



MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2023

**Tuesday 17 October 2023 at 7.30pm
Kincaid Hall, Letchworth Educational Settlement,
Letchworth Garden City SG6 4UB**

Committee Members present:

Elaine Fox (Chair), Alan Higbey, Tessa Palfreyman (Secretary), Hetty Smith (Treasurer), Jackie Harber (Membership Secretary), Amandeep Dhillon (EDI Officer), William Armitage, Jan Gates

LALG Members present:

Nicole Ashbrook, Derek Blyth, Lisa Browne, Grant Cameron, Margaret Charlton, John Cox, Elizabeth Dun, Alan Ephgrave, Alan Gower, Judith Gower, Maureen Higbey, Tim Jurdon, Angela Lockyer, Celia Lord, Brian Noble, Ann Pegrum, Hugh Pollock, Mark Rudd, Praful Soneji, Carol Stokes, Harold Stokes, Karen Tzimas, Michael Tzimas, Ruth Vaun, Jane Webb, Chris Wheatley

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting noting how grateful we were to see so many members at this AGM.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Mark and Marian Adams, Kim Baker, Sharon Jones, Fiona Lennox, Phil Rowe, Jackie Sayers, Kate Thompson

3. Approval of Minutes of the Annual General Meeting on 25 October 2022

The minutes were approved unanimously and signed by the Chair.

4. Matters Arising not covered under other agenda items.

There were none.

5. Chair's Report

"Welcome everyone to the LALG AGM 2023. It is my last act as Chair, thank you for sharing it with me.

During the year we continued to celebrate our 35th Anniversary with a successful dance and an exhibition at the Broadway Gallery – it was a pity the ground was so icy but we bookended the celebration with two successful events to thank our supporters, showcase our talent and to display how other communities celebrate their Big Days. The whisky to celebrate Hogmanay went down a treat and the Indian savouries soon disappeared!

In accordance with our constitution the new committee will select officers at their next scheduled meeting on 22 November. Until then I have said I will help out in any way needed so I may still pop up from time to time, but as a volunteer.

I am really pleased to say that we have a lot of new people on the committee and I'd like to thank them for stepping forward. One thing I have noticed about LALG is that people do come forward when they are needed. On the whole it is because they feel they have received value from their membership and want to give something back. Most people find their way into the organisation through one of our groups. Many of you here are group contacts, the bedrock of LALG. Thank you for all you do. But in this complex world we could not cope without the backroom staff, developing and updating our website, producing our newsletter, managing memberships, organising social events for us (thank you Social team for your efforts tonight) and promoting us to the outside world.

It has been a pleasure to meet so many lively and intelligent people during my four years as Chair. I believe LALG did a good job in the difficult pandemic period and we have thrived since. When I became chair in November 2019 we had a cash position of £23,500 as at year-end (excluding the commitment to the website upgrade) and we had started the process of spreading membership renewals throughout the year. We knew that would affect our income, as did the 3-month Covid 'holiday' we granted to all members. So we have ended my time with cash in the bank of almost £17k at year end 2023. I do not know of any major planned expenditure that would mean that level of reserve was insufficient. Nor do I think that the organisation carries risks which would require significant additional funds. We have after all negotiated a pandemic, spread our membership renewals and introduced a new website whilst retaining a healthy balance, our membership numbers are increasing and the increase introduced for those who receive monthly printed newsletters still has to completely work through. Of course, that does not prevent us from seeking ways to reduce our overheads. So, a request that if you only pay for an online newsletter, you do not seek out a paper version as well.

When I started my tenure, I had two objectives: to gradually increase membership numbers and to improve the diversity of LALG members to better represent the population of this area. We had 1419 household members at 11/11/19. In August 2023 that had risen to

1556, despite the challenges of the pandemic. Unfortunately, data is not as robust for diversity, but we have made a start. It is my passion that LALG should appeal to everyone, but I believe there is still a way to go before it is truly representative of the community. I started work in a male-dominated environment and know what it is like to be 'the only one like me' in the room. So please welcome everyone to our meetings, especially if they don't look just like you. If you haven't already done so, please complete our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion questionnaire. There are copies available tonight.

