

BRIAR ROAD ALLOTMENT HOLDERS ASSOCIATION (BRAHA)

ANNUAL REPORT 2020 -2021

[ENTRIES IN ITALICS RELATE TO RELEVANT MATTERS OUTSIDE THE PERIOD OF THIS REPORT]

Introduction. This report covers the period from the August 2020 to June 2021. The BRAHA Annual General Meeting normally takes place in June but due to Covid legislation restricting meetings and gatherings no AGM was held in 2020 and the same will apply in 2021.

The Committee. The Committee remains without a formal Chair although Alan Charles has agreed to be Acting Chair for a limited period with effect from 1st August 2021. The current members of the Committee are: Jim Boocock, Alan Charles, Tom Crosland (Hon. Treasurer), Graham Day, Helena Fogel (Minute Secretary), Alison Horwood, Dennis Leigh (Site Co-ordinator), Philippa McCabe, Ben Renton (Hon. Secretary), Gill Ware and Gill Whitelegg. In the absence of an AGM this year all members of the committee are willing and able to remain in post for a further year. Any BRAHA plot-holder interested in joining the committee should speak with an existing committee member.

The Site. Until recently all plots were let with the exception of one which the Council required to be left vacant for a few years following the discovery of Japanese Knotweed growing on it. The waiting time for plots in the borough is currently some 5 to 6 years and over 250 people are understood to be on the waiting list. Some plots remain neglected this year, mainly due to Covid issues. The committee has written to those plot-holders whose plots have been left untended for a while to offer extra assistance, and to check whether they still want to continue with them. The Council Allotments Officer resumed his round of plot checks in April and wrote to those plot-holders whose plots he felt required attention. Evictions for unsatisfactory plots have resumed. *Presently we have 9 vacant plots. Two of these have recently been let and the remaining seven have been viewed.*

The Finances. As at 30 June 2021 the BRAHA financial situation was: Special Account £2198.92, BRAHA Account £246.37. Expenditure this year has been modest, mainly on site and hut maintenance and the purchase of parking permits. The cancellation of the Twickenham May Fair for the second year running deprived the Association of its main opportunity to raise funds, usually in excess of £1000; likewise we were unable to hold our pre-Christmas social and fund raising raffle at the end of 2020. By charging £5.00 for access to the parking permits we have recovered their full cost.

After many years of using the Nationwide Building Society to keep our funds the Committee agreed to transfer them to Metrobank as the facilities offered allows us greater flexibility and visibility in handling the various financial transactions we have to make throughout the year. For example when the parking permits are next renewed plot-holders who use them will be able to pay us by direct debit or transfer from their bank account rather than by cash or cheque. Likewise payments to and from the Council can now be made direct rather than by a cheque drawn at the building society.

Covid 19. Allotments have remained largely unaffected by lockdown measures and many plot-holders have taken advantage of this to spend more time on their plots, possibly because working from home has given them greater opportunities to do so. On the other hand some plots have suffered because their tenants were either self-isolating or caring and unable to visit. The Community Hut has also had to be closed during each period of lockdown. *[It has since re-opened.]*

Fund raising. In the absence of the pre-Christmas social and the Twickenham May Fair our fund raising activities have been limited. In spring this year we held a seed swap outside the Community Hut which raised £22.00 using an honesty box alone, and which was boosted by £39.40 from the sale of some donated iris corms. A few weeks later as the planting and growing season moved into full swing we held a plant sale, again outside the Community Hut, which was very well supported (with a queue waiting for the opening at 10.00) and almost everything sold by the time the sale ended. We raised £380.62 from this activity. It is hoped that with the easing of lockdown restrictions this summer that other fund raising activities, like our summer barbeques and the pre-Christmas social, can resume.

Accessible Plot (Number 35) – The Raised Bed Project.

Earlier this year a long-standing plot holder and his sister decided to give up their plots near the Andover Road entrance. This gave the Committee a chance to fulfil a plan to help older or less able plot holders. We received permission from the Local Authority to put our plan into practice and were also able to secure a community grant from the Local Area Fund. We have also applied for more funding from other sources.

This project is especially important to us as for many years we have watched as older plot holders start to struggle with their plots and eventually give up. These are special people who enjoy the wellbeing that exercise gives but also appreciate socializing with other plot holders. We intend to build eight raised beds of 2.4m x 1.2m and fill them with topsoil. Solid paths that will be suitable for wheelchairs or people with mobility problems will be laid and there will be seating, storage, compost bins, a shed, and ramps down from the main path. We intend to have the project finished by early Spring 2022, ready to welcome our first plot holders. Currently we have three plot holders interested. A huge thank you to all the volunteers who have helped in the clearing of the plot so far. We really could not have done it without you.

Parking Permits. Stocks of visitor parking permits are held at both entrance gates to our site and may be used by plot-holders on payment of a small annual fee, currently £5.00 per annum, to cover the cost of sourcing the permits.

Hampton Court Flower Show. In 2019 BRAHA was invited by the Flower Show organisers to design and produce a stand on the theme of 'Gardening for Everyone; reuse, recycle and reduce waste' for the 2020 show which was cancelled due to Covid restrictions. The organisers have now invited us to contribute something for the 2022 show which we have accepted. The theme has yet to be announced.

Hot Bin. The communal compost bins alongside the River Crane are popular and well used but they are unable to process some of the more difficult to compost material that arises on site. In an effort to overcome this problem the committee refurbished a previously used hot bin to see how effective

it was. The initial outcome has not been promising because the bin did not perform as well as expected but the trial continues. We have also made good use of the Council's offer to remove woody waste from our site.

Wildlife. Our site is known to be home to a wide variety of wildlife – birds, amphibians, insects and mammals. Plot-holders are asked to do whatever they can to ensure that this diversity is maintained and supported. A study took place earlier this year to see how large and diverse our bat population was alongside our stretch of the River Crane. Five species were observed: Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Nathusius Pipistrelle, Daubenton's Bat and Noctule Bat. This summer we have also had several sightings of hedgehogs *and shortly researchers from ZSL Institute of Zoology will place several cameras on site to monitor how many of these animals may be living there.*

Volunteer Days. Normally each year the committee organises several volunteer days to ensure that the site is kept looking presentable and the compost bins are emptied. However due to coronavirus restrictions these had been suspended but with the recent funding approval for Accessible Plot 35 the opportunity was taken for a series of volunteer days to be held with the aim of clearing the site before preparatory work to create the new plot can be started.

Summary. The continuing Coronavirus restrictions have seen a second year of intensified activity on many plots but at the expense of gatherings and fund raising opportunities. Fortunately the Committee has not faced any major or unexpected expenditure requirements this year and our finances remain healthy. We look forward to a period of greater stability in the year ahead.

BRAHA Committee, September 2021.