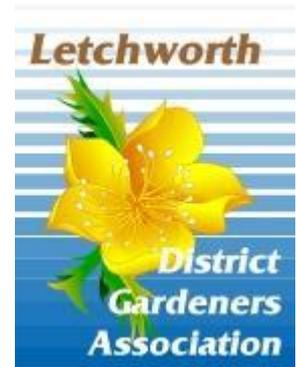


Minutes of Annual General Meeting 20th February 2020

Venue: The Cloisters, Cloisters Road, Letchworth Herts –
7.30pm

Present: See attached list



Chair: Maureen Hersee

Minutes: Diane Pohlman

1. The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. She stated that the Minutes and agenda have been available via the website. She outlined the order of the meeting and mentioned there would be refreshments, as usual, in the break. After the Break there would be a slide show of gardens visited by Paul Cunningham and prior to the close there would be a raffle drawn.

2. Apologies: John & Cherry Brookbanks, Kay Walker, Emma Lockey

3. Minutes of last meeting – 21st February 2019 had been available on line to all the members and by a show of hands, all were happy with them and Maureen signed them as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

4. Matters Arising: None

5. COMMITTEE REPORTS

Paul Heydon – Shows

Our two shows were again a credit to the exhibitors. No matter what the weather throws at us during the year an excellent display is always staged. We have exhibitors that only stage one exhibit, this does not matter, it is the taking part that counts and might lead to more at the next show. In the summer show, all but one of those with single exhibits won a prize.

We had excellent displays in all sections in both shows, my favourite in the summer was the art, but in the autumn it is difficult to select just one as it was overall fantastic.

The autumn show broke the record of the number of exhibits stated to be entered, my worry for future shows will be for tabling and space.

It would be good to see more people coming to view the shows and if more children could enter.

I have heard that there have been a few local societies have had to cancel their shows and one that is having to move venue and possibly downsizing. We just go from strength to strength.

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

We continue to use email to keep you up to date on a monthly basis; I hope you find what we send useful. On average in 2019, 60% of those emailed opened their monthly update, which is a little bit higher than it was in 2018, about 5% in fact.

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 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 although I did miss out the autumn edition. I was again encouraged by the contributions from both committee and the wider membership. More have been pledged for future editions. Average readership for the main Compost Heap mailing remained about the same, with just under 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.

One other thing I must do is draw the winner of the winter Compost Heap competition. In the bag are lettered tiles that correspond to all the correct entries on my list.

NB – John Sharman was drawn as winning £15 vouchers

John Brookbanks – Trading Store

Report read by Diane Pohlman in John's absence

It has been a fairly successful year at the Trading Store and we have managed to increase the volume of sales. For this, I really do have to thank every member of the team who help to run the store. They give their valuable time freely and without complaint, even when it is cold, damp and miserable. Also of course the members of the Association for their continued support.

During the course of the year we removed one or two items of stock from sale due to EU and government bans that came into force, an expense the Association had to bear. At the time of writing, all the current stock is fully licensed and legal for sale to the members.

As for this year. We have made a couple of major changes, along with a few new items that we are introducing.

The biggest change that members will notice is that this year we are discontinuing Sinclair Pro compost due to price increases. Instead we will be stocking Clover Multi Purpose, Professional Potting, Professional Container and Professional Ericaceous. These will complement our existing range of Clover

Growbags, John Innes and Peat. There will be a small amount of Sinclair All Purpose and Potting carried over for sale.

Another change this year is the way we have priced the seed potatoes. Last year we had 20 different price levels over the range of stock, this causes a lot of time consuming work. So this year we have streamline the pricing. By using the average cost price per kilo over the whole range to give us just 3 price levels. Meaning 1kg is selling for £1.30, 2.5kg for £3.00 and 5kg for £5.50.

As a trial, we are stocking a limited number of 10.5cm (4") and 13cm (5") Bio-Based Growing Pots. These pots are highly suited to natural organic growing. They are manufactured using a plant based polymer that is 100% biodegradable and industrially compostable. The Bio-Based Growing Pots have an extremely low carbon footprint and should last for up to 3 growing seasons.

