



THE FEDERATION OF
EDINBURGH AND DISTRICT
ALLOTMENTS AND
GARDENS ASSOCIATIONS

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting

7.15pm on 25th October 2016 at the Southside Community Centre

President: **Peter Wright** (Lady Road).

In attendance: **Willie Aitken** (Carrick Knowe) : **Alice Bain** (Warriston) : **John Barclay** (Pilrig Park) : **Jake Booth** (Carrick Knowe) : **I Browning** (Stenhouse) : **Gilbert Clark** (Midmar) : **Carolynne Doig** (Chesser Crescent) : **Maureen Edwards** (Lady Road) : **John Grace** (Midmar) : **Jon Gray** (Warriston) : **Alison Hewitt** (Warriston) : **Chris Hughes** (Warriston) : **Diane Hughes** (Warriston) : **Barbara Hunt** (Lady Road) : **Paul Kerr** (Redhall) : **Neiria McClure** (Claremont Park) : **Pam MacDiarmid** (Portobello East Junction) : **Alexis McKay** (Ferry Road) : **Jenny MacKenzie** (Dumbryden) : **Stuart McKenzie** (Inverleith) : **John McKinlay** (Craigentenny) : **Kathy Parker** (Inverleith) : **Helen Petrie** (Inverleith) : **Dave Roberts** (Restalrig and Telferton) : **Jane Robinson** (West Mains) : **Lai Fun Russell** (Stenhouse) : **Mary Simpson** (Saughton Mains) : **Donald Stevenson** (Saughton Mains) : **Ernie Watt** (Cambridge Avenue) : **Rosina Weightman** (Saughton Mains).

1. Guest Speaker: Peter Wright (**PW**) opened the meeting by welcoming our Guest Speaker, Dr. Brian Boag, formerly of the James Hutton Institute. Dr. Boag delivered a brief, informative and entertaining presentation on New Zealand Flatworm, an alien species found in all Edinburgh allotments that poses a threat to earthworms and by extension the health and structure of our soil. Since retirement he has maintained a keen interest in the latest research. His presentation was followed by a lively question and answer session. A show of hands revealed that 80% of those in attendance had direct experience of this flatworm. Dr. Boag was warmly thanked for his contribution to the meeting.

2. Apologies: **Liz Grace** (Midmar) : **Stuart Swarbrick** (Ferry Road) : **Alan Wilson** (Stenhouse).

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting: There being no amendments the Minutes were proposed by Jon Gray (**JGray**) and seconded by Chris Hughes.

4. Matters Arising: There were no matters arising.

5. President's Review of the Year 2015-16:
PW gave the following report on activities:

Council rent rise: The City of Edinburgh Council will impose a rent rise in 2017, in contravention of the agreement reached in 2009 which, following a series of rises, set a freeze from 2015 to 2020. Breaking this agreement has soured our relationship with the Council, which has been seen to lose a lot of credibility with allotment service users. It seems likely that the Council will seek to further raise rent levels in future years. Next year's invoice will include an option for allotment holders to opt in or out from paying their subscriptions to site associations and FEDAGA. The Council will provide details of who has paid to FEDAGA. It was emphasised how much members can save by participating in FEDAGA trading schemes and all will be encouraged to decide to continue to pay their subscriptions.

Allotment Strategy: The third document covering the years 2015 to 2020 is now a year late. This is largely due to lack of resources and uncertainty over staffing within the Parks and Greenspace Department, which manages allotments. The anticipated revision of Regulations and Missives of Let is still held up while the Parliament processes the Community Empowerment Act, which is still going through the consultation phase. Discussions on these important topics have been hampered by the slow legislative process and the ongoing reorganisation within the Council. This has impacted on the availability of senior managers to talk with FEDAGA and reduced the number of Strategy meetings.

Allotment Show: It was agreed last year to revive the Show and Stuart McKenzie (**SMcK**) will give a report on this later.

Secretary: Ernie Watt (**EW**) has continued to provide support to FEDAGA, maintaining the website, editing the Newsletter, communicating with representatives and members and providing Minutes to the Management Committee.

Treasurer: Dave Roberts (**DR**) has continued to administer and report on FEDAGA's finances. He will submit his annual financial report later.

Allotment Officer: Regrettably, the Allotment Officer has not attended regular FEDAGA meetings this year. On occasion he will provide a report to our Liaison Officer, Neiria MacClure (**NMcC**), who works with him to process repair and maintenance issues in accordance with an agreed assessment of what takes priority.

