

Rotherham Allotments Alliance

Board Meeting No.66

Held: Monday 25th April 2022

Meeting Location: Clifton Park / Online on Zoom

(Minutes Donna Bushby)

Present: Directors: Brian Steele (BS) Chair, John Palmer (JP), Mick Hist, Jack Taylor (JT), Tess Sheen (TS), Allotment Support Assistant - Donna Bushby (DB).

On Zoom - Cllr Sheppard (DS), Cllr Rachel Hughes (RH), Alice Parry (AP)

- 63/04/22** (1) **Apologies:** Kris Edwards (KE). *Cllr Hughes and Cllr Shepherd advised that they would need to leave the meeting early due to a council meeting. AP entered the meeting after the start as advised prior to the meeting.*
- 64/04/22** (2) **Declaration of Interest**
JP declared an interest as a tenant on Barnsley Rd site.
JT declared an interest as secretary on Wood St site.
MH declared an interest as a tenant on Avenue Rd site.
BS declared an interest as the spouse of Cllr Rachel Hughes.
TS declared an interest as a tenant on Avenue Rd site.
AP declared an interest as Chair of South St site.
- 65/04/22** (3) **Minutes of previous Board Meeting –28th March 2022**
These were moved as a true record by JP and duly signed (electronically) by the Chairperson.
- 66/04/22** (4) **Matters Arising**
Email received regarding the refund given by RMBC for overpaid rent for a plot on Avenue Rd. The RAA board had already decided not to give a refund but a precedent has now been set. The board decided to await further action from the tenant.
- 67/04/22** (5) **Admin report – circulated to directors prior to meeting**
- a) 6 new lets, 6 terminations (most due to non-payment of rent).
 - b) DB met with an RMBC Officer regarding the cemetery at High St. The responsibility for the lane to the allotments is not confirmed with RMBC so this is being looked into. Also advised that there is a plan to tidy it up and it may be fenced off. Discussed regarding chippings being left on the lane which is falling into the graveyard. DB had advised tenants not to have any more chippings left.
 - c) South St – the FOI request has been completed and, as far as the directors are concerned, the matter is closed. If any complaints are received, they will be dealt with in the correct manner. It was discussed regarding on what grounds, if any, can tenants be refused an allotment.
 - d) Thefts and break-ins reported at Rosehill Park and Avenue Rd. DB been in touch with local Councillors / police in Rawmarsh. The tenants who had a burning bin stolen were new and felt it was discouraging to have something stolen. It was discussed that all incidents should be reported to the police. Having cameras were also discussed in regard to having someone to look after them and ensure they don't get taken. TS/MH to speak to the tenants on Avenue Rd to see if they would have a camera on their plot and monitor it.
 - e) Added by JT – tenant from Hartley Lane advised they'd been a tenant for 6 months and put chickens on the plot. Was told by the secretary that the rules said they had to be on site 12 months. Tenant advised that they hadn't been given any rules so didn't know. Tenant been advised to appeal to the committee and come back to the RAA, pending the outcome of the appeal.
 - f) Avenue Rd society bank account was discussed. Need to check the minute when it was discussed regarding the time allowed before the money gets transferred to the RAA. The money should be held by the RAA, to be spent specifically on the site. DB to find the minute and advise directors. It was discussed that the signatories should sign the money over to the RAA and close the account. The signatories need to be formally contacted regarding this.

- g) Fire left burning at Rectory Field. DB aware of who it is and will speak to them at the site visit tomorrow. Tenants who dealt with it to be contacted and thanked.
- h) Cllr Shepherd had received a communication regarding a WW2-themed allotment in Rotherham. Will pass details onto DB.
- i) JT to speak to contractor who have being working on the pylons at Wood St, Swinton.