We are also going to be stocking Calcified Seaweed in 25kg, 5kg and 2.5kg pack sizes. This is highly favoured by onion, leek, dahlia, chrysanthemum and sweet pea growers. It is produced naturally from marine sources but has been calcified (turned to lime). It is rich in calcium, magnesium and trace elements, can be used on lawns and borders as a soil conditioner. But it shouldn't be used on Ericaceous plants.

Now that the allotment site and Trading Store have been removed from the local development plan. We have started the process of repairing and refurbishing the store exterior. We have had to have asbestos removed professionally from around some lower levels of the building. This has since been followed up by builders removing and re rendering areas that were in very poor condition. The next stage of the process will be the repainting of the building exterior when the weather permits.

Kay Walker – Publicity / Seedlings

Report read by Diane Pohlman in Kay's absence

Having run successful Seedlings events for the first half of the year, I had to step down in the summer due to ill health. I am grateful that Emma Lockey was able to take on the Seedlings group for me. She is the right person for the role, she is fun, creative and has a voice that carries above the roar of excited Children (always useful).

After a few months, I was feeling much better and missed helping out with the Seedlings and missed LDGA. I think LDGA is a wonderful group especially in this modern age. I am not sure if people realise how much work goes on behind the scenes to put on all the fabulous events we have and of course the trading store.

Last November I was able to take back my original role of Publicity Secretary but was then asked if I would consider handling membership, as Jo was looking to stand down after many years in the role. After Christmas Jo brought me the membership packs and I was soon out and about delivering them to our posties. I helped out on the Membership desk on Potato Day and absolutely loved it so was happy to confirm I would take on the role.

I work full time so attending the coffee mornings at Tapps will be few and far between but I will be manning the membership desk at the Trading Store a couple of times a month.

I am looking forward to settling down into the Membership Secretary role and to meeting all of you at some point during the year.

Jo Schurch – Membership

The membership ended this year at approx. 427

We had 62 new members which looks promising but is balanced by 54 leavers so membership overall remains fairly static.

Of the leavers about 12 were older or long-standing members but about 17 were people who had only been members for between 2 and 5 years and 25 were people who had only joined last year. This is a similar picture to last year and I am not sure what can be done. We sent out a questionnaire a few years ago but results were not helpful as few people bothered to return them.

Myra Smith – Meetings, Outings & Events

We started in January with a Chilli Supper Social. Attended by 55 members. That got us off to a flying start. We had a good team cooking, and with John B in charge of the oven, Cherry B. setting up the room, it was all systems go for the rest of us. In March we tried a Lunch with a Speaker at Letchworth GC. and

that was attended by 35. We also tried a supper evening in November with a speaker, attended by 33.

Our last meeting of the year was a Free Buffet and very enjoyable members Question and Answers session, headed up by two conscripts, Val and Roz and helped out by the audience. Thank you Val and Roz, and an extra thank you to Roz for all her help at all meetings during the year.

We had Talks by James Smallwood, Phillip Whaites, Ann Luder, Roger Harvey, Geoff Hodge, Nick Dobson, and Bev Bond. They covered a wide range of subjects, attended on average by 42 members.

We also had outings by car, train and coach. No plane or boat yet! We visited The Botanic Gardens at Cambridge, Stamford and Market Deeping, Hyde Hall Flower Show and The Beth Chatto Gardens. Thank you Fran and Irene, you did a great job with the organising of those outings, it helped me considerably.

We also have our Monthly coffee mornings at Tapps Garden Centre. Lots of information gets passed around, also the opportunity to sign up for various outings etc. and of course some of us can't resist the cake temptation.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank all the members who have supported the various events over the year, and if there is a particular speaker, or outing you would like me to organise or if you would like to get involved in some way, please get in touch.

