

Borough of Richmond Allotment Group (BRAG) – Seventh Annual General Meeting: Draft Minutes

Date: 8th December 2020, 7pm

Venue: Via Teams

Present (Site Representatives):

Sue Childs – Old Palace Lane (Deputy Chairman)

Bill Collis – Manor Road

Peter Dunning – Manor Park

Jim Hawkins – Sixth Cross Road

Robin Hewitt – Bushy Park

Ian Hyde – Walnut Tree

Paul Leonard – Cavendish House (Chairman)

Val Lowman – Cavendish House

David Metherell – Walnut Tree

Chris Morley Smith – Kew Short Lots (Deputy Chairman)

John Padgett – Palewell Fields, Palewell Pavilion, Priory, Triangle

Richard Ward – Townmead

Mike Wren – Hatherop

Present (LBRuT):

Yvonne Kelleher (Parks Service Manager)

Apologies (Site Representatives):

Graham Day – Briar Road

Dennis Leigh – Briar Road

Ian Micklewright – Mill Road

Jessie Sheffield – Queens Road

LBRuT: David Allister (Head of Culture)

Pete Lewis (Allotment Officer)

Rajula Mehta (Parks Admin Officer)

Welcome & Apologies

Paul Leonard (Chairman) welcomed everyone to the Seventh & first BRAG AGM to be held by Teams due to the Covid – 19 pandemic. He thanked Site Representatives for their contributions during the last twelve months which included reviewing the Council's Terms and Conditions. He was pleased to welcome Yvonne Kelleher, the Council's Parks Service Manager and noted apologies as listed above.

Previous Minutes

The minutes of the 2019 AGM (9th November) were approved by Jim Hawkins & seconded unanimously.

Council Perspective

Yvonne Kelleher thanked BRAG for their contributions in the last twelve months. The Allotments' Officer Pete Lewis found interacting with Site Representatives particularly helpful, when this was possible. Since March, the challenge of the Covid 19 pandemic had resulted in the Parks & Open Spaces, Tress and Cemeteries staff being given other community duties, such as dealing with the increases in complaints, waste and antisocial behaviour, as well as emergency planning for an increase in deaths., thus there had been a reduction in e.g. site visits. There has to be a proportionate response on impact, both in terms of plot holders ability to visit and tend to their plots during lockdowns this year, as well as their restrictions on travel and access to supplies. Well being and health benefits are a key aspect of the Council's policy support. This should be explored & options suggested in 2021.

Invoicing & CAPITA There had been a technical error generated within the Council's finance system when a new process had resulted in the rents charged to concessionary plot holders and standard plot holders being reversed. This was resolved with credit notes raised to cancel all invoices issued on 1st October 2020 and revised invoices with the correct charges were issued during the w/c 12th October. This should not happen in 2021. Yvonne apologised on behalf of the council. Any outstanding issues please contact site rep who will feed this via Chair to Yvonne to investigate.

The Council's Lead Member for Finance (Councillor Brown) is appraised of the issues and we remain in dialogue with central finance, the assistant director of finance who are the client managers of the Capita contract and who are on board with the issues experienced – we are aware of work still need to be done to improve and are doing so with a meeting arranged with Finance colleagues in January.

Continental Landscapes contract: These contractors do not routinely shred woody waste. Frustrations were acknowledged on the availability of a contractor with suitable equipment and Yvonne said that she will take personal responsibility in establishing a viable woody waste shredding operation. Notwithstanding that allotment holders should still be managing their own materials responsibly during the year.

Evictions: This is an evolving process, complicated by the pandemic. A meeting in January with the BRAG Chairman will be helpful to explore potential improvements depending on resources and priorities. Yvonne said that she was happy to take feedback from BRAG on the known repeat offenders.

Plot Waste: Should be part of a review of the Terms & Conditions. Again, discuss in January. Plot holders were again encouraged to manage their own materials and waste.

Theft of produce: The scale of thefts and availability of evidence would be helpful to ascertain what has been happening. Plot holders should be reminded of suitable protocols and routes for reporting misdemeanours. Reporting to the police in first instance.

Plans for 2021

Yvonne suggested that sites work more like Friends Groups, e.g. reducing the time that Pete Lewis & Rajula Mehta have to spend with plot holders telephoning / e-mailing issues where it may be more appropriate for the plot holders to liaise with their BRAG representatives. This could free up staff time and allow more site inspection time. **T&Cs:** These have only been in place during 2020 and a review was planned for 2022. However, the challenges, frustrations and appropriate best practice needed to be kept under review.

After her presentation, there followed an opportunity for comments from Site Representatives and these included : From John Padgett, reminding colleagues that reading the 2019 AGM minutes had led to him having a sense of deja vu where many hoped for tasks had not been completed e.g. no one from the Council had undertaken a Site Visit. Yvonne advised that Council policy on risk to staff was enhanced because of the potential for infection, hence vulnerability to the Council Officer meant that most meetings could not be undertaken but in a post vaccinated world, she hoped that site visits again would be possible and hoped to be able to visit some sites herself.

