



MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2022

**Tuesday 25 October 2022 at 7.30pm
Kincaid Hall, Letchworth Educational Settlement,
Letchworth Garden City SG6 4UB**

Committee Members present:

Elaine Fox (Chair), Alan Higbey (Treasurer), Amandeep Dhillon

LALG Members present:

Derek Blyth, J Christie, M Christie, John Gregory, Diane Jury, Linda King, Malcolm King, Celia Lord, Tony Maynard Smith, Tessa Palfreyman, Praful Soneji, Carol Stokes, Harold Stokes, Joy Stroud, Keith Stroud, Kate Thompson, Amy Wilson

Visitor present:

Stephen Charles

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting noting how grateful we were to achieve quorum as several committee members were unable to attend due to illness, travel difficulties and other commitments.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from George Barnes (Vice Chair), Marian Adams (Secretary), Jackie Harber (Membership Secretary), William Armitage, Emma van der Veen, Emma Rowe, Brian Combridge, John and Margaret Cox, Ann Pegrum, Valerie Schicker

3. Approval of Minutes of the Annual General Meeting on 19 October 2021

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

"LALG has had another successful year. Despite lingering effects of Covid the number of member households is growing, we have a core of 120 groups plus a continual flow of new ones, some of which are successful and others that don't take off. We continue to grow and to attract a wider diversity of members. One of our bigger challenges has been to reestablish our programme of trips. There is still some hesitancy amongst some members in gathering in large groups and using public transport and coaches, which combined with strike action has added complexity. The membership clearly enjoys going on trips so the committee has decided that Group Contacts should not be out of pocket and will underwrite losses.

2022 is a special one as we reach our 35th Anniversary which we have celebrated in several ways.

The summer saw the return of the Letchworth Festival. LALG participated by running some events and co-sponsoring others. The Ukulele group performed during the music weekend. LALG crossword showcased the Discount Suppliers in Letchworth, as the winning hamper was donated by local business so there was no cost to LALG. On 11th June we promoted LALG with events in the town centre. In addition to the LALG information stall several groups participated in activities. £160 was spent on advertising and flyers and £60 room hire for Bridge group who gained 3 new members. £60 in donations from the mini golf was split between Social Committee and Carers UK.

To promote LALG to a wider audience we spent £250 supporting the Colour Run on Norton Common, which paid for the band. The event raised £500 which was split jointly between Homestart Herts and Garden House Hospice. We also gave £100 support to the Inflatable Assault Course, the profit of £1200 donated to WHISPA (health support service for young people).

We ran the Sing for Ukraine event on 21st June which raised £612. We also ran a writing competition which resulted in 30 entries, currently being appraised! £250 adult prize and £100 child prize will be awarded shortly.

There is no way to know the exact result of this activity, except the amounts donated to charity. Our aim was to raise the profile of LALG. If we want to be here in another 35 years, we need to appeal to younger people and to the many different communities represented in the area. Although we do not know if it was directly related, we recruited 36 new member households in June, 24 in July, and 19 in August.

In July we celebrated the contribution of our volunteers with an evening of fun and the cutting of a wonderful cake. LALG would not exist without its volunteers. We rely entirely on their hard work and goodwill. We always need more! We are short on committee

members and there are several other areas where we have doubled up with people taking on more and more jobs. In the longer term this is simply unsustainable. Please consider if you can help. It does not have to be a big high-profile commitment. If you can find a couple of hours a week we can find you something fulfilling to do! We are grateful to Tessa who has stepped forward as our new secretary and Amy who is joining the committee. A personal 'thank you' to the current committee for their hard work, help and support.

It is usually invidious to single out some people for special mention. But I would like to give a big thank you to George and Marian who are stepping down from their positions of vice chair and secretary after many years of service. We are very grateful for all they have done though unfortunately, they cannot be with us tonight. We also say goodbye to Emma Van de Veen whose work commitments mean she can no longer give time to the committee but we are grateful she is continuing to promote LALG on Social Media which has been a real step forward in raising our profile to a different audience. George's final act as vice chair was to run the recent highly successfully social event at the Grange Community Centre. Thank you, George.

I would also like to thank the IT technical team which has been working behind the scenes, with the help of the web editors, to upgrade our website. It is almost ready to launch and there will be a few days when the website will be unavailable. We are putting in place contingency plans so that key functions can continue. We will let you know precisely what is planned in a members' email and on the website.

