

Letchworth Arts and Leisure Group

Annual General Meeting

Monday 7 November 2016 at 7.30pm

Held in the Main Hall, Mrs Howard Memorial Hall, Norton Way South,
Letchworth Garden City SG6 1NX

Attending

Diane & Nigel Jury, Gwynneth Grimwood, Jane Bird, Ann Pegrum, John Gregory, David Tappin, Celia Lord, Maureen Strutt, Veronica Tompkins, Tony & Jane Webb, Geoff Morse, Andrew Tether, Sheila Hogan, B Raines, Alistair Pollard, Jas Phugura, Megan Stacey, Andrew Dear, Glenda Boxwood Davies, William Armitage, Kate Thompson, Clive Roylance, Jan Turner, Tony & Katie Maynard Smith, John Raines, George Barnes, Peter & Gina Allam, Michael Homfray-Cooper.

Chair's Opening Comments

The Chair welcomed all attendees.

Apologies for Absence

Val Quieros, Grant Cameron, Howard Webber, Malcolm & Linda King, Susan Mellor, Bonita & Arthur Thompson, Sue Lines, Rose Scanlan, Elaine Fox.

Approval of Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting

Last year's minutes were accepted as a true record and duly signed by Chairman.

Matters arising not covered elsewhere on the Agenda

There were no matters arising.

Chair's Report – Ann Pegrum

I explained at last year's AGM that LALG had applied to the Charity Commission to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO).

We heard shortly after the meeting that our application had been unsuccessful; the Commission gave a detailed explanation of why it had failed and gave us the opportunity to reapply. After several helpful discussions with the Commission the LALG Committee decided to withdraw from the process. There were several reasons for this:

- The groups would not be able to manage their own financial affairs as they do at the moment.
- Too many of the groups would not be able to stay in LALG - we knew that the Investment Group would have to become an Associated Group but we had not appreciated that many of the social groups would have to leave the fold too.
- The creation of new groups would be severely constrained by having to adhere to LALG's charitable objects.

You would be forgiven for thinking we should have realized all this before we started the application process, but like many things the devil is in the detail. While the Charity Commission was happy to have broad-brush discussions in the early stages, they were unable to provide detailed, specific feedback until they had seen our formal application. We therefore did not understand the minutiae or appreciate the full implications until we received the response to our application.

However, the real clincher was that the advice had changed and it was no longer compulsory for us to register as a charity.

LALG's status is therefore unchanged.

This all made a lot of extra work for the committee but it was not in vain: LALG is now a more robust organisation.

So, what has been achieved this year? A huge amount and I'd like to thank the Committee, sub-committees and teams for their support and hard work.

- Our Treasurer, Val Quieros, moved our bank account to Lloyds and introduced online banking. This has made the task of authorizing expenditure much quicker and easier, and reduces the amount of cash in people's homes and the number of trips to the bank to pay in money.
- Online banking has made it much easier for people to pay for, and for the Membership Team to process, renewals. We have also had a preliminary look at a new system which will allow people to renew their membership online and remove the risk of relying on our current elderly bespoke system, and plan to do further investigations this year. In the meantime we stream-lined the renewals process by emailing everyone the information held about them in the membership database, so members only had to notify us of changes.
- We have adopted new technology to email the newsletter. This is more efficient than the old method, and allows us to share the task between several people. We have also used it to send occasional emails to everyone who has given us their email address; these have proved very effective at reminding people of booking deadlines, and to tell people about things that crop up between newsletters.
- Gwynneth Grimwood has again spent much of the year knee-deep in boxes, sorting, cataloguing and preserving our large paper archive. She is now up-to-date and our history is available to be mined!
- Local businesses continue to support us by offering members discounts. A few have withdrawn from the arrangements but new ones have come forward and we are now at an all-time high. Maureen Strutt is working with them to publicize what they are offering and to improve cross-promotion.
- The number of Associated Groups continues to increase, an indication of how positively LALG is viewed by others in the Letchworth area. Sheila Hogan works with them to establish the benefits they will offer LALG members before recommending to the committee whether or not the group should be accepted.