I was due to report on our membership survey this evening, but we only had 37 responses which is not representative. On the whole those people who responded thought we were doing ok. We will have to find another way of getting your views if LALG is to continue to respond to the needs of its members.

During Covid we introduced a regular chair email. Needs must at the time, anything printed was out of date before it went out. Thank you for the lovely messages that many members have sent me both in a personal capacity and recognising the value of that communication. But it's not really the Chair's job to tell you 'What's On' so we have introduced a new facility tellus@lalg.org.uk where you can send your messages. We'd like to know what's going on but also to hear about what you have been up to. A picture we can use in the newsletter [with the permission of those featured] together with a write up would be great.

Of course, we have a new look newsletter and some new team members to produce it. Again thank you to those who came forward, and to Nick who designed the new format which has been uniformly well received.

Looking outwards we have sought to engage outside of LALG, with the Letchworth Culture Group and with local organisations that share our values. Under our new gazebo we have set up stalls in Stotfold, Fairfield, Royston and Weston as well as at the Letchworth and Hitchin festivals. Congratulations to the Letchworth Garden Shed on their opening. Don't forget to try them if you need something you will only use once.

We know many of you enjoy our trips but that remains difficult with some still wary of group transport and the continuing rail strikes. We have therefore linked up with other local groups to cross advertise in the expectation that will increase what is on offer to our members. Thank you to those who have made this possible.

My final task to thank the committee for their support. Running LALG is a team game, and I couldn't have done it without them. A particular thanks to Alan who is stepping down as Treasurer and a welcome to Hetty who is taking his place. Also thanks to Tony my husband and Betty my mum who are always there in the background in support. Tony says he looks forward to giving up his job as Chair's secretary! A final thank you to Ann Pegrum who is stepping down as head of the team of web editors, she has done a great job.

So, I wish LALG all the best as I hand over responsibility to my successor. Here's to another successful 35 years and more!"

There were no questions.

6. Treasurer's Report

"The year ended 31 July 2023 has again been negative from a cash flow point of view, with the amount held in LALG's bank account reducing from £21,767 to £19,209, down by some £2,500. This was in part because we maintain accounts for a number of groups whose expenditure this year has been high such that the overall balances have reduced from £3,800 to £2,300 accounting for £1,500 of the reduction.

We also continued to support the Letchworth Festival and spent some monies celebrating our 35th Anniversary, with various events around the town.

Membership income was up from last year at £21,280, although associated postage costs were also up. This prompted the change in the membership fee structure, which is likely to reduce the number of paper issues of the Newsletter in favour of online membership, hopefully giving us a better net position in the 2024 accounts.

During the year, we continued to earn on deposits held with Redwood Bank. This bank is FSCS protected so our funds are completely safe.

Overall income for the year totalled £22,447, with Membership monies still forming the bulk of our income.

Advertising income was very slightly up at £1,145 as opposed to £1,020 last year. Social Team events provided a surplus of just under £1,000 as people started to feel more comfortable coming back into life after Covid.

We continue to hold a reserve towards likely costs for future IT development including a necessary update in the software, although a lot of this has already been done at no cost thanks to the sterling efforts of our volunteer team of "Techies".

With my Treasurer-ship of The Settlement now requiring more of my time, I have decided that the time is right for me to pass over the LALG baton to someone else. I have therefore resigned from the Committee and my place as Treasurer has been taken by Hetty Smith. Please be gentle with her as she gets her head around the accounts.

As my last task, therefore, I commend to the Meeting this report, and the accounts for the year ended 31st July 2023."

There were no questions.

7. Formal Approval of Accounts for the year ending 31 July 2023

The accounts were approved unanimously. William Armitage made the point that much of LALG funds was held individually by the groups and therefore does not appear in the annual accounts.

8. Membership Secretary's Report

Jackie Harber gave a short presentation illustrated with slides.

The first slide showed how the membership numbers have changed since 2012. Membership continues to rise; currently there are 1589 households and 2515 members. There is a net increase of 3.6% since last year of 56 households and 135 members.

