**BRIGHTON & HOVE ALLOTMENT FEDERATION**

***Committee Meeting 10th October 2012 @ 6.30pm***

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

**In attendance:**

John Burns, Steve Lucas, Anne Glow, Lynn Long, Mark Carroll, Allan Brown, Melanie Matthews

**Apologies for absence:**

Gary Johnson, Tania Johnson, Simon Powell

**1. Minutes of the last meeting:**

Passed.

**2. Matters Arising:**

None.

**3. BHAF Constitution and sub-committee.**

The Federation’s Constitution needs to be updated. John Burns suggested that this is advertised on the BHAF website and a sub-committee convened to carry this out. Melanie Matthews felt there was a danger that if there aren’t any committee members on the steering group, we may end up with a constitution that we are unable to fulfill. She suggested that we draft a constitution ourselves and then put it out to the rest of our members (via website) to comment on/ ratify. The constitution would ultimately be voted on at the next AGM. There was general agreement from the committee that this would be the best approach.

The discussion then moved onto ‘representation’ and how the BHAF can fulfill it’s commitment to this issue, as outlined in our new objectives. Melanie Matthews felt that we should clarify exactly how we can realistically fulfill our obligations especially with regards representation.

We can’t represent everyone, but we need to create a mechanism whereby sites are represented on the Federation. Mark Carroll suggested a model whereby each site has their own Allotment Association and an elected ‘site representative’ – although to avoid confusion they should perhaps be called ‘Association Representatives’.

The BHAF committee would therefore be made up of officers and elected ‘Association Representatives’. Moulscoomb, Tenantry Down, The Weald and Whitehawk all have current associations.

John Burns mentioned that previously the Fed. had trialed a system whereby the B&H allotments were divided up into areas, so that committee members would oversee a few sites each.

Melanie Mathews queried how people without site Associations and are not on the internet will be represented. John Burns/ Lynne Long suggested notices on gates and notice boards etc.

Although there are a number of details that would need to be worked out – namely, how smaller sites could be realistically grouped together to form single associations. Despite these difficulties, there was general agreement, that at present this model, or one similar to it, is the only realistic way of achieving better representation. Individual Allotment Associations would need to hold annual elections, most probably at their AGM’s, whereby candidates would be voted on to represent those Associations on the Federation Committee. The Federation would once more be a Federation of Allotment Associations. If the system worked, each site would be able to bring specific issues from their sites to the Federation as a whole. No site would be obligated to form Associations if they so wished, but they would not be able to have a representative sitting on the Federation Committee.

Steve Lucas said that we should contact existing Associations and other sites need to be informed about these proposals. Ideally the BHAF website would make available information, sample constitutions etc. in order to make the forming of Associations as simple and straight forward as possible. It was agreed that those sites that do have working Associations bring a number of additional benefits to their plot-holders. Site ‘suggestion boxes’ would enable Associations to get a better idea of the concerns and ideas of its plot-holders.

This model will hopefully be discussed further and in greater detail at the upcoming Allotment Strategy Review meetings.

**4. New Chairperson/ New Treasurer.**

John Burns suggested we advertise the Treasurer position on the BHAF website. Mark Carroll asked Steve Lucas whether he was certain he was going to resign as BHAF Treasurer. Steve Lucas said he was unhappy with the relationship between the Fed (namely the newer committee members) and the Allotment Officer, and felt the co-operative atmosphere the Fed had built up with the Allotment Service officers over the last few years had been undermined. (We are still hoping Steve will reconsider.)

Melanie asked whether Steve would write a short job description of Treasurer for the BHAF site. He agreed he would do so.

The subject of on-line banking came up. RAGS for example have on-line banking but the drawback being, you can’t have two signatures for issuing cheques as is current practise. In fact RAGS has a lot more money coming in and out, the accounts of the Fed. are actually a lot simpler. Melanie felt that having just one signee is poor practice.

Steve Lucas clarified that the Fed. doesn’t actually hold the fund. We draw upon the fund, but the council actually holds the fund.

It was felt by the committee members that for the chairperson position we probably can’t advertise as we would need to select someone who has either sat on the committee or currently sits on the committee. Various names were suggested but we will investigate further. Melanie agreed to contact one of the names that was suggested. It was felt by the committee, that if possible, it would be good to have a female chairperson.

**5. Publishing past minutes on the BHAF (matters of confidentiality).**

Allan Brown has been given a hard-drive of all Tracy Llwellyn’s (former Secretary)past minutes. He asked whether past minutes should be published on the BHAF website, given they were now quite old and if so should we remove individual’s names from minutes, especially in instances where there have been specific complaints against individuals.

**6. Plot halving (Moulsecoomb Site Reps and plot sizes at Moulscoomb).**

There are several plots on Moulscoomb that were set aside for learner plots.

These starter plots are still empty. Melanie suggested that they get returned to half plots, Mark said that David Cooper has been informed and he has stated that they cannot be returned to half plots. Gillian said that David will be visiting the site over the next couple of weeks.

In addition, Joesephina (Moulscoomb site rep) requested that a couple of full plots be not halved. One of the plots has a big greenhouse, so this plot has been let to a husband and wife. Mark Carroll and Gary Johnson had visited the plots in question last week. Melanie commended this pro-active approach and felt that this should be our standard response to such queries. Whilst the Fed. is behind a pro-choice approach to plot size (as opposed to the current Council policy of halving all plots as they become available), we would lose credibility if we supported site-reps without investigating each request individually. One of the plots in question has subsequently been let to a husband and wife, both having been on the waiting list for several years, thus nullifying the problem of halving a contentious plot.

