



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

Minutes of the 38th Annual General Meeting held at 6pm on Thursday 4th September 2025 via Zoom

The AGM was recorded.

Trustees present: Angela Wright (Chair); Keith Arrowsmith (Treasurer); Joe McIndoe (Vice-Chair); Caroline Boshier, John Varney, David Bond.

Trustees joining via Zoom: Mark Mitchell (Vice Chair)

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.

43 members of Garden Organic joined via Zoom.

Proxy votes were received by 46 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

I would like to note a few of the milestone achievements from 2024-25.

We took the decision to modernise our systems in 2024, updating our accounting software and moving our financial reporting from a calendar year (Jan - Dec) to be in line with the UK Financial and Tax Year (April - March) meaning we had a five quarter year last year ending in March 2025. This brings us more in line with those who have contracts with us, but I am sure Keith Arrowsmith, our Treasurer will discuss this more in his words later this evening, but I wanted to thank our finances team - particularly our Finance Director (Rizwan Ali) for their hard work in making this happen.

You can see in our Annual Report that we had a number of highlights and events over the year

- Ryton opened for pre-booked tours and open days as well as being in the National Garden Scheme Yellow Book once again
- Visitors were able to see the three national plant collections we now hold (Calendula, Comfrey, and the Heritage Seed Library). This includes some critically endangered varieties in these collections.
- We launched our research report 'Every Garden Matters,' boosting backyard biodiversity as well as being the first comprehensive research paper we had published for well over a decade.



- We won some significant funding bids over the year, including the National Lottery Heritage Fund project to conduct seed searches across the Midlands for our Heritage Seed Library, with a view to adding 50 new varieties to the collection in this its 50th Year.
- We have continued to build on our established and new relationships with Local Authorities and commercial businesses across England, showing local communities how to grow and compost food and live more sustainably.
- Finally, we processed our largest harvest in the HSL to date! We have over 200 volunteers who support us with the HSL growing, pollinating, and saving seeds over the course of the year. With their help we were able to distribute over 26,000 packets of seeds from the catalogue in December 2024.

We are continuing to do all of this great work and reach new people, but none of it would be possible without our volunteers, and the support from our members and donors – thank you

I would also like to thank the science and gardening teams for the work they have undertaken for us to have this list of achievements tonight

We are so grateful to all the volunteers who work alongside our staff – we have teams of community volunteers around the country giving their time to show people how to compost and sharing their knowledge of organic growing, as well as those working in the HSL and Ryton gardens.

Finally, thank you to our members and supporters who have been so generous this year, donating to appeals and adding extra to their membership subscriptions. We have had an outstanding amount of support from legacies and are so grateful to all those who plan to remember us in their will.

2. Apologies for Absence

46 members sent their apologies and have given their proxy to the Interim Chair. With the proxy votes and the members in the room and online it was confirmed that the meeting was quorate.

Apologies have been received from Trustees Catherine Dawson and Nadia Mazza.

3. Minutes of the 2024 AGM held at Ryton Organic Gardens on 5th June 2024 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 37th AGM held on Wednesday 5th June 2024 were confirmed as a correct record. They were proposed by Joe McIndoe, seconded by Hannah Bolger. The minutes were formally approved as a true record.

4. Speech by Fiona Taylor, Chief Executive



Last week I visited my local community garden in the city of Worcester. Positioned near the river, the garden floods regularly. And when I say flood, we are talking well over a meter of water above ground level. What once was a rare event has become almost commonplace – happening several times a year. But instead of moving to higher ground, the team there has worked out a way to raise up a polytunnel, beehives and workroom onto a base that floats when the site floods. So, the community garden is literally rising up to meet the challenge if you can picture it.

It is a helpful metaphor for our work here, where we are in the middle of so many exciting initiatives, all with the aim of helping growers everywhere rise up to meet the challenge. The challenge of biodiversity loss, poor harvests, soil degradation and extreme weather events...

So, we are taking steps to strengthen our community of people so we can learn more from each other – first up we are building up a network of places where people can see for themselves how to compost, to save seed, to grow food. We are calling them Garden Organic Growing Partners – and they range from well-known public gardens through to community gardens and even private gardens. We promote these spaces to our members and more widely to the general public – wanting people to feel they can go along and find out more. It is about sharing knowledge together, to make a difference faster. We've got 14 at the moment, but we've got lots in the pipeline, and I'm looking for hundreds of them, so if you know of a great garden in your area which you think would welcome being part of this network, do please let me know.

