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

**Date:** 15th October 2018, 7pm

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

**Present:**

Wendy Akers – Old Palace Lane

Joseph Ambaye – Bushy Park

Bill Collis – Manor Road

Howard Fletcher – Manor Road (Minutes)

Robin Hewitt – Bushy Park

Phil Iddison – Bushy Park

Derek Lawrence-Brown – Hertford Ave

Dennis Leigh – Briar Road

Paul Leonard – Cavendish House

David Metherell – Walnut Tree

Ian Micklewright – Mill Road

Chris Morley Smith – Kew Short Lots (Chair)

Brian Nicholls – Hatherop

John Padgett – Palewell Park, Palewell Pavillion, Priory, Triangle

Mike Wren – Hatherop

1. **Apologies**

Rosemary Fulljames – Cavendish House

David Mertens – St Anne’s Passage, Westfields

Richard Ward – Townmead

1. **Changes to Representatives**

Joseph Ambaya replaces Guiseppe de Vai as one of the Bushy Park representatives.

1. **Previous Minutes (23rd July 2018)**

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

Chris Morley-Smith noted a subsequent email from Yvonne Kelleher stating that the financial figures quoted omitted some undefined direct and staff costs, and thus the surplus shown was probably exaggerated.

1. **Matters Arising**
   1. A number of sites reported that the revised staffing in the LBRuT Allotments Department appears to be working well and that Erin Dunford is proving helpful.
   2. Robin Hewitt’s work on the website had been passed to the Council, and Erin Dunford is incorporating suggestions in the revised website design. She has also requested that each site provide her with a short description and one or two photos.
2. **BRAG-LBRuT Meeting**

Chris Morley-Smith, Mike Wren and Bill Collis met with Yvonne Kelleher and Pete Lewis on 19th September. The principal reason was to discuss BRAG’s proposed revisions to the Allotment Terms & Conditions. The meeting was positive, with most proposed changes being accepted. One item proved contentious, being the specification of a maximum height allowed for fences and hedges. Ultimately Pete Lewis did not include this, relying instead on judgement in individual cases. Yvonne Kelleher has subsequently issued the Council’s draft which the Secretary will circulate for comments, to be returned within two weeks.

There was no major change to the Tenancy Agreement.

The Introduction aimed at potential and new plotholders prepared by Bill Collis was accepted for publication on the new website.

The bonfire rules have been revised in line with BRAG’s recommendation and will be incorporated in the new T&C’s. These are effective now, and have been published to all sites.

1. **Joint Tenancies**

Wendy Akers reported that following the death of a plotholder, his wife – who had always worked the plot together with the deceased – had not been allowed to take over the tenancy as it had not originally been in joint names. Other sites reported similar cases. The meeting agreed that this seemed unreasonable. Although care must be taken to ensure that a ‘back door’ to the waiting list is not opened, the rules should be flexible enough to allow genuine cases to be considered. It was agreed that BRAG should discuss this further with the Council to see if a compromise can be reached. Chris Morley-Smith will contact Yvonne Kelleher.

1. **Allotments Strategy**

Yvonne Kelleher has reported the Allotment Strategy document has been revised following BRAG’s response. As requested, a chapter has been added dealing with resources, finances and a timetable for actions. The new draft is now with Cllr Martin Elengorn, although there is no date set for his response. Chris Morley-Smith will ask Yvonne Kelleher for a copy of the latest draft.

1. **Charities**

Paul Leonard raised the matter of allotment sites supporting charities and people with special needs. Cavendish has some raised beds with wheelchair access, and Hatherop has also set aside an area for people with special needs. The Council is supportive of this – there is now a sensory garden in York House – and the beneficial health effect of gardening is becoming widely recognised. There are a number of initiatives in place such as RHLT (connecting people with special needs to the Richmond community) and THRIVE (national society for horticultural therapy) with which sites can engage.

1. **AGM**

This year’s AGM will be held on Monday, 26th November in the Council Chamber at York House starting at 7pm.

Chris Morley-Smith has invited Yvonne Kelleher and Pete Lewis, and will also suggest that Cllrs Elengorn and Wilson are invited.

1. **Terminations**

Bill Collis and Mike Wren have been working with Pete Lewis to improve the terminations procedure, specifically with a view to shortening the process.

Under the old system a ‘friendly’ warning was often sent by the site committee before Council involvement, followed by two, 1-month warning letters and a final 2-week eviction subject to appeal. This could total more than 12 weeks.

The new system agreed would see inspections carried out in spring, with a 2-week ‘friendly’ warning, followed by a single 1-month formal Council warning and a 2-week appeal period. The Council will produce a template for the ‘friendly’ warning notices, which must always be copied to Pete Lewis.

Chris Morley-Smith said that letters to plotholders from site committees should always be signed off ‘for and on behalf of *xxx* Site Committee’ rather than from an individual.

Probation periods will also be reinforced. Erin Dunford will maintain a spreadsheet of new starters to remind sites when a probation period is ending.

There is still no general information about non-payment of rents, although specific enquiries will be responded to.

1. **Feedback from Site Reps**

David Metherell asked about the policy on swapping plots. Several sites reported that Pete Lewis had agreed to specific instances, but a general rule was that the original plot must have been well maintained.

Paul Leonard said that Council contractors pruning neighbours’ overhanging trees had damaged a shed and exposed asbestos.

Paul Leonard pointed out that the financial benefit of removing Council waste bins had to be weighed against the environmental cost of multiple trips to the tip.

1. **AOB**

Paul Leonard said that in his professional capacity he had produced a report for the Council on surface water flooding. Some measures have been taken to improve this around the Crane river. He would be interested to hear of any flooding issues on allotment sites.

Chris Morley-Smith said that he has received an offer from Emily Millhouse of ‘Froglife’ to provide a talk on the contribution of frogs to the environment. It was agreed that she should be invited to address the next BRAG meeting.

Erin Dunford is now maintaining site maps. If any site has their own maps, they should forward any updates to her.

1. **Next Meeting**

The BRAG AGM will be held on 26th November (see 9, above).

The next ordinary BRAG meeting will be held on Monday, 21st January 2019 at 7pm at The Triple Crown pub, 15 Kew Foot Road, Richmond TW9 2SS (room on 1st Floor).