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***Committee Meeting April 3rd, 2013@ 6.30pm***

**The Haven, Pankhurst Avenue, Brighton.**

**In attendance:**

Alan Phillips, Russ Howarth, Steve Lucas, Anne Glow, Mark Carroll, Allan Brown, Emily Gardiner, Melanie Matthews, Simon Powell

**Apologies for Absence:**

Tania Johnson, Linda Long

**Minutes of the Last Meeting:**

The minutes of the last BHAF Committee Meeting were formally approved.

**Matters Arising:**

None

**1.Site Development:**

***(Site Security & Long Term Vision of Fund.)***

EG – the main problem seems to be with active vs. inactive site reps and how the fund is distributed accordingly. The suggestion was made that perhaps we should look at requests in blocks, per quarter for example, with specific projects in mind – like site security – and that way we can be more proactive in ensuring that the funds are distributed more fairly. There should always be a residue fund set aside for emergencies.

(The Dev Fund is allocated to the BHAF and we screen requests that come in from the site. This fund is separate to the revenue that comes to the BHAF from plot holders rent.)

The issue of contacting site reps was raised and MM outlined some ideas as to how we contact both plot-holders and site reps. Essential data could be shared on ‘Dropbox’ for example, as well as group emails etc.

AP requested that GJ and EG clarify how the Dev Fund was spent, before the financial year 2012/13 ended. It was reported that £2,400 of the £3,500 left in the fund was earmarked for security hedges for three sites: Weald, Whitehawk and Racehill. (All of which have suffered from vandalism and theft over the last few months.)

AP welcomed EG proposal of planning the dispersal of funds suggested the funds are largely allocated by December, possibly up to £2000 in July,September and November with a certain percentage retained for emergencies.

EG commented that some site reps don’t attend Site Rep Meetings, so the Fed will have to be more proactive to ensure that the fund is more fairly distributed. As far as equipment goes EG felt we need to have a more coherent policy. The issue of safety was also raised.

MM felt the Dev Fund application should be more specific and that we should get subsequent feedback. We should clarify our criteria and then we need another sheet for people to give an account of how the money was used.

We should also have an inventory of all equipment that is bought. EG we need receipts and that should be part of the follow up report.

RH felt that large sites should be encouraged to lend out their equipment (nominal fee) to smaller sites. (Especially equipment like a rotovator that could be shared.)

A library of essential equipment should be held by the BHAF.

Priorities: There was a discussion on priorities for expenditures in the coming year. Equipment is important but perhaps Site Security should be given greater emphasis, certainly at the moment after a number of acts of theft and vandalism.

MC felt that things that help build communities – like tea rooms/ shops etc. are particularly good investments and should be a priority. Community development has positive repercussions for a site. SP suggested site fertility is always a good use of excess/ unspent fund. MC agreed that this is a good use of such funds and could even be sold for a small price to raise further funds for sites and Allotment Associations.

MM – suggested that we should encourage private tree surgeons, the council etc. to drop off wood chips at sites. This already happened on some sites and could be an income earning opportunity.

***Action: AP proposed that everyone should write short note about their respective ideas, sending them to EM and this could be compiled into a report for the committee, with priorities agreed at the next meeting.***

RH suggested that GJ as plot liaison officer could put in applications on plot holders behalf.

MM would like to continue putting up a summary of what was spent, on what sites at the end of the financial year in the newsletter. EG was worried that publishing that data could encourage theft, as a list of equipment on a public forum is asking for trouble.

In summary, it was recognized that if we don’t spend the Dev fund in its entirety each year, it will be reduced or cut as the Council budget is under great pressure.

**2.** **AGM Review:**

Some committee members felt the 60 person attendance at the 2013 AGM was disappointing compared to 2012. There were complaints received about the venue from some quarters – especially with regards parking, but a central location on good bus routes was in part why the venue was chosen.

However SP felt that traditionally people turn up when there is a specific problem, ie rent rise, allotment rules etc. Hopefully the lower numbers meant that people were largely content that matters are in hand. MM and some others felt this to be the case as we haven’t had numerous emails from plot holders complaining about specific issues.

It was suggested that previous AGMs have been very boring and this is a legacy we need to overcome. It was suggested that the we keep the formal business to a minimum, we treat the AGM in part, at least, as a social gathering and then we have something (unspecified) to bring the membersin. (Like a guest speaker on a controversial issue for example.)

The general feeling is that the venue was more professional and appropriate than Patcham.

Perhaps having someone read the text off the screen would have helped, but it was good in that people did actually read it. RH suggested that it be presented as a Powerpoint as opposed to a Word doc.

AP suggested that we encourage people to read the minutes prior to the meeting and email in suggested amendments, to save time at the beginning of the meeting.

It was encouraging the amount of people that signed up to help with the Strategy Working Groups and to help with the Strategy in general. (There were about 15 names put forward.)

RH suggested that the AGM may be the sort of event that a sponsor would like to be involved with and they could provide ‘goody bags’ or fund a guest speaker.