A few weeks ago, we had a members' day at Growing Partner, Nant y Bedd garden in Wales - and we have another coming up at Growing Partner - Castle Bromwich Historic Gardens later in the year – bookings will open shortly, priority is given to those living locally. Looking ahead to next year, we will be doing a guided tour of Nunington Hall in Yorkshire and hopefully a tour of Forest Green Rovers Football Club near Stroud.

Our flagship Growing Partner is our garden here at Ryton, which we open for prebooked tours throughout the year, and also for the National Garden Scheme. There is always something new we are trying – this past year we have been experimenting with a new rain garden and taking a more obvious polyculture approach to mix together food and flowers. The team also took the message to thousands of gardeners via a show garden at Gardeners World Live at the NEC in Birmingham in June, showcasing many heritage seed library vegetables interplanted with flowers and insect habitats and winning a silver merit medal in the process.

We share information and evidence of organic growing in our magazine, *The Organic Way*, which has gone from strength to strength and is a very useful reference tool. And our website is a treasure trove too – do explore it. As members, though, if you want some specific advice – you can email us on advice@gardenorganic.org.uk and our expert team will get back to you.

Our science team continues with its programme of citizen science – a central plank of which is asking you, our members, for your help in gathering data.

In 2024 we sought to find out if companion planting could deter allium leaf miner, surveyed instances of beet leaf miner and did a growing trial with Achocha to find out more about this crop.



This year we are doing trials around the Carlin Pea. We are rolling out a programme to build a better vegetable growing planner - working with a German company called Fryd, who have designed an app for gathering in data from ordinary gardeners across the whole of Europe to monitor changes in climate and weather conditions – this is so we can appeal to generations coming through who are interested in the science behind successful food growing.

Thank you so much to all who take part in our surveys, it plays into our long history of working hand in hand with our membership to gather real life data from people's own growing experiences.

Our research reputation is growing again, and I am particularly proud to say that we are now partnered with Coventry University on a 4-year research programme into how to get locally grown food onto local plates in schools, hospitals and canteens in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. We are also working closely with Warwick University, which houses the UK Vegetable gene bank (which our founder Lawrence Hills was instrumental in setting up). This year our Heritage Seed Library team has worked with the gene bank to grow 10 of their vegetables. These include varieties that were once sold but are not anymore. We are also trialing two underutilised crops – purslane and orach. Both have fallen out of widespread use, and we want to reintroduce them – it was interesting to see that both were untouched by the aphids bothering our brassicas. Great for us to have this information, and to have new varieties in the Heritage Seed Library, but great too for Warwick University to have the data we are collecting on these seeds as we grow them out – a wonderful way of working together. This is all part of a 2-year project called Sowing Your Seeds – funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund

The Heritage Seed Library turns 50 this year – and we are just about to embark on a year- long celebration of this, and I wonder if we could ask your help. If you've any stories or memories connected to the Heritage Seed Library, we would love to hear from you. It is a real opportunity to reminisce. We want to show that seed needs to be passed on in order to survive. Over the next few months, we are organising a Seed Relay – starting at Bocking in Essex where it all began – and passing seed on to locations across the UK. We will be talking a lot more about this, but it will symbolise the need for all of us to share seeds so they can be sown in a wide variety of locations. But it is not just for sentimental reasons that we want to mark this birthday. It is true to say that food security is at least as precarious as it was when the seed library was first set up. There will not be any crops of the future if we do not allow seeds to adapt to change by sowing and growing them. It has to be a joint effort between growers and governments, between libraries and banks, between countries and continents. The work of the Heritage Seed Library is on equal terms with both a neighborhood seed swap and the vital importance of Svalbard as the world's seed vault. We have to back each other up at all levels – from attacks of pests and disease to extreme weather events and even acts of war. We must prioritise the safety of seeds for future generations.

Setting seed in the context of organic growing brings me onto soil health. There's so much more information around now about the need to look after life below the soil – and the interchange between plants and soil. What roots do, how they communicate – these topics are finding their way into mainstream media, and that is exciting.

And it gives us a wonderful opportunity to keep composting on the agenda – showing people how to close the loop by turning their kitchen and garden waste into food for the soil. Of course, there is more to it than that, but it is amazing to think that we have the power to address a global issue like soil degradation by our



own actions. Each week hundreds of Garden Organic volunteers are talking about composting and sustainable living in schools, at community events and gardening clubs – that adds up to tens of thousands of conversations and more and more people composting their own green and food waste.

