

# LETCWORTH ARTS AND LEISURE GROUP

## MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2018

Tuesday 20 November 2018 at 7.30pm

In Kincaid Hall, The Settlement, Letchworth Garden City SG6 4UB

### Committee members present:

George Barnes (Chair), Val Quieros (Treasurer), Marian Adams (Secretary), Julie Bolter (Membership Secretary), Jackie Sayers (Publicity Officer), William Armitage, Astrid Hansen, Diane Jury, Maureen Strutt, Jane Webb

### LALG Members present:

Sheila George, Michael Gifkins, Jackie Gough, John Gregory, Jackie Harber, Sheila Hogan, Nigel Jury, Celia Lord, Alastair Lochhead, Jon Marsh, Jon and Diana Marshall, Kenneth and Valerie Nelms, Ann Pegrum, Alistair Pollard, Robert Slater, Kate Thompson, Veronica and John Tomkins, Rob Townsend, Tony Webb

#### **1. Welcome**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Kate Thompson informed the meeting of the sad news of the death of Sybil Sinclair after a short illness. Sybil was chair of the Committee from 2003/4 to 2005/6. Her funeral would take place on 10 December 2018 in Reading.

#### **2. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Nigel Carrick, John and Margaret Cox, Andrew Dear, Elaine Fox, Malcolm and Linda King and Jan Turner.

#### **3. Approval of minutes of the Annual General Meeting on 7 November 2017**

The minutes were approved and signed by the Chair.

#### **4. Matters arising not covered under other agenda items**

There were none.

#### **5. Chair's Report**

The Chair reported as follows:

"After the excitement of our thirtieth anniversary we have had the opportunity to focus on rather less headline grabbing but still very important matters.

## **Review of the year**

We began the year with a workshop in which a number of members of LALG helped the Committee in considering the direction that LALG should take. I would like to thank everybody who gave up their Saturday morning to participate in this event.

In the workshop we considered what sort of organisation LALG should be and what were the priorities for its future. The view that we came to was that combating social isolation was a key role for LALG, and that we should aim to continue the slow steady growth in membership. To this end we should focus for this year on promoting LALG in parts of Letchworth where membership was under represented so it was decided to hold a drop in social session in each of the Grange and Jackmans areas. These proved to be lively and rewarding occasions.

As part of our governance, the Committee has drawn up a risk register which going forward it will keep under regular review. We also took on board the new requirements relating to data protection and to help us comply with them have appointed a Data Protection Officer on the Committee, Elaine Fox. Elaine has produced guidance for us and has published advice in the newsletter.

Our IT arrangements continue to be reviewed, one of the prime objectives being the development of a new membership system integrated with a revamped website. To help us to achieve this we have very recently engaged a consultant to support our own IT team, but by far the bulk of the work of this complex task continues to be undertaken by our own team. I would like to thank them for their tremendous efforts and reluctant as I am to single out anyone above the others I must mention Tony Maynard -Smith in this respect.

The Committee is concerned that all of these activities should not lead to us ignoring the vital role of our activity groups and the volunteers who set them up and lead them. Updating the guidance provided to group contacts is nearing completion. In October we invited all group contacts to a workshop to discuss any concerns or ideas they might have so we can ensure we provide the most effective support we can to them. Following this we decided to set up a team to be available for group contacts who need assistance in running their groups. Additionally a group of Committee members chaired by William Armitage has been brought together to monitor the progress of groups. Until now the role of assisting current and aspiring group contacts has been carried out, heroically and effectively, by William with only limited support.

Finally, a review of the newsletter has been undertaken which will lead to changes in its appearance which we hope will make it more appealing and useful.

## **Committee**

The Committee and its various sub groups, as always, have been carrying out a tremendous amount of work, perhaps more than ever, and because of the nature of this work it is not always apparent to our members. I would like to give a special mention to Graham Wood and John Needham for their invaluable assistance to Tony Maynard - Smith in the overhaul of our IT systems.

On a personal note I would like to thank the Committee members for their hard work and the support which I have received from them. In this respect I have been rather more fortunate than our own prime minister - no resignations and as we speak I have not been subject to a vote of no confidence. Indeed, Astrid Hansen was so impressed with the Committee that she agreed to be co-opted onto it and is standing for election tonight, as are all existing Committee members who are retiring and are due for re-election.

This includes Val Quieros, who after three years in her second stint as a very effective Treasurer has decided to relinquish the post. I would like to thank Val for her contribution in that role and am pleased that she wants to continue to serve on the Committee. We are currently advertising for a replacement Treasurer.