Second slide - increase in cost of Membership. Overall there has been a fall in the number requesting the Newsletter by mail; however a show of hands showed that the majority attending the AGM receive a hard copy. The fee charged per household for this option has risen from £14 to £20.

Jackie then went on to explain the production and postal costs. Each printed newsletter costs £1.60 including postage. Eleven issues a year come to £17.60 leaving £2.40 towards other LALG costs. So even at £20 the full cost of membership plus printed newsletter is not being covered and the committee will be considering this in the current financial year.

Third slide - Other changes

We have now completed the process of spreading membership renewals across the year. Now our busy months are December and July. This is a great help to our small membership team.

We have made it easier for members to pay online by improving access to the payment form. Unfortunately, we have had to cease taking phone payments as our system doesn't allow us to process them. We have made small changes to the optional information we collect from members: year of birth helps us to understand age diversity and how you heard of LALG is useful for marketing purposes.

Fourth slide - Jackie thanked others who have helped her through the year, particularly Frances Sly and Jackie Sayers. David's Bookshop continues to accept our mail and cheque payments, display our Newsletters and host the new noticeboard in the café. Thanks also to the Publicity team who take some payments at events and thanks to all our members for continuing to support us.

Finally Jackie thanked the members attending for listening and there followed several questions:

- Could a digital membership card replace the paper version and therefore the need for postage? This will be considered by the committee.
- Did the increase in cost to £20 for membership with printed newsletter result in some members not renewing? No, some converted to digital copy only (for £10).
- Could putting old copies of the newsletter in David's prevent digital-only members helping themselves to a printed copy for nothing? Jackie noted that we put the new one out a little later now to discourage this. It was felt that the importance of potential new members being able to see events in the current newsletter which they might then attend outweighed the potential advantage.
- Could a reference copy in David's be helpful, ie 'do not take away'? It was felt this would not be as effective as it would not be terribly easy to access.

- One member noted that they did not renew their membership during Covid, but forgot when things improved and then returned to attending events without renewing. Do groups have a way to check membership? Jackie explained all group contacts are encouraged to check that those attending their groups are LALG members but if they feel uncomfortable asking face-to-face can send Jackie a list of those in their group and she will check the database on their behalf.
- Aman Dillon noted that the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Survey is an important way of gathering relevant data on the membership and encouraged everyone to complete it if they had not already done so.

9. Election of Committee Members

Name	Proposer	Second
William Armitage*	Tessa Palfreyman	Alan Higbey
Jackie Harber*	Tessa Palfreyman	Hetty Smith
Kim Baker^	Elaine Fox	Jackie Harber
Jan Gates^	Jocelyn Rowe	Robin Boar
Judith Gower	Ann Peters	Anthony Mansey
Fiona Lennox^	Jackie Harber	Tessa Palfreyman
Jackie Sayers	Pauline Cocevar	Katie Maynard-Smith
Hetty Smith^	Alan Higbey	Elaine Fox

* Retiring by rotation and standing for re-election

^ Co-opted during the year and now standing for election

The nominations were read out and their election en bloc approved unanimously.

There are vacancies on the committee: we would welcome more members.

William Armitage gave a vote of special thanks on behalf of the Committee to Elaine as retiring Chair and Alan as retiring Treasurer and gifts were presented.

11. Any Other Business

i) Ann Pegrum offered a personal thank you to the committee, particularly Elaine Fox and Alan Higbey, for underwriting the events run by the Social Team. This enables them to run events such as the recent Poundbury trip which was much enjoyed by those attending and made £1.05 profit.

ii) Grant Cameron clarified that the tellus email address will go to Elaine Fox to collate in the period leading to 22 November.

12. Date of 2024 Annual General Meeting

The date was confirmed as Monday 21 October 2024, subject to committee approval.

The Chair thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and declared the formal business closed. The prize draw was held for those that attended. Members were invited to stay for refreshments and to chat.

These minutes were approved at the 2024 Annual General Meeting on 21 October 2024