Thank you to all volunteers, dryer uppers, and cake makers, and Andrew D. for his Compost Heap plugs and reminders of all these activities.

So that was 2019

See what a fantastic year we've got lined up for you in 2020 LDGA's 115th year.

Myra went on to state that she was looking for help with the 'Outings' side of what she does and asked if anyone was interested in helping out, please let her know.

Report of Chairman – Maureen Hersee

The committee members have reported on what has been happening in their areas so I don't want to reiterate what has already been said but I am sure you would like to join me in thanking them all for what they do for the Association. I think you will agree that 2019 was another busy year for the Association. Although we didn't have the Beast from the East to contend with it was still a challenging growing year. However with the results from the shows and trading accounts and support for the monthly meetings I think you could say that our members are like 'hardy perennials' for they come back each year despite the weather and put on their best show.

For the Association to prosper then we do have to embrace change and again as you have heard I think we are doing that. New things are being introduced gradually since evolution rather than revolution hopefully lets us take all our members with us on that journey. The committee run the Association for you the members so it is important that you give us feedback on what you like or dislike. Sometimes we will be able to oblige but on other occasions we may not be able to make the change requested but we will always consider what is being proposed and hopefully at the end of deliberations deliver what serves the majority of members.

The committee has again been asked to consider stopping selling peat based and other chemical based products. This is a very difficult decision since LDGA isn't a body that campaigns on different issues. We run the Association for the benefit of all of our members. Should the members decide not to purchase some of the products that we sell then obviously it no longer makes sense for us to stock them but according to our sales figures that isn't the situation with these products at this point in time. John is constantly reviewing what we stock and will only continue with those items that you the members buy. Please rest assured that we do check items that are banned for sale and these are removed from our shelves.

I am sure some members still question our reserves. The accounts as presented to you cover the period to the end of November 2019. Since then

£12,900.00 has been spent to restock the store (£1,200 for further restocking during the year), £3,775 for building repairs, £750 asbestos removal, and £900 training for fork lift truck driving making a total of **£18,400.00**.

We need reserves of up to **£15,000** for a replacement forklift truck, **£9,000** for 12 month running costs of the Association (**£42,400**) which brings our reserves down significantly. The external appearance of the store is looking very shabby so the committee has just approved the cost of £890 plus the cost of paint. I hope this explains why the committee feel that these reserves are necessary.

As always I am most grateful for the support given to me and the Association by our President Graham Tapp. Not only do we have the committee meetings in his tea room, it is often taken over by members for the monthly coffee mornings. His knowledge and advice is invaluable to me as Chairman and also the committee. Thank you Graham, members of the committee and to you the members for your continuing support.

6. **FINANCIAL REPORT**

Carol Russell – Finance

Sales have seen a large increase over the year, whilst at the same time, the cost of sales % has improved from 80.4% to 67.4%. This result has been aided by the finding of a problem in the stock valuation of last year. The actual reduction, taking this factor into account, is a 4% improvement, down from 71% to 67%. The accounts show the larger reduction due to the prior Years stock position being incorrect, as it should have shown as £11105, not £9436. The continuing actual improvement in the Cost of Sales has been achieved by the on-going review of product costs and subsequent successful negotiations with suppliers, which is an ongoing process in the Trading Store and the Group as a whole.

Other trading store costs have increased due to a full fork lift service, repairs to the Roller Door and some painting costs. The Trading Store is showing an

increased surplus, of nearly £3k, but this improvement should actually be viewed with the Stock correction arising from the Prior Year (£1.7k) in mind.

Other Income has reduced by £1.5k, due to 2 successful events with Christine Walkden and Pippa Green taking place in the prior year-value £2k. Trips and Outings saw an increase of £0.5k.

Other expense costs have dropped overall by £2.8k, of which a reduction in Speakers fees (Walkden & Green) is £1.7k, and a saving of £0.8k was made by actively investigating and moving some of our Insurances to a new supplier.

Capital Expenditure there has been none this year.

