

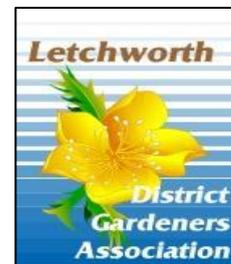
# Minutes of Annual General Meeting 21<sup>st</sup> February 2019

**Venue:** Central Methodist Church Hall, Pixmore Way, Letchworth – 7.30pm

**Present – see attached list.**

**Chair:** Maureen Hersee

**Minutes:** Diane Pohlman



1. The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed everyone and apologise if she seemed not up to par but this was due to the fact that she had arrived back from New Zealand very early that morning. She went on to state that the Minutes, agendas and annual reports have been available via the web site.

2. **Apologies** from: Jo Schurch, Catherine Antrobus

3. **Minutes of last meeting** – 15<sup>th</sup> February 2018 had been available on line to all the members and all happy with them and signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

## 4. Matters arising

None

## 5. COMMITTEE REPORTS:

### Myra Smith - Outings, and Social Report.

We started the year in January 2018 with 64 members attending our popular Sausage Sizzle and Quiz, a great night. As we progressed through the year we had 7 speakers plus 2 that included excellent demonstrations one of which was in the afternoon. They covered many differing aspects of gardening from growing to design and much in between, there was also our version of Gardeners Question Time headed up by Pippa Greenwood with a supporting cast of Philip Whaites Nicholas Warliker and our President Graham Tapp, a thoroughly entertaining evening, attended by 159, a good result. In June we had another celebrity to entertain us, Christine Walkden, what a very knowledgeable and entertaining lady she was and a great example of how never to give up on what you want to achieve in life, attended by 112.

We had 3 coach trips booked, one cancelled due to lack of support. 44 of us visited Wisely Flower Show always very popular a super day out, then in November 69 of us finished the year of with the most wonderful evening at Kew's Winter light extravaganza, what a show.

In addition there were 10 coffee mornings at Tapps Garden Centre, the 1st Wednesday of the month, where not only is the coffee good but also several cakes to tempt us and the good news is as a member we get 10% off plants as well as in the coffee shop.

Thank you Roz for all your help with setting up the hall, and the rest of the team for their invaluable help, especially when we had our celebs, it was all hands on deck, so thank you team.

As some of you may already know we are going to be holding some of our meetings at the Cloisters next year. The main advantage will be flexibility with our meeting's content and times along with a bar facility and a lot more parking spaces, 84. We will try a supper with a speaker evening and maybe a lunch time event. I have 4 outings booked so far for next year. Our first adventure will be to Letchworth Golf Club, we have a speaker and lunch booked on Thursday 21st. March. So a lot of new things to look forward to in 2019. Hopefully there will something in this year's diary for everyone.

**Question** from Irene Fussell – could she have directions to ‘The Cloisters’ for the meetings scheduled to be held there. **Response:** - These will be available on the web-site shortly.

### **Paul Heydon – Shows Report**

It has been a trying year for growers and exhibitors, the bitter cold, rain and the long hot dry weather. This said, I was again amazed at the amount and standard of what was shown at our two shows. They were both excellent especially a display of carnations in July, which I think is a first for me as show secretary, and the impressive display of chrysanthemums and dahlias in September. There was also some outstanding vegetables and handicraft.

The number of exhibits in the September show was the most we have had, we only just had enough tabling with extra tables I had supplied and others that were borrowed from across the road.

I would like to thank all the helpers, without them the show could not take place. Also a big thank you to those who exhibited as without you there definitely would not be a show, and a thank you to those who donated plants, cakes and produce as these go to help offset the cost of running the shows.

It would be nice if there were more children taking part, it seems that we can only rely on the schools whose pupils enter. If you have never visited our shows, please make 2019 the year to start, you never know it may make you feel like entering.

### **John Brookbanks – Trading Store Report**

This past year has been my first year in charge of the Trading Store since my predecessor, Peter Faulkner, stood down. Now I fully appreciate how much hard work he put into doing the job! It has been a steep learning curve for me. But this has been made easier by all the people who give their time freely to help with the running of the store. To all of them, both myself and all the members owe a big thank you.

