

Friends of Geilston 2020 Annual General Meeting Report

Nearly 100 people attended the AGM last week. Also attending were Ian McLelland, recently appointed area manager for the National Trust for Scotland and Louise Baker Visitor Services Manager based at Hill House. Stewart Noble, chair of the Helensburgh Heritage Trust made a very interesting and informative presentation on the history of Geilston in the context of the village of Cardross and the local area.

Allison Hillis, chair of FOG, reviewed the year's campaigning to keep the garden open and under National Trust care. Visitor numbers had increased. Members were pleased to hear that these included Ian and his young family and he reported that his children had loved it.

Allison presented the various options that had been assessed for Geilston by the NTS appointed consultants. At their November Board meeting trustees decided to investigate further the option of enabling development in the grounds of Geilston with the aim of raising income from this to refurbish the house for possible sale or rental, generating long term funding to keep the garden open. Questions were raised about the nature of any development but until the review is presented later this year it remains unknown whether this will prove viable and meet the aims of FOG to maintain the gardens as an NTS visitor attraction. In the meantime, Geilston remains open for the forthcoming season.

Allison highlighted events for the new season including craft workshops, wildlife days, outdoor theatre production of Robin Hood and an Easter Egg hunt. FOG has secured NTS commitment to invest in visitor facilities.

Another highlight of the year was the presentation of a petition to the Scottish Parliament supported by local MSPs Jackie Baillie and Maurice Corry. This petition voiced concerns that the contribution of small gardens like Geilston had been underplayed in national tourism strategies. The issues are due to be further investigated by the Parliament's tourism committee.

Finally, presentations were made including a donation of £1,000 by FoG treasurer John Hanks to head gardener Alison Farrell.

Chris Moore,
Secretary, Friends of Geilston
30/1/2020