BDAC Executive Meeting Minutes

10th August 2024

Meadow Road Allotments

Present: Keith Yardley (KY Chairing), Hester Blewitt (HB Sec), Yvonne Brookes (YB Treas), Len Tubbs (LT), Dave Reece (DRE), Andrew Large (AL), Stuart Guest (SG), Cheryl Butler (CB), Clive Fenn (CF), John Whittaker (JW), Kerry McGahey (KM), Ross White (RW)

Apologies: Kate Martin Smith (KMS), David Read (DR), Tony Webb (TW), Luke Richards (LR)

Note: As David Read, our current Chair is recovering in hospital. Keith Yardley has agreed to be Interim Chair for August, September and October meetings only. All wish David a speedy recovery.

Minutes of Exec of 15 June 2024. Two sets of minutes had been circulated as there were two people taking minutes at the last meeting and a final version had not been agreed. Various objections, comments and alterations were discussed. The meeting otherwise agreed the remainder in principle. CB and KY to draft their respective changes for circulation. Revised copy attached for final on-line agreement. CB objection to "CB says he (DaRa) is now claiming that CBir told him to destroy records"
Minutes provisionally agreed with amendments to be approved in September.

Proposed item that Minutes of meetings should be issued within 14 days of meeting and then respond back within 7 days. Further discussion needed as the members who write and then retype the minutes are already overloaded with other tasks. Volunteers welcome.

Matters arising from the minutes of the June Executive

1. HB still needs assistance with the secretarial duties especially now due to our Chair's hospitalisation. As there were no volunteers, HB and YB will take today's minutes. Following objections to wording and factual descriptions in the draft minutes it was recognised that we need to agree the extent and format of these minutes. The following was agreed:
   Action - Exec to review extent and format of minutes and make recommendation for September meeting.
   Action - A standard declaration of any conflicts of interest to be recorded at every executive meeting by the minute taker
   Action – All executive minutes are to be circulated in draft form within 14 days of the meeting being held. Members then have 7 days to comment which allows around 7 days for the agreed draft to be circulated by the secretary before the next meeting
2. KY and AL requested a definition of the Conflict of Interest declaration
   Action – KY asked the Governance Working Group to come up with a definition for approval at the September meeting. HB will send to the Governance WG some wording detail on Conflict of Interest which was in one of the original drafts of the Code of Conduct

Secretary's Report (HB)

3. We still need a Minute-taker for Exec and other meetings which would make it easier for BDAC Secretary to participate in the meetings.

4. A large part of the Secretary's time is being taken up with dealing with complaints which BCC expects us to handle. The different levels of complexity can involve conflicts between plot holders and associations and vice versa; plot cultivation, letters of eviction, misinterpretation

of rules, ignoring of rules, inabilities of some associations to handle conflicts, lack of communication all round…etc. There is a lack of training for associations/committee members: many of them are willing but lack knowledge eg on discrimination, cultural differences, disabilities. The latest complaint involves a residents group contacting councillors about site management on behalf of one of its tenants. We do not have the resources to deal with the more complex complaints received, and generally they cover the full range of the many issues we have to deal with on sites.

Action – HB to draft a brief list of the complaints as requested at the previous meeting to enlighten this executive to be able to consider our options and come up with solutions. KM and KMS have summarised the issues for exec review as it is considered by the MOSA Working Group that it needs our full executive to consider the way forward. The role of the landlord (B'ham Council) should also be considered.
Action – a dedicated separate meeting on 7th September was agreed to consider this single subject. Venue to be arranged (YB) NOTE: 7th Sept meeting to be postponed because YB unable to attend

Treasurer's Report

1. BDAC insurance fees for sites not yet paid to Chris Knott because BCC has not yet sent the money to cover them. YB is continuing to chase BCC for this.

2. DR has spoken with one of the signatories on the "Audited" Statement of Accounts for year 2023-2024. The person said the "task" was to tick the hand written Statement of Accounts against the Bank Statement. No supporting documentation was involved, no invoices, no cheque stubs, not an audit that would be recognised by any professional body. Following a letter from our solicitors giving a deadline for handing over all past paperwork to them, they have arranged to collect the past records and paperwork from the former treasurer's home, next Monday, as he is now saying it's too heavy and difficult for him to deliver it himself by public transport.
Action – YB

3. The current account transactions were circulated. It was agreed to add more detail showing what the transactions referred to.