After an extremely challenging start to the year, when we had a long drawn out cold Spring that impacted on trading. Sales did recover and the year ended on quite a positive note.

Seed potatoes sold well, though that said this year's order is being reduced by 10% due to declining sales. This involves reducing the quantities of certain varieties, but also introducing 3 RHS recommend new varieties.

Both Spring and Autumn Onion sets sold out. Although our usual order has been placed for this year's Spring Onion sets, at the time of writing this report we are unsure what quantity we will be receiving. This is due to last Summer's drought that has caused a shortfall of up to 65% of the harvest of certain varieties in Holland.

All the composts continued to sell well, as did the Strulch. Our star seller of the year was the Farmyard Manure which we introduced as a trial. We ended up having to reorder an extra 3 pallets. This was our first year of stocking King's Seeds which also sold steadily through the season.

As for the coming trading year. We are phasing out items that tend to sell slowly and are introducing around a dozen or so new lines across the store. If anyone has further suggestions for other new items, we would be more than happy to hear your ideas.

I'm going to end by saying that we have lost 4 or 5 people who helped down at the store for various reasons. This has made the creation of this year's rota's very hard work and puts an unfair burden on the few. We do have two or three members who have offered their services and are joining the team. But we need to teach more members to use the till, as well as helpers. We only have one certified forklift truck driver, we need someone else to be qualified as a backup driver. The Association would pay for any qualifying course, could it be you?

**Question** from Sue Lines – Could the Committee state their policy on products held in the Trading Store and the effect they have on the insect population, particularly with a view to the news regarding significant decrease in insects. **Response:** - The products held in the Trading Store are continually under review, not only from a cost standpoint but also the chemicals contained therein. This will continue to be the case as we wish to sell products which have the least impact on the environment and ecology.

Question from John Humphries – Haven't the Government banned most substances that are harmful to the Environment. Response: The RHS Website has a list of what is banned and this list is reviewed annually. Graham Tapp - Confirmed that he had nothing 'nasty' available in the Store at the Garden Centre.

## **SUBSEQUENT NOTE::**

'We looked at the pesticides we sell in the Trading Store and the group of chemicals widely associated with insect decline, namely neonicotinoids. This group comprises of clothianidin, imidacloprid, thiamethoxam, acetamiprid and thiacloprid. Of these clothianidin, imidacloprid, thiamethoxam were deemed unsafe for use and arrangements were made by the EU Commission to ban them. However after ongoing and considerable debate amongst scientific and conservation groups, acetamiprid and thiacloprid were deemed to have no proven link to declining numbers and weren't included in the ban. They are likely to be kept in products for the foreseeable future, but with careful monitoring.

Of the products for sale in the Trading Store we have only two that contain these which are Provado and Bug Clear. Provado has Thiacloprid in and Bug Clear has Acetamiprid. These are widely considered to be safe, especially when used in a contained environment, such as a Polytunnel or a Greenhouse. As with all products people must ensure that they follow the instructions of use. The Trading Store does offer Bug Clear based on rapeseed oil and extracted naturally occurring pyrethrins. As with much of our sadly declining nature, loss of habitat is a huge factor. We can all do our bit to help insect numbers by planting up unused areas of our gardens or allotments with one of the many Bee and Insect friendly flowers available, including night scented flowers which are invaluable food for nocturnal insects such as moths. Many of the flower seeds for sale in the Trading Store are excellent for pollinators and can be grown in the smallest of places, even in containers.'

## **Kay Walker – Seedlings & Schools Liaison**

Having been warmly welcomed and nominated to join the LDGA Committee I took on the role of Publicity Secretary in February 2018 after the AGM. Amongst my first tasks I updated our Facebook page and our Twitter account and shared details of the fantastic Pippa Greenwood and Christine Walkden events. As the events of the year passed I realised that everyone was already fantastic at sharing publicity duties, which gave me the time to look at other areas of interest to the LDGA.

