**BRIGHTON & HOVE ALLOTMENT FEDERATION**

***Committee Meeting 07th January 2013 @ 6.30pm***

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

**In attendance:**

John Burns, Steve Lucas, Anne Glow, Mark Carroll, Allan Brown, Gary Johnson, Tania Johnson, Lynn Long, Emily Gardiner, Simon Powell

**Apologies for absence:**

None

**Minutes of the last meeting:**

Agreed

**Matters Arising:**

None

Emily Gardiner, the prospective new BHAF Treasurer, was invited to attend this and subsequent BHAF Meetings to ‘shadow’ Steve Lucas, the outgoing Treasurer.

**Treasurer Post:**

Steve Lucas gave Emily Gardiner a quick run down on the role of Treasurer. The amount received from the Council each year is 2.5% of revenue raised through rent from plot-holders. BHAF also receives £6600 (approx) for its Development Fund. The council holds the money and we draw on it as requests come in. If it’s not spent the funds are reabsorbed by the Council. Two signatures needed for writing cheques – usually Treasurer and Secretary.

Mark Carroll inquired whether BHAF is registered as a Friendly Society as this had come up during the Strategy Meeting. John Burns clarified that we’re not.

Simon Powell stated that the minimum designation for a group with a constitution, Chairperson etc is an ‘Unincorporated Institution.’

Emily will be taking over as Treasurer, pending AGM vote.

**Chairperson Post:**

Alan Phillips has agreed that in principle, subject to a vote at the AGM, he is prepared to take on the role of Chairperson. He has stated that he’d like to trial it for a year. Because he travels a lot he would like to have a Vice-Chairperson. Russ Howarth has stated that he would be happy to take on the role of Vice-Chair. John Burns mentioned the constitution would need to be amended to accommodate a Vice-Chair.

It had been agreed by the Committee, at a previous meeting, that it would be preferable if we could find a Chairperson from within the existing Committee ranks, as we would have already built up a working relationship with them.

Most organizations have guidelines in their constitutions as to how to elect officer positions. John Burns said the constitution declares that we need to inform plot holders by putting notices on gates, as well as informing plot-holders by post/ email.

(JB mentioned that for the FA, with which he is also involved, nomination forms are sent out to members by post, 6 weeks before their AGM.)

Simon Powell understood the need for the committee to be pro-active in the search for a new Chairperson, but also feels we should respect due process by inviting nominations for the post.

**Action:** Mel to send out e-newsletter and Mark Carroll to put up notice on website. Posters for AGM will go up on gates at the end of February, which will have information about possible candidates etc. Mark Carroll will do the layout/ graphics for the poster.

Simon Powell to draft info for website & e-newsletter about Chairperson position and necessary constitutional amendment prior to electing Vice-chair.

(We’re not going to do a physical, hard copy of the newsletter this year as we’ve left it too late.)

**Constitution Update and Self-Management Discussion**

(Although these were two separate items on the agenda they merged together during the course of discussing them. Self-management has been floated by Gillian Marston in discussions with the BHAF Strategy Team.)

John Burns said that we need to set a date and get on with updating the constitution as we’re running out of time before the AGM. Russ Howarth has put forward some ideas on this front, but it would be quite a large undertaking to implement this in the time available. Simon Powell suggested we need to come up with an interim constitution as we’ve not much time left before AGM. A deeper change to the constitution would, in part, depend on the results of the Strategy Process and a fuller consultation with our members.

Mark Carroll said that we need to make the constitution match the new objectives. In terms of creating a more representative body he outlined a couple of alternatives.

The easiest solution would be to have an elected ‘Association or Site Delegate’ sitting on the Committee. If a site doesn’t have an Association then they wouldn’t be able to have a Delegate sitting on the committee. This would ultimately encourage the creation of more Site Associations, which most on the Committee agree is the direction we would like to go down.

Alternatively Russ Howarth has proposed a model where there is a Committee with dedicated officer posts and a wider body made up Elected Site Reps or Delegates. Unelected Site Reps and the Allotment Officer would also make up this body but perhaps voting rights would be the preserve of elected Site Delegates.

**Actions:** A working party has agreed to work on an interim constitution update over the next few weeks. (Mark Carroll, John Burns, Anne Glow – possibly Allan Brown)

*Steve Lucas had requested that an item on “How do we represent our plot-holders” be put on the agenda. I’d placed it in parenthesis under this Constitution discussion, but it probably should have been dealt with separately. This item generated a fast moving discussion which I didn’t manage to capture in its entirety.)*

We returned to a question that has arisen several times over the last few months, that of site-reps, how they’re selected/ chosen and who they’re primarily representing – plot-holders or the council.

As far as site-inspections go, Linda Long feels working to the rules is the best policy. Discretion and subjectivity creates problem. She explained that as plot-holders have signed a tenancy agreement and as a result they have agreed to abide by the allotment rules.

MC points out that different people have different sets of rules that they agreed to as the rules have changed over the years and some people haven’t signed new contracts, thus they are still working under the rules they agreed to at the time of signing their initial contracts.

