



Annual General Meeting of The Henry Doubleday Research Association (known as Garden Organic)

Minutes of the 37th Annual General Meeting held at 6pm on Wednesday 5th June 2024 via Zoom
The AGM was recorded.

Trustees present: Angela Wright (Chair); Keith Arrowsmith (Treasurer); Adam Alexander (Vice Chair); Mark Mitchell; Nicola Hope; Catherine Dawson.

Trustees joining via Zoom: Rhiannon Davies, David Robinson, and Amanda Sandford.

Executive Team present: Fiona Taylor, Chief Executive; Rizwan Ali, Director of Finance & Corporate Resources; Hannah Rogers, Director of Membership & Communications; Colette Bond, Director of Communities; Bruce Pearce, Director of Science.

43 members of Garden Organic joined via Zoom.

Proxy votes were received by 60 members and given to the chair.

Introduction and Welcome - Angela Wright (Chair)

Angela introduced Keith Arrowsmith, Treasurer and Fiona Taylor, CEO. The etiquette for the meeting was noted.

1. Angela Wright (Chair) Speech

Angela highlighted some milestones that have been achieved since last year's AGM:

Work done to rebuild the charity after lockdown started to reap rewards. Our membership, which rose during the pandemic then fall, has now started to recover. We have seen a great response to our charity appeals, which is a real vote of confidence, thank you. We have been recognised by universities such as Coventry, Warwick, and Dundee. Our Heritage Seed Library has been featured on BBC Gardeners World. We have been invited to collaborate with organic companies such as Yeo Valley, Mr Organic and Veridian Nutrition. And this year all our contracts with local authorities were renewed.

Angela conveyed her gratitude to the staff for their commitment, and to the hundreds of volunteers who make up the Garden Organic family and help us in so many ways.

It was noted that whilst margins remain tight, it is good to be presenting a much healthier set of accounts this year. But it was firmly acknowledged that the charity would not be here today without the steadfast generosity of people who have remembered Garden Organic in their wills. With this immense kindness we have been able to invest in the future – developing our Heritage Seed Library, conducting important research, and getting alongside individuals and communities to champion organic growing and composting. Angela thanked anyone who was considering supporting the charity in this way.



Like most charities, we work in partnership with many organisations – indeed the back cover of our Annual Report lists no fewer than 62 organisations that worked with Garden Organic last year. Angela conveyed thanks to all of those.

It was noted that over the years we have traditionally held AGMs in person here at Ryton and at other locations around the UK. However, this year we took the decision to hold the AGM online during a weekday evening, on the basis that it widened participation as much as possible, and therefore it felt more democratic.

However, we also know the importance and value of gathering together and so members were asked to mark September 21st, 2024, in your diaries for a members' day here at Ryton Organic Gardens, with speakers, demonstrations and workshops. An invitation to this will come out via email in the coming weeks.

Angela finished by thanking everyone for being members of Garden Organic, and for their support and enthusiasm.

2. Apologies for Absence

60 members sent their apologies and have given their proxy to the Interim Chair. With the proxy votes and the members in the room it was confirmed that we were quorate.

Apologies had been received from Trustee Joe McIndoe.

3. Minutes of the 2023 AGM held at Ryton Organic Gardens on Thursday 18th May 2023 in person and Zoom.

The Minutes of the AGM held last year were posted on our website. Paper copies were available by post if requested.

The minutes of the 36th AGM held on Thursday 18th May 2023 were confirmed as a correct record. The proposer was Hannah Rogers, and the seconder was Adam Alexander. The minutes were formally approved as a true record.

4. Speech by Fiona Taylor, Chief Executive

Fiona informed the meeting that we had received a letter from Buckingham Palace, stating that having concluded the review of all royal patronages, the King is delighted to remain the Patron of Garden Organic. Given the sheer number of organisations that were reviewed, it was heartening to discover that our small charity, which was instrumental in igniting the King's passion for organic gardening, was still remembered, and valued.



Members Experiments – something that has taken place from the start. Thank you so much to all those who are taking part, we want to widen participation and so do please consider getting involved next year.