68/04/22

(6) Financial Matters

- a) Minutes from the Finance meeting were circulated prior to the meeting.
- b) BS asked Finance Committee to consider payment of rents and the law surrounding it. People should be given the opportunity to pay in instalments but an administration charge should be applied, subject to tenants being in receipt of benefits.
- c) DB circulated an interim statement for April. £3,760.05 received in income, spent £7601.22 (£4500 is the solicitor fee which is being reimbursed by RMBC). Current bank balance is £78,799.50. Outstanding payments – were owed £6500. £4000 has been paid / recovered so £2500 outstanding. Approximately 6 tenancies have been terminated due to non-payment.

69/04/22

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

- a) DB chased up with the solicitor. They advised that they are contacting RMBC's solicitor from a progress update.

70/04/22

(8) Society Update

- a) Barnsley Rd – BS has been given 5 resignations from committee members. The 2 remaining members wanted to run the AGM but it was felt that the RAA should run it due to only 2 members making it inquorate. A date was decided so DB will communicate this to tenants once the venue is confirmed. It was discussed regarding the suitability of using a local venue or on the car park and what would be best suited. DB has had 8 tenants express interest in being on the committee so far. Need to ensure that the RAA constitution is adopted. The RAA will run the meeting until committee members are appointed.
- b) Herringthorpe – need to arrange to meet secretary onsite to look at the tree removal issue.
- c) Society bi-annual meetings – DB sent out an email to ask what societies would prefer. Only had 1 reply so far who couldn't commit at this stage. Were given a deadline of 19th May for responses so societies had an opportunity to discuss with committees.

71/04/22

(9) Sub-Committees

- a) Treasurer will go on the Finance Committee. RH and TS were added to the Maintenance committee. It was discussed that it was appropriate to have 1 of the RMBC directors to be on each sub-committee. Directors details need to be updated for JT.
- b) Matter arisen from the Finance sub-committee meeting – regarding outstanding rents after the deadline has passed. It was discussed regarding shortening the length of time given to pay because the end of March is into the growing season so time is lost for cultivating and the RAA loses rents if plots are given up at this time. It was suggested to change the wording on the invoice to encourage payments to be made earlier. The current economic situation needs to be taken into consideration and so it doesn't exclude people, tenants can be given an opportunity to pay in instalments if required, as long as it is arranged with the RAA prior, subject to a surcharge. Proposing to give deadline of end of February, then if not paid, give 30 days' notice until end of March, after which the tenancy can be automatically terminated. It was discussed that issuing fines wouldn't be practical as they wouldn't get paid. It was decided that this should go back to the Finance committee for completion.

72/04/22

(10) Maintenance Update

- a) Maintenance committee meeting is Monday 9th May. BS and DB are visiting a few sites tomorrow to address the outstanding issues such as the rubbish pile on Rectory Field.
- b) It was discussed regarding the issue of keeping cockerels on allotments. If the RAA get a complaint about noise, they have a duty of care to ensure that they are removed from the site by tenants to stop any nuisance caused. If they don't get removed, RMBC Environmental Health can issue fines. Current issue with Avian Influenza is restricting the movement of birds.
- c) Moor Rd – The Drainage Officer from the council has revisited the site. the ditch is working OK but there is an old well in the middle of the site. Have asked for another quote for a drain to be put

in. They have advised that there might still be a problem even with the drains due to the lay of the land and proximity to the brook. It would have to be monitored.

