

Borough of Richmond Allotment Group (BRAG) – Third Annual General Meeting

Date: 28th November 2016, 7pm

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

Present (Site Representatives):

Hilary Denness – Old Palace Lane

Howard Fletcher – Manor Road (Minutes)

Robin Hewitt – Bushy Park

Duncan Hoadley – Palewell Fields, Palewell Pavilion, Priory, Triangle

Derek Lawrence-Brown – Hertford Avenue

Dennis Leigh – Briar Road

Ian Micklewright – Mill Road

David Mertens – St Ann's Passage, Westfields

Chris Morley Smith – Kew Short Lots (Chair)

Richard Ward – Townmead

Mike Wren – Hatherop

Present (LBRuT):

David Allister (Head of Culture)

Yvonne Kelleher (Parks Services Manager)

Pete Lewis (Allotments Officer)

Also tenants from various sites

Apologies (Representatives):

Rosemary Fulljames – Cavendish House

Paul Leonard – Cavendish House

1. Chairman's Report

- 1.1. The Chairman summarised his report for the year, which had previously been circulated to Representatives and LBRuT Council officers for review and comment. There were no issues raised.

2. Election of Officers

- 2.1. The following volunteers for BRAG Officer positions were proposed by Richard Ward and seconded by Hilary Denness, and unanimously approved by the Representatives present:

- Chris Morley-Smith –Chairman
- Duncan Hoadley – Vice Chairman
- Howard Fletcher – Secretary

3. Update on Allotment Matters by LBRuT

- 3.1. LBRuT was represented at the meeting by David Allister (Head of Culture), Yvonne Kelleher (Parks Services Manager) and Pete Lewis (Allotments Officer). The Chairman thanked them for attending.
- 3.2. David Allister summarised the new structure whereby Richmond and Wandsworth now share a Chief Executive and Directors, although operations staff are still currently largely separate. Policies differ between the two boroughs and it is not expected nor necessarily intended that they should merge.
- 3.3. David's new role incorporates the previous Parks, Sports and Arts services, and is largely strategic. Pete Lewis now reports to Yvonne Kelleher, who in turn reports to David. Yvonne should be the primary contact in future, rather than David. Pete Lewis continues to deal with day-to-day allotment matters and now covers both Richmond and Wandsworth, although Wandsworth's allotment services are outsourced under contract until 2019.
- 3.4. David explained that he has three main areas of strategic focus regarding allotments:
 - Allotment Strategy
 - Devolution
 - Representation
- 3.5. The existing strategy document has expired and needs updating. David has drafted an outline which has been reviewed by Cllr Fleming. Once amended in line with her comments, the next version will be shared with BRAG for comment.
- 3.6. The revised strategy will set out key principles for the next 10 years, with a review point half way. The current terms and conditions will be broken out to make them easier to maintain.
- 3.7. Regarding devolution, David observed that the current situation is inconsistent between sites. The Council's desire is for all sites to be fully devolved, but only Briar Road is in favour of this. David said that he will issue a letter in the new year cancelling all existing agreements (formal or informal) and offer a single new agreement which may be adopted or not by each site. Chris Morley-Smith asked that BRAG be consulted further on this before letters are sent, to which David agreed.
- 3.8. David is concerned that those purporting to represent plot holders are, in fact, properly empowered to do so. Although site representatives help the Council, individuals rent directly from the Council and are therefore entitled to (and do) make direct contact. Several representatives explained the difficulty in communicating with plot holders using notice boards and emails, and that letters are the only way to ensure messages are delivered. However, postage costs prohibit this both for the Council and for site committees.

- 3.9. The Council displayed notices at all sites to communicate the change in bonfire rules in June. This amendment to the Terms & Conditions has raised several issues, with many plot holders complaining that it is impractical. David offered to attend the next BRAG meeting (9th January 2017) to discuss it further and asked Representatives to gather plot holders' opinions beforehand.
- 3.10. Pete Lewis said that he has had to deal with an increasing number of complaints including physical and sexual assault, theft, drugs, racism and more. These are issues which must be addressed immediately and deflect from the more everyday tasks such as lettings and site management.
- 3.11. Plot holders' churn (joiners and leavers) has increased by 30% to 450 per year across the 2,000 Richmond plots. Most site waiting lists now go back to about 2013, but only 4 out of 10 people respond when contacted about a plot. Overall, about 25% take a plot when offered. Waiting lists vary by site – Old Palace Lane is very long and slow-moving, whereas Hatherop and Manor Road have vacancies now. There are some 4,000 applications on waiting lists overall, although many are multiple (up to 3) entries for one person for different sites. A realistic number is thought to be around 2,000.
- 3.12. It was noted that on some sites the number of poor plots is increasing and David said that he would support harsher inspections to raise the standards. Some find it helpful to issue and discuss Terms & Conditions when plots are first shown to stress the importance of proper cultivation. Probation periods and how they are managed (particularly depending on the time of year) would be a useful topic for BRAG consultation.
- 3.13. The subdivision of plots is encouraged in the existing strategy. David noted that this is proving more popular as allotmenting becomes more of a leisure activity with less rigour of crop rotation, etc. Some plot holders also wish to downsize. Good use of an existing plot should be demonstrated before internal moves are authorised.

4. Any Other Business

- 4.1. Richard Ward asked that the annual Borough allotments competition be given a higher profile as it is both inspiring and educational. He noted that results of this year's competition are not shown on the website. David said that there is no intention of stopping the event, although costs must be contained.
- 4.2. The Secretary requested that sites formally declare when one of their Representatives changes, so that notices, minutes, etc. can be properly distributed. The following changes were noted with immediate effect:
- Giuseppe de Vai replaces Phil Iddison for Bushy Park
 - Bill Collis replaces Tim McGough for Manor Road

The meeting was closed at 8:00pm