Planning: The lack of a volunteer to monitor planning proposals was highlighted when rumours started circulating about the revival of residential development plans seriously affecting Leith Links. By not being able to actively monitor such proposals FEDAGA is on the back foot.

New Allotment Sites: The main addition this year was the extension to Stenhouse. An extension to Pilrig Park is anticipated next year. Other small "raised bed" are being created on an ad hoc basis when funds arise in neighbourhood locations. Future sites are likely to be leased by the Council for a peppercorn rent but created and managed locally by the ploholders themselves.

Site Associations: This year more sites were represented at Management Committee meetings, which was very encouraging. All representatives can discuss their particular site problems with others. Any site can send observers to meetings and participate in discussions. A few sites, however, do not

communicate with FEDAGA and never send representatives along. The Treasurer has been working on how to distribute subscriptions owed to these sites and how to make payments to sites who do not have bank accounts.

Newsletter: This is sent out via e-mail on a regular basis to all on our mailing list. Those who have not yet signed up are encouraged to do so to keep in touch with events.

Trading: Thanks are due to **Brian Bleakley** for continuing to administer the seed potato and onion set bulk order trading scheme. This year, to prevent a repetition of the increasing incidence of failed potato orders, the supplier will be Kings Seeds, who also provide the excellent on-line order service for members.

Participation in these schemes is encouraged as it provides great savings directly to members as well as a small income stream to site associations and FEDAGA.

Thanks are also due to **SMcK** for liaising with Kings.

PW signed off by thanking on behalf of all ploholders the dedicated and hard-working volunteer team of committee members and site representatives who continue to make it all happen. This was PW's twelfth and final President's Report as he is not standing for re-election. He said that he had experienced great fun and pleasure in leading such a dedicated team.

The President's Review was proposed by **SMcK** and seconded by **DR**.

In response to points from the floor, **PW** said that his biggest disappointment had been in the Council's position on rent. Their actions had caused them to lose credibility and FEDAGA had lost trust in the Council. The wound caused by this development will take some time to heal. However, he noted that the Strategy meeting he attended this morning seemed to have a different atmosphere so there may be some cause for hope that things will change for the better.

6. Allotment Show Secretary's Report: **SMcK** said that after a 3 year break the Show made a return in a new venue, the Central Edinburgh Methodist Hall. The main remit was to reduce costs. This was done by staging the event on one day by removing the registration of entries the previous evening, and changing the venue. Due to less available space the home and handicrafts sections were discontinued. The rest of the schedule was revamped, with some new categories added. The Show Schedule was based on the website which saved £500 stationery and postage costs, however a limited number of paper copies were distributed for those who choose to not use the internet. The cost of staging the Show was successfully brought in under the £800 budget, a reduction of nearly half the previous running costs.

The number of entrants and entries was down on previous years but the disappointment felt by organisers was dispelled when the doors opened and a large number of members and visitors arrived. The buzz was palpable and the consensus at the end of the day was that the event had been a great success. It has since been decided to stage the Show again next year.

7. Financial Report: **DR** said finances continued to be strong with a year on year rise in income of £1800. The net profit was up £200 on last year. The bond interest was £9.12, which was an extremely poor rate of return. For every £1

spent on the Kings Seeds scheme 10p was returned to the relevant site association, totalling £481.48. Profits from the Shop rose slightly to £224. Site association subscriptions were paid at a rate of £1 per member to each site, totalling £1368. Profits from the potato and onion trading scheme came to £163.75. Overall, trading contributed over £700. Total income for the year was £5440.15.

Most expenditure is accounted for with the return to site associations of their subscriptions collected by the Council and paid to FEDAGA for redistribution, and site association commission from trading schemes. Problems paying a few sites, Chesser Crescent, Dumbryden and Hutchison Loan, caused by them not maintaining bank accounts have now been resolved. However, this progress has been undermined by the addition of a lot of new, small sites. It is likely they will take some time to organise their finances and it is expected that they will feature in the “expenses committed but not yet cashed” category for the next few years. The other thing to note was the Show. Some of the charges were accounted for this year but the bulk will feature in next year’s report. This will have the effect of wiping out the potential profits if this year’s performance is maintained. Another important event to note is the Council’s intention to separate out subscriptions from rental and make the former optional. It will be vitally important to encourage all ploholders to continue to pay their subscription. Active participation in the trading schemes bring savings that are much greater than the cost of membership. The benefits to individuals and their site associations will be forcefully made over the winter.