Cash at Bank has increased by £6k, of which £2.4k is prepaid monies received for Trips in 2020, and the rest is due to the profit for the Year.

Overall, we have achieved a very good result for this year of £4.8k, but of course some of this has arisen due to the Stock Correction of the Prior Year. The £0.79k profit last year should have been £2.5k and this year's profit should be £3.2k, which gives us a more reasonable increase of 28% increase over the Prior Year, which is to the credit of all the hard work being done by the LDGA Team.

ADOPTION OF ACCOUNTS

Maureen asked the meeting for someone to propose the adoption of the accounts, Val Aitken proposed and the meeting ratified that the accounts be adopted.

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER OF THE ACCOUNTS

Maureen stated that we had not covered this item last year but that Ledger & Co and had done the work for 2018. We needed to get approval from the Membership for an Independent Examiner of the Accounts. David Williams had undertaken this task for 2019 and Maureen asked that David continue for 2020. The Membership approved this.

7. AMENDMENT TO THE RULES – Clause 8 Honoraria

Maureen explained that the Committee feel that the payment of Honoraria, Clause 8 of the LDGA Rules, is no longer appropriate and that instead out of pocket expenses as agreed by the Committee should be adopted. This would seem to be in line with other voluntary organisations. She proposed that the wording in the rules should in future read:

“The Committee shall have the power to reimburse Committee members for out of pocket expenses associated with the smooth running of the Association.”

Peter Hollingsworth questioned whether the free membership received by Posties should also be seen as Honoraria and if this should also stop.

John Humphries stated that he felt free subscriptions for Posties was not an Honoraria, as it is usual in organisations for free subscriptions to be awarded for regular ‘odd jobs’.

Diane Ketcher stated that she was a postie, she got free subscriptions, but felt other posties did far more than she.

Lesley Williams asked how many Posties we have and Jo Schurch confirmed that there were 25 and they deliver 4 times per year – but the amount delivered varies. The main delivery is the Winter package which goes to all members. During the rest of the year much is sent out electronically.

John Humphries suggested we compare what it costs in free subscriptions for our Posties – compared to paying royal mail stamps. He further suggested that the Committee discuss this at the next committee meeting.

After some further discussion, John Humphries suggested that the whole Honoraria clause be deleted from the rules as it was not in fact a rule but something the Committee should decide. This was agreed by the Membership.

Maureen explained that it was her intention to work on the rules during the forthcoming year, as there were several anomalies in the rules that needed to be resolved. The new Rules would be ready for submission to the Membership at the AGM in 2021.

8. ELECTION OF COMMITTEE

Maureen read out the names of those prepared to continue to stand for Committee:

Maureen Hersee, Diane Pohlman, Myra Smith, Roz Jennings, Carol Russell, Andrew Dear, Paul Heydon, John Brookbanks.

Catherine Antrobus proposed the adoption of the Committee en-bloc and this was agreed by the Membership.

9. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

At this point Maureen stood down, and Graham Tapp, President, took the Chair.

In the absence of any further nominations, Maureen Hersee was proposed as Chairman for 2020 this was approved by the Membership.

Maureen explained that she had been Chairman since 2003 and that she felt it was time for someone else to take over. She thanked everyone for their support and stated that this would be her last year in office.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Val Aitkin thanked the Committee on behalf of the Membership for their hard work, which was very much appreciated.

Maureen thanked Val and asked if there was any other business. There being no further business Maureen told the meeting that Jo Schurch had been Membership Secretary for many years but she was standing down this year. In appreciation of all her hard work, and for the many plants which she had grown for the shows etc. Maureen made a presentation to Jo of some Garden Centre vouchers which she felt sure Jo would put to good use.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8.25pm.

John Humphries stood to state that he, on behalf of the membership, would like to thank Graham Tapp for his help and support over the last 12 months. Grahams help and advice is always appreciated.

DATE OF THE NEXT AGM

The next AGM will take place on Thursday 11th February 2021 at The Cloisters, Barrington Road, Letchworth.