

## Minutes From APCG Members' Meetings – March 2023

### Meeting 3 – Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> March 2023

**Present:** Steve B. (Chair), Tom J. (Minutes), Lucia D. (Trustee and Treasurer), Suzanne (Manager), x5 members (names withheld)

#### 1. Welcome:

- Steve thanked everyone for coming and led those present in thanking Tom for his work as Acting Manager in 2022.
- Tom thanked everyone for the thanks, and told everyone about his plans to depart from the garden to return to higher education in September – sad but an exciting opportunity for the garden to bring in new skills and experience.

#### 2. Introductions:

- Those present introduced themselves in turn, what they do at the garden, and how long they have been coming.

#### 3. Apologies:

- x1 member – hopes to attend later in the week.

#### 4. Members' Covenant:

- Steve thanked everyone who contributed to producing the Members' Covenant now on display in the cabin, and asked everyone to consider suggesting any potential amendments.

#### 5. Funding for the garden:

- Steve informed those present about the three year National Lottery funded project which began in February – building towards a sustainable future for the garden. A member asked what this grant funds, Lucia clarified this is core costs - primarily salaries for running the garden, maintenance and renewals, initiatives related to building sustainability.
- Steve described the intended goals of the newly-formed APCG Members' Fundraising Group following their first meeting 24/3/23. Some of their ideas include Wine and Wisdom evening (Guild Hall hired for free), paid-for events / experiences / tours at the garden, evening or weekend events such as talks from members or external speakers.
- Steve emphasised the need for these initiatives to be member-led and requiring of time and energy on the part of volunteers. Steve asked everyone to consider ways to contribute to this and put the topic out for general discussion:
  - A member suggested push bikes for hire – Steve and Suzanne remembered giving this a go once, but found that while most people approved the idea they didn't want to participate. Suzanne pointed out the need for carrying out some market research, and some planning about the costs, staff / volunteer time, and impacts on the garden of such schemes.
  - Another member approved of the idea of raising more funds through the coffee cabin, but has found that it is taking up to an hour to clean and prepare the cabin for this use each morning, with other uses being made of it through the week. It was felt that committed volunteers, and clear guidelines to follow, would likely be needed to make a success of this.
  - A further member wondered if more bids besides the National Lottery are being submitted. Lucia confirmed the details of other grants currently submitted. Suzanne reinforced that smaller grant applications are a continuous and unending process essential to the future of the garden.

- A member asked what the outcomes of the inaugural Friends of the Garden event in December 2022 had been. Suzanne confirmed that no direct donations had resulted yet. Lucia clarified the follow up contacting that is taking place, and the external consultation underway to develop and implement the Friends of the Garden concept alongside membership. Tom observed that these sorts of relationships take time and effort to develop, and Lucia agreed that this made purposeful development of the idea as soon as possible all the more necessary.
- Another member observed that large sums of money are needed, and felt that small one-off events take a disproportionate amount of time and effort. They also wondered if an over-focus on the need to generate sustainable income could dilute the core aims of the garden, and felt that charitable grants were preferable.

Lucia clarified that member fundraising would never be expected to cover all or even large proportions of the running costs of the garden, rather that if carried out routinely it could be made into a small but vital part of the reliable income of the garden each year. Lucia also affirmed that plans made for diversifying income take into account the need to protect the ethos and character of the garden.

Suzanne agreed with Lucia and expressed that fundraising should not transfer anxiety on to members, but rather should be about tapping into the energy and enthusiasm of those with the time to support the garden in this way. She felt it could give a sense of ownership and contribution to members who may not engage with the garden in other ways, but agreed it would not be for everyone.

Steve felt it looks very good for the garden to have members contributing when applying for larger charitable grants, demonstrating their passion for the project. Suzanne noted the value to the garden of the many hours volunteers give (equivalent to approximately £53,000 a year at £10 an hour!), it was agreed this should be noted in grant applications.

- A member asked if selling plants and vegetables could generate more income, and if the current display could be improved. Suzanne noted the already significantly improved income generated by plant sales in the new display location and agreed it could be even better still, with volunteers needed to maintain and propagate plants. The need for dedicated staff time to lead volunteers on plant and veg production was noted, made all the more apparent in 2022 in Suzanne's absence.

- Another member wondered about hiring the garden out for parties and events. Suzanne explained that this would likely go against the terms of our lease. This member also suggested hiring the garden as an exhibition space, it was felt that market research and an understanding of the cost, time, impacts, and benefits would be needed.

- Encouraging ticket sales for the Faversham Community Lottery was suggested – this currently brings in just over £1600 a year and could be improved with some effort.

