

Summary of AGM/Public Meeting 15/3/2023

On a dull wet evening some 67 people attended our 2023 AGM, which was very pleasing. This was the first face to face meeting for 3 years. We were pleased to welcome Ian Mclelland (regional director NTS), Brigit Luffingham (regional conservation surveyor NTS) together with NTS colleagues from Hill House Louise Baker, Rachel Thompson and Ross McFarland.

Following approval of the minutes from the 2022 AGM, Chris presented his first Chair's Report. This outlined some of the events which FOG had organised through the 2022 season. The big events were Apple Day and Craft Fair which between them had attracted some 800 people to the garden and had been a major success. Chris did point out that putting on such high profile events whilst really good for promoting Geilston was a big effort and thanked all our volunteers for their support. He made an appeal for anyone interested in helping at future events to contact him. A range of workshops and themed walks, Thai Chi and the Sundays in the Garden with the Friends Home Baking Stall and live music had all helped bring people into the garden through the season. A new initiative with funding support from the MEB Trust was facilitating organised visits to Geilston from local community groups. These were aimed at widening access and helping groups of people who might not necessarily visit the garden without some support. Under this project we helped organise visits from the Helensburgh Heart, Stoke & Chest Association, Jean's Bothy and the Cardross Toddlers group. Chris highlighted the visits made by Renton Primary which had been organised following contact by the headteacher with Ross. We are hoping we will be able to plan further visits this coming season.

Planning for events for 2023 had been on hold pending further information about work on the house but a meeting with Visitor Services was being set up to progress this and we hoped to get information out soon on a programme for the season to compliment the regular NTS events.

Chris also emphasised the donations towards projects around the garden from the Friends supplementing NTS investment. These were in consultation with Alison and the gardening team and NTS staff. One particular project which we were hoping to work on this year was refurbishment of the garden gazebo in the woodland by replacing the flooring with mosaic tiles. This was being made possible by a very generous donation from Dr John Coggins in memory of his late wife Lesley who was a great supporter and friend of Geilston. We were awaiting approval and permission for the work to go ahead but are hopeful that this would be forthcoming soon.

Another new project which we hoped to complete this coming year we are calling **Geilston Memories** which is basically an oral history project led by Ruth McKechnie. We are inviting those with memories of Geilston and its last residents, Miss Hendry and Miss Bell, to participate by sharing their recollections with Ruth so we can store these for future generations. Anyone interested was advised to contact Ruth on geilston.history@yahoo.com

Chris finally thanked all those who had supported the garden and Friends in various ways including all the members of FOG, the event and baking volunteers, the committee, local MSPs and the *Helensburgh Advertiser*. He also thanked David Hughes and the Cardross Golf Club for hosting our meetings. Special thanks go to Alison and all the gardening team for making Geilston look so amazing through the seasons and to Ross and the Visitor Services Team for meeting and greeting the visitors and making their experience of the garden the best possible. Finally, and not least, thanks to Ian, Louise and Rachel of NTS for all their help and support.

The Chair's Report was followed by John presenting the accounts and Treasurer's Report. Details of the figures can be found on our website. John highlighted our main sources of funds and expenses. He explained that the events we put on were not designed to generate substantive income but really

to encourage people to visit the garden and we have tried to keep costs of these down to a minimum to help people come along and enjoy the experiences. We are especially grateful for the support from the MEB Trust over the years and most recently to help facilitate the visits from local community groups as highlighted above.

The reports were adopted by the meeting.

This was followed by elections for the new committee for 2023. Our constitution stipulates that all members stand down at the end of the year but are eligible for re-election by the membership. Two long standing members, John Hanks and Veronica Davis, had decided to stand down, but we had two members who had offered to stand for the committee. All other members of the committee had indicated that they were happy to continue, so following proposing and seconding we retain a full-strength committee membership. Details of the new committee and office holders will be displayed on our website. Chris welcomed the new members, Caitlin Hegney and Lesley Quirk. He thanked both John and Veronica for all their hard work and support over many years and presented John with a token of our appreciation. Unfortunately, Veronica was unable to make the meeting so we will arrange to hand over the present to her.

Ian Mclelland and Brigit Luffingham of NTS were then invited to make a presentation on the progress of plans for restoration of the house. Ian reaffirmed the commitment of NTS to repair and restore the house. A full project design team has been put in place under Brigit. He anticipated that the project would take about 2 years to complete, explaining that all building projects within NTS had been subject to delay due to general problems in the building industry. But the plan remains to create a 5 rooms holiday let with one room in the West Wing (the bungalow) accessible to the Friends and NTS for events space. Money has been approved for works and fitting out. Ian also pointed out NTS had invested in various repairs around the garden and in additional gardening staff.

Ian then answered questions from the meeting. These included whether there were any plans for using renewable energy in the refit of the house. Whilst this is being considered, Ian did say that it was problematical with older properties like Geilston. Looking at other potential developments, was a museum or café being considered to enhance Geilston as a visitor attraction? Ian said that neither of these was being considered, partly because they were unlikely to generate income for Geilston which was essential for its long term future. No NTS cafes made a profit. Neither were additional toilet facilities planned due to cost constraints. Some concerns were raised about possible noise and nuisance from holiday letting. Ian said that NTS had not experienced any such issues with its properties and it was unlikely that the marketing and pricing of Geilston as a holiday let would attract such problems. Promoting Geilston as a destination for cruise ships docking at Greenock was suggested and Ian said that he would investigate this. Joint ticketing with Hill House was another suggestion which Ian said would be considered. Better signage to Geilston including at Cardross Station was suggested. Ian said that this was costly and often a drawn out process.

Chris thanked Ian for his update and responses.

Members were reminded that the garden was now open for the season. The meeting was closed and those who had braved the elements thanked for coming out and invited to enjoy refreshments including home baking courtesy of the Brownies (donations welcome to support their fund raising efforts).

Chris Moore,

Chair, Friends of Geilston (Scottish Charity SCO50608)

