



Meeting with Society Representatives

Meeting Date: Tuesday 25th February 2020

Meeting Location: Garden House, Clifton Park, Rotherham.

Meeting Called By: Councillor Brian Steele

Chair: Councillor Brian Steele

Secretary: Jack Taylor (apologies)

Present:

Directors: - Councillor Brian Steele (BS), Al Dean (AD), Mike Farrell (MF), John Palmer (JP) and Mohammed Suleman (MS)

Allotment Support Assistant – Donna Bushby (minutes)

Society Representatives 25 – Sites currently society managed = Broom Valley Old (2), Clifton (2), Herringthorpe Valley Road (3), Queen St South (2). Sandymount Road (Fitzwilliam Estates site) (2), South Street (2), Wood St (2), Kimberworth Park (1), Wharf Road (2), Hartley Lane (1). Societies formed on currently directly managed sites = Avenue Road (2), Barnsley Road/Wet Moor Lane (2), Vicarage Fields (1). (1 person: site not specified)

Some notes have been added for clarity

1. Update from RAA

- 1.1 Chair opened the meeting welcoming and thanking representatives for their attendance. Directors present introduced themselves and also the Allotment Support Assistance.
- 1.2 Advised that the RAA has been 'live' since 1st January 2020 and the policies and procedures have now been set up.
- 1.3 RMBC have transferred any operating revenue up to the end of March 2020 so the RAA will be responsible for collecting rents from 1st April 2020.
- 1.4 The website is now up and running. It is a work in progress so information will be added on an ongoing basis.
- 1.5 The AGM has been set for Tuesday 21st April 2020 at the Town Hall for 7.00pm. All allotment plot holders/members are welcome. All the directors except the Councillors will stand down and be up for re-election. Any potential new directors need to contact the Allotments Support Assistant to register their interest. *Required at least 2 weeks prior.* Councillor Steele aims to work with the project in its first couple of years to ensure its success and proper management. The AGM will be publicized on the website and also in local notes in the Rotherham Advertiser and an agenda confirmed prior to the date.
- 1.6 The allotment management is done using a computer system called Colony of which training has taken place. It is apparent that the data held on Colony is not up to date so the Allotment Support Assistant needs all the up to date information sending. *Secretaries will be supplied with a spreadsheet to capture all plot holder's details*
- 1.7 Anticipate that new bills will be sent around 3rd week of March. *Bills will be April – December as a new accounting period has been agreed. From 2021, bills will be January – December.* Rents have been agreed and communicated for 2021 and have been kept in line with inflation.
- 1.8 The income that the RAA receives covers the administrator's salary plus other operating costs. Income projections for 2020/2021 have been calculated.

- 1.9 Pleased to say that 3 new societies for 4 sites have now been created. JP stated that no new society has been created in Rotherham in the last 50 years. This shows the progress the RAA is making.
- 1.9.1 Avenue Rd site asked if a meeting could be set up for directors to view the site – *this will be arranged*.
- 1.10 New Societies will be able to receive the personal data from Colony once the lease agreement has been signed. This is due to data protection. (*GDPR*). The RAA needs to have the detail of every tenant on Colony.
- 1.10.1 Wharf Rd site asked about skips – they have requested one due to the flooding. Advised that this would be considered.
- 1.11 It is now evident that the RAA has got to sort out the problems left / not sorted out by RMBC.
- 1.12 RMBC have granted £100k to be spent on improvements. Discussions are taking place regarding what this can actually be spent on. The priority is to look at any Health and Safety projects. Each site is being given a “wish-list” sheet to specify any jobs that they feel need doing on their site. The Board will then make a decision on what projects will be carried out. The money can be spent over 2 years. BS will be arranging a meeting with Andy Lee to discuss this. The procedure for the expenditure will probably be to get quotes etc. We endeavor to ensure that all of the £100k is spent. Income and money from possible grants also need to be considered.
- 1.13 The RAA will be more operational from 1/4/20. Attendees were then invited to ask questions:
- 1.13.1 Question from Vicarage Fields: asbestos shed on site needs removing. BS stated that he had visited the site last year but was not shown this and had only seen it on a more recent visit.
- 1.13.2 Question about rents: When do they pay? Societies will be given until the end of March to pay their bill on the new billing period. It was changed to make it better for planting. Bills for this year will be the same amount but for 9 months only. The next bill will be for 12 months and will be sent at the end of this year.
- 1.13.3 Question from Wood St: need to establish the total area size of the site. BS advised that this information will form part of the Heads of Terms document which will come from RMBC
- 1.13.4 Question: what site maintenance will there be? BS stated that the RAA will provide the same as the council. The aim is to actually provide a better service but there will be teething problem which need to be sorted out. The responsibility of the directors is to try and facilitate all needs.
- 1.13.5 Question: what about insurance? BS advised that insurance is being provided by RMBC until the end of March for all direct sites plus some societies. Some societies also have their own. Possibly looking at being able to cover all sites including buildings. This is being determined in the Service Level Agreements (SLA).