Generally speaking the Committee and its sub groups are in a better shape than at this time last year. The only real concern is with the newsletter editorial team which is down to three editors, an inadequate number for this very important task. We are aiming to address this shortfall by various means including advertising in the newsletter.

However, I continue to be impressed by the enthusiasm of our members and their preparedness to volunteer. I haven't time to mention all of the individuals and the roles they fulfil, from helping out at the Monday morning sessions, turning out at the drop - in sessions or staffing the LALG stalls at various events but I would like to thank them all for their work.

Our financial position is sound and our membership numbers are holding up although we have not achieved the objective of slow growth we identified at the beginning of the year. All in all I think that we have every reason to be proud of what we have achieved over the last twelve months, but there is still much to be done.

So while I am full of admiration for the energy and commitment of our members, looking to the future I believe that we really need to find ways of attracting younger members. I think this should be a priority in the next year or so. It will not be easy, and we would welcome ideas and initiatives to achieve this objective."

## **6. Treasurer's Report and appointment of independent examiner**

The Treasurer presented the accounts for the 11 months 1 September 2017 to 31 July 2018. She reported as follows:

"The balance in Central Funds at 31 July 2018 stands at £16,647, an increase of £2,664 from the opening balance of £13,983. The reporting period is 11 months, as the accounting year end was changed from 31 August to 31 July.

Overall income was £25,323, derived predominantly from membership subscriptions of £19,277. Advertising in the newsletters raised a further £1,538 and Social Committee events (including the 30<sup>th</sup> party) gave us income of £4,445, with a surplus of £442 after expenses of £4,003.

Expenditure for the 11 months totalled £22,659, of which £15,933 was the cost of printing and mailing the monthly newsletters. Committee expenses were £385 as we are now renting space for the monthly Committee meetings, and the cost of insurance for all the group activities was £1,481.

At the end of July we had total funds of £28,647, £6,684 in our Nationwide account and £21,962 in our account at Lloyds Bank. This includes £9,500 held on behalf of seven groups, and prepaid membership subscriptions of £2,500. One group had funds of £6,780, which was unusual and due to a delay in invoicing for the costs of the Portsmouth trip in August.

We decided to increase membership subscriptions from £13 per annum to £14, due to the rising costs of printing and postage, with the electronic newsletter membership remaining at £10."

Responding to the report, William Armitage pointed out that although the figures in the accounts were relatively modest, they would be significantly more substantial if all of the income and expenditure from group activities was taken into account.

A member proposed a vote of thanks to the Treasurer for her efficiency during her term of office.

## **7. Formal approval of accounts for period ended 31 July 2018**

The motion to formally agree the accounts for the 11 months from 1 September 2017 to 31 July 2018 was proposed by Kate Thompson and seconded by Michael Gifkins . It was unanimously agreed.

The Treasurer noted that Jan Turner had confirmed that she would be happy to examine the accounts at the end of the current financial year.

## **8. Membership Secretary's Report**

The Membership Secretary reported as follows:

“On the date of writing this report (12 November), the number of households holding LALG Membership is at 1,394 (as of tonight 1,418). It is worth noting that of these 1,394 households, 341 (24.5%) chose to have their newsletter delivered by online link only. Due to the way our membership works it is, I think, important to remember that this number reflects the number of households and **not** the number of members. Our current membership year runs from 1 September to 31 August. Therefore, we have just gone past that time of year when a number of members decide not to renew. With Tony Maynard-Smith's help, in the middle of October an email was sent to over 400 members with an email address who had decided not to renew, and at the same time a letter was sent to the 70 members without email addresses who had decided not to renew. This brought about a late flurry of renewals – over 100 in a week.

The total number of households with membership at the end of the last membership year was 1,680. Each year the cycle follows a similar pattern - in 2017 the number of households fell from 1,683 at its peak to 1,453 in November 2017. Therefore, our current total number of households with membership is about 60 below the same time last year (as of tonight about 40 below).

Payment by bank transfer was introduced last year. This has proved even more popular this year with 468 households renewing by this method. At times, trying to match payments to members when no reference other than a surname is given has proved an interesting exercise. When the surname is fairly unique it is relatively easy but a surname such as 'Smith' and no other reference does present us with some difficulty. So, please, if you do renew in future by bank transfer (and we hope more people will), then please remember to include your membership number (found on your membership card) as well as your surname as a reference.

Once again, we are grateful to David's Bookshop for acting as a collection point for membership renewal forms. This year we took the decision to omit the statement 'you may pay be cash' from the membership form. Whilst a number of payments are still made in cash, the majority have been by cheque. This is not only a more secure method of payment but also reduces the amount of work for the staff at David's and makes life easier for the member of the membership team taking payments to the bank.

