

Letchworth District Gardeners Association

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**Letchworth Golf Club
Letchworth Lane
Letchworth SG6 3NQ**



Thursday 20th February 2025 at 7.30pm

Agenda

- 1 Chairman's Opening Remarks**
- 2 Apologies**
- 3. Minutes of the meeting held on 15th February 2024**
- 4. Matters Arising**
- 5 Chairman's Report on behalf of Committee**
- 6. Financial Report**
 - Approval of Accounts for the year 2024**
 - Appointment of Independent Examiner for 2025**
- 7. Election of Committee**
 - Diane Pohlman, Paul Heydon, Roz Jennings, John Riley, Jane Thorn**
 - Additional nomination received for Alison Coulter**
- 8. Election of Chairman**
- 9. Any Other Business**
 - Compost Heap competition**
- 10. Date of Next Meeting – Thursday 19th February 2026 at Letchworth Golf Club**

We invite everyone to stay for refreshments and an opportunity to talk to Committee and fellow members.

Minutes of Annual General Meeting 15th February 2024

Venue: Letchworth Golf Club, Letchworth, Herts - 7.30pm

Present: See attached list

Chair: Andrew Dear

Minutes: Diane Pohlman



1. Chairman's Opening Remarks

Good evening everybody and welcome, for those that don't know, my name is Andrew Dear, Chair of the Association. After the formalities we'll have refreshments and there will be time to socialise.

2. Apologies:

Chris Rinkel, Pat Madden, Marian Adams, Mike McConnell, Mureen Hersee, Roz Jennings.

3. Minutes of last meeting – 16th February 2023

The minutes have been available via the website and a link to it was sent to all those with e-mail this week. The Chairman didn't propose to read them out again this evening and asked if everyone was happy for him to sign them as a true record of events.

Proposed Inge McConnell

Seconder John Riley

Vote Agreed

4. Matters Arising

The Chairman stated that there was just one matter arising which concerned the availability of the finalised accounts prior to the meeting. This year, as well as the usual printed copies, we have made them available, in advance, to individual members who requested them.

5. Chairman's Report on behalf of Committee

I would like to start with a topic dear to all our hearts – the weather. The LDGA year of 2023 began back in December 2022 with a severe week-long cold snap that put paid to many of our garden plants. Fast forward to summer and a prolonged warm spell gave rise to the hottest June on record for the UK as a whole, even eclipsing the much-fabled summer of '76. July and most of August were quite wet, so very little watering was needed. Then in September, came another heatwave which gave us our hottest day of the year – that was also our Autumn Show day!

The year also saw the passing of several of our members and past members. One of them was Ron Garrod. He was a true old school gent who loved to grow chrysanthemums, sweet peas, and a host of vegetables on his large plot in Bygrave. His family have given all the money donated in lieu of flowers, to us (LDGA) for the benefit of future members. I'm not sure what we will do with it yet, but we will let you know as soon as we have decided. We also lost Thelma Colman who served on the committee as Meetings & Outings Secretary for many years.

Talking of Meetings and Outings and the social side of the association you may recall at last year's AGM Myra told us that she planned to retire from committee after this AGM. More on that shortly, but first a look back at her last year in post.

Our most popular evening came in July when over 50 members attended our first ever garden party at the store garden. Russel Atwood's No Dig Gardening talk, including a sing-along, was our most popular speaker evening, closely followed by Annie Godfrey from Daisy Roots with her talk about autumn colour. Another notable evening involved home-made wine tasting with prolific wine maker and show judge Kevin Martin.

In May our very own Mike McConnell presented an Insight into Flora & Fauna & People of South America and the Galapagos Islands, this meant we were able to make a small donation in lieu of speaker's fee to Garden House Hospice Care.

Looking ahead, we are pleased to announce that Jane Thorn is standing for election this evening, she had previously been co-opted to committee and has been helping Myra with the 2024 calendar which is now pretty much finalised. The next meeting, 'Making a living from sticks' with countryside steward Guy Lambourne from Wassledine is on Thursday 21st March at 7:30pm.

Due to rising costs, we regret that from now on, the meeting entry fee will increase to £4 for members and £5 for non-members. This is the first rise in 5 years and allows us to maintain the quality of both speakers and venue that we have enjoyed in recent times.

The Golf Club, therefore, will continue to be the main venue for our evening meetings, as you can see it offers comfortable surroundings with bar, a large car park and the option to have some food beforehand.

