## Allotment Strategy Meeting – Tues. 9th April 2013

**Brighton Town Hall**

*Meeting commenced at 1.30pm*

**Present:** Vic Borrill, Allan Brown, Mark Carroll, David Cooper, Anne Glow, Russ Howarth, Gillian Marston, Paul Neary, Alan Phillips, Simon Powell, Graeme Rolf, Fiona Hare, Barbara Hardcastle.

**Apologies for Absence:** Nicky Cambridge

*(Alan Phillips & Gillian Marston chaired the meeting as Nicky Cambridge was unable to attend. Barbara joined us from Public Health and Fiona Hare senior administrator City Parks – data. )*

**AGENDA:**

* Minutes of the last meeting
* Matters arising

TOR

AP had made a few amendments to the B&H Allotment Strategy Group TOR document as requested. These changes had been circulated amongst Committee Members prior to this meeting.

GM pointed out that that there isn’t an ‘Environment & Sustainability Committee’, it is currently called the ‘Environment and Transport Committee’ (TOR – under ‘Role & Responsibility’.) GM said she would amend the document accordingly, but other than that all were in agreement with the AP’s suggested amendments.

* Strategy Forum

MC clarified that the website forum is up and running. AP explained that it would be good if everyone signed up, as it would be a good place to collate data and share information in a manner that reduces the quantity of emails that are being generated. At the moment it is just for people on the Working Groups. RH suggested that the forum be opened up so it could be read generally by the public, although they would not be able to post on the forum. However it was agreed that for the immediate term we would keep the forum purely as a tool for the Strategy and Strategy Working Groups. MC will send the link out again and some people had not managed to register successfully.

* Federation AGM  ( Alan Phillips and everyone)

AP gave a brief overview of the AGM. One participant referred to a previous Strategy, a copy of which has been circulated amongst some Committee Members. GM clarified that it wasn’t a Strategy as such, however there was a paper that was taken to Council, but it was certainly not a Strategy on the scale that the current Strategy is predicated on.

At the AGM, AP concentrated on comments that arose from the floor. These included:

Questions on finance

Security was a big issue

Several comments made about waiting lists and the possible involvement of people on waiting lists.

Comments on choice on plot sizes.

Comments about Workfare/ “slave labour”.

Autonomy and devolution of allotment sites

RH requested clarification as to the Workfare Scheme, as this came up at the AGM. RH asked whether there is an official policy on this issue. GM felt that this Strategy Meeting was probably not the appropriate occasion to tackle this issue, but as far as allotments are concerned she stressed that this is not likely to be an issue. VB clarified FP/ Harvest’s position as to the Workfare Scheme and confirmed that they would not support any policy that forced people to work on Community Gardens etc. in order to receive their benefits. There was general acknowledgement that allotments were a great resource for the long term unemployed.

There was a brief discussion on the chairing of the meetings. NC is otherwise engaged, although she will be available to help later on in the process. AP is keen to ensure the Council keep ownership of this Strategy, so was keen to encourage NC to chair the meeting. GM suggested that AP chair the meeting as she was keen to have someone from the Federation chairing; it gives a strong message that that it is not the Council alone driving the strategy.

VC felt that we needed and independent chair. She was worried that the effectiveness of the Strategy may be compromised by having AP chairing, as he has so much to contribute.

After various options were discussed:

It was agreed that GM and AP would co-chair the meetings and take it in turns, with AP chairing one meeting, GM the next etc. The first part of this meeting would be chaired by GM, she had to leave at some stage, and AP would chair the second part. GM’s office (Helen Loughnane) will cover all the necessary admin. required by the Strategy Group. DC would continue to cover the printing of any relevant documentation for the Meetings.

AP was keen to ensure we have access to a statistician from the Council in order to offer advice on surveys, conduct group sampling etc. PN asked about how important it was to find a statistician, while GM said there wasn’t a statistician available from within the Council, but this was an area where an outside agency could be used if it was deemed necessary. VB mentioned that FP/ Harvest have strong links with several academics from local universities who have active interests in food issues and possess skills that could be useful to the Strategy if further research/ analysis is required at any stage.

It was also noted that good financial information would be needed as there was some confusion on financial issues including the levels of the Council’s contribution to allotments and elsewhere e.g. bowling.

DC said he was working with Pauline Clark (who has subsequently left) on detailed accounts/ financial data to be presented to the relevant Working Group. GM said she felt that we didn’t need an accountant as the Allotment Budget is so small and that the group contained the necessary skills in order to evaluate the financial data..

* Composition of Working Groups

AB spoke briefly about how names/ volunteers were collected at the AGM. These names were run by the BHAF Committee and approved. The names were passed to the various Working Groups and the volunteers have been contacted and co-opted onto the various Working Groups accordingly.

GM asked how meetings were arranged. It was confirmed that meetings have either been arranged by private email or through the Strategy forum.

GM spoke briefly on Council employee participation in the Working Groups. She asked whether there was a perception that the Council could be doing more? MC confirmed that there was a general perception that the Council should be doing more. AB suggested that a lot of the data needed is self-evident and should be being produced beforehand.

GM queried whether NC could be involved on the Consultation Working Group. VB and MC both agreed that it would be helpful to have NC involved. This was endorsed by the others at the meeting.

GM asked whether Fiona Hare would be useful to contribute to the Resources Working Group to help with specific data they may require. (DC is also on this Working Group.) This was welcomed and agreed.

