

Rotherham Allotments Alliance

Board Meeting No.52

On Meeting Date: Monday 21st June 2021

Meeting Location: Online: Zoom

Meeting Called By: Brian Steele

Chair: Brian Steele

Secretary: Jack Taylor (Minutes Donna Bushby)

Present: Directors: Brian Steele (BS), John Palmer (JP), Jack Taylor (JT), Mick Hirst (MH), Alison Howard (AH), Mohammed Suleman (MS), Cllr David Sheppard (DS).
ASA: Donna Bushby (DB)

178/06/21 (1) **Apologies:** N/A

179/06/21 (2) **Declaration of Interest**

179.1/06/21 JP declared an interest as a tenant on Barnsley Rd site.

179.2/06/21 MH declared an interest as a tenant of Avenue Rd site.

179.3/06/21 JT declared an interest as Secretary of Wood St site.

179.4/06/21 AH declared an interest as an interim committee member of South Street.

179.5/06/21 MS declared an interest as a tenant of Clifton allotments.

180/06/21 (3) **Minutes of Board Meeting 51 – 7th June 2021**

These were moved as a true record and duly signed (electronically) by the Chairperson.

181/06/21 (4) **Matters Arising**

None declared.

182/06/21 (5) **Administrator's Report – submitted to Director's prior to meeting. Summary:**

182.1/06/21 **Herringthorpe** – report of fire from local resident. Contacted site secretary

182.2/06/21 **Avenue Road** – tenant reported untidy paths and plots being used for scrap. Advised tenant that we will be doing non-cultivation inspections soon.

182.3/06/21 **Rosehill Park** – tenant reported grass hadn't been cut. Chased up with Grounds Maintenance

182.4/06/21 **Vicarage Fields** – tree from site has fallen into resident's garden. Arranging repair of damaged shed with resident. It was agreed by the board to offer £25 as it needs a few boards replacing. It wouldn't be feasible to go through insurance even though it would still be under RMBC's responsibility. DB reported that the tree will need looking at for any future works.

182.5/06/21 **Barnsley Road** – cockerel letters went out to tenants. Complaint not been reported since. Tenants put a lot of negative comments on their Facebook page directed towards the Alliance. Following post about no firearms – tenant commented that the site has a rat problem. Also had a phone call from another tenant who reported the rat problem also.

182.6/06/21 **Greasbrough** – tenant reported shed broken into and tools stolen – only theirs targeted. Letter of complaint received anonymously regarding a tenant who was recently allegedly arrested for some incidents that did not take place on the allotments. Letter showed concern for if the tenant behaves inappropriately on the allotment. It was discussed and agreed that no action can be taken at this moment in time as the letter is anonymous. We would need proof of wrong-doing on the allotments to take any action. It was suggested that we should contact tenants to advise that any complaints need to have proof in order for us to deal with them and we should have contact details to follow up.

182.7/06/21 **Non-cultivation Inspections** – plot grading criteria drafted and need to arrange dates with directors.

182.8/06/21 **St Leonard's Rd** – tenant reported grass/car park needs cutting. Not on the schedule. Discussed whether it is worth putting on the schedule. As we have no one to do this, it was decided that it needed adding to the schedule.

182.9/06/21 **Moor Rd** – a number of tenants have asked regarding the flooding work. DB explained that we wouldn't be able to get a quote from Burkinshaws to do the work as they have had an arson attack. This will also hinder the other allotments works which have been approved. Dye testing the flats will cost up to £500 – permission has been sought. It was discussed that of the quotes

received, one had more work included than the other. It was discussed regarding doing the dye testing before the drainage works and also investigating the water that runs from the under the steps down into the site. RMBC have already done some testing and reported that the water was not from the area tested. The dye testing does need doing but all other areas also need investigating, and if it is the flats, will the owner of the flats contribute to any remedial costs? DB to liaise with DS regarding the issue as he is responsible for flooding in the area. A tenant also requested a refund of their rent paid for this year which was supposed to be transferred over to next year. DB explained their situation and it was agreed the rent can be refunded on this occasion.

182.10/06/21 High Street – DB reported to DS regarding evidence of drug use on the access road to the site -DS is the Councillor for that area. DS will inform the local police. It is likely being used as it is concealed from the main road.

183/06/21

(6) Financial Matters

183.1/06/21 AH reported that access to the bank account is almost complete for everyone. BS, JT and DB are now set up. A resolution was made that AH and DB are now authorized to pay any bills. DB cannot authorize any payments relating to reimbursement of own expenses - another director will have to approve it. BS thanked AH for the help in sorting out the bank account.

183.2/06/21 It was then discussed that the Internet Banking section of the financial regulations policy needs completing. AH offered to put the policy together to be discussed in the next meeting.

183.3/06/21 DB has requested to have the account linked to Quickbooks to use to create the reports required.

183.4/06/21 DB reported that rents have been reconciled up to the end of May and there is currently 90.1% rents paid with £5264 outstanding. Outstanding rents will be chased once the bank has been checked up to the present date. Pest Control invoice has been received.

