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

**Date:** 12th January 2015, 7pm

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

**Present:**

Maria Casey – Bushy Park

Hilary Denness – Old Palace Lane

Howard Fletcher – Manor Road (Minutes)

Ian Hyde – Walnut Tree

Rosemary Fulljames – Cavendish House

Phil Iddison – Bushy Park

Dennis Leigh – Briar Road

Ian Micklewright – Mill Road

Chris Morley Smith – Kew Short Lots (Chair)

Vicky Phillips – Bushy Park

Richard Ward – Townmead

Gill Ware – Briar Road

**Apologies:**

Joyce Bentley – Walnut Tree

Denis Brown – Westfields

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

Robin Hewitt – Bushy Park

Tim McGough – Manor Road

James Simcox – Shacklegate Lane

Mike Wren – Hatherop

**1. Previous Minutes (25th November 2014)**

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

**2. Matters Arising**

**2.1 *Reps to submit photographs to Richard Ward***

Richard reported that he has received photographs from eight sites. Any further photographs should be submitted directly to Pete Lewis for publication on the revamped council website.

**2.2 *Bushy Park to create livestock inspection ‘tick list’***

See item 4, below

**2.3 *Reps to provide summary of inspection process***

See item 3, below

**2.4 *Vicky Phillips/Phil Iddison to suggest improvements to T&Cs***

Phil Iddison reported that he has received a MS Word version of the current T&Cs from David Allister. He and Vicky Phillips will work on an improved version with a view to producing a draft in advance of the next BRAG meeting. It is unrealistic to expect a revised version to be agreed by October 2015; 2016 is more likely.

**2.5 *James Simcox to provide poster guide to Twitter***

Carried forward due to James’s absence.

**2.6 *James Simcox to approach Esher College for website designer***

Carried forward due to James’s absence.

**2.7 *Reps to send Secretary website addresses***

The Secretary has been notified of five website addresses, which are now included on the Sites spreadsheet.

**2.8 *Secretary to issue list of Reps, to include devolution status***

The Secretary has included an extra column for Devolution Status on the Sites spreadsheet and will reissue with updated information.

**3. Inspection Process**

Reps have sent to the Secretary descriptions of their inspection processes which have been summarized on the Sites spreadsheet.Processes vary, but fall into 3 main groups:

* Sites which leave all inspections/notices to the council
* Sites which do their own inspections and request Pete Lewis to write letters
* Sites which do their own inspections and make initial approaches (verbal, email, or letter) to errant tenants before asking Pete Lewis to issue final notices.

Many sites said that the Council procedures, which are set out clearly with defined timescales in the T&Cs, are not being consistently followed. This is probably due to pressure of work on Pete Lewis and we should attempt to adopt procedures which will help him to do what is necessary to maintain standards and ensure that plots are properly developed.

Non-response to Council letters constitutes a breach of T&Cs, whereas there is no recourse to a lack of response to letters issued by site committees.

It was reiterated that inspections early in the year (April) are essential so that where necessary the eviction process can be completed in time for the plot to be reallocated for the growing season. Most sites take photographs of poor plots and copy them to Pete Lewis with requests for letters. It is important that all photographs and communications are recorded to retain evidence of decisions and actions. All plots inspected – even satisfactory plots – should be recorded, even if only by a ‘tick’ on a site list.

It is noted that most sites do not have complete and up-to-date plans showing all plot numbers, and many plots are not marked as is required by the T&Cs. Rosemary Fulljames said that Cavendish House use a hand-held chalk board to record plot numbers on photographs.

Bushy Park have developed a process which appears to be effective and is available for adoption by others. The Secretary will distribute this to all Reps.

**4. Any Other Business**

**4.1 Livestock**

Vicky Phillips has produced a set of guidelines for livestock keeping following a number of welfare issues at Bushy Park. These are comprehensive and have been developed using available information from DEFRA and RSPCA.

Where problems have been encountered, both the council and the RSPCA have appeared reluctant to act. However, it appears that some plot-holders are keeping far more birds than could reasonably be used to support only personal use, implying that there is a commercial intent in clear breach of regulations. T&Cs restrict livestock infrastructure to 25% of the plot area, suggesting a maximum number of about 12 birds according to RSPCA space recommendations.

RSPCA guidelines (and common sense) suggest that daily visits and constant clean water are required for livestock. This can be a problem on sites where the mains supply is turned off during winter months.

The variety (and intermixing) of livestock is becoming extended, with quails, partridges, pheasants, turkeys and ducks all being kept.

It is believed that only four sites – Bushy Park, Townmead, Briar Lane and Shacklegate Lane – currently have livestock on site. Most have few or no problems.

It is proposed that the Bushy Park document becomes the standard for all sites. All sites holding livestock should review the document (already distributed) to ensure that it is appropriate for their use. It should then be referred to in revised T&Cs.

It is noted that current T&Cs require plot-holders to obtain express permission of both the Council and site committees before holding livestock. This should be enforced on all sites.

**4.2 Open Days**

Richard Ward asked for site Open Days to be published. The Secretary said that he would record and issue on the Sites spreadsheet any such events notified to him.

**4.3 2015-2016 Rents**

Phil Iddison said that he has been talking to council representatives regarding the setting of allotment rents for next year. It understood that this will be discussed by the Scrutiny Committee in a ‘non-public’ meeting.

It is noted that the current Allotments Strategy document which explains the finances supporting annual rent settings expires in January 2015, and there has been no contact with BRAG as promised to communicate regarding the subsequent period.

It was agreed that the Chairman should write to the Lead Scrutiny Member for Environment (Cllr Kate Howard) and/or the Strategic Cabinet Member for Environment (Cllr Pamela Fleming), with a copy to David Allister, requesting engagement on the strategy and, in particular, on the subject of rents.

**4.4 Tim McGough**

The meeting sends congratulations to Mr and Mrs McGough on the arrival of their baby daughter.

**5. Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Monday, 13th April 2015 at 7pm.

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