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

**Date:** 13th April 2015, 7pm

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

**Present:**

Joyce Bentley – Walnut Tree

Hilary Denness – Old Palace Lane

Howard Fletcher – Manor Road (Minutes)

Rosemary Fulljames – Cavendish House

Phil Iddison – Bushy Park

Dennis Leigh – Briar Road

David Mertens – St Anne’s Passage, Westfields

Tim McGough – Manor Road (Chair)

Ian Micklewright – Mill Road

Chris Morley Smith – Kew Short Lots

Berny Simcox – Shacklegate Lane

James Simcox – Shacklegate Lane

Richard Ward – Townmead

Gill Ware – Briar Road

Mike Wren – Hatherop

**Apologies:**

Alan Billany – Sixth Cross Road

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

Robin Hewitt – Bushy Park

Ian Hyde – Walnut Tree

Vicky Phillips – Bushy Park

**1. Previous Minutes (12th January 2015)**

Vicky Phillips made the following points of clarification to the previous minutes:

* The Bushy Park Livestock Standards were written by the Bushy Park Livestock Sub-committee rather than by Vicky herself;
* The Bushy Park Allotments Association committee wants the standards introduced as soon as possible, without waiting for a longer term revision to the main terms and conditions.

Subject to the above, the minutes were accepted as an accurate record of the previous meeting.

**2. Membership**

The meeting welcomed David Mertens who has succeeded Denis Brown as representative for St Anne’s Passage and Westfields.

**3. Matters Arising**

**3.1 *Livestock Standards***

Vicky Phillips has sent the draft standards to David Allister but has not yet had a response. It is understood that he does not consider it a priority issue.

LBRuT is due to merge many of its services with LB Wandsworth. The impact of this on allotment services is not yet known, but it would seem a potential area for commonality. It is known that Wandsworth has a much stronger policy on livestock which they restrict to hens only.

It appears that there are no significant issues with livestock on the few other sites which have them, and this is an urgent issue for Bushy Park alone. The meeting would encourage the implementation of the standards at Bushy Park while waiting for a longer term borough-wide solution, possibly adopting the Wandsworth standards.

**3.2 Revised *Terms and Conditions***

Phil Iddison has been in contact with David Allister, who has said that the Wandsworth merger is taking priority over most other matters and there is likely to be little movement on this or the Allotments Strategy document in the immediate short term. Phil Iddison has reviewed the Wandsworth Ts&Cs, which are broadly similar to RBRuT.

**3.3 *2015-16 Rents***

Without a revised Strategy document, we have no information on the council’s intentions for rent increases in future years. Dennis Leigh said that the current strategy aimed to ‘balance the books’ but without a specific date being set. As the council will not/cannot give income and expenditure figures, it is difficult to tell whether there is still a shortfall, although the extraordinary 40% increase in 2013-14 was an attempt to achieve break-even.

It is understood that 2015-16 rents have been discussed by council, but not yet declared. Indeed, the council invariably fails to give the statutory one month’s notice of rent increases each year.

Tim McGough has written to Cllr Pamela Fleming (cc David Allister) asking for information and offering BRAG’s input to the forthcoming strategy. She has replied that the current document will be used until such time as a new one is agreed. It was agreed that Tim McGough should write again to Cllr Pamela Fleming asking specifically what, if any, increase will be applied for next year.

It is noted that Wandsworth’s rents are considerably (~3x) higher and concessions are less generous, although their SLA may be different. It was agreed that Tim McGough on behalf of BRAG should contact the Dover House Road (Roehampton) allotment to see what arrangements they have.

It was also noted that Hounslow, however, currently has many vacant plots.

**4. Social Media/Website**

James Simcox has sent a document to all representatives on the mechanics of using Twitter, which he suggests is a worthwhile tool to communicate between BRAG, sites and plot-holders. It will also help to contact and lobby the council.

Although tweets are limited to 140 characters, it is possible to attach documents and other items (pictures, etc.) There is no cost involved.

A twitter account has been set up called BRAGCOMMUNITY. (This name has also been reserved for a website.) Berny Simcox has offered to post tweets on behalf of BRAG.

Each site is invited to recruit a member who will act as a contact to publish and disseminate information for the site.

**4. Any Other Business**

**4.1 Devolution**

Gill Ware said that Briar Road is still interested in taking devolution further. Tim McGough said that Manor Road has been approached by a Kingston representative from a devolved site who is willing to discuss experiences. It was agreed that he should be invited to address the next BRAG meeting. Tim McGough to arrange.

Berny Simcox said (as David Allister has also reported previously) that an organisation called Swelen is being paid by RBRuT to contact sites to discuss devolution. No sites represented at the meeting have yet been approached.

**4.2 Working Parties**

Joyce Bentley said that Walnut Tree convenes working parties to work on communal areas. It is also believed that RBRuT employ conservation volunteers to clear plots at a cost of £200 each.

**4.3 Shacklegate Lane**

James Simcox distributed posters asking for individuals to sign their petition against closure.

**4.4 Environment Trust**

Berny Simcox said that the Environment Trust conduct market garden walks and hold workshops which would be of interest to allotmenteers. More details at [www.environmenttrust.co.uk](http://www.environmenttrust.co.uk)

**4.5 Seed Swaps**

Phil Iddison said that Bushy Park seed swaps have proved very beneficial to their community and develop positive attitudes towards self-help and cooperation. Their plant sale and open day dates are on the BRAG Reps list.

**4.6 Council Services**

Chris Morley-Smith said that he would like to progress the original BRAG discussions on services provided by the council which differ from site to site.

Phil Iddison is compiling a list of activities undertaken by and for allotments to identify site/council responsibilities. He will send this to the Secretary for distribution. This would greatly help those considering devolution.

**4.7 Site Maps**

It was a council target in the current strategy document to create plot maps for all sites. These would be extremely useful and should be maintained by the council. Tim McGough will write to David Allister requesting an update on progress, suggesting that it might be a useful exercise for college students.

**4.7 Council Help**

Richard Ward said that, despite frequent complaints about council inactivity, Pete Lewis had been helpful in arranging fencing repairs and site clearance at Townmead, for which he was very grateful.

**5. Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Monday, 20th July 2015 at 7pm.

Venue: To be arranged by Richard Ward in Kew area.