Net profit	£ 630.16	
Bank balance 28 July 2015	£ 7,379.02	
Bank balance 27 July 2016	£ 9,251.76	£ 1,872.74
Committed cost	£ 1,251.70	
Funds minus committed funds	£ 8,000.06	
Bond interest paid @ 0.25% = £9.12 5/4/16	£ 4,519.68	
Total Assets	£12,519.74	
Unresolved discrepancy		£ 5.96

Total balance of FEDAGA assets on 27 July 2016 was £12,519.74

Note - Bond is now on 0.25% awaiting the outcome of rent rise before committing funds to a fixed term investment.

Total balance of FEDAGA assets on 28 July 2015 was £10,652.96

Total balance of FEDAGA assets on 27 July 2016 was £12,519.74

Reserves Balance Summary	2012 - 3	2013 - 14	2014 - 15	2015 - 16
Bank balance at start of year	£6,447.24	£ 1,398.58	£10,210.59	£10,652.96
Cash in hand	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -
Deduct: loss for the year	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -
Add: profit for the year	£ 951.34	£ 812.01	£ 442.37	£ 1,872.74
Add or deduct; credits or debits from previous year	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -
Current reserves (Bank balance at end of year)	£9,398.58	£10,210.59	£10,652.96	£12,525.70

DR concluded by thanking John Grace and **NMcC** for examining the accounts. Random verification of cheques against accounts was carried out. All receipts were accounted for and the totals checked. It was noted that there was an unresolved discrepancy of £5.96 credit and it was agreed the accounts could be signed off, declaring this to the AGM. It is possible that the discrepancy will resolve itself as the finances run through next year. It was **AGREED** that options for reinvesting the Bond with a view to making a greater return be explored. The Financial Report was proposed by John McKinlay (**JMcKinlay**) and seconded by **JGray**.

Gilbert Clark (**GC**) suggested that, given the healthy surplus, the annual donation of £75 to the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society (SAGS) be doubled. **PW** responded by saying that SAGS do a lot of good work, especially on the writing of the Community Empowerment Act and providing assistance to small sites elsewhere in Scotland so FEDAGA should continue to support them. He was not convinced, as there had been no approach from SAGS for more money, that the £75 was insufficient. **DR** said that FEDAGA had recently decided to support delegates to SAGS by providing them with travelling expenses.

John Barclay said that the cheque to Pilrig Park had not arrived. **DR** undertook to investigate this.

8. Nominations: **EW** had received the following nominations:

President

Stuart McKenzie (Inverleith, nominated by Lady Road and Restalrig)

Secretary

Ernie Watt (Cambridge Avenue, nominated by Lady Road and Restalrig)

Treasurer

Dave Roberts (Restalrig/Telferton, nominated by Lady Road and Restalrig)

Show Secretary

John Grace (Midmar, nominated by Management Committee)

Management Committee

Alice Bain (Warriston, nominated by Restalrig)

Brian Bleakley (Midmar, nominated by Lady Road and Restalrig)

Gilbert Clark (Midmar, nominated by Lady Road and Restalrig)

Maureen Edwards (Lady Road, nominated by Lady Road and Restalrig)

Jon Gray (Warriston, nominated by Lady Road and Restalrig)

Alison Hewitt (Warriston, nominated by Restalrig)

Paul Kerr (Redhall, nominated by Lady Road and Restalrig)

Neiria McClure (Claremont Park, nominated by Lady Road and Restalrig)

Jenny MacKenzie (Dumbryden, nominated by Dumbryden and Saughton Mains)

Rosy Naylor (West Mains, nominated by Lady Road and Restalrig)

Mary Simpson (Saughton Mains, nominated by Saughton Mains)

Peter Shaw (Saughton Mains, nominated by Saughton Mains)

Rosina Weightman (Saughton Mains, nominated by Saughton Mains)

Peter Wright (Lady Road, nominated by Lady Road and Restalrig)

The nominations for officers were proposed by **PW** and seconded by Andy Crofts.

The nominations for the committee were proposed by **PW** and seconded by Willie Aitken (**WA**).

PW said ideally every site should nominate a representative. This year more sites are represented, especially a strong showing from Saughton Mains which has gone without representation for too long. Rosina Weightman questioned why nominations were from sites, rather than individual members. **PW** explained that constitutionally FEDAGA's members were the site associations so this is the correct way to proceed. Jenny MacKenzie (**JMacKenzie**) suggested nominees should say who they are and why they want to be nominated. **PW** said that in the past there were insufficient nominees to fill all positions so this had not been a priority, but perhaps now there is more interest and a full complement elected this should be revisited. **JMcKinlay** suggested an article for the Newsletter explaining

the nomination process so people understand it better and celebrating the new, full, committee. **PW** suggested that before next year's AGM a brief resume of the nominees' CVs be circulated in an attempt to make the process more meaningful and transparent.

