

Held on-line on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2021 at 4.00pm

*On 11<sup>th</sup> May the papers for this meeting had been circulated to Members by email and post, as appropriate, and comprised an introductory letter from the Acting Chair of the Council of Management, Ed Bennis, a Zoom Meeting Registration Form, the Agenda, the Minutes of the 15<sup>th</sup> AGM and the Directors' & Trustees' Report and Financial Statement for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> January 2021.*

*Because of the need to hold a 'virtual' meeting which some would be unable to attend, Members had been invited to submit questions and proposals in writing in advance of the meeting.*

#### **1.0 Chair's Welcome and Introduction**

Ed Bennis, acting Chair of the Council of Management, welcomed and thanked everyone for attending Cheshire Gardens Trust's 16th AGM.

#### **2.0 Attendance and Apologies**

- 2.1 24 members were in attendance
- 2.2 Apologies had been received from 11 Members

#### **3.0 Minutes of the 15<sup>th</sup> AGM held on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2020**

- 3.1 The Minutes had been circulated by email or by post on 14 August 2020. No amendments were required. The Minutes were duly proposed as an accurate record of the meeting by Barbara Moth, seconded by Gordon Darlington and accepted by the meeting.

#### **4.0 Matters Arising**

##### **4.1 *Item 4.1 Book Legacy:***

No progress had yet been made regarding finding a home for this legacy. RHS Bridgewater had been approached but no response had been forthcoming to date. Further enquiries continue to be made.

##### **4.2 *Item 8.0 Membership Fees:***

As in 2020, no complaints had been received regarding continuing with the existing Membership Fees in spite of the lack of visits and live talks due to the ongoing Covid-19 epidemic. Nor had any requests been submitted regarding waiving the fees due to hardship.

It was therefore agreed to continue to charge membership fees for 2021/22 as before.

- 4.3 *Item 8.2 Proposal to donate Membership Fees to a gardens charity:*  
The outcome of enquiries had been that it is illegal for one charity to donate to another so this suggestion could not be taken further.
- 4.4 *Item 9.0 Travel Bursary:*  
The awarding of the Travel Bursary remained 'on-hold' but discussions were continuing into amending the format of the award.

## 5.0 **Annual Report – Key Points**

- 5.1 *Membership*  
Although there had been a modest reduction in existing members, more new members were being attracted via the continuing on-line talks which are achieving between 40 and 70 attendees. Crispin Spencer was again thanked for his invaluable and efficient support in his role as Membership Secretary.
- 5.2 *Research & Recording Group*  
The work of the R&R Group was continuing, albeit with very restricted opportunities to visit sites and archives. Group Meetings were being held via Zoom. However, progress was being made in liaising with Planning Departments in relation to the preparation of Local Lists of significant designed landscapes.

It was also very pleasing to report that the Caldwell Archive had been chosen as a Regional Comparator in an Historical Research project "*From specimens to commodities: the London Nursery Trade....*" owing to the extensive digitization of business records of the nursery carried out by Cheshire Gardens Trust.

- 5.3 *Conservation & Planning Group*  
It should be recognised that the work of this group utilises that of the R&R Group when commenting on certain planning applications. Over the past year CGT has commented on 58 applications plus Neighbourhood/Local Developments Plans. Details of past and current applications and submitted responses can now be viewed on the Planning Log via the Conservation tab of our website.
- 5.4 *Newsletter, Website and Facebook*  
Not only has the Newsletter been given a facelift but a number of new series of articles has been introduced. Work is also taking place on adding a search Newsletter facility on the Website. We have Tina Theis to thank for her dedicated work on this. The website will always be a work in progress and we always welcome comments and contributions.

Members were also reminded about the CGT Facebook page, a link to which can be found bottom right of each Website page. All were invited to contribute, but if you don't wish to do so personally, please send your comments and photographs to Margaret Blowey at [events@cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk](mailto:events@cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk) so that she can load them onto the page.

## 5.5 *Events*

After twelve months of not being able to meet in person, the Group is pleased to be in a position to plan some summer visits including a garden social. To avoid meeting indoors during the autumn/winter, talks will continue to be held on line and will also include some international speakers. Details would be circulated shortly, plus a questionnaire to gather Members' ideas and comments.