4. We now have partial access to the current account but not the deposit account. Santander Bank now agree they no longer need the death certificates of past signatories, but they are sending a form for completion. The Show account remains blocked.
All actions – YB

Working Group Reports

HB reminded all Working Groups to review the Terms of Reference provided earlier to their groups and reminded all of the general process i.e. they decide how they are going to work and report findings/recommendations to an Exec meeting.

A Governance (Lead: RW Others: DRe, KY, AL, DRE)

1. Monthly meetings progressing. Last meeting was 1st August and held on-line

2. Policy Schedules are not on our Web site as yet. Ross asked for any and all formal BDAC policies and our Constitution to be placed on our web site. Agreed by all.
Action - KY and HB to prepare content. Clive to publish on web site.

3. Concerns raised about what Constitution is currently in operation and what has been agreed so far. Currently the application to become Co-operative is currently with Tyler Harris at NAS, and he says changes are needed by the FCA so it can be resubmitted. Concerns around the BDAC Constitution dated 2014 that was amended 2019. Then an amendment was made at the AGM 2024. The amendment states that the BDAC will need to change the Constitution/ Working Rules when we become a Co-operative. **Action** - KM to send her concerns to the governance group regarding our current constitutions (2014, and 2019) and what is required once we are operating as a Co-operative.

4. Our legal Registered Address remains as DR's home address to ensure all legal paperwork is received and actioned promptly. We need to agree a new address and a process for handling any postal mail received.
Action – BDAC Exec – future agenda item

5. Freedom of Information requests. We are concerned that some information has not been received in full following KYs requests e.g. Site survey reports; asbestos reports and Flo Pickering fund information.
Action – CF and RW to contact all sites to ask them to review their respective reports on our web site to identify any missing reports

6. The roles and handover process between officers e.g. treasurer and auditors' roles needs to be agreed and documented for future use. We also need to recruit new auditors, preferably with accountancy qualification to conform with Cooperative rules
   Action – RW/Governance Working Group to draft for executive agreement
   Action – DR to research auditor requirements and selection process.
7. Diversity amongst our own executive and our association members has been considered. It is acknowledged that a communication barrier exists if members do not speak English.
   Action – the Communications Group to consider adding alternative languages to our web site pages and communications, and to agree an ongoing process
8. A draft Stakeholder list has been circulated to this executive which will enable our external communication to be more focussed.
   Action: All executive to review and send comments to RW before September meeting

B. **Finance** (Lead: Yvonne Brookes)
As Treasurers report above.

C Management of Sites and Associations (MOSA) (Lead: HB, KMS (apologies for meeting)

1. The Terms of Reference circulated earlier has been agreed, and that any non-Exec people involved in MOSA should also be asked to sign up to the Code of Conduct (once agreed), and this should apply also to sub groups. The Exec member on the group should present the report at Exec meetings. Minutes should be shared amongst the Exec group. Whatever kind of meeting notes should be written and shared with Exec members, so the Exec will make the final decision based on the work undertaken by the Working Group.
2. A draft of "Guideline on plot cultivation" has already been circulated to the Executive for comments (awaited) and the non-cultivation guidelines are in trial phase at West Heath allotments while an App-based plot inspection process has been trialled at (5) Ward End sites.
   Action – All exec to review guidelines and respond.
   Action - the cultivation guidelines to be agreed at Sept meeting (HB)

3. There have been four training workshops (2 topics repeated – one on Minding the Money, the other on Decision-making and meeting skills) which took place in June and July. They went well and were well attended by 23 associations, with follow-up material provided and links made so participants could stay in touch. Written report already circulated. The meeting gave their thanks to HB and the team. Future workshop topics which could be run in the autumn (September onwards) include Funding, Secretary's Role.

Action – All Executive to look at HB's report and comment, make suggestions for future workshops if they have any for MOSA to consider.

D Communication, Website and Marketing (Lead: Clive Fenn)

It was noted that there was a comment on Facebook from a person called Bob Capp. He is an RHS judge and was due to Judge at the forthcoming BDAC "Show Event". Unfortunately, the show was cancelled and Bob's comment was that "we're a bunch of clowns". Agreed to follow this up and find out more specifically what his grievance is (late notice??)