The exception to this rule being when we host high profile speakers as we will in June when Bob Flowerdew will present 'No Work Gardening' at the Central Methodist Church.

Now we come to outings. During the year we took coach outings to Beth Chatto Gardens in May, Kathy Brown's Gardens and Willington Garden Centre in July and RHS Wisley in September. We finished with 50 members and guests taking a trip to see the Winter Lights at Wimpole Hall.

The visits planned for 2024 are: the first one in May is still to be confirmed, then, Gotha Gardens (near Ashwell) in July, RHS Hyde Hall in September and the potential for another winter lights trip in December.

I am sorry to say that Moira Rigby our committee helper for outings has had to stand down, so if any of you would like to take control of one, some or all of these outings please come and speak to us afterwards.

Finally on the social front, our coffee mornings at Tapps Tea Room continue to be well supported. If you haven't been before, the next one is on 6th March from 10am, please do make a point to come along. We also plan to have two summer socials again this year, these will be in the form of tea and cake afternoons at Dimples.

Now on to Trading. First, on behalf of Trading Secretary John Riley, I would like to thank everyone who has helped to keep the Trading Store running smoothly particularly when he was out of action towards the end of the year. Their help has been invaluable. Also, to you the members for supporting the store so well again. Despite a slow start, store sales had caught up with the previous year's by mid-May and went on to finish 5% higher.

We had some bad news around the middle of the year. The owner of one of our major wholesalers passed away and the family decided to close the business. We managed to fill the gap for most of the products and introduced a whole range from Durstons which includes organic peat free compost, manure, topsoil, soil improver and decorative bark. We also introduced seaweed meal and Heart of Eden peat free compost for the first time.

Despite standing down at the last AGM, former Trading Secretary John Brookbanks has not been as retired as he was hoping. As well as continuing to be around when the store is open, he has been working hard behind the scenes helping John Riley with ordering and stock control and covered for him when he was out of action. He has also taken over from Peter Hollingsworth as 'Till Man'. I.e. the person we turn to when the till needs some attention. So, thanks John for all your efforts.

Don't forget it's not our store or John's store or John's store, it's yours, the members, so please give us feedback about the products that we sell, particularly the peat-free composts, and if you have any ideas for new products have a word with John Riley at the store or drop him an email.

Next, we turn to our produce shows. A big thank you to Show Secretary Paul Heydon, Roz Jennings and all those that helped run the shows last year.

Despite some rain around mid-day, our Summer Show was a great success. The number of exhibitors (32) and the number of declared exhibits (266) were both up 30% on the previous year. Takings from refreshments, plants sales and raffle also indicated a strong attendance especially from the general public.

As I mentioned, our Autumn Show was held on the hottest day of the year. It was none-the-less for that, with exhibitors (37) and declared exhibits (365) both higher than the previous year.

Both shows however, encountered problems when judges weren't available at the last minute. Fortunately, other judges were able to step in, but this did put the timetable back a bit, particularly at the Autumn Show.

Because of this, we are making some changes to timings. Staging will finish at 11:15am, a quarter of an hour earlier than normal, and judging will start at 11:30am, that gives us an extra half hour. You've been warned, so get in early, it always takes longer than you think to set-up.

With other shows in the area struggling or cancelled due to lack of interest, please make it your resolution to visit at least one, better still both of our shows this year to find out what it's all about. After all they are your shows really. You don't need to stop there either, why not give exhibiting a go, there's sure to be something that appeals to you out of the almost a hundred and seventy classes on offer. What could be more fun?

Show Schedules are available this evening if you are interested or speak to Paul afterwards.

Finally, let's look at membership. At the end of 2023, membership stood at 369 households. Before this evening, we had taken on 16 new members and renewed 212 more, making a total of 250 including 14 posties and 8 honorary positions which are free. A good proportion of new members come via word of mouth, so please keep singing our praises to everyone you come across.

After careful consideration by committee, which took in to account the current economic climate and our healthy financial position, we have decided to maintain the membership fee at £6 per household for the coming year - 2025.

If you use email, we like to keep you up to date on association news on at least a monthly basis and hope you find what we send useful. On average over the year, just over two thirds of those emailed opened their updates, which is a little bit higher than it has been in previous years. For that reason, please be sure to let us know if you have a change of email address.