2 Leases

- 2.1 BS asked if anyone had any questions regarding the draft lease and rules which were sent prior to the meeting
- 2.1.1 Question asked regarding the rules – are they retrospective? Tenants have been breaking about 90% of them. These have been written using RMBC information and NAS guidelines. BS replied that the rules and lease are not much different to the

previous ones. Slight differences on societies who look after own buildings. However, the RAA will try to help make right.

2.1.2 Question regarding decommissioned plots on new society sites– are they getting charged for? To help the society get set up, they will not be charged for any vacant or unlettable plots this year. The idea is to get all the plots back into a cultivatable condition. Meetings need to be set up to see every site.

2.2 JP expressed that every site must supply the RAA with a full tenant list so that they can be recognized as shareholders. This is to make it possible to vote in the AGM.

3. **Any Other Business** (*some questions related to the previous agenda item regarding leases*)

3.1 DB spoke about building the website and social media pages which are currently being done.

3.2 It was stated that it is everyone's best interest to have all plots let to reduce risk of vandalism etc. Every effort is needed to get plots let. Any improvements made need to be reported to the RAA.

3.3 Question asked regarding A and B sites which is on the lease. JP explained that this is down to the facilities on each site. Those with more facilities i.e. toilets etc. are charged slightly more per sqm.

3.4 Question asked regarding tenants having more than 1 plot. Currently they advertise plots to other tenants on the noticeboard for 2 weeks. It was explained that if you have a waiting list, available plots should be offered there first, rather than to existing tenants. Other question regarding hosepipes – the rules say they are allowed but the site rule is that they are not.

3.5 Question regarding fires. It was advised that they are allowed between March and November and not to cause a nuisance to the local residents. The Directors have a duty to follow up any complaints.

3.6 MF advised that the rules are basis ones so societies can add their own little rules, i.e. encouraging water collection rather than using taps. The society AGM is an opportunity to cast a vote for a rule to be introduced. JP added that societies can have sub-rules above the RAA rules / lease / Heads of Terms as these are only the minimum requirement.

3.7 Question regarding payment of rent. Societies are responsible for collecting rents from tenants. The RAA will try and help new societies in the first year.

3.8 Question from Queen St North & South at Swinton – an area nearby had been let for grazing. It was fenced off and had new gates. Not being used. Can it be made into allotments? It would need top soil putting on. *This area is called Woodside and is marked as having potential.*

3.9 Kimberworth Park asked regarding some conifers that were higher than the houses and have blown over. BS advised that we would need to look at what was inside the boundary.

3.10 Question regarding 6.1.2 of the draft lease regarding notice of using allotment for other uses, mentioned the situation taking place currently with Kirklees Council in Leeds. BS stated that societies would be given plenty of notice if that kind of situation would occur. RMBC does own the land but has a statutory obligation to replace any sites, like for like.

3.11 Question from Broom Valley Old site regarding discrimination. BS explained that all RAA policies are available on the website which cover such matters. Any complaints will be investigated.

3.12 Question raised regarding the share. It was explained that the share has already been included in the rent cost. Associate members who do not pay rent as a plot holder will need to pay separately - £3 – to become a member.

3.13 The Board have decided to propose the NAS membership and vote at the AGM. The cost will be £3 per member. Some sites do already do their own membership. It wouldn't

be in 2020, however. It would start next year if voted in. The cost would have to go somewhere so possibly put on rents, dependent on budget of RAA. The Business Plan has already been approved for this year and will be renewed next year.

- 3.14 Question regarding shareholders and split plots. It was explained that as long as both tenants have provided their details and pay rent for each plot, they are both shareholders. The Support Assistant can send a copy of a share certificate if required.
- 3.15 A suggestion was made regarding future meetings – use a pub function room to avoid paying any room hire costs and easy to access/park etc.
- 3.16 Question regarding 11.4 of Allotment Rules – keeping sites vermin free at all times – how will this be possible? It was explained that the pest control information was obtained from RMBC today so this will be looked at. It was also suggested that common sense be used, especially by those keeping livestock which is an attraction for pests. BS wanted to point out that getting information from RMBC has been difficult at times.
- 3.17 The RAA has got a different set up than RMBC with better administration. Still got a lot of work to do. Discussions take place with all directors and everyone has a different opinion which need to be considered.
- 3.18 BS stated that as Chair, he will operate to the best interest of the members and other board members by putting in the time and effort to ensure the success is achieved. Everyone was thanked for attending.