GC asked what the Constitution had to say which might influence how FEDAGA should best approach the Council, considering the manifest lack of influence over senior officials. He said the next 10 year programme is being set up and yet the consultation period closed 2 weeks ago without discussion by FEDAGA. **PW** replied, stating that FEDAGA has been party to the drafting of the Strategy and the Constitution primarily referred to the protection of member site associations' interests and the improvement of their conditions. For clarification, Mary Simpson asked if FEDAGA did not have individual members. **PW** said that FEDAGA's members are site associations, so ploholders are members through their site associations. He said it was essential to try to engage smaller sites that do not have direct contact with FEDAGA and to this end work should be done to make FEDAGA more attractive. **EW** endorsed this, telling of difficulties contacting such sites with papers for the AGM. It is notable there are no representatives from new sites at this evening's meeting. He said that he sometimes receives enquiries from people on these sites but has no success when asking for volunteers to act as representatives. **JMcKinlay** said that FEDAGA had also sought to reach out by arranging for the Allotment Officer to distribute a New Plotholder's Pack which included an introduction to FEDAGA. **ME** said that efforts have been made to entice membership interest, but the revival of the Allotment Show only attracted 26 entrants. **DR** commented that the newly elected Show Secretary's remit will include encouraging participation.

9. Forward Plans: **PW** led off by saying the main areas were likely to be the creation of new sites and the Allotment Strategy document. If you examine the draft you will see in small print that the Council has no funding for new allotment sites. The Council has property identified as potential allotment land and must somehow fulfil its obligations under the Community Empowerment Act. To this end it will bring together applicants on the waiting list who live in the vicinity of a potential new site and facilitate the creation of a group who will take the project forward. It will then be up to the new group to secure funding and arrange for the creation of the new allotment site, which will thereafter be leased by the Council at a peppercorn rate and managed locally by the new allotment holders themselves. Currently, the only example of a site in Edinburgh operating this way is Wester Hailes. The next is likely to be a new site on the grounds of the former Lismore Primary School. He posed the question to the new committee, are you going to concentrate on supporting existing ploholders or support the creation of new sites?

SMcK replied, saying that the constitution doesn't say anything about new sites. He suggested that FEDAGA assist new allotment holders by giving the benefit of their experience to help them move forward. Further, he suggested that FEDAGA should stop dealing directly with the Council on routine matters as it has proven to be fruitless. The way forward will be to encourage site associations to make their representations to Councillors and officials. FEDAGA should continue to work with the Council only on the Strategy document. What we should be concentrating more on is providing benefits and added interest to ploholders, such as extending the trading scheme and staging visits like the recent trip to SASA (Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture) to find out more about heritage potatoes. There should be more social activities such as talks, visits and shows. Trading could be extended to include bulk items, tools and machinery. The Newsletter could be complemented by a blog, and **JMacKenzie** is already developing this. This would be useful to get feedback and generate discussion.

Another initiative he would like to see taken up would be the return of the Council/Ploholders' Forum. The idea would be to enable ploholders to speak directly to the Council and enable councillors and officials to get some direct, informed feedback. FEDAGA has to get over obsessing about substandard plots. It is the Council's duty to manage the allotment service - not FEDAGA's. We could however remind them that an unused plot is a waste of resources. It will be important to get the Allotment Officer back to give regular reports to the Management Committee on repairs, maintenance and inspections. Edinburgh ploholders pay the highest rents in the country so they have a right to expect the highest standard of service. In conclusion, he said that FEDAGA must follow a strategy of avoiding fruitless confrontation with the Council. With regard to the Community Empowerment Act he said responsibility for the creation of new sites is now placed squarely with the Council. He said it was not necessary for FEDAGA to be directly involved in this. However, he was certain that FEDAGA would have a great deal of advice that could be offered.

10. Any Other Business: **WA** raised the ongoing problems faced by ploholders at Carrick Knowe. Due to construction of the tramline the site had lost quite a few plots. The construction also damaged the field drains so that many of the remaining plots were frequently flooded in wet weather. To alleviate this the Council built a soil bund in an unsuccessful attempt to hold back the flood water. Over the course of recent years this bund has grown a healthy crop of seed-bearing and unsightly weeds. Attempts to get Edinburgh Trams and the Council to maintain this piece of land have been unsuccessful. **SMcK** suggested that the site association find out who owns the land in question and contacts their councillors to start trying to remedy the problem.

11. Date of Next Year's AGM: 24th October 2017.