

Annual General Meeting (Draft Minutes)

Meeting Date: Tuesday 29th March 2022

Meeting Location: Unity Centre, St Leonard's Rd, Rotherham

Meeting Called By: Brian Steele

Chair: Brian Steele

Secretary: Jack Taylor (Minutes Donna Bushby)

Present: Directors - Brian Steele, John Palmer, Mick Hirst, Mohammed Suleman, Councillor Dave Sheppard, Councillor Rachel Hughes, 34 shareholders, 1 non-shareholder and the Allotment Support Assistant (ASA), Donna Bushby.

Apologies: Jack Taylor (Secretary), Alice Parry (Director)

1. **Chairperson's Address** – The Chairperson opened the meeting by asking all attendees to stand and participate in a minute's silence in memory of Al Dean, former treasurer, who passed away last year. He was remembered for all his hard work and commitment to the RAA and Broom Valley New allotments. The directors then introduced themselves to the attendees. The directors were then thanked for all their hard work with the Alliance. The ASA was also thanked for all her hard work, especially in the challenging conditions. The Chairperson then confirmed that the lease agreement signing with RMBC is still in progress but this will hopefully be resolved soon.
2. **Minutes from previous meeting – 23.03.21**
The draft minutes were circulated to attendees prior to the meeting. They were presented on screen to the audience. The minutes were moved as a true record.
3. **Matters Arising**
 - a) Question from Greasbrough tenant regarding the uptake of NAS Membership. Was advised that approximately 60 direct-managed tenants signed up, with approximately 25 from Greasbrough. *For the purpose of accuracy, the actual figures are 57 signed up, 30 from Greasbrough.* It was advised that some sites did not have any tenants sign up. All existing tenants were given the opportunity to join. Only new tenants will be given the opportunity from now on.
4. **Board Members – Election and Appointment of Directors**
 - a. The two longest serving directors (JP/JT) are required to step down and be put up for re-election. All shareholders were given the opportunity prior to the AGM to put themselves forward for a director position. 1 tenant put themselves forward for a director position. Shareholders were then asked to vote for the election / re-election of these candidates. This was carried by a majority vote, no votes against.
 - b. A second applicant was received from a tenant with an interest in the Treasurer's position. The Chairperson explained that this position would be filled as per the constitution as it was considered a specialist director role, due to the applicant's professional background in Finance and accounting.
 - c. The standard directorship was then confirmed as full, with 1 specialist vacancy available if required.
5. **Election and Appointment of Officers**
 - a. **Chairperson** - The current Chairperson stood down and handed the meeting over to the Vice Chairperson. The current Chairperson was put forward for re-election and the attendees voted in favour. No votes against were cast. The Chairperson thanked everyone for their continued support.

- b. **Vice Chairperson** – current Vice Chairperson put themselves forward for re-election. Vote was cast in favour, no votes against.
- c. **Secretary** – current secretary has indicated they would like to step down as secretary due to family commitments out of the country. The Chairperson asked if any other director would like to fill the position, if not current secretary will continue for the next 6 months. A vote was cast in favour, no votes against. Question was asked regarding what the role of the secretary entails and could it be anyone. The Chairperson explained that the secretary has to be a director and is the official named person / point of contact of the organization and assists the ASA with sending letters etc.
- d. **Treasurer** – the applicant for the treasurer position had been interviewed by the Chairperson and Vice Chairperson prior to the AGM as a specialist director due to their background in finance and accounting. They currently hold plots on High St allotments. The Chairperson asked attendees to vote in favour of the election of the Officer. This was voted in favour, no votes against.

6. Annual Report.

- a. The Chairperson explained the annual report will be explained by them and the ASA and was put on the screen.
- b. The ASA went through the site statistics including the importance of tenant's details from societies. This is also part of the lease agreement with RMBC. Most societies sites are fully occupied, apart from those with known uncultivable plots. Direct-managed sites are mixed – some sites still have unlettable plots. Using Community Payback to clear plots on Rectory Field. Attendee questioned regarding the number of plots listed. ASA explained regarding figures based on maps and some plots are decommissioned.
- c. Tenant from Clifton raised issue regarding pest control on the site. Tenant commented that the site secretary had not done anything about it. The ASA explained that the issue is in hand and sites have not yet been given the boxes / poison but will do so soon. A director is now trained to be able to order it. All site secretaries were given the opportunity to do the training to be able to distribute the poison. The Chairperson explained that the RAA is here to work with societies, but not to control the day-to-day operation of the sites. The societies were thanked for their hard work in running the sites. It was suggested that sites contact the RAA direct and go through the complaints procedure for specific issues. These will then be followed up.
- d. Achievements & Challenges – the Chairperson stated that the biggest challenge has been working through covid and thanked the ASA for keeping the organization going during this time. Some work has been completed on sites, but there is also other work still to do. It was explained that most work carried out has been damage to gates / fences following damage / break-ins. One site was allowed a year's free rent due to a flooding problem. Each individual problem is looked at as it arises and considered by the board to resolve. The issue is funding as the Alliance does not have a great deal of funds so outside funding sources will be looked into. Funding has already been sought from local Ward Councillors for items such as new locks and security cameras.
- e. Question was asked regarding site rules and societies. It was explained that the RAA have a set of basic rules which should be adopted by societies as a minimum. Societies are then able to add to these rules as required. Some societies have been supported by directors through attending AGMs and assisting in re-establishing the committee. It was stated that the rules are based on the National Allotment Society – issued rules.
- f. Question was asked regarding how often directors visit sites. The Chairperson explained that they visited most sites last year and usually, they are only visited if required. The RAA does not want to be constantly visiting society sites as the trust is in the committee to run the site.
- g. A major challenge going forward is rising costs and inflation. This means that outside funding will be looked into for future projects. Will also to look to keeping costs as low as possible. Work from contractors will be monitored and any contractor not carrying out satisfactory work will not be used again.
- h. Question raised regarding the grass cutting schedule. The ASA explained that it will start in April and there will be 6 cuts – (April / May / June / July / August / March).
- i. It was also raised about a tree that needs attention at Vicarage Fields. The ASA explained difficulty in finding reputable contractors to quote and carry out works.
- j. Works completed – The Chairperson explained that some sites have had more work done than others, i.e. due to being targeted for break-ins. It was asked regarding where the funds for repairs come from which was explained as being from the RAA rental income. It was stated that major works would come out of the RMBC capital expenditure if it was an approved project. It was argued that some

