
Held on Wednesday 22nd May 2024 at 3.30pm
in Olympia at Arley Hall, Arley, Northwich CW9 6NA

The papers for this meeting had been circulated to Members by email or post, as requested. These papers comprised the AGM Notice & Agenda, the Minutes of the 18th AGM and the Directors' & Trustees' Report and Financial Statement for the year ended 31st January 2024.

Prior to the meeting, Lord Ashbrook welcomed attendees to Arley with an introduction to the long history of his family's exceptional gardens, after which he, together with Head Gardener, Gordon Baillie, lead two groups in guided tours. This was followed by very welcome tea and cakes, including a celebratory cake for CGT's 20th Anniversary which was cut by Lady Ashbrook.

1.0 Welcome and Introduction

On behalf of the Council of Management, David Cash welcomed our Patron, The Viscount Ashbrook, Lady Ashbrook, Mr Peter Hughes KC, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Gardens Trust, Mrs Christine Hughes, members and their guests. He thanked Lord Ashbrook and Gordon Baillie for their tours in exceptionally inclement weather and thanked everyone for attending Cheshire Gardens Trust's celebratory AGM.

2.0 Attendance and Apologies

- 2.1 Fifty four members and guests were in attendance. (152 total membership at April 2024)
- 2.2 Apologies had been received from twelve members

3.0 Minutes of the 18th AGM held at Castle Park, Frodsham on 24th July 2023

- 3.1 The Minutes had been circulated by email or by post prior to 29th April 2024.
No amendments to the minutes were required.
The Minutes were duly proposed as an accurate record of the meeting by Beric Bartlett, seconded by Gordon Darlington and accepted by the meeting.

4.0 Matters Arising No matters arising raised.

5.0 Annual Report – Key Points

5.1 Active Membership

David Cash repeated that for some years, the reduction of members in active roles in the Trust has raised concern and last year had necessitated the formal reduction in the number of Trustees forming the Council of Management to a minimum of four. In past years our general membership has been falling but last year saw an increase of five.

There continues to be a small reduction in members of our active groups and David stressed that although support is still needed for the larger roles, taking on smaller, less time-consuming and also one-off roles is equally helpful and rewarding. He encouraged members to tell their friends about CGT and bring them along to events. One particularly appropriate event will be the Anniversary Garden Party on the afternoon of Wednesday 21st August which will provide opportunities to talk to group members about

their activities and David Cash also encouraged attendees to remind themselves of the charitable remit of Cheshire Gardens Trust.

David warmly thanked the Events Group for organising the AGM and all members of the individual Groups for their contributions throughout the year.

5.2 *Events Group*

Group leader, Margaret Blowey, thanked the team and everyone who had supported the talks and visits during the previous year. The group aims to not only provide garden visits but also a variety of experiences and last year the visits to the new Mayfield Park and 'Growing@Field 28' were particularly popular.

As for the future, Sue Eldridge is leaving the Group in order to focus on the Newsletter so new faces and ideas would be welcome for Events.

events@cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk

5.3 *Research & Recording Group*

Barbara Moth thanked all the volunteers who had produced such a tremendous body of work and had fun learning, researching and developing friendships. In 2023 members of the Group had joined with the Gardens Trust to raise awareness of work of the Trust at a Heritage Open Day event in Queens Park, Crewe. This year she especially thanked Jackie Cawte for taking on the administrative role of the group, allowing Barbara to step back, although she would still be continuing her own research.

Barbara Wright, a very long-term and fulfilled member of the team, invited members to a taster day on Wednesday 18th June starting at 10am. This would be a site visit at the recently restored 1820's Bath House and Physic Garden in Congleton, followed by a visit to Congleton Park, designed by Edward Kemp, a notable Cheshire designer.

research@cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk

5.4 *Planning & Conservation Group*

Barbara Moth also thanked the volunteers assisting with planning issues, informing the meeting that planning officers always take notice of CGT's comments. She also thanked Tina Theis for continuing her indexing of the Newsletters as searches via our website help planners and other researchers reach the information they need. Volunteers are important in assisting on individual planning matters, such as Sue Eldridge joining meetings with National Trust Officers at Lyme Park. It is encouraging to note that the NT are keen to work with the Gardens Trust and County Gardens Trusts. Members were urged to be observant in their own areas and pass on concerns to the group.