Our final event in our 35th Anniversary year will be an exhibition at the Broadway Gallery in December. Look out for more details of what we have planned in the next newsletter. And finally, a big 'thank you' to all our members who have stuck with us through the difficult Covid years. We welcome everyone who has joined LALG and look forward to sharing many more memorable meetings, events, trips and activities together."

There were no questions.

6. Treasurer's Report

"The year ending 31 July 2022 has again been negative from a cash flow point of view, with the amount held in LALG's bank account reducing from £23,100 to £21,900. Around £1,000 of this was due to a decision by the Committee to support the Letchworth Anniversary Events including the sponsoring of a writing competition.

Membership income was up from last year at £19,162, some of this being due to an evening out of income in line with changes to the renewal dates as outlined in last year's report.

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 totaled £22,447. Membership monies of £19,162 still formed the bulk of our income.

With the UK vaccination programme helping us to now treat Covid as endemic rather than a pandemic, we were able to move back to something like normality, resuming regular production of our newsletter. As a result, advertising income rose to a healthy £1,020 as opposed to £40 last year.

Social Team events raised much more income as we were able latterly to reinstate the Monday meetings. Cancelled events did however mean that there was a loss of £309. Our members are still not coming out in confidence and we will need to reflect on this as we move into the current year.

We continue to hold a reserve towards likely costs for future IT development including a necessary update in the software.

Overall, this has been another mixed year for LALG, but one where we have started to move forward.

I commend this report, and the accounts for the year ended 31 July 2022, to the Meeting.”

In response to a question from Kate Thompson, it was confirmed that, following the closure of Prontaprint, printing and dispatch of the newsletter is now handled by a company in Washington, County Durham located following research by Jackie Harber.

7. Formal Approval of Accounts for the year ending 31 July 2022

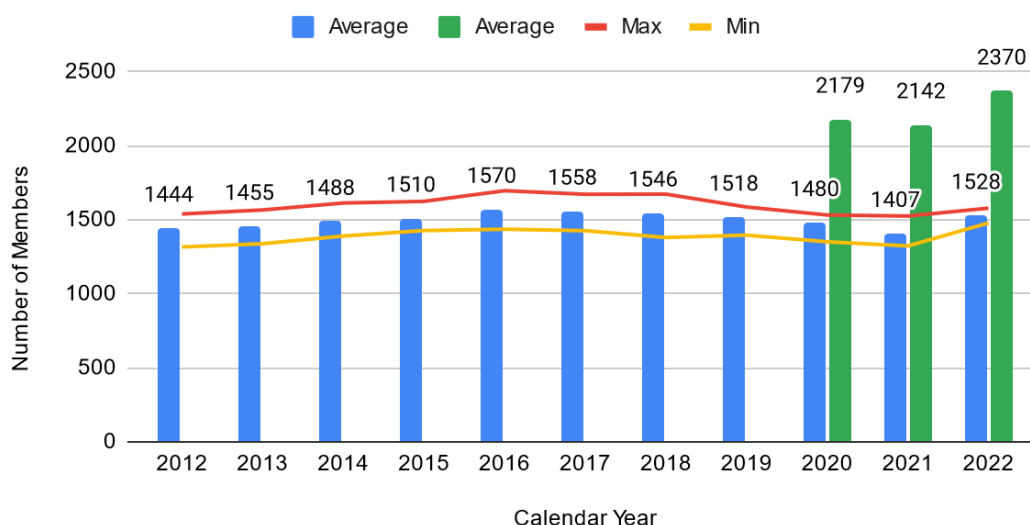
The accounts were approved unanimously. Thanks were extended to Val Quieros for examining them.

8. Membership Secretary's Report

In the Membership Secretary's absence, the Chair reported on her behalf as follows:

Membership Numbers - Annual Averages

Blue - Households; Green - Individuals



“The membership team have been busy this year with the changes to the renewal process. Over 1100 membership cards were processed in December 2021. Thank you to all of you who paid online via the website. It really helped.

To help mitigate this for future years we have changed the time you renew in 2022/3 for many of you so that the renewals are spread across the year. We calculated the new renewal date based on your loyalty, your new renewal date can be found on your membership card.