CF is awaiting policy list to add to the website where there is a Policy Index, although specific policies are yet to be approved by the Exec. If we did include policies for associations, they should be seen as templates, helpful, not our recommendations, not our rules. For the moment, it was confirmed that what's on the website would be BDAC policies only NOT ones for associations to adopt for themselves.

E Infrastructure – Flo Pickering Fund

YB will lead this group until DR returns to Chair duties. YB confirmed the Working Group members have visited 10 sites with 3 more not visited on the day by the City Architects and contractors as well as the BDAC reps. Commercial quotes have been received by BCC/BDAC with a verbal commitment to complete the work this calendar year. There are not enough funds in the budget to complete all the work so will be referred here to decide priorities based on i) Health and safety concerns; ii) need-to-have; and iii) nice-to-have. HB reminded Exec members the list has already been circulated to them for comments only.

Action - YB to contact Anthony Downes City Architects Dept for a full update following the visits to 13 sites and confirm scheduled completion dates when list provided

Action- Working Group to make recommendations to Executive on criteria for Flo Pickering Fund

Action – to add DRE to list of Infrastructure Working Group members.

F Shows and Events Lead: CB for Show, KM for Events

Cheryl reported that the Annual BDAC Show was cancelled due to the lack of applications as Prize Money was not offered. Bob Carr, a judge for the event was allegedly very upset about this (he was due to be paid £50). She pointed out that at a committee meeting some years ago it had been agreed that funds would be available for 4 years (2024 is the second year of this period) and that the Show committee felt it was very late in the day when they were informed that funds would not be available apart from £250 expenses and no prize money. (See minutes 11th May). **Agreed** that the judge's fee should be paid.

Following discussion, it was **agreed** that a BDAC show should be more open to all communities and greater participation encouraged; less emphasis on RHS standards for any competition being organised.

Action: CB to ask current Working Group their thoughts on moving forward, ask to come up with a proposal for the future to get wider involvement for future events and shows.

Action: YB & KM to join the Working Group

It was noted that the Flo Pickering Agreement allows for an award for a 'Best Plot' competition and that has not been held for a couple of years. Proposed by HB, seconded by AL and KM and agreed by the exec to start running this again, but next year not this year. **Action:** KY to review the Flo Pickering Best Plot Competition scope, then Working Group to agree processes e.g. best plot definition, criteria and requirements, points system, recruiting a judge(s), timetable for event, communication process, cost design for A3 posters and the award.

Code of Conduct

Following the earlier action for the governance WG to provide a definition of Conflict of Interest there was no further discussion.

University of Birmingham/BDAC Survey Launch of "Allotments and Wellbeing: the Future of Allotments in Birmingham" Seminar on June 20th, report from the Secretary

This was hosted by the university and was a positive event for BDAC and the report. Cllr Mahmood did not attend so was not available to answer our other issues. - We must do something with the knowledge we have gain from this unique report and survey which took a lot of BDAC effort and time in late 2023/early 2024. We should continue to promote it to all Allotment Associations and plot holders and encourage them to make use of its findings.

Action – Exec to consider how else we can use this report's findings.

"Growing Birmingham" - 1 page written summary tabled

This is a proposal from BOSF and Social Farms and Gardens for BDAC to join them in a combined funding application eg to the Lottery. The objective is to secure funds for 3 years for a salaried person to achieve stated objectives common to all three organisations, including raising profiles and getting people in the community more involved in growing and environmental issues. Bid is still in early stage of development. The BDAC would be allocated 1 day per week of the worker's time.

BDAC needs representation by more than just the Secretary to ensure that our concerns are addressed especially concerning the role of the employee and our involvement is manageable. KM and LT willing to be involved with the Secretary to ensure this.
Action – HB to pass details to KM and LT and to contact BOSF and to get involved in helping to develop the bid. KM, HB and LT to coordinate and report back.

Any other business

1. CF noted that we still need to review the future relationship between BDAC and Sutton Coldfield allotments as they move away from BCC.
   Action: KY to consider.
2. Next Meeting is on 14th September but has been moved to Bordesley Green allotments

NOTE: Bordesley Green and Meadow Road not available, so meeting will be at Northleigh Road

The meeting closed at 16.46 pm.