

Annual General Meeting

Meeting Date: Tuesday 23rd March 2021

Meeting Location: Online: Zoom

Meeting Called By: Councillor Brian Steele

Chair: Councillor Brian Steele

Secretary: Jack Taylor (Minutes Donna Bushby)

Present: Directors: - Councillor Brian Steele, Al Dean, John Palmer, Jack Taylor, Mick Hirst, Mohammed Suleman, Councillor Emma Hoddinott, 25 shareholders and the Allotment Support Assistant, Donna Bushby.

1. **Chairperson's Address** - Board Members and the Allotment Support Assistant Introduced themselves. Chair, Councillor Brian Steele (BS), opened the meeting and thanked everybody for their attendance. Present and past directors were thanked for their commitment over the last 18 months for helping to get the Alliance up and running. Special thanks were placed to the Allotment Support Assistant, Donna (DB), who has worked extremely hard over the last 12 months in very difficult conditions.
2. **Annual Report - 2020**
 - a. DB ran through the annual report and started with site statistics. Explained this is why secretaries have been asked for up to date tenant details regularly. Highlighted that the majority of society sites are at 100% occupancy which is a great achievement. Identified that direct-managed sites are harder to manage due to plots being left in poor condition previously.
 - b. Principal achievements and challenges were summarized. DB thanked all the tenants who have helped with supplying site information as this has been very beneficial to the running of the Alliance. Identified what is being looked at in the future and advised about looking at sourcing funding for future projects. Advised that tenants should contact the Alliance if they need any information clarifying. BS added that the Board of Directors make all the decisions and information is presented at board meetings every two weeks. Any complaints can be directed to BS if necessary. Society secretaries have also been invited to attend a board meeting to discuss any concerns they may have and to see how business is conducted.
 - c. Director's attendance was then summarised and explained any non-attendance and how directors are required to send apologies to meeting as a requirement of the constitution. BS explained that 2 directors are appointed by RMBC.
 - d. John Palmer (JP) Vice Chair, ran through the changes made to the policies as listed in the annual report. Identified the items that need adding once the legal process is finalized.
 - e. DB summarised the future plans which are based on the wish lists that were submitted. Highlighted that the majority of these works will hopefully come out of the £100k capital expenditure, focusing on health and safety issues – e.g. asbestos removal. Fence and path works – contractors site visits have been done so just waiting on the quotes for these to come in. Other future projects may be funded from RAA revenue and also external funding.
 - f. No questions were raised regarding the annual report. Attendees voted in favour of approving the annual report and carried.
3. **Accounts for 2020 –**
 - a. Al Dean (AD), Treasurer, was asked to present the 2020 accounts. For the purpose of the minutes, an audited and endorsed version of the accounts were presented on screen to attendees. Explained that the top of the report is showing capital and rental income, the middle section is relating to administration costs and the bottom section is maintenance / site operating costs. The balance at close of business 31.12.20 was £36,212.12.

- b. A question was asked regarding work completed on Avenue Rd. It was explained that for the capital expenditure, any works not involving VAT are paid for by the Alliance then RMBC reimburse the amount from the capital budget. Rents were collected for Sandymount but were returned to RMBC due to the Alliance not managing this site.
- c. AD identified that the Auditor asked about water charges and it was explained that due to the billing difficulties experienced, more water charges will show on the 2021 accounts. A vote was conducted and the financial report was approved by attendees.

4. **Board Members –**

- a. BS stated that all existing directors are standing again. It was voted in favour that all directors are re-appointed.
- b. 2 vacancies were identified and BS asked anyone interested in joining the Board to contact DB.
- c. BS then stood down as Chair and asked JP to Chair the meeting. BS was moved by AD and seconded by Mohammed Suleman (MS). A vote was conducted and it was carried that BS remains as Chair.
- d. The next election was for Secretary. Jack Taylor (JT) was moved by BS and seconded by JP. No other nominations received. The vote carried that JT remains as secretary.
- e. Treasurer was elected next. AD was moved by MS and seconded and was voted in favour of remaining the treasurer.
- f. Last election was for Vice Chair. JP was moved by AD and seconded by JT. The vote was carried for JP to remain as Vice Chair.

BS thanked everyone for participating. Also thanked the people who have put themselves forward for another 12 months. It was reminded that directors do not get any expenses for being a director, it is all done on a voluntary basis.