repairs, i.e. damage to a meeting room roof should have been the responsibility of RMBC as it was a known issue before the RAA took over. It was explained that RMBC did not see repair works as part of the capital expenditure. The Chairperson explained that due to the sale of statutory allotment, more funds may be made available to the RAA to invest into sites. It was also identified that a roof repair had not been done satisfactorily and damage has occurred to it. This was not reported to the RAA so the contractor could not be asked to go out to repair it. It was also brought to attention regarding a fence that had been installed which was not secure at either end. Again, the RAA were not made aware of this at the time, so unable to investigate.

- k. It was explained regarding the responsibilities of the RAA and RMBC. It was requested that any other issues be brought up to the RAA separately as the AGM was not the correct time to do so. Attendees were advised they are welcome to view any policy documents relating to the RAA on the website.
- l. Complaints summary – the summary of these was shown on the screen. Each complaint is dealt with but some are very minor/petty. It was explained that having to deal with a lot of complaints means that the ASA is kept away from spending time on other projects. An example of cockerel complaints was used to highlight the law surrounding allotments and the keeping of livestock. It was asked about other birds and it was explained that there are some grandfather rights to other birds being onsite prior to the take over from the RAA. Once these birds are gone, permission for new tenants to keep them would not be granted. It is easier for the RAA to enforce rules and avoid complaints on direct-managed sites. It is up to the committee to deal with complaints on society-managed sites. All tenants should be working together to ensure that sites are kept safe and happy. It was suggested that all sites to have the same rules across the borough. It was discussed that this would be hard to police as people do choose to break them. It was highlighted that complaints about burning don't necessarily originate from the allotment site. In this case, it was suggested that any houses surrounding the allotments who are burning, should be reported to RMBC. The RAA is responsible for investigating any complaints on allotments from RMBC.
- m. Director attendance – as listed in the report. RMBC representatives have changed in 2021.
- n. Policy amendments. These were circulated prior to the meeting and agreed by the meeting.
- o. Capital works completed / £100k summary and future plans – brought up on screen for attendees. Explained that all 'wish-lists' are still being worked through. Difficulties in getting work done have included dealing with covid and getting suitable contractors. Priority is still health and safety issues.

7. Accounts for 2021

- a. These were submitted as part of the annual report prior to the AGM. The Vice-chair person, who is Chair of the finance sub-committee, advised that the accounts for 2021 were professionally audited by the Community Accountant at VAR for 2 reasons: 1, due to the difficulties faced with Al Dean passing away and also the person who took over, Alison Howard, resigning for personal reasons at the end of 2021 and 2, it would help to ensure that good financial practices are being followed and highlight where any changes are required. The ASA has been doing all accounting tasks for the last 3 months, overseen by the finance sub-committee. A surplus has been declared due to some works not being carried out but the allocation for these funds has been agreed. The contingency amount of £10,000 will be put into a separate account. This will be displayed in future accounts on the balance sheet.
- b. No questions were offered by the meeting. The accounts were then approved by shareholders.

8. Motion 1 – Continuation of NAS membership

- a. Moved by Mick Hirst / Seconded by Mohammed Suleman. Question was asked why societies were asked to renew themselves and then be reimbursed. It was explained that this is how NAS wanted it to be done as societies have different anniversary dates and it would make the administration easier. Some societies did not want to be signed up. All DM tenants were also given an opportunity to sign up. Existing members will not be given another opportunity but new tenants will. The motion was passed by shareholders, no votes against.

9. Motion 2 – Society bi-annual meetings

- a) The Vice-chair explained the addition to the Business Plan to introduce two society meetings during the year in months 7 and 11, to enable the RAA to work more closely with societies. Asked for some feedback from society representatives attending to see if this would be beneficial and idea of where? – in-person / on Zoom? Suitable times? Topics? Still a lot of work to do with societies to ensure that we

all work together to provide a better allotment environment in the borough. No one voted against the motion so was passed with a majority vote. In 2021, societies were invited to attend board meetings to discuss any issues they had. Societies will then be contacted with further details to get the meetings arranged.