LALG's sub-committees and teams have also continued their good work:

- The Membership Team has worked hard as usual. I will leave John Gregory to give details in his report.
- The Newsletter editors and proof readers maintained their high standards and somehow always got the newsletter out on time. They met last week to discuss possible lay-out modifications, including suggestions from the recent Members' Survey: you will see the results over the next few months.
- The website team has continued its good work and kept the details up to date. They are meeting next week to start specifying the new website, which will hopefully be implemented as part of next year's anniversary celebrations.
- The technology to support the newsletter, website, LALG emails and membership database has been looked after by Tony Maynard Smith. He has also provided training and trouble-shooting to those grappling with it. A huge task for one person, which we are working to reduce.
- The Social committee (led by Maureen Strutt with Celia Lord) organized some very successful events, which were enjoyed by many members and raised a significant sum for LALG funds. They also arranged an eclectic series of talks for the Monday morning members' meetings. Evening meetings were introduced successfully and are now a regular part of the programme.
- The Publicity team led by David Tappin has again excelled and helped us to an all-time high of more than 1700 memberships. He coordinated the book, poetry and writers' groups to provide a wonderful set of events for the Letchworth Festival; he organized a marquee at the Food and Drink Festival complete with a successful Bake-off run by the Food group and a Tutored Whisky Tasting with the Malt Whisky Group; and publicized us through printed and social media. There have also been several recruitment events, including taking over a shop on Arena Parade last year and a coffee morning in Ashwell last month.
- We have recently created a new team to coordinate our 30th anniversary celebrations. They have some brilliant ideas so do keep an eye open for announcements in the newsletter.
- Last, but not least, are the Groups. In addition to the established Groups, we seem to have a never-ending succession of ideas for new ones. While some never progress past the ideas stage, many succeed. This is due to the work of

William Armitage, who starts new groups and supports them while they find their feet.

Unfortunately however a few groups have closed. Sometimes this was because numbers were too low to make them viable, but more often it was because nobody wanted to take on the role of organizer. This is a great shame, but also a constant reminder of what a wonderful and valuable asset our volunteers are: about 200 of them make sure LALG thrives overall. I know everyone is very grateful for their contributions and commitment; LALG couldn't survive without them so thank you all very much.

It is now time for us to look to the future. LALG is in good shape at the moment but like all organisations it has challenges ahead.

- The first challenge is the same as last year's: to increase the amount of each newsletter that people read. It is hugely frustrating when someone says they'd have gone to something if only they'd known it was on, particularly if the event ran at a loss or had to be cancelled due to lack of interest. Plus of course people aren't making full use of their membership!
- The other challenge I'd like to mention regards recruitment. We work constantly to increase membership but we would like to widen the age range. While an organisation such as ours is always going to be "top heavy", we would all benefit from having more younger members and will be trying to attract them. One possibility we shall be considering is to adopt a model similar to organisations such as the Ramblers Association and have a separate, younger section.

Letchworth Arts and Leisure Group is a wonderful and unique organisation. It will celebrate its 30th birthday next year in good shape and I thank you all.

Treasurer's Report and appointment of examiner – Val Quieros (read by Jane Bird)

The balance in Central Funds at 31 August 2016 was £15,077, a reduction of £332 from the opening balance of £15,409.

Overall income for the year was £22,423, derived predominantly from membership subscriptions of £18,316. Advertising in the newsletters raised a further £830, and Social Committee events raised £2,337.

Expenditure for the year totaled £22,755, of which £16,022 was the cost of printing and mailing the monthly newsletters.

Expenditure on Social Committee events totaled £2,853 and the cost of insurance for all the group activities was £1,290. At the end of August we had total funds of £31,174, £6,659 in our Nationwide account and £24,515 in our account at Lloyds Bank. This includes £3,450 held on behalf of eight groups, and prepaid membership subscriptions of £12,647.

We transferred our current account from HSBC to Lloyds in May 2016 in order to take advantage of free on-line banking. We are now able to accept payment for membership subscriptions by bank transfer, which has been a popular move with 257 members paying by this method up to the end of August.

We decided to increase membership subscriptions from £12 per annum to £13, due to the rising costs of printing and postage, with the electronic newsletter membership remaining at £10.

Membership Secretary's Report – John Gregory

There are three people in the Membership team – John Gregory, Mady Groot & Julie Boulter. They divide work between the team taking a four month stint each. Where possible the team deliver membership cards – Mady and Joy Stroud on foot & John by bike. In total 700 cards were delivered by hand this year saving £350 postage costs.

The current membership stands at 1700 households which adds up to an even larger number of people if you factor in the number of people in households.

At the end of October 2016 membership was up 30 households compared to the end of October 2015.

At the start of November the Membership team removed those who have not renewed since 31st August, resulting in the removal of 350 households this year. The team sent 270 email & 50 letters as reminders to these old members.