I produced a list of things we could do to increase interest from the LDGA members. This included starting children's workshops. I found that parents can lack confidence in the garden and not sure where to start. However, through simple activities we could educate both the children and their parents. We chose the name 'Seedlings' for our children's group and the first workshop was held on my own allotment in May 2018. We had 8 children sign up and we received great feedback. The 8<sup>th</sup> Scout Group Letchworth also approached us to help them achieve their Gardening Badge award. Maureen and myself also attended the Samuel Lucas School in Hitchin and talked to the school assembly about LDGA. We also gave talks to several different classes about the food in their lunchboxes and how it had been grown. Realising the need for the Seedlings group to have a purposely designed allotment, we approached North Herts District Council. They met us at the Flint Road site by the Trading Store and in June 2018 we took on two full sized plots. One was divided up to be used as mini plots and the other would be used for the Seedlings plot. At the same time, a group of us also revamped the existing half plot opposite the Trading Store. All the plots have taken a lot of hard work to clear, level and plant up. We were extremely grateful to have been

donated our amazing Greenhouse, paving slabs and a couple of water butts. On the 16<sup>th</sup> September, the Seedlings plot was ready to hold its first event. This time 12 Children and their parents arrived for an Autumn Themed Workshop. We made bug houses, planted bulbs on the plot, planted up a crocus pot and put a Viola on top for instant colour. The children were also able to pick their own Pumpkin from the Pumpkin Patch and take it home. The cost of the Workshops has been £3 per child, which covered the costs involved. At both Workshops, they have been able to take everything they have made home with them. They have been incredibly successful and my huge appreciation goes to all who helped. The Seedlings Workshops are being very well received by parents and children alike and we have received some amazing feedback. We do however need continued support and the plot itself would really benefit from some weeding volunteers throughout the year.

For 2019 we plan to hold at least 3 Seedlings events themed by the passing Seasons. The first being a Seedlings and LDGA open day planned for Easter Sunday which is the 21<sup>st</sup> April 19. The fantastic gift of the Greenhouse enables us to start off strong healthy plants for the events and to help fill the allotment up. We also want to push the Children's section of the Summer and Autumn Show. It was suggested that I take on the Schools Liaison Role of the committee and link the Seedlings Activities with the Schools encouraging all to enter the shows.

I have only had my own allotment for 3 years now and I have a lot to learn, so I'm always grateful for growing advice, any spare plants and especially some volunteers to help maintain the plot.

We have a slide show at the rear of the room for you to look at. It shows pictures of what we are doing with the Seedlings.

## **Andrew Dear - Website & Newsletter Editor's Report**

### **Website**

The website's yearly overhaul is now complete, and we are ready for the new season. The website is still the place to go when you want current information about the Association. Have a look at the photos on the gallery pages as they showcase everything we do throughout the year. Please send in your photos if you have anything garden related that you would like to share.

### **Member's emails**

As part of our preparations for the new GDPR regulations, last year we took the opportunity to tidy up the mailing list, removing all those who were not currently paid up members. During this process we managed to re-establish contact with some members who's addresses had changed or gone out of date. On average in 2018, 55% of those emailed opened their monthly update, which is a shade higher than it was in 2017. Email is the best way for us to keep you up to date with things relating to the association, so please let us have your email address if we don't have it all ready. We will look after it! Please also let us know if you are not getting the emails. Check spam or junk folders first and add our mailing address [membershipsecretary@ldga.org.uk](mailto:membershipsecretary@ldga.org.uk) to your address book. If you still don't get them, let us know your correct email and we'll try to see where the problem is.

### **Compost Heap**

I enjoyed compiling the quarterly Compost Heap's again last year and was encouraged by the increase in contributions from both committee and the wider membership. More have been pledged for future editions. Also encouraging is the increase in readership, for the last 2 editions particularly, with nearly 50% of all those emailed clicking on the link to open the file. In addition to this, others may be accessing via the website or reading paper copies if they don't have email. As ever, your feedback would be most welcome, let me know what you like or dislike and what you would like to see in future editions.

I would now like to draw the winner of the Winter Compost Heap competition: Letter K – Julia Kitson. Julie will be contacted in due course with her prize.

