

## **Borough of Richmond Allotment Group (BRAG) – Ordinary Meeting**

**Date:** 25<sup>th</sup> November 2014, 7:15pm

**Venue:** Terrace Room, York House, York Street, Twickenham TW1 3BZ

### **Present (Representatives):**

Joyce Bentley – Walnut Tree

Denis Brown – Westfields

Alex Clarke – Hertford Ave, Palewell Fields, Palewell Pavillion, Priory, Triangle

Hilary Denness – Old Palace Lane

Howard Fletcher – Manor Road (Minutes)

Robin Hewitt – Bushy Park

Ian Hyde – Walnut Tree

Phil Iddison – Bushy Park

Paul Leonard – Cavendish House

Tim McGough – Manor Road (Chair)

Ian Micklewright – Mill Road

Chris Morley Smith – Kew Short Lots

James Simcox – Shacklegate Lane

Richard Ward – Townmead

Mike Wren – Hatherop

Gill Ware – Briar Road

Also tenants from various sites

### **1. New Representatives**

The Chairman welcomed as new members of BRAG Ian Hyde and Joyce Bentley who will represent the Walnut Tree site.

### **2. Previous Minutes (22<sup>nd</sup> September 2014)**

The previous minutes were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.

### **3. Matters Arising**

3.1 Richard Ward said that he has had four responses to his request for photographs of allotment sites, but was hoping for more. The deadline will be extended to the end of the year and Representatives are urged to submit offerings.

3.2 James Simcox said that he has booked the venue for the next meeting.

### **4. Allotment Terms & Conditions**

The current Terms & Conditions (T&Cs) are deemed to have been accepted by tenants by paying their rent for 2014/2015. Although these T&Cs were developed through a lengthy period of discussion, they can be amended by agreement with the council and need to kept under review. BRAG is the best organ to initiate required changes.

As T&Cs are 're-accepted' on each rent payment, changes can be introduced which affect existing tenants. Amendments can therefore be applied to pre-existing conditions.

It was suggested that BRAG should maintain a list of issues requiring review and formulate recommendations for changes to the T&Cs. It is necessary to determine which are general and which should only apply to specific sites; different wordings may apply. The following issues were raised and discussed, to be followed up at later meetings:

- Handling of complaints (via site committee first if possible?)
- Thefts
- Antisocial behaviour
- After-dark attendance (limited to 30 minutes after sundown?)
- Bonfires (prohibited in summer/at weekends?)
- Bee keeping
- Poultry (and other livestock) keeping

Phil Iddison said that Bushy Park had formed a Livestock Welfare subcommittee following the Council's and the RSPCA's unwillingness to address concerns raised about chickens on site. It was suggested that a 'tick-list' be created to assist inspections, which could be shared by other sites.

A number of Representatives expressed concern that the Termination Warning process was not working at the speed stated in the T&Cs, as a result of which some plots were rendered unproductive for a whole season. Sites have differing inspection regimes and some are more proactive than others. It was agreed that we should help Pete Lewis to identify improper plots and prioritise those that need action from him to terminate tenancies promptly such that the plot can be best utilised. To take this forward, each representative should provide (email) a summary of their inspection process and its effectiveness to the Chairman for collation and discussion at the next meeting.

Linked to Termination Warnings is the question of whether a tenant has paid his/her annual rent. It appears that whilst Pete Lewis can confirm whether or not an individual has paid, it is not possible to provide a list of those who have not. This should be considered in conjunction with recommendations to the council on warnings.

Vicky Phillips (Bushy Park) suggested that the T&Cs would benefit from some rationalization of wording, particularly in the 'General' section, e.g. clearly differentiating between obligations (Tenant and Council), guidelines and comment. She offered to work with Phil Iddison to suggest improvements for the next version.

## **5. Social Media**

James Simcox reported that he has created a Twitter account entitled 'bragcommunity'. There was no cost to this. It will enable easy communication

between site points of contact and facilitate the building of a related community. Such a community could be used to negotiate discounts from local suppliers, for example. Each Representative is asked to invite their tenants to provide two people who would get involved. James Simcox will issue a poster for site notice boards, and will email a simple guide to Representatives.

James Simcox has also registered a website with the address 'brag.community'. He has paid the small amount involved, but the site will require approximately £100 per year to maintain. He will approach the council to see if they might fund this. He will also approach Esher College for a student volunteer to design and set up the site.

Howard Fletcher as BRAG Secretary will maintain and distribute a list of Representatives with their contact details. Representatives are asked to forward to him all web addresses for individual sites.

## **5. Any Other Business**

- 5.1 Paul Leonard reported on a number of issues from Cavendish House which may be of interest to other sites and on which he would welcome feedback:
- Trees – a paid contractor was engaged with council permission;
  - Water – has been turned off; is this an issue for chickens?;
  - Asbestos – some on site, but low grade and not of interest to council;
  - Toilets – possible connection of portable toilet to main services;
  - Car Park – potential to let out on rugby days;
  - Path Width – difficulty maintaining when subdividing plots.
- 5.2 Mike Vile (Walnut Tree) said that he had complained about the recent rent rises and that the council was not providing accounts to support the increases. There was also a suggestion that the increases might have exceeded what is permitted by law. The Chairman said that he and Phil Iddison had attended and spoken at a council meeting (29<sup>th</sup> January 2014) on the matter. The Secretary said that David Allister had provided a set of council allotment accounts at a previous meeting (3<sup>rd</sup> March 2014), although these were not broken down by site. The Secretary will forward a copy to Ian Hyde.
- 5.3 Chris Morley-Smith asked if a record could be kept of each site's devolved/semi-devolved/not devolved status. The Secretary will add a column to the contacts list for this purpose.

The meeting was closed at 9:05pm

## **6. Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> January 2015 at 7pm.

Venue: The Waldegrave Arms, Waldegrave Road, Teddington, TW11 8LX

Tim McGough gave his apologies for the next meeting, which will be chaired by Chris Morley-Smith.