73/04/22

(11) AGM

- a) It was felt that it turned into an attack on what the RAA does. The opportunity given to ask additional questions was abused to some extent.
- b) It was stated that lessons were learned for future meetings including the positioning of directors and delegating sections of the meeting to board members. Members must ensure that they are fully aware of all the information being presented.
- c) Questions to be asked could have been answered prior and involved individual site issues, rather than the business of the Alliance. Only questions regarding the AGM should be asked.
- d) It was discussed that attendees may not know how an AGM runs and need to be made aware of what the procedures are. Some of the points raised were irrelevant to the AGM which caused it to become out of control. Tenants need to be advised that non-relevant issues won't be discussed. Individual issues need to be communicated to the RAA direct rather than brought up at an AGM.
- e) It may be beneficial to have an introduction at the meeting to explain proceedings.
- f) A point was raised regarding the grass cutting which was brought up in regarding to paying for cuts that were allegedly weren't done. This will be monitored much better this year.
- g) AP offered her apologies for not attending the AGM due to illness. It was also suggested that roles of directors/shareholders etc. should be communicated to tenants prior to the meeting to help them understand the roles and responsibilities better.
- h) A suggestion was made to offer direct-managed tenants another opportunity, like with the society bi-annual meetings, to discuss issues. A separate meeting with a forum-style environment will give tenants a chance to raise any concerns, possibly 6 months after the AGM. It could potentially take place directly after the AGM so it involves those at the AGM who can stay if needs be. It would give an opportunity for shareholders to speak to directors. A format will need to be devised and will be discussed at the next board meeting.
- i) It was brought up about NAS membership and giving tenants an ongoing opportunity to become members. It is proposed that it will be communicated to tenants on the annual rents letter so that they can join up if required. It was discussed regarding getting all the anniversary dates the same but this would be very difficult to do.

74/04/22

(12) Director Skills Audit

- a) Received back from JT and TS. BS / MH requested it to be sent again.
- b) Once all received, it will be reviewed by BS and DB to identify any training gaps.

75/04/22

(13) Volunteer Policy

- a) Draft policy was circulated to directors before the meeting. A number of highlighted areas to discuss:
 - i. Induction and training – induction checklist has been attached.
 - ii. Support of volunteers by the society or RAA
 - iii. Professional Indemnity Insurance – discussed if this is required. The purpose of it was researched during the meeting. DB to contact Chris Knott Insurance and find out if included and cost if not.
 - iv. Risk assessments to be done for all projects added – includes any projects done on society sites. Discussed regarding completing the risk assessments for sites.
 - v. PPE – added that the RAA will supply certain items – gloves / goggles etc. Decided not waterproof items as volunteers wouldn't be expected to work in inclement weather.
 - vi. Reimbursement of expenses – confirmed that it would only apply to outside volunteer groups, not tenants working on their own sites.
 - vii. Directors expenses reimbursements – needed clarification on what applies in terms of travel etc. and if it is an integral part of being a director. It was debated that certain tasks are not expected as a director, such as visiting sites to do pest control, so any costs should be reimbursed as it is considered being a volunteer. Certain visits may, however, be considered as part of the director role. It was decided that this should be in both the volunteer policy and financial regulations for clarification.

b. BS thanked JP for his work on this policy.

76/04/22

(14) Website Community Message Board

- a) This was asked as an AGM question for somewhere for tenants to communicate with other tenants – share ideas, tips etc. on the internet, but not necessarily Facebook. DB advised that there are some add-ons that can be added to the website that could facilitate this. It was debated about the moderation of this and ensuring that it does not turn into a platform for complaints. There would be a cost to an add-on to the website. It was asked why not use Facebook as this is free? It was debated that some people do not want to use Facebook due to privacy issues. It was suggested that a FB page could be set up purely for tenants only and sites and plot number could be logged. It would need to be further researched into registering the identity of people posting on a website platform and whether all posts can be put for approval before appearing on the site. It was agreed that something on the website will be trialed for 12 months to see how it works.

77/04/22

(15) Future Actions

- Site risk assessments
- New gate signs and plot numbers to be distributed on direct-managed sites.

78/04/22

(16) Any Other Business

BS noted that he was glad to see people face-to-face and also confirmed that the conference microphone worked well for those attending by Zoom.

79/04/22

(17) Agenda Items for next meeting

- Bi-annual society meetings update
- Shareholder meetings

80/04/22

(18) Date and Time of Next Meeting. (Meetings will be cancelled if not required).

Maintenance sub-committee meeting – Monday 9th May 2022, 2pm - Zoom.

Board meeting – Monday 23rd May 2022, 2pm – Clifton Park

BS thanked everyone for their attendance both in person and online. The meeting was closed at 4.20pm.



Signed (Chair)