If you don't use email, we plan to deliver a copy of our Compost Heap newsletter to your door 3 times a year - in Spring, Late Summer, and Winter. These will of course be available via email as well.

Our secure website is still the place to go when you want current information about the association and up-coming events. Your contributions to both Compost Heap and website are most welcome.

The Chairman then asked if there were any questions:

Diane Jury asked whether the craft demonstration room at our Autumn Show was successful or not and would we be having it again this year. The Chairman stated that it was difficult to measure but felt it was successful. Mrs Brookbanks would not be available to organise this year, but that it is under consideration, if we can find a replacement. The consensus is that we should do it again as it helped with the popularity of the show.

Diane went on to refer to the Chris Beardshaw evening at the Methodist Church in June 2022 and stated that it was almost impossible to hear what was being said from where she was sitting towards the back of the church. The

President, Mr. Graham Tapp stated that during the early part of the evening there had been a complete power failure and we had to work extremely hard getting the PA system to work at all and this was only achieved with the expert help of Brian Bylett. The Chairman stated that we would endeavour to ensure the PA system was working properly when Bob Flowerdew visits in June.

6. Financial Report from the Chairman

Due to an increase in other volunteering commitments our Treasurer Brian Bylett had to step down at the end of March, I have been acting as Treasurer since that time. I must say it's been a useful insight into the inner workings of the associations finances and has enabled me to make a few improvements particularly with regard to the presenting of the final accounts. That said however, we have now enlisted the help of a qualified bookkeeper to take care of day-to-day transactions.

Now for some figures:

The trading surplus for the year was approx. £5.3K.

Store sales were approx. £28K, up nearly £1.3K on 2022. After a slow start, over 20% down on the first day, sales gradually picked up and finished approx. 5% up on the 2022 figure.

Stock purchases were just over £14K and the cost of running the store was approx. £2K. Around £400 of that was for electricity, mostly standing charges. However, we signed up to a new, more favourable tariff in September which will give us savings of about 25%.

Now let's talk about some of the other main cost centres in more detail:

Meetings - over the year, meetings were in deficit by about £450 but this does, however, include the benefits offered to members by way of refreshments at the AGM and the summer garden party.

Outings - over the 4 outings there was a small surplus of around £30. Two of them were more popular than the other two but the average uptake was just under 40 which is the number we use to judge our breakeven point.

Shows - over the 2 shows there was a deficit of just over £800, this is almost equal to the hall hire costs for the 2 shows which have risen significantly this year. It was felt that both shows were a success with good turnouts which income relies upon, whereas expenditure is more or less fixed regardless of numbers.

Regular visitors to the AGM will be aware that for some years now we have been holding a small amount of money on behalf of Green Shoots, an educational project run by Graham Tapp at his Garden Centre in Baldock. Previously the money was in a separate account incurring a £5 monthly fee. During the year with took the decision to transfer it to our own savings account thus avoiding the fee. As a consequence, a small amount of interest has been earned each quarter, this has been tallied up and credited to the Green Shoots project.

So, what was our final position?

The year-end balance, which includes all our assets, and all our cash was just over £80.7K an increase of £5.5K on the 2022 figure. This increase is roughly in line with inflation which was relatively high for most of the year.

One absolute last thing. Our preferred method of payment when you are at the store continues to be card. We are trying to deal with as little cash and cheques as possible so please use your card if you can. Also, if you are not paying in person ie for outings or membership, please use electronic transfer.

The Chairman then asked if there were any questions relating to the accounts.

John Humphries stated that it appeared that the cost of banking had quadrupled and was there an explanation for this. The Chairman stated that this was mainly due to the way costs have been allocated. Previously, card reader hire, and

card payment fees were included in the store overheads, but it was considered that this was not the right place for these charges as the card reader is now used to take payments for all aspects of the association activities.

The Chairman then asked if someone would propose the approval of the accounts for 2023.

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| Proposer | John Brookbanks |
| Secunder | Inge McConnell |
| Vote | Approved |

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER OF THE ACCOUNTS

David Williams has acted as our independent examiner of the accounts for the last four years and I propose that he continues to do so for year ending 30th November 2024. The Chairman asked for a show of hands, and this was agreed by those present.

7. Election of Committee

The Chairman stated that the following people have offered to stand again:

Andrew Dear, Diane Pohlman, Paul Heydon, Roz Jennings, John Riley

As we have already heard Myra Smith is standing down from committee after 7 years.