- A member wondered if it would be possible to charge for participation in activities over and above membership fees. Lucia explained that it is currently explicitly stated in active and pending grants that the garden is 'free' for members. Tom wondered if voluntary suggested donations could get around this commitment? It was felt to be worth considering, following the current ongoing external evaluation of membership and fees – one suggestion was to use the signage on the new donation box at the exit of the garden to encourage this form of giving.

- Steve canvassed opinion about current membership fees, and if people felt an increase or alternative 'tiered' membership system could work. It was felt that the current emphasis on accessibility was important to retain, but that opportunities to give more could be encouraged from those who are able.

'Tiered' memberships felt to be a possibility, but with sensitivity needed to avoid embarrassing those on the 'affordable' tier, or creating separation from those who do give more.

The complexity of monitoring memberships and renewals was noted, given the highly diverse and unpredictable ways and times that new members arrive at the garden throughout the year and the different volunteers and members of staff who may be the point of contact – not to mention those who join online!

A member asked how much memberships currently bring in annually – Lucia clarified that, including those who do currently give more than £15, this is around £5000.

- Tom noted how valuable this week of meetings has been to convey to members how their fundraising efforts can contribute a small but vital part of the diversified funding picture the garden is seeking to embrace, as well as conveying the hard work being done by trustees and staff to complete the rest of this picture.

## **6. Update from APCG Trustees:**

- Lucia spoke about the recent work of the Board of Trustees implementing the first steps in the National Lottery delivery plan
  - recruitment
  - development of projects and processes
  - setting the direction of the garden for three years' time and beyond through consultation with members and evaluation.
- Lucia asked for questions from those present. A member lead off a discussion, wondering if other similar local community garden charities could be consulted for advice or direction regarding funding. It was felt that, with our developing approach to diversifying funding, and history of success in grant applications, we may already be as well or better positioned than most.

Blackthorn Trust was discussed – it was felt that we could learn from their successful integration with statutory healthcare provision, but that as they are a much larger organisation with many more staff we would have to recognise where our boundaries lie in seeking to emulate them.

Suzanne emphasised the new and modified the garden and its projects are taking, reducing delivery of events and projects for external providers, and seeking to get 'back to our roots' and focus on the core aims of the garden and the projects we ourselves run.

There was general approval for the stated aim of seeking to balance growth and success with retaining the ethos and atmosphere of the garden.

## **7. Community Partnerships:**

- Steve invited those present to consider contacts or connections they may be able to provide to Jacqui in her role as Community Partnerships Lead.

## **8. AOB**

- A member wondered if alcohol licences would be needed to run special events at the garden – yes if alcohol is sold or provided as part of a ticketed event. We have had one-day licenses before, up to 10 a year may be obtained per premises, costing about £30 a time.
- Another member wondered if the water feature in the Moon Garden could be made to work again. Tom felt that it was likely doable, and would not cost a great deal, but would require a concerted effort from someone with the time to give it a go. Tom estimated that due to frost damage the trough has likely sprung a leak, the bricks supporting the iron pump have crumbled, and the water pump would likely need replacing. A member offered a water pump they have to spare, Tom will gratefully have a look and see if it is likely to be compatible with our solar power source.
- Lucia noted that the garden is looking great and well cared for at the moment.
- Tom canvassed those present for interest in volunteering to help the garden potentially open up during evenings and weekends: x6 present were interested and their names were recorded.
- A member asked about the chicken coop area, now nearing full demolition. Suzanne expressed that it has been great to have the chickens, but the practical realities of attracting pests had made it untenable. Plans for the area include extended covered seating from the Moon Garden area. There was general approval for an above-ground metal firepit to replace the filled in in-ground pit.

- Another member suggested seeking to tap into pledged government support for mental health causes. A further member is aware of large sums pledged in a recent budget statement. A member wondered if we gain any income from formal referrals to the garden. Suzanne, Tom, and Lucia clarified that seeking exactly this form of statutory income is a key focus of the National Lottery project.

- A member asked what plans were in place to fill the gap left by Lottery support from 2026. Suzanne, Tom, and Lucia clarified the diverse income streams being sought, many of which having been touched upon during the meeting.

Tom affirmed that every contribution is vital to the bigger picture of diversifying funding – the earlier example of a member-led annual wine and wisdom evening bringing in “only £1000” does not fill the gap, but if it’s a reliable source of annual income then it can be a part of budget plans and a vital component in a diverse funding strategy.

Lucia explained that having secure lottery funding (for the third time in a row!) is a great source of confidence for other funders, increasing our chances of success with them. Suzanne clarified that other smaller sums of Lottery funding may be available, such as Heritage Fund, from 2026 onwards.

## **9. Date for next meeting:**

- Steve thanked everyone for attending, next meetings in July 2023 – dates TBD.