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

**Date:** 24th April 2017, 7pm

**Venue:** The Triple Crown, Richmond, TW9 2SS

**Present:**

Hilary Denness – Old Palace Lane

Howard Fletcher – Manor Road (Minutes)

Robin Hewitt – Bushy Park

Duncan Hoadley – Hertford Ave, Palewell Fields, Palewell Pavillion, Priory, Triangle

Dennis Leigh – Briar Road

David Mertens – St Anne’s Passage, Westfields

Ian Micklewright – Mill Road

Chris Morley Smith – Kew Short Lots (Chair)

Brian Nicholls – Hatherop

Richard Ward – Townmead

Mike Wren – Hatherop

**Apologies:**

Bill Collis – Manor Road

Rosemary Fulljames – Cavendish House

Derek Lawrence-Brown – Hertford Ave, Palewell Fields, Palewell Pavillion, Priory, Triangle

Joyce Bentley – Walnut Tree

Ian Hyde – Walnut Tree

1. **Bees**

The meeting was addressed by Jenny Murray Band, President of the Twickenham and Thames Valley Beekeepers’ Association, who gave a talk on ‘The Plight of the Humble Bee’ summarised as follows:

71% of the food crops and 85% of wild flowers are pollinated by bees. An International Apiary Congress was recently held in South Korea to collate data from around the world and identified a dramatic decline in the bee population particularly in developed countries.

Bees preserved in amber show they existed 50 million years ago, but man’s actions are clearly now responsible for reduced numbers. In wild areas bees show no signs of disease and colonise naturally so that honey is ‘hunted’. Managed beekeeping began in natural fibre ‘skeps’ which housed bees for a season but were then destroyed, along with the colony, to retrieve the honey. Modern wooden hives, similar since the 19th century, enable bees to live in healthy, cleanable and reusable homes.

A hive typically houses one queen, about 50 drones (males) and worker bees (female) in numbers of 20,000 in winter to up to 60,000 in summer. Mating takes place during spring in the air on the wing, each queen mating with about 15 drones whereafter the drones die. Drones left at the end of the summer season are ejected from the hive and killed by the workers. New drones are hatched the following spring.

The queen will lay about 2,000 eggs every day for about 5 years. The workers live for about 6 weeks, during which they go through a regular cycle of cleaning the honeycomb cells, feeding the larvae, building the honeycomb, foraging, receiving food from incoming foragers, guarding the hive and removing dead bees. Foraging bees collect pollen and nectar and process it internally before transferring it on their tongues to those receiving in the hive.

A typical worker bee will visit 100 flowers on each foraging trip, and can fly up to 9km from the hive. A clever system of static electricity discharge between the bee and the flower will prevent bees visiting flowers previously emptied. A worker bee will make just 1/12 of a teaspoon of honey during its life. The colony will travel 55,000 miles to make 1lb of honey; a single hive will produce about 8lbs of honey per year (although this used to be much more).

Bees will consume 6lb of their own honey to manufacture 1lb of beeswax to create the honeycomb. The honeycomb acts as a store for the honey, and the queen lays her eggs in the cells. The queen is created by being fed royal jelly. When the queen is exhausted after several years, a new queen is created and the weaker of the two will take some other bees and leave the hive in a ‘swarm’ to find a new home. The swarm will rest and send scouts to locate a new safe site. The scouts will return and ‘waggledance’ to communicate their findings and the swarm will by consensus locate to the new home. The waggledance is also used by foragers to tell other bees where the best nectar and pollen are to be found, indicating direction, distance and quality by their movements.

Diseases and pests are harming bees and weakening colonies. The varroa mite attacks larvae and feeds on their blood, and multiply inside hives. Colony collapse disorder is prevalent in parts of America due to transportation of colonies causing stress, plus additional problems of pesticides and lack of nutrient variety due to large areas of single crop production. Traces of pesticides and insecticides are found in both honey and beeswax. Neonicotinoids are systemic and have latency exceeding 20 years.

Apiaries near international gateways are deemed ‘sentinel’ sites, and under DEFRA regulations must check weekly for notifiable diseases which can result in hive destruction and containment of movement.

Bees can be assisted by growing simple, open flowers with diversity of variety to create year-round supplies. Bees are known to self-medicate using spores from mushrooms so leaving discarded wood to rot down and produce fungi will help.

Courses are available available from Twickenham Apiary to learn both theory and practical beekeeping, optionally leading to exams and qualifications.

The meeting thanked the speaker for her most interesting talk.

1. **Previous Minutes (9th January 2016)**

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

1. **Changes to Representatives**

Colleen McKenna is no longer representing Briar Road. Dennis Leigh continues.

1. **Matters Arising from January Meeting**
   1. **Herbicide and Pesticide Spraying**

Chris Morley-Smith has forwarded the agreed wording to Yvonne Kelleher requesting that it is incorporated as an update to Allotment T’s&C’s by the Council.

* 1. **Bonfires**

See item 5, below.

* 1. **Strategy**

See item 6, below.

* 1. **Waiting Lists**

Some sites reported that requests for identification of plots with outstanding rents had been responded to. Chris Morley-Smith will write to Yvonne Kelleher asking for all requests to be honoured.

1. **Bonfires**

After a lengthy email exchange and the intervention of Cllr Fleming, the Council have agreed to permit bonfires durng the summer ‘blackout’ period on the first Saturday of each month between 9am and 1pm. This is now reflected on the Council’s allotment website.

1. **Allotment Strategy**

The new Allotment Strategy is said to be in progress by Steve Marshall, working on behalf of the Council. Chris Morley-Smith will reiterate BRAG’s request to be involved in reviewing a draft as soon as it is available.

1. **Vice-Chairman Vacancy**

Duncan Hoadley will be working abroad from this summer, so the BRAG Vice-Chairman position becomes vacant. Derek Lawrence-Brown’s offer to stand was gratefully accepted.

1. **Comments from Site Reps**
   1. **Hertford Avenue**

* Open day 14th May
  1. **Townmead**
* Good support from Pete Lewis
* Rubbish accepted at Townmead at no charge with Council arrangement
  1. **Mill Road**
* No vacant plots
  1. **Bushy Park**
* Open day 20th May
  1. **Old Palace Lane**
* Tree work delayed by Council
  1. **Bushy Park**
* Open day 20th May
  1. **Manor Road**
* Further problems managing rubbish
* Orders placed with Dunkirk Nursery, but concerns over future operation

1. **AOB**
   1. **Insurance**

Pete Lewis has asked a site representative if BRAG would approach the NSALG for an offer on insurance for all sites. It was agreed that if this is required, then the Council should ask BRAG through the proper channel (i.e. through the Chairman). It was noted that insurance was discussed in some detail with David Allister at a previous meeting, when he insisted that no changes were envisaged.

* 1. **Rents**

Pete Lewis sent an email to site managers (notably not to BRAG site representatives) informing of the rent increases for the current year. Chris Morley-Smith’s response was rebuffed by Yvonne Kelleher who said that the new levels were set by members, implying that the Council Parks and Allotments team had no influence. The meeting expressed disappointment at this exchange.

1. **Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Monday, 24th July 2017 at 7pm at The Triple Crown pub, 15 Kew Foot Road, Richmond TW9 2SS (room on 1st Floor).