

## Briar Road Allotment Holders Association

### Minutes of the AGM of the Association held in the Communal Hut Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> June 2016

**Committee members present:** Gill Ware (Chairperson), Dennis Leigh (Site Coordinator), Graham Day, Shirley Tubridy (Hon Treasurer), Helena Fogel, Dennis Marks

**Plot holders present:** Angela Marks, Maggy Ramsay, Ralph Cox, Keith Goodsir, Jasmine Brown, Jean West, Roger Wilson

**Apologies for absence:** Colleen McKenna (Media Secretary), Kathryn Harrison, Valerie Stevens (Membership Secretary), Jim Boocock, Pat Riordan, Susan Lee

#### Matters arising

- Last year's AGM was held on a Thursday to see if having it on a weekday would lead to a higher attendance. However, some tenants said they preferred a weekend date so this year's AGM was moved back to a Saturday
- We still need to find out whether tenants would be willing to pay for a skip
  - **Question:** did we find out how much a skip would cost?
  - **Response:** about £300 to £400
  - **Comment:** we would still get people dumping rubbish from outside and the green bin might encourage people to dump rubbish
- There is still an issue with the gate being left unlocked. We have put notices up but some tenants still ignore them

#### Chairperson's report

- Gill Ware thanked everyone for coming and thanked and introduced the committee members, including Ben Renton, the newest member of the committee
- Graham Day has taken over as Vice Chair from Colleen McKenna
- We sadly lost two plot holders this year, committee member Ron Chappell and Ian Trebett who, as a child, used to help his father with his plot at Briar Road. Ian's family have donated a bench in his honour which has been placed by the river, in front of the communal hut
- Voluntary Management (VM) – the committee met with David Allister from the Council to discuss progress on VM, with David addressing our concerns on water, trees, boundaries, income and expenditure. Following this meeting, a BRAHA sub-committee (Gill Ware, Colleen McKenna and Kathryn Harrison) amended the draft lease drawn up earlier this year and the next steps are to show it to the Council's legal department and to get our own legal advice on it. Finally, tenants will have a chance to vote for or against moving to VM. Note that we would have a clause in the lease to say we could hand back control to the Council if we struggled to manage the site
  - **Question:** would it be up to us to collect rents under VM?
  - **Response:** yes, but this should be manageable once a system has been set up, especially if we can persuade tenants to pay by direct debit
  - **Question:** are there tenants who don't pay their invoices?
  - **Response:** yes, but the Council is unable to tell us who has not paid
- Under VM, we would be expected to pay the Council 25% of the rents we collect, but we would do this gradually so that we can build up a contingency fund. For example, in the first year, we would pay the Council nothing; in the second year we would pay a quarter of the 25%, in the third year, half of the 25% and finally the full 25% in year 4. The funds we collect will then be used for maintenance and repairs, although not major works
  - **Question:** are some boundaries private residents' boundaries?
  - **Response:** yes, and some are in very poor states of repair, especially in Andover Road. Pete Lewis, the Allotments Officer at the Council, is liaising with Richmond Housing Partnership about carrying out repairs but has had little success. Also, some of the properties are privately owned and it is difficult to distinguish between them
  - **Question:** what are the advantages for the Council if we manage ourselves?
  - **Response:** they won't have to collect rents and manage the site so they will save money. The Council no longer wants to manage allotments so if sites do not manage themselves, the Council will pass management onto an outside contractor. This would leave sites with no say in how they are run