One of the Member' experiments undertaken this year was investigating amaranth as a crop for a changing climate. We also evaluated green manure mixes for the winter months, so we trialed a 'Gardener's mix' containing Vetch, Phacelia, Crimson Clover, Flax, and Forage Pea. Having a diverse mix worked well, Overall, the participants scored the 'gardeners mix' as easier to incorporate with less tough fibrous material than the grazing rye and vetch, so it would work better for no dig systems.

Having rebuilt our science function in 2022 and 23, we partnered with Coventry University on two small research projects last year and now we have entered a much larger four-year programme, researching local food networks. At the same time, we have strengthened our links with Warwick University, home to the vegetable genetic resource unit and seed bank. And we hope to bring some of the vegetable seeds held in Warwick's cold store into our living collection at the Heritage Seed Library.

This year the gardens are opening twice for the National Garden Scheme. We are delighted to be able to showcase our organic demonstration garden to visitors on 6th July and 7th September. Our gardens are looking superb, and we have created a new front entrance border, too, to welcome our visitors.

If you do visit, amongst other things, you will be able to see the National Collection of Comfrey here at Ryton, which we have reinstated - and are now curating 31 varieties. Hopefully, that by this time next year we will have another National Collection, as we are currently developing one for Calendula.

For a long time, we have listed our partner gardens in our Organic Way magazine and on our website, but we are expanding this by inviting public and community gardens to become official *Garden Organic Growing Partners*. The idea is to promote gardens and green spaces of all sizes in as many places as possible so that members can visit to see organic growing, composting and seed conservation in their area. We also want to encourage our *Growing Partners* to take part in our experiments and help us with important data collection.

Last year we added a record 20 rediscovered heritage vegetable varieties to our Heritage Seed Library. A record 102,000 packets of seed were grown at Ryton and by our volunteer Seed Guardians. Our work was showcased on BBC's Gardeners World and described by Monty Don as 'heroic.'

Looking to the future we have clear aims for the important National Collection of Heritage Vegetables, not least to ensure we are conserving seeds that represent the diets of tomorrow, but also to do more research into the collection we hold. However, we are going to need help on funding this work. Just to be clear, the Heritage Seed Library costs more to run than the income we get from Seed Library memberships and so we have a shortfall which means we cannot develop further without some more financial resources. So, we are launching a number of fundraising initiatives. The first of which is asking people to come forward as seed variety champions and support the Heritage Seed Library with a minimum donation of £25 a month. In return you will receive a packet of seeds for your chosen seed variety, plus an



annual update and a namecheck in our Heritage Seed List. You can find out more by searching for 'Variety Champion' on our website.

Like all charities, income remains a challenge, and your support makes all the difference. Thank you so much to those of you who have given to our fundraising appeals. We have an army of amazing volunteers – showing people how to compost their food and green waste, helping us here at Ryton in the office and the garden, and growing seeds on for the Heritage Seed Library. We also have a steadfast board of trustees, and wonderful set of Vice Presidents including Raymond Blanc, Jane Davidson in Wales, and Pam Whittle in Scotland and of course our President, Professor Tim Lang.

On campaigning we still play an active role in forums dedicated to a ban on Peat and Pesticides. We are involved in networks to promote composting, water saving and alternatives to peat and we publish many articles on these and other contemporaneous issues in our Organic Way magazine, on our website, on the Organic Gardening podcast and through articles in national newspapers, TV and social media.

Last year we were proud to be a founding partner in Coronation Gardens, a partnership between the Wildlife Trusts, Incredible Edibles, the WI and endorsed by the King which asks people to pledge to grow fruit and vegetables sustainably, in order to help nature along the way.

It has been a huge challenge to break new ground – for example we're doing all we can to take the positive message of growing your own food and flowers to housing associations – as we believe this way we can encourage thousands of people to adopt organic gardening methods in their own neighbourhoods, supporting biodiversity on their doorstep.

At last year's AGM I mentioned that we were working on our first piece of academic research in 6 years, and we published it earlier this year. Every Garden Matters is the name of report, and it has the strapline – *A Blueprint for boosting Backyard Biodiversity*.