AP said that specific data on Waiting Lists would be particularly helpful and will be required fairly quickly. We need to clarify exactly what data we need and how we go about collecting it.

GM offered her office as a channel for getting detailed information/ data. Working through traditional channels may be difficult and slow. RH said that he was happy to work along the basis of contacting the Council for clarification on specific data issues for WG1 on Governance.

AP said that he felt there was a need for an additional BHAF member from the Resources Working Group, to be coopted soon to sit on the main Strategy group. Especially as external work demands would curtail his ability to be the focal point in pulling everything together. He proposed Emily Gardiner the new BHAF Treasurer. This was noted.

VB said that there was interest from the University that are interested in food issues, and would be able to help with specific data as it arises. GM explained that she/ her office would be able to act as a conduit and that she has some experience of statistics. She didn’t feel it was necessary to have a council officer on every working group but that it was important that the WG’s have access to the best possible data. She suggested that where there was missing data we may have to commission specific research.

MC said that contacting everyone on the waiting list would be a worthwhile project. We can both collect data and streamline the waiting lists. Once we know exactly how big the waiting list actually is and their real needs for food growing.We could continue to closely monitor the waiting list and conduct an annual review to ensure it remains an accurate reflection of the reality of the situation.

* Reports from all 4 Working Groups
* WG1                 **Governance** (Russ Howarth and Simon Powell)

RH gave a brief summary of their first meeting. Written report to follow.

(7 recommendations and data request.)

AB asked for clarification as to Harvest/ Food Partnership and their support of community plots, and how this fits into the overall governance of the allotments. MC said he’d like to see if voluntary groups/ Associations could work more closely together. SP spoke broadly about the Whitehawk Food Project. VB suggested that we engage with existing community groups and harness their expertise, especially where there are no associations currently in place.

* WG 2                 **Land** (Allan Brown and Anne Glow)

AB clarified that the first meeting has yet to take place. VB said that the Food Partnership/ Harvest are conducting a land survey looking at land on the urban fringe for food growing. The land survey is not necessarily for allotments, but they would be prepared to include that in their work. RH suggested there is almost as much decommissioned allotment land as there is allocated allotment land.

AP asked VB whether the FP were in the position to do paid research work if the need was highlighted. She said they were and referred to the academics at local universities that were involved in food and food planning.

* WG 3                  **Resources and Research** (Alan Phillips and Emily Gardiner)

Initial meeting has taken place and notes from meeting circulated by AP and placed on the internet forum. Requested that someone from this group ultimately sit on the Strategy Steering Group.

* WG 4              **Communications and Consultation** (Mark Carroll and Vic Borrill)

This Working Group has met and Vic Borrill has circulated a report. They need some sort of direction on timescale on consultation. AP suggested that this happen soon and be undertaken in close liaison with WG1(Governance) and WG2 (Land) to specify their needs. VB said the report highlighted some costings for consultation – if there were resources available, she said it was possible to Do this in July/August, but needs detailed requests from the Working Groups so their group will know exactly what they’ll need to include in their consultation.

The meeting agreed that GM be asked to clarify what resources are going to be made available for consultation and research.

* Use of current Data base for the strategy

Three sets of data had been provided and circulated by DC at the end of the previous week.

AP asked DC for clarification on the data that is currently available.

He noted that the initial request received from the group was a break down per site of plot sizes, voids, let plots, unlet plots. These are also ordered in plot size.

AB queried the whole/ half plot designation of plots. It was clarified that the m2 figures is far more accurate and reliable than the whole/ half plot designation, which could be misleading.

RH suggested that we compile the m2 data also in another way by land area and it would be possible to see how much land was allocated to full plot and that which was likely to be less productive for food growing eg over 10 rods, 5 to 10 rods, and under 5 rods..

RH suggested that a survey could be unduly weighted if non veg. growers were weighted equally with those that traditionally used allotments. He suggested that we could ask people what specifically they want out of an allotment as opposed to a leisure garden.

MC and VB suggested that framing one of the questions in terms of time available to commit to one’s plot and growing food is perhaps a better way to go.

VB asked for clarification in the data for categories of concession. To highlight reasons for concession – ie. unemployment, age, disability etc.

BH suggested we collate postcode data with waiting list as well as existing availability as this would be beneficial to the Health dept.

The Chairperson (AP) concluded that it was agreed that there was a crucial need to ask the right sorts of questions to determine the real needs.This would be an important task for the working groups in the next period.

AP suggested that in future the database, in its current format, may not be unfit for purpose, but we should make good use of what we do have. In the short term it was requested from the Council via FH:

Data analysis:

1. A breakdown of existing allotmenteers by postcode.
2. Allotments pie chart by land area

It was agreed by the meeting that we don’t need regular data updates in the short term, we’re largely interested in the long term picture. ie. 3 years ago, 5 years ago etc.

* Research needed

1. A survey of those on the waiting list with details of their needs analysed by postcode. ( This would be an opportunity to update the waiting list and this will then be updated every 6 or 12 months).

2.Survey for existing plot-holders on their current and future needs

1. Information on why people had given up ( or were forced to give up) their allotments including data on how long they had had the allotment that could be analysed.

– We want to understand more closely the reasons why people are giving up their plots. Departures on a yearly basis would be sufficient.

Every Working Group should pass along info/ survey requests to Resources and Research WG3 and to Consultation Group WG4 by the beginning of May.

*Meeting adjourned at 4.00pm.*