- **Question:** would we be able to evict tenants if they don't cultivate their plot?
  - **Response:** yes, we would add a clause to new rules and regulations to allow us to evict tenants who neglect their plots
- We have been looking into getting a compostable toilet on site. They seem to work well on other sites but there are concerns that they are very expensive and no-one will volunteer to help maintain it, ie dig out the compost every couple of years. We may go back to the Council to ask for a proper toilet connected to mains sewers, especially as they have already done this close by in Kneller Gardens
- We continue to carry out regular plot checks and liaise with Pete Lewis to contact tenants who do not work their plots. Waiting lists seem to be reducing, with some applicants having changed their mind when they get to the top of the list
- The committee has been disappointed with attendance at events during the past year, especially on our Open Day and BBQs, so we are planning fewer events this year. The one success was the Twickenham Green Charity Fair in May where we had a stall and raised £810. This was hard work but worth it for the money raised. Spending this year included a new shed, a table for use at future events, a strimmer for tenants to use and a new seating area in front of the hut
- Two tenants from our site won the Best Novice Prize in the Richmond Borough competition. We held our own competition, with tenants submitting baskets of produce, although we would have liked to have seen more entries
- The beehive on site was closed down over winter and Emma has introduced a new calmer queen, which should mean calmer worker bees and therefore fewer incidents of tenants being stung. Small taster jars of honey were available in the hut for tenants to try and larger jars were available later to purchase
  - **Question:** will there be honey available for fundraising?
  - **Response:** the honey produced belongs to the beekeeper and would be sold to cover Emma's costs
- We continue to attend BRAG (Borough of Richmond Allotments Group) meetings, although the Council seems to ignore them and does not consult them on issues such as rent increases and rule changes
- The Council wanted to ban bonfires on all allotment sites but as a compromise, have banned them at weekends and during summer, although BRAG have complained to the Council that this is still too restrictive
  - **Question:** could we change this to allow fires under VM?
  - **Response:** probably not as we would be leasing Council owned land
- Gill finished her report by sharing comments she's received on how friendly and welcoming people are on site and thanking tenants for their continued support

### Membership Secretary's report

- There are currently 257 people on the waiting list
- The person at the top of the list applied for a plot in May 2012, so waiting time is currently 4 years
- Between October 2015 and June 2016, 46 applications were processed and 14 plots were allocated. Of the other applications, 10 people had taken a plot at another site and 22 had either moved away or no longer wanted a plot
- A new "Good Allotment Guide" has been prepared for new tenants
  - **Comment:** part of the challenge for new tenants is clearing an overgrown plot
  - **Question:** is there something we can suggest to help tenants in this situation?
  - **Response:** black plastic can be used and there are no rules saying you can't spray. We also have a strimmer available for tenants to borrow
  - **Comment:** there is an unrealistic expectation that plots should be perfect before letting
- Gill suggested we hire someone to clear all the paths every couple of weeks but would need approval from tenants to pay for this

### Site Coordinator's report

- There have been no water problems apart from a couple of dripping taps
- A new shed with shelving has been put up this year
- Use of the communal compost bins has not been great in terms of what is being dumped and where and some tenants are not following notices on the bins as to what can be placed in them
- Gill has asked tenants not to donate large electrical items such as lawnmowers and shredders and furniture such as tables and chairs as we cannot store them

### Hon Treasurer's report

- Copies of the accounts as at 31<sup>st</sup> May 2016 were distributed:
  - BRAHA account: £2.08
  - Hut account: £714.83

- Note that approximately £800 from the May Fair is still to be added to the Hut Account
- Gill would like to replace a broken gazebo and asked tenants if there is anything else they think the site needs
- **Election of officers**
- No nominations for new committee members have been received. The current committee members are happy to continue so a proposal was made to re-elect all current committee members:
  - **Proposed:** Ralph Cox, **Seconded:** Maggy Ramsay
- We still have no auditor – Dennis L audited this year but it should not be done by a committee member). Gill appealed for any volunteers from the floor. We will definitely need an outside auditor if we manage ourselves

#### **AOB**

- For information, Dennis L lost all his chickens to foxes this year
- **Question:** Does everyone know what BRAG is?
- **Response:** It is a group made up of representatives of all the allotment sites in the borough to discuss allotment issues. There have been problems however, eg:
  - the Chair resigned and no-one took over the position for a while
  - the Council see BRAG as weak and treat it accordingly
- **Question:** Is there another name we can use for the hut?
- **Response:** Possibly the chalet or the clubhouse? The committee are open to suggestions
- **Comment:** Gill and other committee members were thanked for all their hard work

End of meeting