We are aware that the sale of historic properties are rising, the most recent being Dorfold Hall. CGT is keen to monitor potential changes arising from new ownership and if possible to support these estates to remain in family ownership.

The previous day, Barbara had lodged the last of the Caldwell Nurseries documents at Cheshire Archives & Local Studies but reminded members that the Calwell Website is a fund of information and continues to be used by researchers.

planning@cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk

5.5 *Newsletter*

We are especially delighted that Editor, Sue Eldridge, has agreed to continue in that role for one more year. Sue was particularly commended on the April Newsletter issue

reminding us of CGT highlights from the past twenty years. Also deserving of our thanks was our long-serving, very committed proof-reader, Freyda Taylor.

During the pandemic, members were extremely supportive by submitting articles but these are dwindling. Sue is keen to continue the Head Gardeners of Cheshire series but now that the Newsletter Group is reduced, she asked members to return to contributing articles, including volunteers to write Events reports. All ideas are welcome and Sue can be contacted directly or via this email address:-

newsletter@cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk

5.6 *Membership and Website*

The current situation regarding these subjects can be found in the Annual Report and Crispin Spencer and Sue Bartlett were thanked for their continuing contributions to the running of the Trust.

6.0 **Financial Review and Accounts**

6.1 Martin Slack drew the attention of the meeting to the Financial Statements on page 14 of the annual report. He stated that it was reassuring that membership subscriptions continue to broadly cover running costs.

6.2 2023-24 saw an increase of £122 in unrestricted funds. It had been hoped to use some of these reserves to partially support the short-term employment (via the Gardens Trust) of a planner to continue the activities of the Conservation & Planning Group. This aim is still under consideration.

Another option could be a stand-out event designed to attract new members.

6.3 There were no questions from the floor and Martin was thanked for his contribution.

7.0 **Elections to the Council of Management**

7.1 No nominations had been received and no volunteers from the floor were forthcoming. Sue Bartlett and Martin Slack were both willing to stand again following their three years' service and this was agreed by the meeting.

7.2 To clarify, anyone can attend Council meetings to contribute on particular topics or just to find out how the meetings work. There are approximately six meetings per year, face to face or occasionally via zoom. Members can find out when and where meetings are held by checking the calendar on the website or by contacting current CoM members.

8.0 **Address by Peter Hughes KC Chairman of the Board of the Gardens Trust**

David Cash introduced Peter Hughes, and thanked him and Mrs Hughes for joining us at our anniversary meeting.

Mr Hughes congratulated Cheshire Gardens Trust on its 20th anniversary, providing a special opportunity for him and his wife to join us and visit Cheshire. "We were married here 50 years ago, living in the Chester area until moving to Cumbria in 2009. Apologies for bringing the Lake District weather with us."

He continued:-

Many members may not be aware of the relationship between the Garden History Society (GHS), the Gardens Trust (GT) and the County Garden Trusts (CGT's). The

GHS researches historic designed landscapes, produces an acclaimed academic Journal entitled 'Garden History' and fights for their protection, in the process needing people on the ground to do this. GHS was the original statutory consultee for planning issues relating to Registered parks and gardens.

Forty years ago the first County Gardens Trust was formed, debatably either Hampshire or Sussex, and eventually the Association of County Gardens Trusts (ACGT) was formed. Historic England (HE) then recommended that the GHS and the ACGT amalgamate to become the Gardens Trust which is formed of 50% individual members and 50% County GT's.

There are now 36 County GT's and one Country GT – Wales.

