Food Strategy (no mention of allotments in BCC Food strategy documents)
- Help Train people how to raise funds/grants
- Create working groups
- Need to move attitudes away from old men in sheds, encourage more than 10 kilo of produce on each plot.

Highlight the benefits to health and medical needs.

Renegotiate monies available to spend in different areas i.e. training and support

Lift the profile of allotment within the city

It would be valuable to obtain information from the surveys i.e. site by site response

Launch a conference to deliver the outcomes of the survey.

Funding is more accessible when engaging with local communities, reach out with site events i.e. open days etc.

There will be an article in the Observer newspaper 24th March, 4-page pull-out on Dads Lane Allotment Site. Jon will supply a copy of his power point document.

AOB

1. The Chairperson proposed a laptop for the Treasurer due to previous issues of security– a costed proposal from Finance Working Group to be done before discussion at the next meeting

2. WhatsApp group proposed for Executive to enable easy and speedy communication. All agreed and will join except Andrew who doesn't do WhatsApp and Dave Rawlings who doesn't have a phone,

A code of conduct re WhatsApp & social media platforms will be addressed as soon as possible

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Task	Who's responsible	Deadline
Check all documents and sign off accounts	Treasurer (Former Treasurer)	Before May meeting
Read, agree to and sign code of conduct document	Everyone	Before May meeting
Fill in meeting availability document and return to Secretary	Everyone	20th April
Sort out dates/arrangements for Working Group meetings if not already organised	Everyone	Before next meeting
Find out requirements for Treasurer's laptop	Chairperson	Before working group meeting
Prepare costed proposal for laptop for Treasurer for discussion at next meeting	Finance & Governance working groups	By next exec meeting
If Working Group meetings happen before next meeting provide feedback	Working group leads	By next exec meeting
Set up Executive committee WhatsApp group	Secretary	20th April
NAS Conference?	Secretary for details Governance Working Party	

Next Meeting Saturday 11th May 2pm; venue to be confirmed