**Allotment Strategy Meeting – 1st March 2013**

*Meeting commenced at 9.10am*

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

**Apologies for Absence:** Nicky Cambridge

*(Alan Phillips chaired the meeting as Nicky Cambridge was unable to attend.)*

**AGENDA:**

*1/ Working Groups: Progress on their formation*

*2/ Outline of plan of work, including timetables and resources*

*3/ Initial brainstorming and agenda setting on issues for Working Groups*

*4/ Any other business*

*5/ Dates of future meetings*

**Minutes from Previous Meeting**

AP sought clarification of the procedure for minute taking. Thus far AB, DC & VB have been taking minutes at the meetings. AB produces an initial draft, which is circulated amongst BHAF Strategy Team members and VB from Harvest/ FP. Any errors are amended and then these ‘notes’ are passed to DC for a final reading. AP was concerned their may be an unnecessary duplication of roles and that AB, as primary minute taker, was precluded from taking an active role in discussions. However it was agreed the current system was working well and that we would continue as we have been doing.

There were a couple of amendments that needed to be made to the previous minutes.

‘Co-partnership and resolving conflict’ instead of ‘co-partnership/ conflicts’ – AP

40 rods not 4 rods. – SP

Bottom of page 2 – An insertion is needed regarding the role of the BHAF Fed on selecting Site Reps, this section appears to have been omitted - VB

Couple of details need tidying up in the ‘Terms of Reference’ document - AP

**Matters Arising**

AP, stressed the necessity of ‘evidence based research’.

The other issue of concern is ‘plot chopping/ halving’. The BHAF Strategy Team would like greater clarification on this issue, following on from letter from BHAF. (The BHAF Committee had formally written to Gillian Marston. Lizzie Dean and Pete West to request a moratorium on ‘plot halving’ whilst the strategy was in progress.)

GM stated the council was open to all possibilities/ options with regards plot sizes and choice. She appreciated there have been criticism levelled at the council for implementing this decision without sufficient consultation, but stressed that the whatever policy we decided on at the end of the strategy process would be dependent on proper data, research and consultation. Whatever policy emerges from the Strategy will be in accordance with our agreed Strategy Objectives.

She said the plot halving policy had originally been agreed with members of the BHAF Committee, although the current BHAF Committee have been unable to find the minutes and documentation relating to these meetings. The BHAF Committee was very understaffed during this period and support for this decision may have been made by just a couple of BHAF Committee members. RH clarified the BHAF is made up of all it’s members, not just it’s Committee members.

AP commented that there has been concern, given the revised timetable (ie not going to council until March 2014) and that many were worried that a number of further full plots will have been halved. AP said that if it was becoming clear that a new approach to plot sizes was emerging from the process by the summer 2013, we would need to be able act on this before the Strategy goes to council. The

RH said that he (RAGGS) were worried by the council changing the language from ‘half plots’ to ‘standard plots’. RH reiterated that we need assurance from hard data/ evidence that the rate of plot chopping is not happening at a level that precludes a future policy from having a good mix of full and half plots.

GM said she was worried about the emotion about the language being attributed to the plot halving issue. She stressed we need to go through a proper, transparent discussion about what achieves the Strategy Objectives. She said the timetable can be changed, but we would need to acknowledge the increase level and intensity of the time-scale if it were to be shortened. GM stressed we don’t want to shorten the timetable at the cost of proper consultation but there is a flexibility on the time table and feels councillors would be willing to accommodate this.

SP said that we need to timetable the strategy to work around the main plot letting times, ie autumn and spring.

MC reiterated that plot size, plot cost, plot availability are the three main issues

AP attempted to sum up the situation as he was keen to move discussion on to data/ research before GM had to leave. *(GM had made it known at the previous meeting that she would only be able to attend the first hour of this meeting.)*

He stated that we need to set ourselves a timetable whereby we can arrive at a document before the main plot letting in the autumn. We also need to be clear about the language we use, ie half plots being called standard plots.

**Working Groups**

A brief discussion ensued, to clarify which Council employees would be sitting on the various Working Groups as well as which Site Reps and additional BHAF volunteers would be involved. The BHAF had sent out a e-newsletter and put up a note on their website calling for volunteers to input into the Working Groups.

It was agreed that GR would help out on ‘land’ WG as well DC.

