

BARNET FEDERATION – REVISED STRATEGY

Note by the secretariat

1 With the roll-out of self-management approaching completion, it is timely to think about the role of the Federation for the future – once all the allotment sites are self-governing. An earlier version of this paper was discussed at a Federation meeting in 2009, before the Council proposed its current self-management policy, and again in September 2013. It has been updated accordingly.

2 We have all had the benefit of Andrew Brown's work as support officer. But that work is time-limited. After that, if we want something done, then we shall have to do it ourselves. We need to remember that the Federation comprises all our allotment societies collectively: it is not an outside body with its own people and resources. This is the basic principle underlying this paper. It proposes the vision of the future we should aspire to, what that involves, and how we should set about getting there.

Vision and aims

Vision - a strong and sustainable allotment movement in Barnet.

Mission

3 How do we want Barnet's allotments to be in the future? We should aspire to:

- an allotment estate we can be proud of;
- as a community, be proud of what we do and what we're capable of;
- a set-up in which we get maximum value from all the resources available to us whether in the Federation, in our Societies, in our locality or across the country.

Aims

4 What does this vision involve and what do we want to deliver? As a community and as individual societies, we should aim to:

- maintain and develop the allotments ourselves, using whatever resources we can get hold of;
- support ourselves and each other as a group;
- represent the allotment community in Barnet whenever and wherever required;
- hold Barnet Council to its obligations towards allotments.

Approach

5 How do we go about achieving this vision? As a Federation, there are several main lines of approach we should take:

- continue to support allotment societies in improving the management and administration of their organisations and their sites;
- help societies to identify, access and harness the resources available to them – locally and nationally, in terms of information, know-how, facilities, services and income generation;
- develop a financial strategy for the Federation itself so that we can pursue a more active role, with more diverse sources of income;

- help societies to get a better sense of the national allotment picture and the support available from wider organisations;
- seek to meet demand for allotments by maximising the use of allotment land – whether poorly cultivated plots, overgrown plots or derelict allotment fields.

6 So how do we tackle all this in practice? What have we got to work with? It is clear that there's a huge amount that could be done to make things better for our allotments and allotment holders. It's also clear that a handful of Federation officers can't put in the time and effort to do all this – or even most of it. So we need to develop a tool kit which everyone can contribute to and which we can all use. This would:

- help societies to help themselves;
- help societies to help each other;
- provide access to other sources of help and resources.

Ingredients for a toolkit

7 With so many experienced people involved in allotment management and cultivation across Barnet and elsewhere, there is a good chance that, whatever you want to know or do, someone else already knows it or does it. We can draw on this in a number of ways:

Supporting societies

- helping to identify local mentors for societies who want a local, more experienced 'buddy' to act as a first point of contact for help on everyday matters;
- identifying a group of general Federation advisers. These people would have experience of managing allotments, probably together with wider management experience, and would be able to help societies with a range of issues. They would also support the annual 'health checks' mentioned below and for example, if requested by societies, advise on the review of third party complaints required by the Council/Federation Memorandum of Understanding on handling complaints;
- continuing the series of annual 'health checks' of the kind offered by Andrew Brown on the basis of the recent annual surveys.

Obtaining services and information

- maintaining and developing common services such as the Federation website, the plot application service, the 'suppliers book';
- maintaining awareness of, and links with, other allotment organisations in the locality e.g. the London Allotment Officers Forum, and nationally e.g. the National Allotment Society so as to keep in touch with wider issues and concerns and to access information and resources;
- maintaining and developing links to other sources of advice and help ("I don't know, but I know a man who does");
- maintaining and developing the portfolio of self-management documentation including new items as required;
- maintaining and developing the Federation website including a secure web-based forum for societies to exchange views and information.

Financing developments

- developing the Federation's own financial expertise and resources e.g. accessing grants so as to acquire more resources for societies collectively;
- facilitating emergency funding for societies to cope with unforeseeable demands e.g. through loans between societies or other means.

Promoting the allotment community

- representing societies and the allotment community wherever and whenever required;
- developing a public relations capability to raise the profile of our allotments as a good thing for the community. This could form the basis of publicity campaigns when/if major issues arose which demanded such as approach.

Learning together

- arranging a series of site visits for those in societies to see how other people do things;
- including talks and presentations on subjects of common interest in Federation meetings, perhaps on alternate months;
- continuing and developing the annual competition and a successor horticultural show to the Friern Barnet Summer Show;
- developing the social side of our activities to involve each other and the wider community in enjoying our allotments;
- developing good eco-practice which helps to sustain our allotments and plugs in to wider public interests e.g. more bee-keeping to save our bees;
- for each strand of activity, developing contacts in each society to form self-sustaining networks of people.

8 The work set out in this paper is a longer term programme and it would clearly not be possible or perhaps necessary to tackle all of it all at once. But we can make a start.

9 An essential first step is to seek additional volunteers to take on different parts of this work. Federation officers would keep in touch with those involved to ensure that the overall effort hung together in a sensible way.

10 Almost inevitably, we should have to learn how to do some things by doing them – and there would probably be some false starts. But if we don't start at all, we shall never achieve anything.

The constitutional position

11 The Federation's existing constitution is simplistic, out-dated and no longer fit for purpose. It does not set out constitutional procedures adequately e.g. for election of officers, and arrangements for the conduct of Federation business are somewhat impractical. For example, each decision in theory has to be taken by a vote of all member societies though in practice day-to-day decisions are taken by the officers individually or collectively.

12 It was therefore time for the constitution to be overhauled and for the Federation to adopt a more soundly based model. A draft constitution has been prepared based on that produced for unincorporated associations - which has been adopted by many of the allotment societies. The draft is currently open for

written consultation, responses to be submitted by 14th December. Depending on the submissions received, the constitution would then be finalised for adoption at a Special General Meeting arranged for the purpose in tandem with the Federation meeting on 20th January 2014.

13 The new constitution provides for a small elected management committee to provide leadership, deal with strategy and manage the Federation's affairs overall. But the committee will need to be supported by a team of volunteers willing to take on individual activities whether organisational or administrative, including those listed earlier in this paper.

Conclusion

14 **Federation members are invited:**

- to adopt the strategy set out in this paper;
- to identify volunteers willing to manage particular activities.

**Federation secretariat
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