

Borough of Richmond Allotment Group (BRAG) – Ordinary Meeting

Date: 19th October 2015, 7pm

Venue: The Waldegrave Arms, Teddington, TW11 8LX

Present:

Hilary Denness – Old Palace Lane
Howard Fletcher – Manor Road (Minutes)
Duncan Hoadley – Palewell Fields, Palewell Pavillion
Phil Iddison – Bushy Park
Dennis Leigh – Briar Road
Paul Leonard – Cavendish House
Tim McGough – Manor Road (Chair)
David Mertens – St Anne's Passage, Westfields
Ian Micklewright – Mill Road
James Simcox – Shacklegate Lane
Chris Morley Smith – Kew Short Lots
Mike Vile – Walnut Tree
Richard Ward – Townmead
Mike Wren – Hatherop

Apologies:

Joyce Bentley – Walnut Tree
Ian Hyde – Walnut Tree

1. Previous Minutes (20th July 2015)

Item 4.1 of the previous minutes said that a Bushy Park tenant had requested permission to keep rabbits. Phil Iddison pointed out that the tenant had only indicated that he intended to ask permission and had not actually yet done so. Subject to the above, the minutes were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.

As a post-meeting note, Phill Iddison said that Bushy Park tenants keeping livestock have now been given copies of the council's livestock standards. Discussion revealed that this had not happened on other sites. Tim McGough will ask David Allister to issue the standards to all site reps for distribution.

2. Matters Arising

2.1. Council Services

The Secretary has issued the matrix of council services by site, although the low number of responses mean that it is not fully representative. Some issues are emerging where differences are highlighted such as boundaries, tree maintenance and insurance. All remaining sites are urged to send in a return by 31st October to create a more complete picture.

2.2. Site Maps

Site maps as originally promised by the council are still outstanding. This is to be raised at a meeting with the council.

2.3. Bonfires

Tim McGough responded to David Allister with the offer as agreed at our last meeting of a ban on bonfires during July and August. There has been no further communication on this matter.

In further discussion it was agreed that the ban should include incinerators, and it was also noted that communal bonfires would need strong management to prevent them becoming general dumping areas.

2.4. New Allotment Sites

Tim McGough will raise again with David Allister the potential new sites at Twickenham Rifle Range and Mortlake Brewery.

2.5. Revised Terms & Conditions

Phill Iddison said that he is not progressing this until there is clarification regarding joint services with Wandsworth.

It is noted that there is no current allotment strategy document as the last one expired in April 2015. We have offered to work with the council on the next one. A consequence of not having a strategy is that there is no forward view of revenue and costs, and therefore no prediction of likely rent increases.

The rent increase this year was 7.7% - far above inflation. It was also noted that the council did not give the required one month's notice of the increase.

3. Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting will be held on Monday, 16th November at 7pm in the Council Chamber at York House.

David Allister has been told that he would be welcome to attend the meeting, although he is not actually required to be present.

Tim McGough has distributed a draft Chairman's report. Any comments should be returned to him by 26th October.

After the formal business of the AGM, it is intended to agree a list of topics to be addressed at a subsequent meeting with the council. Reps are asked to consult with their members and come to the AGM with the topics they wish to raise.

4. Any Other Business

4.1. Hedgehogs

There has been a notable decline in the hedgehog population, and the council is attempting to address this. A representative of the organisation involved has offered to address the next BRAG meeting on this subject, which the meeting agreed would be welcome. James Simcox will extend an invitation.

4.2. Keys

It does not appear that the council is concerned about retrieving site keys from tenants who leave or are evicted. It is suggested that the deposit is increased dramatically to encourage returns. This is a topic to be raised with the council at the next meeting.

4.3. Royal Paddocks

The Royal Paddocks allotment site is in Richmond, but is not managed by the council. A representative would be interested in attending BRAG meetings and share experiences of self-management. This was agreed; the Secretary will extend an invitation.

4.4. Rent Survey

Further to previous discussions on allotment rents, Ian Micklewright offered to conduct a survey of rents from comparable boroughs in our area. Chris Morley-Smith will contact NSALG to see if they have any relevant information.

4.5. Rodents and Pests

A number of sites are suffering from crop damage by squirrels, rats and/or badgers. This can be exacerbated by having poultry on site. In some cases, the council have provided traps to help.

4.6. Heritage Seed Library

Phil Iddison said that he had achieved excellent results from seeds obtained from the library and would encourage membership. He has also passed seeds on to others who have had similar success. Phil Iddison would like to encourage seed swaps between members and sites.

4.7. Land Contamination

Paul Leonard said that we should be watchful for potential land contamination on allotment sites. This would be particularly relevant if Twickenham Rifle Range were to be adopted as a site (with potential lead contamination).

4.8. Website

James Simcox said that the name BRAGCOMMUNITY has been renewed for another year. James had paid the small cost personally. There would be a further cost if we were to develop a BRAG website. It was agreed that we should ask the council to either fund this or provide enabling services.

4.9. Waiting Lists

Short Lots have calculated that their waiting list would take 25 years to resolve at the current churn rate. Many people on the list are found to be uncontactable when a plot becomes vacant. We should review with the council their policy on waiting lists as it does not seem to be satisfactory at present.

James Simcox said that Shacklegate Lane has been removed from the application list pending closure of the site, although no dates have been confirmed.

5. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Monday, 11th January 2016 at 7pm. Subject to booking confirmation the venue will again be the Waldegrave Arms.