**3. Strategy Process Update:**

***(Working Groups Update and Committee Approval of Additional Volunteers from AGM.)***

AP ran the names of those volunteers that had signed up at the AGM by the Committee. Those volunteers that will help with the Working Groups will not be co-opted into the wider Strategy Group. ( see AGM minutes)

AP had received an email from the Allotment Office requesting whether John Smythe could be co-opted onto the Allotment Strategy Steering Group. As there have been interviews conducted by the Fed, it seems inappropriate to bring someone additional in at this stage, however it was suggested that he could be brought in to help with a specific Working Group or get invited to a specific Strategy meeting on a specific topic. This could be discussed at the Strategy Steering Committee meeting.

There was no suggestion as to how best to use those people that have volunteered to ‘help generally’ but it was agreed that this would be discussed at the next Strategy Meeting.

**4. Allotment Service Notices:**

**(David Cooper’s Draft, Feedback, Ideas & Improvements.)**

David Cooper has stated that there were no more letters/ notices given last year compared to previous years, and the wording of the letter hasn’t changed for several years, so felt that the strong reaction to the notices served last year was out of proportion. To counter this it was clarified that more notices were given out last year, as a number of larger sites weren’t inspected at all.

MC and SP had specific problems with the weed notices. Specifically the 75% cultivation rule. MM clarified that as a site rep she just wants to see that people are turning up and cultivating/ ie doing something with 75% of their plots.

AP suggested in future that we could produce, as the BHAF, guidance as to how we could interpret the rules and this could be shared amongst site reps.

MC referred to the clause about your notice being rescinded if you give up half your plot. MM suggested that this clause doesn’t apply to the majority of scenarios.

It was agreed the plot halving section should be removed from the majority of the letters, and to those it applies to we should encourage co-working above the option of plot-splitting.

As the Strategy progresses we can revisit these letters.

EG highlighted the fact that she’d received two warning letters but when querying the notices with the Allotment Office she never received a reply.

AP suggested that the cultivation and other notices given to many in 2012 needs to be discussed at the next liaison meeting, to ensure that they were not unreasonably enforced. The first inspection needs to be done by the site rep, and if this hasn’t happened we need to question why the “site rep” isn’t fulfilling their role.

This year it has been agreed that in future only the worst 10 % ( at max 20% on any site) of plots will receive notices, so this should improve matters over last year.

**5. BHAF Welcome Letter:**

MM ran through the new draft of the BHAF Welcome Letter. This had already been circulated amongst the Committee and some additional changes had been suggested and implemented. Everyone agreed with the changes and thanks were given to MM for the work she has done.MM would edit this and the other letters in the light of the comments made at the meeting and respond to the Allotments Officer, with a copy to this committee.

**6. Determining Criteria by which ‘Association Reps’ can join BHAF Committee:**

MC said that we need to clarify the criteria by which Association Reps can attend the BHAF Committee. SL highlighted that he’d attended the inaugural meeting of the Chates Farm Association. AB asked whether they’d drawn up a constitution or on what basis the Association was formed. RH suggested that he draw up a draft constitution that could be used by allotment sites to help create Associations.

AP suggested a mechanism initially whereby perhaps we have 2 meetings a year where we deliberately open up the meeting to a lot more association reps and set the agenda accordingly.

It was agreed that we as the Fed just need to ensure there is good practice in how the specific Site Association functions. MM also has examples of constitutions from various community sites. This should be considered by WG1 during the strategy review process.

**Action: RH to post draft Constitution template on BHAF website. MM to contribute additional examples.**

**7. Determining Dates of Future Committee Meetings**.

Liaison Meetings are bi-monthly – on the second Tuesday of the month.

There are four site rep meetings a year, one of which is the AGM. It was agreed that this would continue as previously.

The Committee Meetings happen every 6 – 8 weeks at the moment. If we are able to take decisions by email, between meetings, then bi-monthly meetings should be sufficient.

The next few meetings were arranged for 11th June 2013 and 22nd July 2013.

**AOB.**

**Implementing Development Fund Grants.**

SL has received confirmation that the Dev Fund applications for bushes have been approved. It was agreed that we need to get a move on as the bushes will be coming into leaf. GJ and EG will organize this. SL said there are sufficient funds currently in the account but we can only pay by cheque.

**Authorisation of New signatories.**

Change of signatories; The committee voted unanimously to authorise Alan Phillips (Chairperson) Emily Gardiner (Treasurer) and Russ Howarth ( Vice Chairperson) to become the new signatories on behalf of the Brighton and Hove Allotment Federation bank account.

**Competitions and Events.** AG – reported that the City in Bloom and Festival of Nature are coming up, and she would like to know what BHAF publicity material she should have on the stand. Good opportunity to have a pamphlet or business card that can be given out at events. (Generic flyer.)

**Security**

GJ – met with PC Funnel today (3rd April). She’s keen for the Council, Federation and Police to all work together. GJ and PC Funnel met for a couple of hours and had a fruitful and productive meeting.

They spoke about getting ‘Allotment Watch’ up and running, specifically:

Site Rep emailing system been set up so that police and Site Reps can stay in touch

It was agreed that ‘Allotment Watch’ signs to be put up on site gates/ notice boards when ready.

It was also agreed that Mel would send out to all newsletter contacts informing them of ‘Allotment Watch’ and ask them to sign up

PCSO's been asked to contact site reps to gain keys so they can carry out hi-vis patrols on site. PCSO's to arrange property marking days.

*Meeting finished at 9.00pm.*