## 5.6 *Volunteers*

5.6.1 It was significant that the AGM was held during National Volunteers Week. Cheshire Gardens Trust could not exist without its hardworking volunteers and it was fitting to give special thanks to all active members and those heading our Groups, in particular Barbara Moth for her work with the Research & Recording and Conservation & Planning Groups, to Sue Eldridge and Freyda Taylor for producing the Newsletter and to Margaret Blowey for her work as the driving force of the Events Group.

5.6.2 It was recorded that by the end of the year Barbara Moth intends to take a back seat from leading the R&R and C&P Groups and, similarly, Sue Eldridge intends to retire from her Newsletter editor role. It was hoped that a Newsletter Group could be formed to relieve the pressure from just one person.

5.6.3 Which lead to the Council of Management:

Ed Bennis, *Acting Chair*, and Joy Uings, *Secretary & Treasurer*, have announced their resignation from those roles and as members of the Council of Management, on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021.

5.6.4 All these four members have taken very active and essential roles since before CGT was launched in 2004 and their resignations leave the future of the Trust in a very serious position regarding key roles. All members were urged to consider taking a more active role in the running of the Trust – these can be large or small, to suit the individual.

## 6.0 **Financial Statement**

6.1 It could be seen from the Financial Statement that the Trust is in deficit for the first time. Owing to the decision not to charge for online talks and also the cancellation of garden visits, the only income for the period 2020/21 was from membership fees and voluntary donations. In addition to standing expenses, the main expenditure was approximately £2,000 on updating the website. However, the total funds carried forward were approaching £17,000 so the Trust maintains a healthy financial position.

6.2 No questions or comments had been received from the Membership and the acceptance of the Accounts was proposed by Margaret Blowey and seconded by Beric Bartlett.

## 7.0 **Elections to Council of Management**

7.1 Trustees serve on the Council of Management which, in accordance with the Trust's Memorandum and Articles of Association, can consist of no fewer than seven and no more than fifteen members.

On this occasion two members have to step down having served for three years. These persons are Ed Bennis and Joy Uings, who were willing to continue to stand for re-election but only until 30 September 2021. They were elected unopposed and were thanked for agreeing to continue as CoM members for this limited period.

It was stated that after that period, the Trust would become unconstitutional and its future would be at risk unless a minimum of two volunteers for CoM step forward.

- 7.2 As recorded at the 2020 AGM, Joy Uings had announced her resignation from the posts of Company Secretary and Treasurer to the Trust. It was clarified that holders of these posts are not obliged to also be members of the Council of Management.

With gratitude and pleasure Ed Bennis announced that Martin Slack had volunteered to take the role of Treasurer for the Trust. Members of the Council of Management looked forward to this new association.

- 7.3 As previously stated, the continuing lack of fresh volunteers for active roles within Conservation & Planning, Events and Research & Recording Groups and also the management of the Trust still raises serious concerns about its future.

It was hoped that the general Membership would consider contributing by attending CoM meetings and/or by contacting CoM members directly or via the website where email addresses can be found <https://www.cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk/?Email-or-Write-to-us>

## **10.0 Any Other Business**

- 10.1 Barbara Moth offered her personal thanks to the Research & Recording and Conservation & Planning teams for the fantastic work they had done in spite of current difficulties. It was especially encouraging to confirm that progress was being made in working in partnership with Cheshire East and Cheshire West & Chester Planning Departments.
- 10.2 Janet Horne queried whether other County Trusts experienced similar problems in recruiting volunteers. Ed felt that many volunteer organisations were in the same position. Ambitions always exceed resources.
- 10.3 Gill Crook thanked the Events group for continuing to organise online talks.

## **11.0 Thanks**

Ed Bennis closed the meeting at 4.40pm with thanks to all attendees, members of the Council of Management and of the various Working Groups for their continuing work and support of CGT.

And again, thanks were offered to Ed for chairing the second virtual Annual General Meeting of Cheshire Gardens Trust.