The question was raised whether the current rules were drawn up by council workers, who didn’t necessarily have direct allotment experience, or plot-holders themselves. Steve Lucas maintained that it was plot-holders that came up with the rules on cultivation. (Although these were later amended and added to by different council departments.) Simon Powell therefore asserted that broadly rules were not drawn up by plot-holders, only those pertaining to cultivation which make up a minor part of the overall rulebook. Steve Lucas said the reason for detailed rules was to remove a degree of subjectivity from the inspection process.

*(The discussion then moved onto directly helping/ supporting individual plot-holders experiencing difficulties/ problems or disputes with the council/ fellow plot-holders or site reps.)*

Mark Carroll explained the advantage of encouraging more site Associations was because we on the Federation Committee cannot represent 3000 plot holders. We can only represent them on a broader level, the details of specific queries and individual problems would be better dealt with by Site Associations and elected Site Delegates.

John Burns said that he always understood that if an individual plot-holder approaches us directly, it is our responsibility to represent them.

Emily Gardiner raised the point that the BHAF website actually states that it won’t get involved in individual disputes.

**Action:** Mark Carroll to amend website and remove this comment.

Mark Carroll suggested that there needs to be a dedicated officer position – a ‘Plot-holder Liaison Officer’. Simon Powell suggested that they may need specific training. We don’t want to encourage additional work for ourselves in encouraging all plot-holders to contact us directly. (Gary Johnson volunteered to fulfill this role – he will be the primary point of contact for our members. Anne Glow and Linda Long also expressed an interest to be ‘Plot-holder Liaison Officers.)

John Burns says there is a tribunal process - a Representative from City Council, the Allotment Officer and BHAF Chairperson. (This tribunal has never sat as far as John Burns recalls.)

Emily Gardiner said we need to put something up on the website which clarifies the process whereby problems and queries are dealt with ie. contact their site reps, speak to their Site Association if one exists and then if that fails to provide a dedicated email address to contact the Plot-holder Liaison Officer.

**Strategy Update.**

Members of the BHAF Strategy Team gave a brief summary to the rest of the Committee of the process thus far. Detailed minutes and documentation is available on the BHAF website

**Seedy Sunday (BHAF Presence).**

We need to get a new banner and leaflets/ handouts for the BHAF stall. Emily Gardiner queried whether we need a BHAF presence at Seedy Sunday, she was unclear what it was we were hoping to achieve. She suggested we need an angle – ie. to promote the new website.

**Actions:** John Burns to give Mark Carroll the dimensions of the banner and he will arrange to get a new banner printed (with new logo) and come up with a leaflet giving details of the BHAF. Simon Powell suggested we put details of the AGM on the leaflet. Gary and Tania will run the stall.

Gary Johnson to get in touch with Seedy Sunday and get display board of John Burns. John Burns to bring display board to Liaison Meeting on Wednesday

**Key Deposits.**

Gary Johnson raised this issue but agreed that it would probably be better to discuss this at the Liaison Meeting. Currently there is no single policy over the issuing of replacement keys or how much it costs plot-holders to get replacements or who holds these funds. John Burns said that at Eastbrook it goes straight to the council, at the Weald however they hang on to the deposit. .

**AOB.**

Liaison Meeting on Wednesday. John Burns to call David Cooper and chase him up about this. Also need to get on to David Cooper about Site Rep meeting.

***Development Fund***.

Steve Lucas sent round email £395 for brush cutter, another £40 for faceguard and gloves - £435 in total for Lower Roedale. This was approved by the committee.

*(A general discussion ensued about site requests for expensive items.)*

Emily Gardiner asked whether all plot-holders at a site get told that their site has obtained a new bit of equipment? (No, we don’t do this because we don’t have email addresses for all plot-holders.) She and John Burns asked whether BHAF keeps a record of items purchased. Steve Lucas said we don’t, but one could be compiled as we have detailed records of all Development Fund purchases.

One of the problems experienced by plot-holders is that some site reps store items such as strimmers and shredders at home, where no secure storage exists on site. As a result, unless plot-holders both know about the existence of the items and how to get in touch with their site reps, they do not get fair access to them. The Development Fund is specifically for items/ facilities that benefit the site as a whole.

Different sites operate different policies. In some, such as Roedale Valley, you hire items like strimmers from the Association. You are supplied with the relevant safety gear. Steve Lucas prefers the items to be used by a limited number of specified users so the safety gear would fit and ensure proper knowledge for use of the item. Tania Johnson felt that this would place unfair demands on certain plot-holders and that individual plot-holders should have access to them.

Mark Carroll felt they should only be given to sites with Associations, both to ensure compliance with the Development Fund rules and to encourage the creation of more Associations

Simon Powell raised issues of insurance.

***Whitehawk Food Project.***

Simon Powell explained that at the Whitehawk Food Project they’ve been running training courses through Harvest/ Food Partnership, and that they'd like to build upon this work.

He’s put together a proposal for a collaboration between BHAF and the Food Project to provide affordable and ongoing training/mentoring courses for new and prospective plot-holders.

Steve Lucas thought this was a good idea and suggested there may be funds to put towards this initiative.

Simon Powell suggested that a specific meeting with the Food Project and BHAF members could occur at some later date.

***Co-workers:***

Steve Lucas brought to our attention that David Cooper has agreed that all new people applying for allotments will be contacted to ask whether they would like to be co-workers or work on shared plots. The BHAF would then take it on from there.

Meeting adjourned at 9pm.