

BHAF AGM 2019

3rd April

Brighthelm Centre

Minutes

1. Introduction

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming everyone.

Apologies received from:

Allan Brown (BHAF Committee member)

Hannes Froelich (BHAF Treasurer)

Christine Zaniewicka (Site Rep)

Alan Langridge (Site Rep)
Dave Witts (Chairman MAHS)
Jane Hawkins (Site Rep)

**Chair’s report**

Waiting list – there are around 1170 people on the waiting list and about 250 vacancies. The figures for both have remained at roughly this level for the last 5 years.



**Treasurer’s Report - BHAF Accounts and Development Fund**
(Presented by the Chair as the Treasurer was not able to attend)

The waiting list fee is raising about £4-5000 pounds year and doesn’t seem to have adversely affected waiting lists, but this is being kept under review.

Reserves kept around £4,500 per year in case of a sudden need such as fighting a case on housing development encroaching on an allotment site.

A member asked whether any unspent funds have to go back to the Council at the end of the year. The Chair replied that they do not.

The BHAF accounts show a balance of £4,881



Every year the Council allocates £6,000 to the BHAF Development Fund for allotments, of which £5571 was spent



**Donations to the Allotment Service**

In October last year, BHAF suggested that those plot holders who were able to, should consider making a voluntary donation over and above their rent. In doing this they would be supporting those plot holders who would struggle to manage another rent rise. This raised £6000 extra for the allotment service. A letter from a plot holder was read out, thanking those who had contributed and saying how moved they were at this gesture of support.

**Proposed ban on Glyphosate and other synthetic herbicides**The Chair and BHAF’s ecology officer, Simon Powell, updated everyone on the story so far. A great many emails have been received on this subject and it is clear that plot holders feel very strongly on the matter. BHAF undertook a survey of plot holders. Of the approximately 100 people who replied, 80% were in favour of banning its use on allotments and 85% were for banning its sale from allotment shops. The Allotments Strategy (2014) notes that allotments are part of the green networks that provide an important role in the management of bio-diversity and there should be voluntary restrictions on harmful chemical use.

BHAF also supports a ban and took a proposal to the site reps forum in January. The majority were in favour of not using it but some argued against a ban. Reasons included the fact that it is available to buy legally and that a ban would be hard to enforce. The Allotments Service also argued against a ban as it is not currently Council policy and would be difficult to enforce on allotments. Bruce Riach, the Allotments Officer, explained that the Council restricts its use to certain sites, mostly pavements and hard areas – to guard against accidents that could incur large legal costs. But it is not used generally in parks or allotment sites.

Caroline Lucas, MP for Brighton Pavilion, has spoken up strongly for a ban and some Councils, for instance Lewes District Council, have enacted a ban, and have a found a cost effective alternative. The Pesticides Action Network is campaigning for a ban on the basis of its significant effects on biodiversity. However, as the Council is currently not proposing a ban, and plot holders are tenants of the Council, it is not possible for BHAF to ban it.

BHAF proposes instead to introduce a new rule into the allotment rules handbook with the aim of preventing misuse and careless use, while moving to a complete ban at some point in the future. This rule would ban blanket use, use on communal paths or hedges, and any use which creates drift onto neighbouring plots. It also promotes organic alternatives and greater toleration of some weeds as they are important wildlife plants. The proposed new rule was presented for discussion and agreement of members. It was worded as follows:

*1) It is recommended to avoid the use of synthetic herbicides such as Glyphosate. Synthetic herbicides may pose health risks and adversely affect pollinators and can persist in the soil for several years, potentially affecting the bio-diversity on allotments.*

*2) The use of synthetic herbicides on border paths and extensive use on whole plots is forbidden.*

*3) Any use of synthetic herbicides causing damage to neighbouring tenants' plots, for example spraying in windy conditions, is forbidden.*

There was a very lively and engaged discussion from the floor, with strong support for an outright ban but also disagreement on the strength and weight of the scientific evidence on the adverse effects of synthetic herbicides on humans and pollinators. There was general agreement that the bio-diversity arguments are strongest and the best ones to use. Some members wanted more information on the minority that still used these products. The evidence from the survey suggests that it may be used most by older people and people with disabilities who struggle with clearing persistent weeds.

Other points from the floor included:

* The importance of using positive incentives and education to get people to change their practices and talking to other plot holders to educate them about it
* Placing pressure on the producers of synthetic herbicide, not punishing the minority who use it
* Helping those who are struggling to get weeds under control by volunteering to remove weeds for them.
* The need for greater tolerance of weeds, particularly those that are an important source of food and shelter for wildlife
* Allotments provide an amazing source of biodiversity in the cities. The Allotments Officer pointed out that this is a good argument to use with the wider population who may not think allotments are very important (In recent surveying, only 2% of population thought allotments were important for the Council to spend money on).

The discussion concluded with an agreement that the new rule should be adopted, but that point 1) should be shortened to remove the whole of the second sentence on potential harm from synthetic herbicides. On a show of hands, this revised new rule was carried by a very large majority.

The Chair ended this part of the meeting by drawing members’ attention to a useful new product – a biodegradable strimmer line called Oregon Biotrim – for decreasing the amount of plastics left on allotments

**Election of BHAF Officers and Committee members**

The following officers and committee members stood for re-election:

Chair: Mark Carroll

Treasurer: Hannes Froelich

Acting Secretary: Hilary Standing

Simon Powell
Jane Griffin

Giuseppina Salamone
Allan Brown

The following new members were nominated:

Andrew Amos

Angela Swinn

Milda Liuolyte

Heidi Watts

The new Committee was approved with a show of hands

**Talk on composting**
Following a short break, the Chair introduced the guest speaker, Rod Weston**,** from [CarryOnComposting.co.uk](https://ymlptr6.net/44c0euwhjaaaehmuhaiausarabbm/click.php) Rod is a composting expert and a former Vice Chair of the National Allotment Society. Rod kept the audience entertained with a very informative and often witty presentation on all aspects of composting, covering materials, types of composting systems, ‘do’s and don’ts’ of compost production, and different ways of using home/allotment produced compost. BHAF members are encouraged to explore the [CarryOnComposting.co.uk](https://ymlptr6.net/44c0euwhjaaaehmuhaiausarabbm/click.php) website, which contains lots of practical information for both beginners and experienced composters.