**Minutes of a Committee Meeting of Rowhedge Allotments Association held on 5th May at 7.30pm at Ye Olde Albion.**

Present: Barbara Chaplin, Paul Warner, Debbie Antoniou, Anne Jones, Christian Langlois, Wendy Fransella, Caroline Bates.

Apologies received: Penny Sturt

1. Chair & Minuting : CL agreed to chair the meeting and AJ agreed to take minutes of the meeting. CL confirmed that in accordance with the constitution, the Committee was quorate.

2. WF and CB reported on **grant applications for allotment security work:**

(i) Following their attendance at the recent EDPC meeting (Parish Council) WF had completed and submitted grant application forms in respect of the proposed grant of £500. It was hoped this would be approved at the next meeting of the EDPC.

(ii) CB confirmed that grants would be applied for from both Colchester Borough Council and Essex County Council. With reference to the latter, CB had a meeting arranged with Kevin Bentley (ECC) for the following morning. CB hoped to apply for £1000 from ECC and Kevin Bentley would need to recommend this to ECC. It was hoped that CBC could grant £500. If so, total grants would be £2000. CB confirmed that she intended to apply for the maximum available from ECC.

The committee thanked WF and CB for their efforts to date on this.

CL proposed that a letter of thanks for their support be sent to the EDPC. (Voted and passed unanimously) ACTION CL (on behalf of Treasurer, DA)

3.  **Selection of camera options**: CL and PW had independently researched the 4 options and discussion of the details of each followed. WF had met Matthew from MJS regarding his quote (£1600 plus VAT= £1920) Noted that Matthew provides the security for the Rowhedge Village Hall. There was general agreement that the use of a contractor (rather than DIY) provided better continuity for the Association given that the committee can change from year to year.

Noted that the grant applications would cover the sum of the quote.

CL recommended to the committee that it provisionally accepts the MJS quote, subject to receiving the necessary funding and subject to agreement of various points and satisfactory resolution of a number of questions (CL will send a list to PW for his review, prior to providing to Matthew) The questions covered siting, battery charging etc.

A **vote** was taken and the Committee unanimously voted for provisional acceptance of the MJS option, on the basis set out above.

WF and CB had earlier considered whether there might be any surplus grant funds to assist the subjects of recent vandalism. The committee took no vote on this, and noted that funds from the Association had already been directed to this purpose in providing the recent skip.

4. **Finance** : **Plot Rents -** CL noted that any increase in plot fees needs to be proposed by the Treasurer at an AGM. He therefore asked that the committee consider its ‘in principle’ support for the Treasurer, DA, in her proposing the increase of plot rents. These had remained unchanged for 12 years and now lagged behind comparable rents charged for Borough Council run allotments. DA’s recent draft accounts indicated that the total rents only just covered rent and water, leaving no surplus for other allotment expenses or contingency. An illustration of projected increased fees showed that an uplift from £60 (before early bird £10 discount) to £80 per year (before early bird discount) would provide the association with an additional £590 per annum.

A **vote was taken** and the committee were unanimous in its support for the Treasurer proposing at the AGM an increase of £20 per full plot (pro-rata for half plots) from the next rent collection date. (Early Bird discount to remain at £10/£5)

The Committee also voted to support the Treasurer i**n the proposal at the AGM of a £30 plot deposit** for new tenancies. This would be to help defray costs of moving rubbish (eg sheds/carpet etc) left on a plot after the allotment holder has vacated. If no rubbish is left, the deposit would be refundable. Unfortunately in the last year, Association funds have had to be used for skip hire to deal with rubbish left by vacating tenants.

BC asked for clarification about refunds of application fees where a person applying either rejects a plot or decides not to stay on the waiting list. **Agreed that the membership application form would be amended to state that the fee is not refundable.** ACTION CL/BC

BC asked DA why we appeared to be paying insurance twice. DA explained that we are obliged to hold Public Liability insurance (which is the main part of the general insurance cover) and the other ‘insurance’ item is the NSALG subscription (National Association of Allotment Gardeners) The latter can provide guidance and advice (including legal advice to the committee)

5. **Community engagement:**  CB said that in connection with grant applications, funders often looked at wider community engagement. There had originally been a school plot, however it had proven difficult for the children to be brought up easily and frequently due to the dangerous cross-roads by the allotment site. CB proposed investigated other types of school engagement – and she and DA suggested ideas for bringing the allotments to the school, providing plants, or special open days/information giving. The committee all agreed this would be an excellent plan to research and take forward, subject to volunteer time. AJ suggested trying to involve allotment holders who had children at local schools.

CL suggested that we start a central record of volunteer hours – including mowing, maintenance and voluntary post holders. This can be held to be equivalent to ‘own fundraising’ contributions, when funding is required.

No vote was taken on the above, however the general view of the committee was that both these are positives to work towards, and to engage our members with.

6. **Any Other Business:**

 **AGM – All were agreed on the urgency of bringing in new members to the committee.** A number of office-holders have now completed their maximum 3 years so will need to step down from that office. PW will step down as Maintenance Co-Ordinator. WF suggested that to help engage members, a laminated ‘organisational chart’, with photos of the committee, could be put on the noticeboard at the allotment.

**Format of AGM-** combined with a social: WF suggested combining the AGM with a BYO BBQ or picnic – say a get together first, then the AGM, then afterwards some music. Timing ideally mid-late afternoon, so families with children can find it easier to attend.

**Timing of the AGM** – DA awaits the final bank statement of the financial year and will then prepare accounts, after which AJ will review/audit. Accounts therefore will not realistically be available for several weeks.

**Location of the AGM:** Although the allotment would be ideal, a change in weather could result in cancellation – **AJ agreed to investigate availability of the smaller hall** at the Village Hall on a Saturday or Sunday (preferably Saturday) from Mid-June to mid-July.

7. The meeting closed at 9.00pm

8. Date of next meeting – To be arranged.