The GT hope to take the amalgamation further so that all County GT's could automatically become GT members, which would give more power to the GT.

The GT has three main aspects to its operation:

- Conservation & Planning
- Education & Training, including arranging events and lectures
- Academic research in the form of the Garden History Journal

Conservation & Planning - Grant

Cheshire Gardens Trust is not alone in struggling to keep up with the volume of planning work.

Nationally, the GT is very grateful for support from the County GT's as we are all facing challenging times.

Historic England supports planning casework via a grant which, in 2008 was £45,000 and in 2024 has dropped to £43,000.

Capacity Building Grant

This has supported training for County GT's but came to an end in April 2024. HE may replace this but is dependent on Government funding, so HE is currently having to reprioritise.

Planning

When considering the implications of planning applications on Registered Landscapes there are statutory consultees, e.g. Highways, who are obliged to respond. There are only two charities which are statutory consultees – these are the Gardens Trust and the Theatres Trust.

The Gardens Trust is reconsidering how it can provide an improved service and better support County GT's to assist in this role. One solution may be to employ a lead conservation officer for each area but more discussion is necessary.

Mr Hughes' talk prompted a number of queries and comments from the floor including:

I. Mr Hughes confirmed that currently there is a special reduced rate for County Gardens Trust members and encouraged those present to join the Gardens Trust.

2. Chair of the meeting, David Cash, raised the issue of support for our Conservation & Planning Group. Cheshire Gardens Trust, assisted by planning officers from the Gardens Trust, had approached Historic England regarding assistance in employing a part time, qualified planner to support their planning role. This could be in conjunction with another neighbouring Gardens Trust and Cheshire GT is in a position to contribute financially. However, HE responded that although:-

“similar projects have taken place in other regions, for the North West at this time this isn’t a project we can prioritise”

Mr Hughes replied that the Gardens Trust will have a meeting on 11 June with HE’s Director of Policy and he is hoping that they will be sympathetic to the principle of a lead professional officer for each area.

It is clear that Planning Officers throughout the country are under pressure and the efforts to build new housing is also putting historic landscapes at risk.

9.0 Plans for the Future

9.1 David Cash drew the attention of the meeting to the paragraph ‘Looking Forward’ on page 12 of the Annual Report, which highlights the issues relating to the reducing number of volunteers, particularly in relation to Conservation & Planning and Research & Recording. The editorship of the Newsletter will also become a matter to be addressed in 2025.

He stressed that, although experience can be useful, enthusiasm is most important including taking opportunities to learn from current group members and the wealth of information and advice provided by the Gardens Trust . It would be of great help if members can ‘spread the word’ about CGT and for planning issues in particular, share their local knowledge with the group at planning@cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk
From the floor, Ruth Benson volunteered to set aside time one morning a week to assist on planning issues. Grateful thanks were offered to Ruth.

10.0 Any Other Business

10.1 Tina Theis, in her role as indexer of the Newsletter, said that she had been looking back on the contributions of many members over the years and found that using her ‘scientific picture analysis’ of who featured in the most photographs, Barbara Moth was the clear winner. Barbara had had her finger in many pies, always alert to new opportunities and spreading her ideas and enthusiasm over the years. She had earlier retired from her Trusteeship and was now taking a step back from leading two volunteer Groups.

On behalf of the Trust, Tina had the great pleasure of offering their appreciation and grateful thanks by presenting Barbara with a copy of *Prints and the Landscape Garden* by Michael Symes. Barbara thanked everyone and stressed she would be continuing to enjoy her passion for research and would pursue any planning issues affecting sites which were particularly special to her.

11.0 Thanks

No further business was raised so David Cash took the opportunity to ask members of the original 2003 Steering Committee to stand and receive an ovation from the meeting. He closed the meeting at 4.30pm with thanks for their attendance to Lord & Lady Ashbrook, Mr & Mrs Peter Hughes, members and their guests.