I took over as Membership Secretary this time last year when John Gregory retired after 11 years in the position. Mady Groot, the other member of the team retired at the same

time due to her relocation. I was therefore delighted when Kathryn Maher joined the team. In the last few weeks, we have been joined by Paul Ansbro. Between us Kathryn and I have processed over 1,300 renewals over the past few months. Whilst many new membership cards were posted a significant number were delivered by hand – by Kathryn, myself and my husband. I’ve discovered lots of roads in Letchworth that I’d never been down before and have found two items to take into Room 101 to be cast into oblivion – houses with no visible numbers and letterboxes with very efficient draught excluders!

As the Treasurer mentioned earlier this year the Committee took the decision to raise the membership fee from £13 to £14 for households that wanted a printed version of the newsletter – this was done to reflect the rise in the cost of postage. The fee for those households that receive the newsletter by online link remained static at £10.

And now to the future – you will see an item on the agenda that refers to changes to the constitution. One of these is to allow us to change our membership year from that which we currently have, namely 1 September to 31 August to a rolling membership year. This means that all members, no matter when they join, will get a complete year’s membership for their membership fee. We hope that this change will come into effect sooner rather than later but it is tied up with the introduction of new software for the membership database which, in turn, we hope will bring our membership system into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”

In response to a question about how successful the drop in social sessions held during the year had been, it was noted that it was difficult to know how many new memberships or renewals had resulted from them, although some new members had actually been signed up at the events. In addition the events had been worthwhile in generating interest in and publicity for, LALG.

The increase in the use of bank transfers to pay subscriptions was also welcomed. It was also noted that a new membership system should allow online sign ups, which some people might find easier.

## 9. Proposed changes to the Constitution

The Chairman presented the proposed changes to the Constitution as set out in his note that had been published on the LALG website and the LALG noticeboard at David’s Bookshop. The proposed changes were as follows:

Existing clause	Proposed clause
<b>Clause 3(g)</b> “Each Interest Group shall provide a brief financial report to the LALG Treasurer every August.”	<b>Delete.</b>
<b>Clause 9(6)(a)</b> “All households shall pay an annual membership fee in respect of the current membership year which shall run from 1 September to 31 August.”	<b>Amend to</b> “All households shall pay an annual membership fee.”
<b>Clause 12(2)(b)</b> “The Committee must include: Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Membership Secretary.”	<b>Amend to</b> “The Committee must include the following Officers: Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Membership Secretary, Publicity Officer, Data Protection Officer. The Officers will be elected by the Committee in accordance with clause 19(2).” (See also new clause 19(2).)
<b>Clause 14</b> “The Committee Members will make available to each new	<b>Amend (b) to</b> ...“b) a copy of LALG’s Code of Conduct, Data Confidentiality

<b>Existing clause</b>	<b>Proposed clause</b>
<p>Committee Member, on or before his or her first appointment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) a copy of this constitution and any amendments made to it; and</li> <li>b) a copy of LALG's Data Confidentiality Statement, which must be signed and returned to the Secretary upon appointment." </li></ul>	<p>Statement and any other documentation agreed by the Committee which must be signed and returned to the Secretary upon appointment."</p>
<p><b>Clause 18(1)</b> "The Committee Members may delegate any of their powers or functions to a sub-committee or sub-committees..."</p>	<p><b>Amend to</b> "The Committee Members may delegate any of their powers or functions to a sub-committee/group or sub-committees/groups..."</p>
<p><b>Clause 19:</b> new sub clause</p>	<p><b>New sub clause (2):</b> <b>"Election of Officers and terms of office</b></p> <p>At the first meeting of the Committee after an AGM the Committee will elect a Chair and Vice Chair from its members. The Chair and Vice Chair will serve for one year only, but they may be re-elected.</p> <p>At the first meeting of the Committee after an AGM the Committee will also elect any other Officers, as required in clause 12(2)(b), where there are vacancies. These other Officers will serve for a period of three years or until they resign their office or are no longer a Committee member. They may also be re-elected."</p>
<p><b>Clause 19(2)</b> "Chairing of meetings</p> <p>The Committee Members may appoint one of their number to chair their meetings and may at any time revoke such appointment, subject to any Rules laid down under Clause 25. If no-one has been so appointed, or if the person appointed is unwilling to preside or is not present within 10 minutes after the time of the meeting, the Committee Members present may appoint one of their number to chair that meeting."</p>	<p><b>Renumber as 19(3) (with renumbering of subsequent clauses) and amend to</b> "The Chair will be appointed by the Committee Members in accordance with clause 19(2). The Committee may at any time revoke such appointment, subject to any Rules laid down under Clause 25. If the Chair is not able to attend a meeting, or is not present within 10 minutes after the time of the meeting the Vice Chair will chair the meeting. In the absence of the Vice Chair or stand-in previously nominated by the Chair, the Committee Members present may appoint one of their number to chair that meeting."</p>
<p><b>Clause 23</b> Accounting records, accounts, annual reports and returns, register maintenance</p>	<p><b>Addition at start</b> "The financial year end will run from 1 August to 31 July."</p>

In addition the Chair sought approval to use the term "Chair" rather than "Chairman" in line with current practice.