10. Shareholder's Questions

- a. Tenant suggested a platform for people to be able to share ideas / information with each other. Not necessarily a Facebook page as some may not use it. Could possibly be added to the website. It would be beneficial to be able to share information, but not used to make complaints. It would help to spread the word of good work being done on the allotments. Examples of plot transformations have already been put on the Facebook page/website. The ASA thanked all the tenant's for their hard work on their plots. The ASA will look into creating the platform and also mentioned utilizing the NAS membership to get advice from the regional representative.
- b. Question regarding maintenance on the toilet at Greasbrough – this was already in-hand with the ASA. The ASA explained again about the difficulty with getting contractors to visit sites, especially when 3 quotes are needed.
- c. Community Room on St Leonard's – It was advised that this was not a health and safety issue but can be looked into. The group who made the original request have been asked to provide further information to check its feasibility.

11. Any Other Business

- a. The Chairperson stated that they would not answer any more questions on issues already raised.
- b. It was raised regarding the grass cutting and the irregularity of the service. RMBC have been appointed to provide the service again. A tender was put out to other companies but only 1 responded and the cost was significantly more than the current provider. Following a meeting last year, RMBC have been advised to send a schedule of when cuts are due to take place. It was requested that tenants monitor when the grass has been cut so any shortfalls / missed sites can be chased up with them. It was requested to check if Vicarage Fields were included in the schedule. It was questioned why some sites weren't on the schedule. It was questioned why rents from sites go towards grass cutting on other sites, not that specific site. It was explained that sites may get different types of services so all rents go towards the overall cost of this.
- c. Discussion further continued about the responsibility of RMBC and the issues on sites before the RAA took over. The Chairperson stated that they, along with the secretary, visited most of the sites with the RMBC allotments officer but some issues were not brought to their attention. However, the Alliance was set up on the basis that it would run the sites and attempt to rectify the inherited problems.
- d. It was debated that societies should pay less rent if they are doing their own maintenance on site. It was explained that the condition of sites is down to the quality of tenants on them and that everyone should work together to create a community. Some tenants do not want to get involved in the site but the RAA wants to encourage people to help each other out. It was argued that rent amount that societies pay should be reduced. It was stated that societies do pay less than direct-managed sites and they also get the 10% discount for meeting the payment deadline which is a continuation from RMBC. This was argued that the reduction is to compensate the society for collecting rents etc. The Alliance is looking to encourage direct-managed sites to become societies to get the rent reduction. It was explained that all rents contribute to the running of the organization including the staffing cost for the ASA who is there to support societies and tenants.
- e. The meeting then digressed into a debate regarding the quality of a contractor's work and the RAA investigating complaints. Other opinions were also raised regarding the capital expenditure and rental incomes and where they should be spent as well as the amount of rent paid by societies again. It was stated that if works done were not satisfactory, the Alliance needs to be notified as soon as possible so it can be investigated. Also, the RAA needed to ensure it was kept financially viable.
- f. Cllr Hughes addressed the meeting to say that this was their first time at the meeting and explained that they have a long history of attending meetings and this meeting had progressed way off its purpose and the agenda. Some of the content and contributions were creating an intimidating atmosphere and it needed be calmed down and conducted through the Chairperson.
- g. It was then mentioned about the ASA doing a fantastic job but possibly using a PR company to help with more communication and the sharing of information. It was explained that the RAA is looking at

improvements which could include doing newsletters and installing notice boards but there may be a cost implication to this.

- h. A question was asked about the provision of Smart Water on sites to protect tenants belongings. This would involve working with the local PCSOs. Greasbrough and Kimberworth Park had already had visits and Smart Water given. The ASA did state that some of the Swinton/Wath sites will be receiving security locks etc. for sheds which has come from funding through the Co-Ordinator. Local Ward councillors need to be contacted to see if they can help with any funding etc. Some sites have received wildlife security cameras through Ward funding. These are feasible for sites but they would need someone to be responsible for them on the site and are at risk of being stolen themselves. It was described by a tenant how using cameras helped to prosecute a thief on their plot so they are useful.
- i. Cllr Sheppard spoke to the meeting to advise that liaison with South Yorkshire police is necessary to increase site security. He then went on to say that the purpose of the Alliance is to be stronger together and all part of the same group. The aim is to help each other out and protect vulnerable sites and societies. It is clear that everyone is passionate about their own allotments but it is about working together, not against each other.
- j. It was asked regarding community groups on sites. It was stated that the group would pay rent for the plot but funding could be sought to help them improve the plot. It was described how sometimes, rents are sometimes waived for new tenants to do their own clearance work as this works out more cost effective.

The Chairperson thanked everyone for their attendance. Assurances were given that directors do work hard on tenants behalves. As they are volunteers, can't guarantee to solve all problems but will look at working with all sites to help them be improved.

Signed (Chair)