The membership team have recently emailed members who have provided email addresses to request that they check the details we hold for them on the LALG database. Some corrections have been made but the database is mostly correct. The LALG can now offer renewal by bank transfer; 304 households have taken up that option. This number is expected to increase in the future.

Looking at the post code distribution of the current membership, 58% have SG6 (Letchworth) post codes, 21% have SG4 & SG5 (Hitchin) post codes, 9% live in Baldock, and the remaining 12% are distributed widely over Stevenage and surrounding villages – and one member lives in the Lake District!

A question was raised by John Raines regarding the holding of members' personal details, especially bank details, securely on the LALG database. Tony Maynard Smith confirmed that no one's personal bank details are held on the database and suggested that, if members are concerned with using online banking, they should renew at David's Bookshop.

A member offered thanks to the Membership and Newsletter teams for all their work.

Adoption of new Constitution

The LALG was planning to become a CIO which would involve preparing a new constitution and seeking approval from the Charity Commission. The existing constitution had some shortfalls and was due for a review anyway. To assist the smooth transition to a CIO a new Constitution was written based upon a model constitution available from the Charity Commission. Only a few changes were required to personalise the template to make it suitable for the LALG. Any further subsidiary items needing documenting were put into a separate Rules document.

After recent consultation with the Charity Commission it became clear that the structure of the LALG was not compatible with becoming a CIO and the Commission would not approve registration under our current structure. Hence the transfer to a CIO is no longer to take place.

The work undertaken on reviewing the Constitution has not been in vain. The version of the Constitution prepared with a view to becoming a CIO has now been further updated and has been consolidated into one document, incorporating the Rules document. The final document is more robust and suitable, including safeguards to ensure that the LALG Committee and LALG members behave correctly.

In the Newsletter members were informed that a new Constitution was available to view on the LALG website and on the LALG notice board at David's Bookshop.

The Chair asked if those present required further time to digest the new Constitution - this was not needed by members present. The Chair then proposed that members present should vote to accept the new Constitution – the new Constitution was adopted by a show of hands vote, which was not unanimous.

In her last words as Chair, Ann thanked the LALG Committee for their efforts and thanked her partner, Andrew Dear, for his support during her term of office. Kate Thompson, on behalf of all members, thanked Ann for her hard work as Chair and a Committee and sub Committee member – Kate stressed how much work this had involved.

Election of the Committee

Kate Thompson undertook the voting in of the main Committee members for the next year.

For each named Committee post there was only one nomination and there were seven nominations for general Committee positions, the maximum number of general posts being ten.

Nominations were as follows:

Post	Name	Proposer	Secunder
Chair	George Barnes	Jane Bird	William Armitage
Vice Chair	Diane Jury	Jane Bird	Grant Cameron
Treasurer	Val Quieros	Jane Bird	Andrew Tether
Secretary	Jane Bird	Grant Cameron	Andrew Tether
Membership Secretary	John Gregory	Jane Bird	William Armitage
General	William Armitage	Jane Bird	Grant Cameron
General	Andrew Tether	Grant Cameron	Jane Bird
General	Jane Webb	Judy MacDonald	Peter Pennifer
General	Rose Scanlan	Val Quieros	S Rhodes
General	Elaine Fox	Jane Bird	William Armitage
General	Gwynneth Grimwood	Jane Bird	William Armitage
General	Maureen Strutt	Jane Bird	William Armitage

The nominations for named Committee members were read out. The Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer, Secretary and Membership Secretary were voted in individually.

The nominations for general Committee members were read out. The seven nominated general Committee members were voted in on bloc.

There was a vacancy for three more members to be co-opted on to the Committee at a later date.

George Barnes, the new Chair, thanked the members for appointing him and expressed how Ann will be a hard act to follow. He was looking forward to continuing the good work that the Committee had undertaken recently and looed forward to seeing the LALG prosper in the future.

Any Other Business

Di Jury, Vice Chair, discussed how next year was the 30th anniversary of the LALG. As part of the celebrations, the LALG would be exhibiting Christmas trees at the Hitchin & the Letchworth Christmas Tree Festivals in December – anyone who would like to help dress the trees would be welcome to join in.

George Barnes announced that a LALG calendar was to be printed soon to be sold in the Tourist Information Centre, Letchworth & David's Bookshop – it would be good to support it and help to cover the costs.

The meeting was declared closed at 8.30pm.

Signed: G R Barnes

Date: 7 November 2017

These minutes were approved at the 2017 Annual General Meeting on 7 November 2017 and signed by the Chairman