### **Graham Tapp – Green Shoots**

Graham explained that Green Shoots was a programme of help for vulnerable children where they are brought to the Garden Centre to do gardening work. He explained that last year he had started with Brandles School where the children made hanging baskets, which was sponsored by the people who mend the roads. The baskets were hung in Whitehorse St. Baldock and were admired by everyone. The same boys will do the hanging basket planting at the Garden Centre this year. This is being sponsored by Baldock Independent Beer Festival who will be paying for the brackets and the installation. Also this year there is a programme of fruit and vegetable growing, in land behind the Garden Centre, where the boys will build and maintain a market garden to sell the fruit and vegetables they grow. This will be self funding and LDGA keep the accounts for Green Shoots – to keep everything separate and above board. Building work is currently on-going.

### **Jo Schurch – Membership**

The membership this year is approx. 418

We had 74 new members this year which looks good but is matched by 69 leavers so membership remains static.

Of the leavers about 39 were older or long standing members but about 30 were people who had only been members for between 2 and 5 years. Not sure what this means or what we can do about it.

### **Report of Chairman – Maureen Hersee**

2018 was a challenging year for gardeners in general and it had a knock on effect for the Association. What with the Beast from the East and then a long period without rain in the summer it took its toll particularly at the Trading Store. I was delighted to hear that sales later recovered. This has been achieved due to dedication of John and hard work by his team which you the members have bought into. Thank you.

Talking of the Store, we are often asked why we hold such high reserves.

Twofold, firstly ongoing work needed - Estimates for Store external renovation £800.

fungicide, stabilisers, water sealer, paints and sundries £700 to £800. No labour costs included.

If we used an external contractor the cost would be in the region of £3,500

Also Reconditioned forklift £10 - 15 K

Secondly after we close at the end of the year, we have significant expenses when we restock for the following year, again we draw on our reserves to cover this cost.

Bank charges of £307 - cost of providing card facilities. Necessary but would ask if paying less than £5 helpful if you could pay by cash.

Monthly meetings, - the committee and in particularly Myra are always trying to think of new ideas for our meetings to try and tempt more members to attend. Income is higher this past year due to two major evenings, Christine Walkden and Gardeners Question Time. We made a donation to the Hospice and Growing People but still a slight profit for Association.

Cost of general speakers has increased, regularly paying £100+ so committee would like to propose an increase cost to £3 for members. Monthly Raffle brings in very little with added work so decided no longer to have a raffle every month. Encouraging but it takes a lot of work so please do support the meetings and encourage others to do so.

Shows are a net expenditure for the Association, always been supported by reserves. However important events for us and our members. We are hoping to encourage younger exhibitors this year now that we have our Seedlings Group which is becoming more established.

One new venture in 2018 was the allotments. We took over two allotments at Flint Road one has been subdivided into smaller plots and with agreement with NHDC has been sublet as people told us that they could only manage to cultivate a small area. Looking at what people have grown on their plot it seems that they have been very successful. The second allotment for which we don't pay any rent is for our Seedlings Group. This is being masterminded for us by Kay who is passionate to get youngsters interested in gardening. Hope that this might also encourage more youngsters to enter our shows.

As always I am most grateful for the support given to me by our President Graham Tapp and members of the committee and for the commitment and hard work that they all put in to help run the Association, it is much appreciated. Thank you also to you the members for your continuing support.

**Question** from the floor – why do we hold so much money in the bank:

**Response:** At the year end, we have some major expenses for which the reserves are required. The store is costly to maintain, and there is still more work to be undertaken externally. £1600 initially for repairs and painting (providing the painting is done by members). If the painting is undertaken by contractors then this cost could increase to £3500. We have had the fork lift truck for some considerable time and should we need to find a reconditioned replacement, then we are looking at £10 - £15K for that item alone. There has also been an increase in Bank Charges due mainly to the credit card machine in the Store – we have to pay the bank for this facility.

**Chairman:**

This time last year we thought we had found a Treasurer but unfortunately, due to ill health, he was unable to take on the role. I have done the Treasurer's job over the last year but am grateful that Carol is now on board to take on this role. We have purchased a computer for Carol's use and once the bank had stopped dragging their feet and we were able to get the mandates changed Carol will take on the position. Thankfully Carol was in a position to prepare the accounts for the Auditors.