The Chair noted that the proposed change to allow the Committee to appoint its Officers was common procedure in other organisations. In response to a question about the Chair being elected on an annual basis, he felt that anyone elected to this position should already have the skills to carry out their duties effectively, whereas there was a greater learning curve for officers such as the Treasurer or Secretary, who would continue to have a three year term of office. The Chair would also benefit from the support from the other officers.

A member noted that LALG as an organisation was a paradox in the way it was set up. Most members were not aware of the Committee's work, only the activity group(s) they were involved with. He did not feel that this paradox was detrimental, as the Committee knew what it had to do and the membership as a whole should allow the Committee to carry out its work in the way it felt best.

There was some discussion about the proposal to use the term "Chair" instead of Chairman in the future. While some Members at the meeting were not happy with this the Committee supported the proposal.

In response to a question about the move to a rolling membership year, it was confirmed that this would only happen once LALG had a new membership system, which would automatically send reminders about renewals. If a membership lapsed, access to the membership system would also be terminated.

The Chair reminded members that group contacts should check that those taking part in a group should be LALG members.

The motion to formally approve the proposed changes to the Constitution, including the use of the term "Chair", was proposed by Kate Thompson and seconded by Michael Gifkins. It was unanimously agreed.

## **10. Level of future membership fees**

The Chair asked for Members' views on whether the current level of membership fees was value for money, and whether an increase would be supported in future if expenditure increased significantly.

It was felt that currently there was no shortage of funds so an increase was not necessary. However it was noted that there was a small shortfall between the cost of £14.07 for the hard copy of the newsletter and the membership fee of £14. This meant that costs such as insurance and room hire charges were being met from the online only membership fees.

There was discussion on whether there was an alternative method of delivery for the hard copy of the newsletter and on how necessary the hard copy actually was. It was agreed that the logistics in organising an alternative to the current delivery arrangements by mail would be too onerous. It was also felt that even though the online take up of the newsletter was increasing, many members still found the hard copy more useful and there were some members who might be excluded if it was only available online. Additionally, because of its quality, it was a very good advertisement for LALG.

In response to comments about the newsletter, it was noted that a review of the newsletter had been carried out and some changes were being introduced. However it needed to be borne in mind that the newsletter editors tried to fit entries neatly on the page rather than straddling columns or presenting them alphabetically. Additionally the format encouraged members to read the whole newsletter.

Looking forward, work was already underway to make the newsletter easier to use on mobile devices, and a new membership database would mean that members could receive personally tailored information.

In conclusion it was suggested to revisit the level of membership fees at the 2019 AGM.

#### **11. Election of Committee members (including members retiring by rotation and offering themselves for re-election and members appointed by the Committee during the year and offering themselves for election)**

Nominations were as follows:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Proposer</b>	<b>Secunder</b>
George Barnes*	Marian Adams	Astrid Hansen
Elaine Fox*	Marian Adams	Jackie Sayers
Astrid Hansen**	George Barnes	William Armitage
Val Quieros*	Marian Adams	George Barnes
Anne Sparrowhawk	Jackie Sayers	Marian Adams
Jane Webb*	Sheila Hogan	Jackie Sayers

\* Retiring by rotation and standing for re-election

\*\* Appointed by Committee during year

The nominations were read out and the motion to elect them on bloc, proposed by Kate Thompson and seconded by Ann Pegrum, was unanimously agreed.

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

#### **12. Any Other Business**

- A member had previously raised the fact that Prontaprint had not been given a Discount Suppliers card to display in their window. Maureen Strutt confirmed that they had been given one but had not displayed it.
- William Armitage asked members to let him have any ideas for new groups.

#### **13. Date of 2019 Annual General Meeting**

Confirmed as Tuesday 26 November 2019. The Committee would consider holding the 2020 AGM on a different day but it was noted that whatever day of the week was chosen, there would probably still be clashes with other LALG events. The use of an overhead projector and PA system would also be considered.

The meeting closed at 8.33pm.

**These minutes were approved at the 2019 Annual General Meeting on 26 November 2019 and signed by the Chairman**