Our membership continues to recover following Covid, we currently have 1530 Household memberships and about 2370 household members. This compares well with a peak of 1570 households in 2016.

Our current membership fees are £10 per household, or £14 if you would like the newsletter delivered to your home. The committee is considering increasing the membership fee for households receiving the Newsletter by post, as the extra £4 charged does not cover the costs. I look forward to hearing your views on the proposed changes.

Please remember you can use your membership card at over 50 shops and retailers in the local area. Details can be found in the Newsletter and on our website.”

9. Level of future membership fees

The Chair began the discussion by noting that her recent piece on membership fees in the newsletter received a limited response. One person observed the increasing pressure on the cost of living while a handful of others felt that a £3 increase was not unreasonable. While LALG has around £21,000 in the bank so may be able to absorb increasing costs, the Chair posed the question, is it fair for the fees from members receiving the newsletter in digital form to subsidise the costs and overheads of the members who receive the newsletter in paper form?

The following points emerged in the ensuing discussion:

- As the newsletter contains a fair degree of repetitive material each month would it be more cost-effective to produce a six-monthly or annual ‘catalogue’ with a simpler and shorter update? It was felt that costs would only be minimally affected but this option could be explored.
- Do the collection boxes placed in the cinema, David’s Bookshop and other locations for people to donate after taking a copy of the newsletter generate funds? The collection boxes are administered by William Armitage but while the newsletters are often all taken the Treasurer has no record of funds received.
- Are we printing too many copies? Three hundred or so spare copies are printed each month (as noted above) and often all are taken.
- It was pointed out that we all have two options – digital for £10 and paper for £14. If the latter were to rise to £17 or £20 members could still opt to receive the newsletter digitally.
- Several members present agreed they would be happy to pay an increased fee of either £17 or £20 and view membership as extremely good value.

- The Chair reported that the Membership Secretary has said that a few members change from paper to digital at renewal and some new members opt for digital when they join. Currently approximately 1/3 of the membership subscribes to the digital format and 2/3 the paper newsletter.
- The Chair noted that producing a newsletter of this quality requires a lot of work in terms of eliciting material, meeting deadlines, editing, layout, proof-reading and printing. Is there any way to make this easier for the team? One suggestion was to explore the use of pre-formatted templates in the house style to reduce the editing burden.
- The point was made that a professionally produced newsletter is a powerful advertisement for the organisation and any reduction in quality could be harmful. This was agreed by others who expressed their appreciation for it.
- In lockdown the number of newsletters was reduced from 12 to 11. It was confirmed that this has continued with the December and January issues being combined. Could the July and August issues also be combined to reduce costs?
- It was noted that plenty of notice is required by group contacts when issues are combined to give them sufficient time to agree future meeting and activity dates with group members for submission to the editor by the copy deadline.
- The point was made that fewer issues will reduce advertising income.
- A suggestion was made to increase the digital fee by £1 to reduce the potential discrepancy between that rate and the rate for paper newsletter members.

The discussion concluded with a request for the audience to indicate how they felt about an increase bearing in mind the inequality of the digital membership fee minority subsidising the paper membership fee majority. Membership fees have not increased since the last change implemented in September 2018. The sense of the meeting was that an increase is reasonable and would be acceptable to those present.

10. Election of Committee Members

Name	Proposer	Seconder
Alan Higbey*		
Tessa Palfreyman	Lynne McGeachie	Ann Pegrum
Amy Wilson	Elaine Fox	Derek Blyth

* Retiring by rotation and standing for re-election

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

There are vacancies on the committee and the Chair noted the committee would welcome more members so that roles could be shared more evenly.

The Chair asked that the meeting formally record special thanks to both George Barnes and Marian Adams for their many years of service and considerable contributions to LALG.

11. Any Other Business

None previously advised.

A query was made as to the identity of the accounts auditor. The Treasurer explained that LALG accounts do not meet the qualification standard that requires a full audit but that the accounts are examined annually. Val Quieros has kindly fulfilled this function.

12. Date of 2023 Annual General Meeting

The date was confirmed as Tuesday 17 October 2023, which will not fall in half-term.

The Chair thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and declared the formal business closed. Members were invited to stay for refreshments and to listen to a presentation on the new LALG website by Tony Maynard-Smith.

**These minutes were approved at the 2023 Annual General Meeting, and signed
by the Chair, on 17 October 2023**