

Annual General Meeting of the Amisfield Preservation Trust

Wednesday 28th September 2022

7.00pm

Virtual Meeting on Zoom platform

Minutes

Attendees: Kate Rycroft, Jennifer Adams, Chris Avery, Rosemary Greenhill, Chris Cormack, Ruth Alder, Carolyn Fox, Caroline Libberton, Gill Harley, Steve Gowenlock, Jane Watt, Caroline Bamford, Margaret Furley, John Maules, Erin Armstrong

Apologies: Gordon Ash, Lorna Ash, Lesley Henry, Clare Scott, Margaret Allan, Liz Wilson

1. The minutes of the last AGM held on 6th October 2021

Accepted.

Proposed: Chris Cormack

Seconded: Rosemary

2. Chairman's Report

Achievements and Performance

Our objectives for the year, set out in our Annual Report to the year ended March 2021, were:

- Continued employment of a volunteer co-ordinator and the appointment of a garden assistant(s) dependent on funding from East Lothian Council and availability of candidates for the role
- Continued development of the garden, including the creation of a potager in the centre of the garden, replacement of the existing greenhouse, planting up of one of the grass triangles under the auspices of Queen's Green Canopy, planting up of the west border and continuing re-design of the wildflower meadow with the creation of a new pond and marsh area.
- Improved signage and interpretation within the garden
- Continue working with local agencies – health, local government and national bodies, to encourage use of garden by individuals seeking opportunity for improving their health and well-being through volunteering in the garden
- Promoting use of the education building by groups or individuals for workshops or educational demonstrations

This year continued to be a challenge due to the restrictions imposed on our activities due to the Coronavirus pandemic. However, unlike the previous year, when lockdowns were in place, we were able to run volunteer sessions as normal, with appropriate protocols in place.

We had to restrict some indoor activities and social gathering, but in general we were able to operate normally, enabling our volunteers to maintain social interactions and sustain supportive friendships. We have continued to work with local schools, mental health groups and with East Lothian Works to provide opportunities for volunteering and work experience. We have undertaken some major new garden development projects during the past year, including constructing a large greenhouse, creating a new wildlife pond and marsh and developing the central area of the garden as a new potager garden.

Our volunteer co-ordinator, Alasdair McDougall, worked to ensure that all volunteers had the opportunity to develop new skills, gain self-confidence and enjoy their time at the garden. His presence in the garden full time enabled us to welcome visitors to the garden throughout the year.

The key activities undertaken by our volunteer coordinator included:

- Involving volunteers from the local community in learning new skills, forming new friendships and improving their mental and physical health
- Providing outdoor learning opportunities for local groups including schools and other local community groups
- Working with people referred with specific mental or physical health issues, providing a safe and calm space to benefit from outdoor activities
- Providing work experience for job seekers and school pupils
- Helping volunteers to create and maintain a beautiful and productive garden that is open free of charge to visitors
- Working with the board of trustees to manage the project through the Covid-19 pandemic, communicating with volunteers and ensuring appropriate risk assessments and protocols were in place

Local community organisations that participated in activities with us this year included:

- Changes mental health project – 7 participants on an 8 week WELL (Wellness, Environment, Life and Laughter) course
- East Lothian Works – 2 people with barriers to employment were employed under a paid work experience scheme. This work experience was on a part time basis for a six-month period. One of these, Sean, has now moved on to full time employment and one, Martin, has had a three month extension to his contract and is still with us
- Community Jobs Scotland – one young person, Kieran, with barriers to employment was funded to work with us part time for 9 months. He has now moved on to full time seasonal employment with East Lothian Council
- Napier University – 3rd year graphic design students used the garden as real-world project to design new signage scheme for the garden
- Knox Academy – provided work experience for 4 pupils, and 11 pupils volunteered under the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme
- Rural Development Skills students – 8 secondary pupils from around East Lothian used the garden as a venue for practical skills development

- Primary school pupils – provided 14 morning sessions for primary school class studying for John Muir Award

During the year, over 70 individuals volunteered regularly at the project, and in total 7,200 manhours were worked over the year by volunteers in restoring and maintaining the garden. (Equivalent to 5 full time gardeners) There were more than 6,500 visits from members of the public over the course of the year. The garden was open to the public 34 hours per week all year round. We have continued to make the garden available to visitors free of charge, in order to make the space accessible to all, and to encourage repeat visits

(Photos in AGM presentation not included)
No questions were received.

5. Treasurer's Report

Chris C summarised key points from the annual accounts, highlighting more individual donations both at the garden gate and online. Doors Open was a great success in terms of visitor numbers and income, and together with our newly extended opening hours has allowed the Trust to successfully deliver the range of activities highlighted in the Chair's report above and kept the Trust in a healthy financial state through the year.

A slight discrepancy was spotted in the section of the accounts covering Reserves Policy, and are amended as follows:

'In March 2022 directors approved the release of all the £3,000 of unrestricted funds that were held as designated funds, after they had been applied towards the new greenhouse. The amount held as unrestricted funds on 31 March 2022 was £194,359, including £10,477 as free reserves, comprising £10,632 (cash) and £6 (debtors) less £161 (creditors).'

The good state of the finances was recognised as a great achievement by the Trust, and the accounts approved as follows:

Proposed: Jane
Seconded: Jen

6. Directors due to retire:

Carolyn Fox, Kate Rycroft, Jennifer Adams

Acting Chair led vote of thanks to Carolyn and Kate who were not seeking re-election. Carolyn had looked after Membership and also put in a big effort to sorting out our policies, for which grateful thanks.

Kate has led the Trust for the last 10 years or so, providing energy, vision, knowledge and her time to great effect, and for which all involved will always be grateful.

7. Election of Directors

Jennifer Adams – existing director seeking re-election
Proposed: Rosemary
Seconded: Chris C.

Caroline Libberton – new director, lives locally to garden and comes with fund raising skills.

Proposed: Ruth

Seconded: Chris C.

Steve Gowenlock – new director, volunteer in garden since January '22, background in social work sector, recently working with refugee charity in Leith

Proposed: Jen

Seconded: Carolyn

Lesley Henry – new director, retired accountant, volunteer since December '21.

Proposed: Ruth

Seconded: Chris C.

8. Any Other Business

Kate to publish summary of Chair's statement from annual report in PowerPoint format as used at AGM.