We may be small in comparison to others, but our purpose is sound, and we are intent on creating a better future for those who come after us.

5. Presentation of Consolidated Financial Statements 2023 by Keith Arrowsmith, Treasurer

Last year I had to report a substantial loss for the year 2022, which was funded by large drawdowns from our investments. This year I am happy to report Garden Organic turned this around and made a small surplus of £29k.

Total income in 2023 was £2.1 million, up almost £600k on 2022. The increase was due to receiving £800k of legacies. Legacies are, like for many charities, an important source of income, but not one we wish to be too dependent on in the future.

Membership and donation income was £846k, up slightly on 2022, but, like last year, a really good result given the economic climate.



Expenditures at £2.1 million were up 8% on 2022. This reflects inflationary costs impacting all aspects of the charity's work, in common with the whole economy. However, tight control was maintained over expenditures, staff numbers were reduced, services re-tendered and outsourced work brought in-house. At the same time much work was done to modernise the IT and Finance functions.

Garden Organic's investment portfolio was £682k @31 December, down from £938k the previous year end. Despite making a profit in 2023 £250k of drawdowns were made from the funds in 2023 due to timing differences in income receipts – I am pleased to note that Garden Organic has reinvested this amount into the fund in 2024. Investments valuations rose by 10%.

Garden Organic's cash balances at year end were a healthy £374k, trade creditors fell, as did trade debtors and there are no loans outstanding.

Our defined benefit pension scheme is still a significant liability on the balance sheet. At 31/12/23 the liability was £738k, down from £804k at 31/12/22. We are following an agreed repayment plan for paying off this liability by 2034 – contributing £136k in 2023.

At the end of the year, we had available unrestricted reverses of £162k, up from £19K previous year's end. This is still less than our official reserves policy of £500k requires. The trustees understand that we currently have insufficient official reserves but are confident that Garden Organic's sustainable income plan will have a positive impact on Garden Organic's income and this, together with ongoing cost controls will increase the level of our reserves in future years.

6. Adoption of the Annual Report and Consolidated Financial Statements for 2023

The Treasurer asked for a proposer and seconder to adopt the Annual Report and consolidated Financial Statements for 2023. The proposer was Mark Mitchell and the seconder Adam Alexander.

Garden Organic members present and online were asked to vote to authorise the board to adopt the Annual Report and consolidated Financial Statements for 2023. Including proxy votes received by the Chair, the total figures were 115 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions. The Annual Report and consolidated Financial Statements for 2023 were adopted.

7. Appointment of Auditors 2023

The Treasurer asked for a proposer and seconder to authorise the board to appoint auditors for 2024 and to fix their remuneration. The proposer was Diana Ketcher and the seconder Keith Walker.

Garden Organic members present and online were asked to vote to authorise the board to appoint auditors for 2024 and to fix their remuneration. Including proxy votes received by the Chair, the total figures were 120 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions. The board was given authority to appoint auditors for 2024 and to fix their remuneration.

8. Appointment of Board Members



The Chair advised that Our Articles of Association state that we can have a maximum of 11 trustees; the total number of 11 trustees may be exceeded by the need to co-opt someone with a particular skill set.

Our Articles of Association state trustees are elected for an initial term of 3 years and can be re-elected for two further consecutive 3-year terms. Currently we have one Trustee, our Treasurer Keith Arrowsmith, who has reached the end of his initial 3-year term. We are pleased to formally re-appoint Keith to the Board for a second term.

Retiring Trustees – Adam Alexander is stepping down after 9 years of service, the maximum term he is allowed to serve. Amanda Sandford is stepping down after 6 years of service.

Appointment of New Trustee

As the number of candidates was fewer than the number of vacancies no election is required. The appointment of Leslie Robinson is confirmed. Leslie's biography and biographies of all our board members can be found on the website.

After today we will have a total of 9 trustees and will be advertising in the Organic Way Magazine for new trustees to join us.

The Chair announced that the business of the AGM was concluded and closed the meeting.