



MINUTES 15th Annual General Meeting

Held on-line on Monday 29th June 2020 at 4.00pm

On 4th June the papers for this meeting had been circulated to Members by email and post, as appropriate, and comprised an introductory letter from the Acting Chair of the Council of Management, Ed Bennis, a Zoom Meeting Registration Form, the Agenda, the Minutes of the 14th AGM and the Directors' & Trustees' Report and Financial Statement for the year ended 31st January 2020.

Because of the need to hold a 'virtual' meeting which some would be unable to attend, Members had been invited to submit questions and proposals in writing in advance of the meeting.

1.0 Chair's Welcome and Introduction

Ed Bennis, acting Chair of the Council of Management welcomed and thanked everyone for attending Cheshire Gardens Trust's 15th AGM.

2.0 Attendance and Apologies

2.1 16 members were in attendance:

Sue & Beric Bartlett
Ed Bennis
Margaret & Henry Blowey
Carys & David Cash
Jackie Cawte
Vicky & Gordon Darlington
Nick Lightfoot (part of the meeting)
Barbara Moth
Freyda Taylor
Christine & Rupert Wilcox-Baker
Jacquie Williams (part of the meeting from item 6)

2.2 Apologies were received from:

Sue Eldridge
Ken Moth
Moirra Stevenson
Tina Theis
Joy Uings
Monica Walker

3.0 Minutes of the 14th AGM held on 16 May

- 3.1 The Minutes had been circulated by email or by post.
Item 8.4 of the minutes were amended to read ... a legacy of a **large** collection of books...
With this amendment the Minutes were proposed as an accurate record of the meeting by Gordon Darlington, seconded by Barbara Moth and accepted by the meeting.

4.0 Matters Arising

- 4.1 *Item 8.4 Book Legacy:* No progress had yet been made regarding finding a home for this legacy although RHS Bridgewater was a possible place. Ed Bennis would be making further enquiries later in the year.

5.0 Annual Report – Key Points

- 5.1 *Correction:* The Research & Recording Report on page 4 should read Crewe **Hill** not Hall.
- 5.2 The Council of Management has re-structured its meetings in line with the recommendations of the Strategic Review 2019 but the planned activities for 2019/20 have only been partially achieved. This highlights the need to refresh and increase our number of active members to assist in the work of the various groups.

6.0 Financial Statements

- 6.1 The year ended with the Trust in a healthy financial position in spite of slightly reduced membership numbers.
- 6.2 The Council of Management is alert to possible uses for the Trust's funds and proposes to increase the value of the Student Travel Bursary when this resumes.
In view of the uncertain future caused by the COVID-19 outbreak, further considerations will be discussed but will remain on hold.
- 6.3 No questions or suggestions had been received from the membership

7.0 Elections to Council of Management

- 7.1 In accordance with the constitution, three CoM members, Margaret Blowey, David Cash and Gordon Darlington stood down after serving for three years. The Trust is most grateful to them for agreeing to continue as members and consequently they were re-elected unopposed.

No new volunteers for CoM membership had been received. The Trust's Memorandum and Articles of Association states that the minimum number of members of the Council of Management is seven. It is noted that the CoM is currently running at this minimum.

7.2 *Resignations:*

7.2.1 Joy Uings had offered her resignation from the posts of Company Secretary and Treasurer to the Trust. It should be noted that Joy has served as Company Secretary from the Trust's inception in 2004 and also as Treasurer since Autumn 2008. Her contribution to the running of the Trust is immense and deserving of our gratitude. Joy will continue her dedicated work on the Caldwell archive.

7.2.2 Ed Bennis was also involved in the setting up of the Trust and has been sitting on a holding basis as Acting Chair from 2015 with only a two-year break following his long service as Chair from 2004 until 2013. Ed will continue as a member of the Council of Management.

7.2.3 Barbara Moth stated that she intended to stand down from her leading roles in Research & Recording and Conservation & Planning within the next two years.

7.3 The continuing lack of fresh volunteers for active roles within Conservation & Planning, Events and Research & Recording Groups and also the management of the Trust raises serious concerns about its future.

Discussion took place and, in addition to again approaching members directly, it was agreed that it may also be necessary to look beyond the existing membership for the position of Chair and Treasurer and to approach persons such as practising Landscape Architects, Senior Horticulturalists, Cheshire based companies etc. which may support appropriate volunteering schemes.

8.0 **Membership Fees for the current membership year**

8.1 In the current COVID-19 emergency, the Council of Management is aware that members are lacking value for their membership fee due to the cancellation of planned events, although most also require a booking fee.

It was noted that no complaints about this had been received from members to date. Additional Newsletters were being produced, rejuvenation of the Website is in progress and the important work of the Conservation & Planning and Research & Recording Groups continues.

8.2 A proposal had been tabled to donate a sum equivalent to membership fees to a Cheshire based gardens charity. One objection had been received to this proposal and it was also queried whether one charity is able to donate to another charity.

8.3 Discussion took place over the following points relating to CGT's financial situation:

- a. A large proportion of CGT's income comes from Events, currently cancelled.
- b. The lack of volunteers may necessitate using paid assistance to enable the Trust to continue e.g. Treasurer.
- c. There was concern that membership may drop as a consequence of the COVID-19 restrictions and that one effective way to reward members and attract new ones would be to hire a nationally important speaker. Also, other additional expenditure on advertising etc. may prove necessary.
- d. A healthy reserve of capital is advisable to cover the possibility of legal fees relating to CGT's work.

8.4 It was therefore agreed not to pursue the proposal to donate membership fees.

8.5 However, two further proposals were made:

To offer a subscription holiday for struggling members to apply for individually. This would serve to keep members who may be considering leaving the Trust.

To investigate the possibility of providing more financial support to The Gardens Trust, the parent of the network of County Gardens Trusts.

* CGT's annual payment to TGT is to cover insurance only.

* Post Meeting Correction:

The current annual payment to TGT consists of: -

Subscription Fee £50.00

Membership/affiliation Fee £232.50

Insurance of various kinds £343.59

9.0 CGT/Ness Botanic Gardens Student Travel Bursary

9.1 It has been very disappointing that the Bursary initiative had to be halted due to the COVID-19 crisis but, as stated in item 6.2 above, the intention is to continue once conditions allow when it is hoped to increase its value.

10.0 Any Other Business

10.1 Conclusions

The meeting had raised very serious issues for the future of CGT which would be discussed further at the next Council of Management meeting later in July and Members would be made aware of these and updated regularly.

It was hoped that the general Membership would also contribute to these discussions by attending CoM meetings and/or by contacting CoM members directly or via the website where email addresses can be found <https://www.cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk/?Email-or-Write-to-us>

11.0 Thanks

Ed Bennis closed the meeting at 4.40pm with thanks to all attendees, members of the Council of Management and of the various Working Groups for their continuing work and support of CGT.

This year, particular thanks were offered to Newsletter Editor Sue Eldridge and Freyda Taylor, in charge of circulation, for helping to keep in touch with CGT Members by producing additional Newsletters while the Trust has been unable to meet. Thanks were also due to those Members who have contributed articles to these much appreciated bonus editions.

And finally, thank you to Ed for chairing this unconventional 15th Annual General Meeting of Cheshire Gardens Trust.