VB has approached the ‘Trust for Developing Communities’ to work on The ‘Consultation’ group but they may also be able to help with the ‘Governance’ group. RH suggested DC could help on this group.

Bruce from the Allotments Maintenance Team was suggested as a possible candidate.

Helen from Harvest is on ‘Consultation & Engagement’ group.

Hilary Standing has also volunteered to sit on the ‘Governance Group’

It was raised that we need to mention the WG’s at the BHAF AGM.

AP suggested we would have one person as a ‘focal point’ for each WG. AP clarified that VB had offered at the previous Strategy Meeting, that Harvest may be able to help organise the logistics of the WG’s. VB reiterated that Harvest could provide a venue for meetings. AP stressed that the WG’s are going to generate a lot of material and we need some kind of mechanism to collate all the information. MC has offered to set up a closed forum/ website to help organise the data.

VB stressed that we need to liaise with the ‘focal point’/ facilitator otherwise shared data could become overwhelming.

AP clarified that as greed under the TOR the WG’s can’t in and of themselves make decisions, they can make recommendations and their findings will be discussed by the main Strategy group, where the final decisions would be made on any isssues and be signed off.

There was then some discussion on the ‘Information & Data’ for the WG’s (ie. ‘Data that we hold’.)

MC said that the first item, ‘number of sites, plots & tenants’, we need more detailed breakdown of plots into number of half plots and full plots. (Currently the data doesn’t distinguish between the two). SP requested that we get information going back to Jan 2010 (possibly 6 months earlier) as that was when full-plots were no longer available for rent.

AP said we need to find out from people on the waiting list if they have a preference for choices on plot size.

VB asked DC if the council were willing to use the waiting list data base to contact people. Run a survey of people on the waiting list – GM suggested we could run a survey every year. RH said we could offer a prize for filling in questionnaire.

PN mentioned that the Allotment Regeneration Initiative (ARI )have a document entitled ‘Managing the Waiting List’ which is available on line as well as the ‘Growing in the Community’ booklet that both the BHAF and the Council have purchased and shared between members of the Strategy Process. PN stressed that different ethnic groups have different methods of cultivating community groups. GM said it would be interesting to get a more accurate ethnic breakdown of those on the waiting lists and existing tenants.

MC asked whether we currently record why people give up their plots. Would it be possible to ask the last 100 tenants, for example, their reasons for having given up their plots?

VB is it possible to distinguish between people who’ve been evicted and those that have left out of choice. RH said site reps have a fairly good idea of why people are leaving. GM said we need to conduct an ‘Equalities Impact Assessment’. AP asked whether we have a current EIA for allotments.

SP sought greater clarification on the waiting list and which sites have closed waiting list.

RH suggested that some of the raw data could be analysed by the WG’s. VB said that if we looked at what people are being charged we should be able to determine who’s been taking on half-plots as opposed to full-plots. GM similarly suggested we should be able to determine this by looking at the times when new tenants have taken on plots.

There was a brief discussion on the types of data we aim to gather. GM said it would be qualitative data on things like impact on education and health. She is keen to get the council to start gathering quantative date as soon as possible. The qualitative data is very important but could be gathered further into the process.

Consultation and engagement WG met on Tuesday 26th. VB outlined what had happened. They went through the list of stakeholders and the methods and sorts of questions they will need to be asked. Survey – like ‘Survey Monkey’, as well as actually going on to sites to interview people directly. Plans to run a full day, inviting a number of allotment holders, a participatory day to get suggestions/ ideas etc. They didn’t feel that consulting councillors was in their remit. She said they are keen to ask specific questions, rather than open ended questions. VB agreed that she would type up and share the ‘notes/ minutes’ from this meeting and they could be added as a appendix to these minutes. AP suggested that each WG do similarly.

PN talked about the difficulties of getting in touch with ‘hard to reach groups’, ie. those that want to learn about growing, but don’t know how to go about accessing allotments. VB said that Harvest have good CBSF

AP felt it would be fairer on the minute takers to have each WG type of a brief summary, that could be referred and linked to by the minute takers. These notes could be shared on the website. AP hoped the other 3 WG’s would begin work this month.

There was a brief discussion on the practicalities of coping with additional volunteers to the WG’s that may arise through the BHAF’s drive to raise awareness and call for volunteers.

The next meeting is on the 9th April.

*Meeting adjourned at 10.30am*.