We have received one additional nomination for Committee, that is Jane Thorn who was co-opted last summer in readiness to take over from Myra.

Please could I ask for someone to propose that these fine people be elected to committee en-bloc?

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| Proposer for election of Committee en bloc: | Val Aitken |
| Secunder: | John Brookbanks |
| Vote: | Agreed |

8. Election of Chairman

The Chairman stated that at this point he had to stand down and hand over to our President Graham Tapp.

Graham stated that in the absence of any further nominations, Andrew Dear was prepared to continue as Chairman for 2024. And asked for a vote from the floor.

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| Proposed: | Diane Pohlman |
| Seconded: | Val Aitken |
| Vote: | Unanimous |

9. Proposed change to Rule 7.3

The Chairman stated that his first job back is to do a little bit of housekeeping and we need to make a rule change. A retrospective rule change.

We would like to remove out of date rule 7.3 which states - Where an account can be operated electronically, only transfers between accounts may be undertaken electronically.

In line with current banking practices, we would like to remove this rule so that we can continue to pay invoices and expense claims by electronic transfer.

The Chairman asked if there were any questions.

John Sharman suggested that the point of the rule was to prevent, for their own protection, any one person from making payments without the knowledge or authorisation of anyone else. Much like needing two signatures on a cheque.

He went on to say, banks now offer a dual authorisation function whereby one person sets up a payment that remains pending until another person authorises it sometime later.

The Chairman confirmed that our bank, HSBC did operate this function, but we didn't use it.

It was further suggested by Mr Sharman that it would be good practice to use this function in future.

Although the risk to the association or individuals involved was felt to be low it was agreed in future our Bookkeeper, Treasurer or other committee member will set up payments which will then be authorised by another committee member.

John Sharman also raised a point about bank charges. He stated that in his experience dealing with the finances of other community organisations, he knew of banks who offered free banking to associations like ours. He went on to mention the Cooperative Bank and Lloyds Bank as two examples.

By restricting cash and cheques taken by the association our bank charges for 2023 were approx. £100. Although this was felt not too excessive, it was agreed that if we can find something for which we meet the qualifying criteria, that offers exactly what we need and is free then we would consider making the switch.

Given the concerns raised and our pledge to improve practice, the Chairman asked if the meeting could still approve the removal of Rule 7.3.

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| Proposer: | John Riley |
| Seconder: | John Humphries |
| Vote: | Approved |

10. Any Other Business

The Chairman asked if anyone had any items they wished to raise at this time.

Val Aitken asked if she could speak and informed the meeting that her garden would be open this coming Sunday 18th February for snowdrops. There would be an admission charge which would be split between Marie Curie and Macmillan Cancer Support. She hoped to see everyone there between 11 am and 4pm.

I mentioned earlier that chrysanthemum grower Ron Garrod had died recently. Well, we have inherited his entire collection of show (prize winning) chrysanthus, about 100 of them in 10" pots. If you would like to give one, some or all of them a good home then please come and speak to us afterwards.

Now it's time to 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. I will ask Elaine Wigglesworth to do the draw. And the winner is Patricia Madden.

And one last thing.

On behalf of the members and the committee I would like to thank Myra Smith very much for her efforts on the meetings and outings front for the past 7 years. No disrespect to those that have gone before but Myra really has taken this part of our activities to a new level during that time.

- Moving from church hall to golf club via the cloisters.
- Engaging a number of celebrity speakers incl. Pippa Greenwood, Christine Walkden, Nick Bailey and most recently Chris Beardshaw.
- Dealing with lockdown and the big interruption that that caused.

And then of course there are the show refreshments. I believe Myra was doing those even before she was on committee, anyway she says she's not handing those over to anyone else just yet and plans to continue in the kitchen for the time being.

So, thank you very much Myra, much appreciated. We couldn't let you go without a retirement gift, so if you would like to come forward, Graham will do the honours.

At this point Val Aitken stood to thank the Committee for all their hard work over the year which was much appreciated by all the members.

On that note, if there is no other business, it just leaves me to thank Graham and all the other committee members for their support over the last year and you all for attending this evening. I declare the meeting closed.

Date of next AGM is Thursday 20th February 2025 at this venue.

Tea, coffee and cake will be coming out shortly and the bar is open, so please stay on for a while and socialise. Myra will now draw the raffle.