## **6. Finance Report – Carol Russell**

Sales have increased slightly year on year, whilst at the same time, the percentage cost of sales has improved from 83.6% to 80.4%. This has been achieved by the on-going review of product costs and subsequent successful negotiations with suppliers.

Other trading store costs have decreased largely due to refurbishment costs last year. This has led to a trading store surplus, against a loss in the previous year.

Other income has gone up with increases from mini plot income, subscriptions, and interest on money in bank.

Other expense increases are driven by donations made during the year, credit card charges, and software for the new computer.

Equipment Depreciation increased slightly due to the purchase of the new computer.  
Stock is very much in line with prior year, and cash at bank has increased by £2K  
Overall profitability has changed from being a loss last year to a profit this year.  
Hard copies of the Accounts will be available at the Trading Store, should anyone wish to read them.

**Chairman:**

On the issue of Insurance costs – our policy was up for renewal and I did some comparison work and found that the RHS offered us a better deal. After discussion with Committee, we moved our policy over to them. The year is from February – February. Unfortunately the RHS could not insure the fork lift truck – so we have a separate agricultural equipment policy for that.

That was the end of the Financial Report and the Chairman asked the meeting for a proposer for the approval of the Accounts. John Humpries nominated acceptance of the accounts and this was agreed by the meeting.

Ledger and Co. have been our auditors for a few years but there were issues this year so the Committee will be reviewing the position of ‘Auditors’ for 2019.

**7. Annual Subscriptions**

**Proposal to increase Annual Subscriptions for the year 2020.**

The Chairman explained that it had been some considerable time since the subscriptions were increased and given the possible expenditure as outlined earlier, the committee would like to propose a £1 increase in subscriptions. As this must be approved by the AGM, this proposal, if approved, would come into force for the year 2020.

By a show of hands, this proposal was approved by the meeting.

**Proposal to amend Rule 4.4 and Rule 4.6**

Members whose application for membership has been accepted after 31<sup>st</sup> August will be required to pay the full subscription but such subscription shall be valid up to 31<sup>st</sup> December of the following year.

Amend to say –

4.4 New members whose application for membership has been accepted after 31<sup>st</sup> August will be required to pay 50% of the full subscription. This will cover September to December of that year following which the full subscription will apply.

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Any change to the Rates of Subscription shall be recommended by the Committee and approved by the membership at the AGM.

4.6 Any member, excluding those Members included in paragraph 4.1 above, whose subscription is in arrears by more than six months (to allow for extraordinary circumstances) shall be deemed to have resigned from the Association

Amend to say –

4.6 Any member, excluding those Members included in paragraph 4.1 above, whose subscription is in arrears by more than three months shall be deemed to have resigned from the Association and will be required to pay the full subscription should they later decide to re-join unless it is after 31<sup>st</sup> August when sub-clause 4.4 will apply.

By a show of hands – these two rule changes were approved by the meeting.

## **8. Election of Committee**

Diane Pohlman, Myra Smith, Jo Schurch, Kay Walker, Roz Jennings, John Brookbanks, Andrew Dear and Paul Heydon have offered to stand again.

This was proposed by Kathy Bee and seconded by Peter Hollingsworth.

At this point Maureen Hersee stood down as Chairman and President - Graham Tapp took the Chair

## **9. Election of Chairman**

Maureen Hersee has offered to stand again as Chairman of LDGA and he asked for the approval of the meeting. This was agreed unanimously.

The Chairman took back the chair and asked the meeting if there was :

## **10. Any Other Business.** There was none.

Valerie Aitken stated that, on behalf of the members of LDGA, she would like to thank the Committee for all their hard work during the year. She stated that it was much appreciated.

There being no further business – the meeting closed at 8.27pm

Break for Refreshments – followed by

## **11. Presentation by Teresa Evans – Show Photography Judge**

## **12. Draw of Raffle**

## **13. Date of Next Annual General Meeting - 20<sup>th</sup> February 2020 – venue and time to be confirmed.**