183.5/06/21 DB previously circulated a report to directors regarding the meeting JT and DB had with Allots Accountants. In summary, the Alliance is exempt from paying corporation tax due to being a mutual trading entity – customers are shareholders. The Alliance can disapply the rule on a yearly basis to not have the need for the accounts to be professionally audited. (Allots quoted £1500 + VAT for an audit done by them). It was reported that it had been discussed in a previous meeting that it was agreed to have the accounts be internally audited by a lay auditor due to the turnover threshold. Quickbooks can help with producing any reports required. In regard to charitable status, the accountant advised that it may not be beneficial to the Alliance to apply for it as the Charity Regulator has greater rules and regulations than that of the FCA. There is also no VAT relief benefit for being a charity. We do not need to be VAT registered as we under the revenue threshold and what we offer is not a vatable item. If we did become VAT registered, we would either have to charge VAT on rents or pay the VAT from existing rents. This would not be of financial benefit to the Alliance. DS advised that being a registered charity would mean the accounts have to be professionally audited which would come at a cost.

184/06/21

(7) Transfer and Transitional arrangements RMBC to RAA (including SLA)

184.1/06/21 BS, JT and DB had a 2 hour meeting with the new solicitor. A report was circulated to directors by DB prior to the board meeting. In summary, the solicitor advised that the lease was not fit for purpose and was more suited to a commercial building, not a voluntary organization. Following this, a meeting was arranged with Andy Lee and Liz Ryan from Estates to discuss with them the solicitor's findings. The solicitor has been instructed to remove any irrelevant / unnecessary clauses in the lease and advise further action. This will mean that the signing of the lease will now be further delayed. DB had reported that in communication with York allotments, it took 4 years for their 7-year lease to be signed. DB will contact our solicitor to reconfirm what they have been instructed to do. An observation was made in regard to the length of time it has taken for the solicitor to advise this course of action. We were advised that the originally-appointed solicitor had left the company so a new one was brought in. The legal terms used for 'tenants' was in contention and a decision needs to be made to as to what is the correct terminology for the legal purposes. Allotments have always historically used the term 'tenant' yet this may not be legally correct under our lease. The lease has got to reflect the what the Heads of Terms contain. It was agreed that it was down to both solicitors to ensure that the lease is fit for purpose and covers the Alliance requirements / allotment law. BS and JT will then sign the lease once it has been satisfactorily agreed by directors. It was discussed that we don't have a baseline of what the RMBC requirements are regarding the condition of the allotments – it is pretty much sold as seen.

185/06/21

(8) Society Update

185.1/06/21 There have been concerns regarding the way some societies are being run. Under the restrictions, most societies would not have been able to hold an AGM to discuss site business. It was suggested that a board member should attend every AGM. DB to contact all secretaries to advise them that they need to schedule an AGM when restrictions are lifted.

185.2/06/21 A society who have recently been contacted regarding a cockerel issue have not been communicating with the RAA sufficiently. A lot of comments appeared on their Facebook page criticizing the RAA and also stated that tenants didn't know who the committee members were. No one from the society have been in contact with the RAA direct to discuss the issues. This is not inline with the tenancy agreement with the society and needs addressing. The RAA will not attempt to resolve any issues via social media. JT to write to the society to request another meeting with them to address the issues. If the society doesn't adhere to the rules and run appropriately – electing Officers correctly etc., the society will be disbanded.

185.2/06/21 It has been reported that the site does have a rat problem. Tenant asked if any humane traps can be provided. It was highlighted that tenants may not realise that it is livestock that attracts the rats. It was reported that Clifton site is also having a problem. In regard to training, need to know who has volunteered to do the training and how they are going to store the poison. It can be difficult because if someone is trained up and they leave the site, someone else will have to be trained up. Who will ensure that the procedure is being carried out correctly. It was suggested that the society contact the RAA in regard to the matter.

186/06/21 (9) Maintenance

186.1/06/21 Shed roof at Hartley Lane is in-hand.

186.2/06/21 Grass cutting – received a few questions from tenants asking when sites are being done. It may be that some sites have been missed. Not had dates of when Grounds Maintenance have attended – this was agreed in the meeting with them. DB to contact Neil Archer and request dates. It was suggested that the team may have possibly been changed. It was agreed with them that one team will be specifically used on the allotments.

187/06/21 (10) NAS Membership Update

No update received from NAS. It is possible to sign up societies but not direct-managed sites without the seed scheme being confirmed but some societies may not want the seed scheme through the society so individual tenants will be affected in the same way.

188/06/21 (11) Future Actions

188.1/06/21 Cultivation Inspections – DB to arrange a schedule and arrange with directors. It was suggested we should take pictures of buildings to document their current condition. In regard to the plot categorising, we should assess each plot and the action required individually. AH has recently done inspections on South Street. They have offered assistance to those who need it. Board have a responsibility to show tenants that we are expecting plots to be cultivated to the correct standard.

189/06/21 (12) Any other business

189.1/06/21 Question asked regarding the capital works. £99k has been spent. Waiting for contractors to do the work. Fencing 3rd week of August. Hartley Lane and Psalters Lane work is booked in. There is a delay on materials.

189.2/06/21 Question asked about progress on the Broom Valley New toilet block. DB arranging another meeting onsite with the contractor. Has suggested that the water is coming from the top and bottom of the doors, not the slope, and also a previous leak from the toilet.

190/06/21 (13) Agenda Items for next meeting

- As per last meeting
- Woodside
- Risk Assessments / Health and Safety

191/06/21 (17) Date and Time of Next Meeting. (Meetings will be cancelled if not required).

Monday 5th July 2021 at 2.00pm. DB advised she is on annual leave for this meeting. JP to do minutes. JT to have phone / laptop during this time.

BS thanked everyone for their attendance. The meeting was closed at 3.35pm.



Signed (Chair)