5. **Motion 1 – Appointment of Lay Auditor** – Moved by AD, seconded by MS. A lay auditor can be appointed if the business operates under a certain amount of revenue. It should be someone who has an accounts background. The current lay auditor is John Kirk. One of the attendees identified that they are an auditor by trade and will be of assistance where possible. The vote was conducted and the motion duly carried.

6. **Motion 2 – Board Sub-Committees** – Moved by JP and seconded by JT. Propose to set up 2 sub-committees – maintenance and finance - to allow issues to be dealt with greater flexibility and more promptly. Sub-committees will then report back to board meetings. Question asked regarding why they are needed when board meetings are every 2 weeks. BS explained that the frequency of board meetings will reduce and sub-committee meetings will take their place – board meetings are more for policy setting which has now been done. It was voted in favour and the motion carried.

7. **Motion 3 – Charitable Status rule change** – Moved by AD, seconded by JT. A word change in rule 103 to allow the Alliance to apply for charitable status which enables the Alliance to claim back any VAT paid. A question was asked regarding if any VAT refund payments have been refused. It was explained that we currently don't have charitable status - HMRC had advised to make this rule change in order to be allowed to apply for it. MS added that charitable status also helps to secure funding – this comment was strengthened by one of the attendees. The vote by attendees was made in favour and the motion carried.

8. **Motion 4 – Membership to National Allotment Society (NAS) –**

- a. BS asked Mike Farrell (MF) to declare an interest and refrain from voting in this motion as he is the Regional Representative for NAS. Moved by JT and seconded by AD. Information and benefits regarding NAS membership was read out to attendees. It was explained that the cost will be taken out of rental income and be estimated at £3000 per year.
- b. It was brought to the AGM's attention regarding the data protection / GDPR implications of passing tenant's details onto 3rd parties and advice has been sought from NAS and also the Information Commissioner's Office. We don't want to pass personal details on and be in breach of regulations. An attendee highlighted that NAS will need tenant personal details for the insurance cover element of membership. This was also explained by MF and highlighted that if personal details are not passed on, members won't get the insurance but will still benefit from the seed scheme and access to advice. It was stated by an attendee that explicit permission will be required to pass details on and should be communicated in tenancy agreements. This means that a positive response is required from each individual tenant.

- c. A question was asked regarding societies who are already members and have already paid subscriptions – need to avoid paying twice for them. BS assured the AGM that this would be looked into.
- d. Another question was raised regarding if a tenant doesn't wish for their personal details to be passed on – is there an opt-out clause? – what will their position be if the motion is carried? BS assured that advice is being sought and it may be that the Alliance has to seek permission from individual tenants if required and possibly look at deferring membership for a year. This could be an administrative problem and will incur extra costs for postage etc. It was suggested regarding using email but the RAA currently don't hold email addresses for all tenants. An attendee suggested that it would be beneficial for sites to have a specific contact to be able to collect the required permission to try and reduce the cost. BS assured that the Alliance will not do anything that breaks the law. The vote was conducted and the motion carried. BS stated that this motion will be discussed at the next board meeting.

9. **Motion 5 – Rental Notice Update** – Moved by JP and seconded by MH. Statement to be included on rental invoices to make tenants aware that they are aware of their obligations to abide by the rules. All sites to operate by RAA rules as a minimum standard to create consistency. A question was asked how often the rules are changed. It was explained that has been done when required and any other changes going forward should be put through the AGM in the future. The focus is on getting the allotments used for their correct purpose and operate correctly. The motion was carried by a majority vote.

10. **Shareholder's Questions** – Attendees were asked to submit questions prior to the meeting. In summary:

- a. Skips – the board have allowed in the budget for every site to have 1 skip per year. These need arranging. Society sites will need to nominate someone to oversee the skip so prohibited items don't get put in otherwise the skip company won't take them. This is more difficult on direct-managed sites so we would either need tenant-volunteers or the ASA or a director will have to supervise it.
- b. Grass and hedge cutting – a meeting took place today with RMBC Grounds Maintenance to review the service as it was identified last year that standards were not as expected. The review will identify what work is required and who is responsible for what area. A follow up meeting has been arranged for 3 week's time. A question was asked if the cutting was for all sites. The impression was that society-managed sites do their own. It was explained that the RAA took on the same schedule as Green Spaces had. One site had advised they didn't want any service provided by RMBC. It was asked that if their own rents include the grass cutting for other sites. It was pointed out that some sites have buildings onsite which are paid for using the same rental income and not all sites have other services such as pest control. A question was asked regarding what rents are paid on sites. It was explained that society sites pay a smaller amount per square metre than direct-managed sites (approx. 3p). Society sites are only charged for cultivatable area, not paths etc. Societies are also eligible for a 10% discount on their total bill if paid within a certain time. Society sites do set their own plot rents and some are subsidized by running shops/collecting scrap onsite. One tenant has observed that no grass cutting had been done on South Street – this needs looking at. Another tenant highlighted that the days between cuts varied which caused problems. It was advised that the contract only involves paths and hedges and was discussed in the meeting with Grounds Maintenance. It was also advised that there used to be an allotment operative who did some of the work. The Alliance is going to work with RMBC to resolve the issues including having just one team to look after the allotments. DB asked for tenants to report any works done on site as the grass cutting schedule has resumed.
- c. Pest Control – all tenants are responsible for pest control on their own plots. The problem is more prevalent on sites that have livestock. Proper management of feed etc. will help to control the problem. The current RMBC contract is to continue until further notice. Where there is a major problem, the RAA should be notified. MF identified that NAS offer online pest control courses that allows users to obtain stronger poison.
- d. Site maintenance / fences / locks – societies were sent a survey to ask what they would carry out onsite. This concluded that the RAA would be responsible for any major works such as damaged fences, water leaks etc. Minor repairs – leaking taps etc. would be the responsibility of the society on site. The RAA would be responsible for repairs on all direct-managed sites. Any RMBC-supplied locks are the responsibility of the Alliance. Any locks provided by a society is their own responsibility.

- e. Over hanging trees into the allotments – this will be reported to RMBC tree service. Past reported issues are being looked into by Grounds Maintenance. One tenant raised concerns that the hedges hadn't been touched last year and leaves the site open to complaints from nearby residential properties. Needs to know when the issue will be resolved. Another tenant asked regarding some overgrown conifers at their site which need cutting down. This will be looked at.
 - i. The tenant also identified the need for a rule on stopping tenants taking items from unoccupied plots. The rules do need to be communicated to existing tenants. It was suggested that it is difficult to police items being removed. DB is looking into notice boards for sites. Unfortunately, there are some tenants who don't abide by the rules. This issue is more prevalent on direct-managed sites. Any items on the plots at the point of tenancy should remain for the next tenant.
- f. Parking onsite – paths etc. onsite should not be blocked unless it is for disabled access.
- g. Fires – this is the biggest reported problem over the last 12 months. Tenants should not be causing a smoke nuisance to surrounding areas – consideration and ensuring they are burning permitted materials only is required. This includes the use of burners / chimneys in sheds. Societies to police this on their sites and the RAA will monitor direct-managed sites.
- h. Plot swapping – any tenant wishing to move on a direct-managed site needs to go through the RAA. On society sites, this is at the discretion of the Committee. Tenants requiring additional plots can only obtain them if there isn't a waiting list for the site. A point was raised regarding sub-letting. It was stated that this is not permitted on any site.
- i. Avenue Rd – pest control and barrier. The RAA are aware of these problems and is already in-hand.
- j. Insurance - once the legal leases are signed, the RAA will be obtaining public and employers liability insurance which covers all of the perimeters and public areas of all the sites. Societies may wish to purchase additional insurance at their discretion.
- k. South Street site condition – the Alliance has adopted many problems on a number of allotment sites and its aim is to get them to a better standard. The covid situation hasn't helped. Funds will be spent where needed to improve the standard. A tenant pointed out that they've never had any paperwork/receipts regarding their plot. It was explained that a new society is currently being formed on this site and information has been sent to a couple of people onsite. The Board will offer support to new societies for at least 12 months or will support existing societies where required.
- l. Funding – if a bona fide society is operating – they can apply for funding in their own right. Any additional funding will be beneficial. Help can be sought from the ASA. The South Yorkshire Funding Advice Bureau are very helpful as well.

BS thanked everyone for their attendance. Special thanks were made to society secretaries and members who ensure the smooth running of their sites. The meeting was closed at 8.30pm.



Signed (Chair)

These minutes were approved by shareholders at the AGM on 29.03.22. Min. 2.