The shredding of woody waste was of concern at many sites. Yvonne explained that she would take personal responsibility for arranging for suitable equipment to be available.

Jim Hawkins expressed frustration on behalf of his Site Chairman who had received inappropriate correspondence relating to apparent non- payment of the annual rent. Dealing with Capita, the contractors dealing with invoicing was acknowledged as being a waste of time as their staff were either not available or knowledgeable. It was requested that BRAG compiled a list of outstanding invoicing issues and that such matters should be referred to the Council Allotment's Officer, supported by Yvonne, as necessary. It was confirmed that nobody would be removed from the allotments due to a Capita invoicing error.

Bill Collis asked for clarification on which plot holders had not paid their annual rental charge, which by paying, acknowledged that the person agreed to the Council's Terms & Conditions. Because of data protection laws, it is not possible to provide personal information to site reps. However, Yvonne agreed that providing a list of plots where there are concerns and she will do her best to resolve.

Yvonne was thanked for her advice & left the meeting.

Chairman's Report

The Chairman summarised his report for the year, which had previously been circulated. There were no issues arising.

Election of Officers

The Chairman explained that he was able to continue for a second year before handing over to the incoming chairman, Sue Childs for her two year term commencing after the 2021 AGM when she would become the BRAG Chairman. He acknowledged the support from Sue and the previous Chairman, Chris Morley – Smith. This was supported by the BRAG Representatives. There remained a vacancy for the BRAG Honorary Secretary and all representatives were asked to consider whether one of their plot holders might be able to help.

Feedback from Site Representatives

Besides the issues mentioned in the Q&A session following Yvonne Kelleher's presentation, other comments included e.g. David Metherall talking about positive mind sets that provided plot holders to be more fulfilled in terms of their sustainable approach. Composting of waste utilising locally provided pallets to make compost

bays was one example. Paul Leonard agreed and said many Cavendish plot holders utilised pallets to make compost bays and this system was also utilised in the communal compost bay areas.

Mike Wren (Hatherop) mentioned that one of their plot holders, Councillor Richard Pine, helped to do a site visit and has been very helpful in getting some of the issues raised. The Community Pay Back Team was utilised and did a good job, often collecting large amounts of waste. They also have an increase in new plot holders with young families and he raised that to help plot holders it might be possible for one person with a large van to facilitate removal of site generated waste.

Chris Morley Smith (Kew Short Lots) highlighted that dealing with waste that would have been burnt remained a problem. Some plot holders claimed that an incinerator was not a bonfire and the Terms & Conditions and website needed to be clarified now that the bonfire ban had been implemented. This was to be raised to Yvonne in January 2021.

Bill Collis (Manor Road) highlighted that Kingston Council provide a trailer where plot holders loaded their plots' waste. It was agreed that alternative strategies needed to be discussed with the Council in January 2021 to reduce the amount of waste being generated.

Robin Hewett said that at Bushy Park, part of the site (33 out of 350 plots) had been flooded by the Longford River overflowing. Alternative plots were being sought from fallow / unused plots. The site is also experiencing a problem that the woody waste collection area has been turned into a dumping site so it has been locked up. There is no communal spirit on the site and help manning the opening of this area has proved to be impossible. A further difficulty was the lack of people interested in being on the Site Committee. At Bushy Park, plot holders had been provided with plot numbers by the Council and many had been put up. It was acknowledged that the Terms & Conditions state that it is the plot holders responsibility to provide plot numbers but some never got round to this requirement. At Cavendish, as part of the twice – yearly inspection, a note of missing plot numbers is made. 100mm square offcuts are painted and installed by the elected committee.

David Metherall (Walnut Tree) talked about positive mind sets that provided plot holders to be more fulfilled in terms of their sustainable approach. Composting of waste utilising locally provided pallets to make compost bays was one example. Paul Leonard agreed and said many Cavendish plot holders utilised pallets to make compost bays and this system was also utilised in the communal compost bay areas.

John Padgett mentioned that some plot holders vacated their plots leaving a lot of rubbish. The Pay Back Team was utilised at Manor Road and did a good job, often collecting large amounts of waste which has to be collected by Continental at a cost to the council. It was acknowledged that the Terms & Conditions could be strengthened to include an annual site inspection (suggest by Site Reps) in terms of

plot tidiness. Plot holders are encouraged to keep their plots in a tidy condition throughout the year.

AOB

None

Closing Remarks

Paul said that 8th December 2020 was the first day that a Covid 19 vaccine was given to vulnerable people and the Government's intention was to make the vaccine widely available, so in theory the immunity would mean that people could return to 'normal'. Many plot holders had been fortunate to enjoy their plots during 2020 and it was hoped that 2021 would provide a more positive outcome. BRAG Representatives were thanked for their contributions and the planned meeting in January with David Allister should help in improving site management and enjoyment.

The meeting closed at 1950h.

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