Mark Carroll said the numbering system at Moulscoomb is in a mess. There are currently two maps that don’t accord.

Steve Lucas said that there is a minimum size of half plots. Melanie Matthews feels it is important that we ensure that all our members are actually awarded properly sized half plots.

The discussion then moved to the issue of full and half-plots. The Fed’s position is that plot-holders should be offered a choice of full or half plots. The current policy is changing the nature of allotments.

**7. Waiting list (LGA says closing waiting lists is wrong).**

Mark Carroll said that in the’ Growing in the Community’ booklet it states that closing waiting lists is not good practice. This is B&H’s current policy on certain sites. David Cooper said that opening up the waiting lists would cause Ben Ennis problems inputting the data. Melanie pointed out this is a poor excuse as there is clearly a problem if they are having to do this manually, their software allows for automatic data entry, when prospective tenants fill in their applications on line.

**8. Allotment Rules (our rules are not legal).**

Mark Carroll again referenced the ‘Growing in the Community’ booklet. According to the Allotment Act, the current council rules about 75% cultivation is technically incorrect. The law states that it ‘mainly’ has to be cultivated, ie. growing vegetables and fruits. Flowers make up part of the cultivated area in our rules, the law states that cultivation means the removal of anything that may cause problem for your neighbours. So if your neighbours aren’t complaining, then technically there are no problems.

Who actually receives complaints? Melanie and Steve suggested that people are reluctant to formally complain, even though privately they may be dissatisfied. Melanie expressed concern that reciprocally if someone takes a dislike to someone they could find any number of reasons to complain.

Mark Carroll, felt that we should have a set of rules that accommodates a range of different approaches to what they want from allotments/ leisure gardens.

**9. Co-working & it’s promotion.**

Steve Lucas – if you are a co-worker you inherit the full plot. Melanie highlighted problems with co-working, where co-workers change and the actual tenant doesn’t even know who the co-workers are.

Steve felt the waiting list doesn’t work very well, so despite the problems of co-working there are benefits to be gained.

The discussion then moved onto trial periods. Mark Carroll suggested formal 3 month trial periods for new prospective tenants – perhaps the system could be trialed at sites that have working associations. Starter plots have the innate difficulty that you have to move off the plot when your trial is over.

Steve could see no reason why a 3 month trial period system couldn’t work. We need to bring this up again with David Cooper.

Melanie worried that some site reps would be reluctant to actually fail people.

John Burns – we need to speak to David Cooper whether the council would be in favor of a trial period and then whether we could trial it at a site with a working association.

**10. Potential new logo.**

The logos that Mark and Allan worked on were passed around the room. There was general agreement that the wheelbarrow logo was the best. There are some licensing issues with regards the central image that need to be resolved, but otherwise there was general agreement that the BHAF logo would be updated.

**11. Update on BHAF website/ emails etc.**

We now have a new email address on a gmail account. This can be accessed by all committee members. Melanie and Mark have been in discussion with the web hosts and there is talk of modernizing the site. For a one off fee of £250 the web-site would be overhauled. A vote was taken - all in favour – Steve Lucas will be sent a bill.

**12. Allotment competitions**.

What is the future of allotment competitions? They used to be run in conjunction with ‘City in Bloom’ but the council no longer want to be involved with City in Bloom. The council gave a grant of £25000 to City in Bloom. John Burns gave a brief history of the competition.

The allotment competition is currently run in conjunction with the City in Bloom. The City Council have previously arranged the sponsorship for the competition, but now the council are withdrawing, this would have to be done by the Fed. The federation has put up money.

Melanie says she will organize arranging sponsorship. It will need to be done in association with ‘City in Bloom’ as they organize the actual prize-giving event. We do need someone from the Fed to sit on the City in Bloom meetings. Anne Glow agreed to attend the City in Bloom meetings with John. Lynne suggested we run a competition on the BHAF website to get children to design the children’s competition poster. We need to put an application form for the competitions on the BHAF website in good time, as last year there were very few applications received.

**13. ‘Strategy Review’ update.**

Allan gave a brief review – only one meeting to date. He’ll send Alan Phillip’s notes to the other committee members.

**14. Proposed Allotments on Whitehawk Hill.**

There is the perception that the BHAF has been consulted about the new allotments proposed at Whitehawk Hill as part of the council’s plans for improving the way the whole area is used/ maintained. There are strong environmental reasons for not going ahead with the proposed orchards and additional strip of allotments. The site for the proposed allotments is not really suitable from a growing perspective, environmental objections aside.

Steve suggested we send a letter to Paul Gorange, stating that we as a Fed. are not in favour of this proposed allotment site. (Steve Lucas has agreed to write to Paul Gorringe about this.) Melanie suggested we put something up on the BHAF website stating we are not in favour of these new allotments.

**15. Site Improvement Request – Keston site gate & Steve’s request.**

Steve will send us emails regarding this. John explained the lay-out of the site and it was agreed that it was going to be a big expense - £1000 approx. Steve questioned whether it was just for him or whether there was a general feeling on the site that this was necessary. It was felt by the committee that the expense wasn’t justified.

Geoff Woods, Ovingdean – replacement strimmer, shredder etc.. The meeting was running late so Steve said he would forward the rest of the committee details.

**15. Any other business.**

Venue for the AGM. Brighthelm was suggested, Steve enquired – 240 capacity, £138 pounds. Everything in would be about £200. Could do it on a Tuesday in March. Steve will go ahead and book it.

*The meeting ended at about 9.45pm. There was a feeling that it had been a very positive and productive meeting.*