Autumn and winter are great seasons to get caught up on reading and learning – if you visit the ‘Get Involved’ area of our website you can find some self-guided learning courses, and we’re also launching a new online organic gardening certificate later in the year – this is fronted by our very own Chris Collins and is currently in the testing phase. And there is our podcast too – all sorts of interesting people come onto it; recent guests include Huw Richards, Becky Searle, Kate Bradbury, and Juliet Seargent.

I am delighted to tell you that we will be having a winter talk online from our President Tim Lang – who spoke at a Coventry University event held here at Ryton in the summer about how UK needs to prepare for shocks to our food system. We will be promoting this and all our events through emails to members, so keep an eye out for those.

So, there is much to look forward to – from seed relays, courses, events and of course your own year of growing which lies ahead. We will be working away on research, experiments, community projects, seed conservation, campaigning and sharing evidence, skills, and knowledge of the benefits of organic growing, composting and seed saving.

One final thought - micro actions matter, they really do. Every time you put your peelings on the compost, sow flowers amongst your food, save and share your seed then you are part of something far bigger. So, tell someone about it and encourage them to do it too.

5. Presentation of Consolidated Financial Statements 2024/25 by Keith Arrowsmith, Treasurer

This year has been a little unusual as Garden Organic changed its year end from 31 Dec to 31 March, to align with key partners such as local authorities. As a result, today’s report covers a 15-month period to 31 March 2025, rather than the usual 12 months. This makes some comparisons with the previous year less straightforward. For clarity, when I say year, I am referring to this 15 month period.

This is a high-level overview, but for more detail I recommend the Financial Review (pages 16–17) of the Annual Report, or the Consolidated Statement of Financial Activities, which contains the full accounts.

- **Surplus:** Last year I reported a modest surplus of £29k. This year, I’m pleased to report a much stronger surplus of £874k.
- **Income:** Total income rose to £3.2m (from £2.1m in 2023). Membership, donations, and Gift Aid reached £1.26m, reflecting both the extended period and our members’ loyalty during challenging times – as well as the dedication of our fundraising teams. Legacies contributed an exceptional £1.4m, and we are deeply grateful to those who remembered Garden Organic and the Heritage Seed Library in their wills.
- **Grants:** We end the year with a strong pipeline of charitable and research grants, one of the early successes of the Sustainable Income Drive launched in December 2023.



- Expenditure: At £2.4m, expenditure rose because of the longer accounting period. However, on a comparative 12 month, we achieved savings of over £200k through operational efficiencies and careful budget control.

Investments

- Surplus funds were prudently placed in the Liquidity Fund rather than the Investment Fund, managed by LGT Wealth.
- Balances with LGT rose from £691k to £1.77m, comprising £445k in investments and £1.32m in the Liquidity Fund.
- The investment portfolio generated a £16k profit this year. We continue to review both the balance between funds and the overall risk profile.
- Garden Organic's bank balance at year end stood at a healthy £248k.

Liabilities

- Creditors rose by £112k to £421k, largely due to deferring grant income until work is carried out in 2025/26.
- Importantly, Garden Organic has no outstanding loans.
- The defined benefit pension scheme liability fell significantly, from £738k to £442k. We remain on track with the agreed repayment plan to clear this by 2034, contributing £181k during the year.

Reserves

Unrestricted reserves increased to £1.28m, up from £197k last year. This is well above our reserves policy requirement of £500k, putting us on much firmer ground.

Summary

Garden Organic's financial health is much improved, though there is still more work ahead.

6. Adoption of the Annual Report and Consolidated Financial Statements for 2024/25

Garden Organic members present and online were asked to vote to authorise the board to adopt the Annual Report and consolidated Financial Statements for 2024/25.

Including proxy votes received by the Chair, the total figures were 105 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions.

The Annual Report and consolidated Financial Statements for 2024/25 were adopted.

7. Appointment of Auditors 2025/26

Garden Organic members present and online were asked to vote to authorise the board to appoint auditors for 2025/26 and to fix their remuneration.



Including proxy votes received by the Chair, the total figures were 105 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions.

The board was given authority to appoint auditors for 2025/26 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.

Retiring /Resigned Trustees – (15-month year)

Rachel Paddon resigned in February 2024

Adam Alexander is stepped down in June 2024 after 9 years of service, the maximum term he is allowed to serve. He is now an advisor and seed guardian for the charity

Amanda Sandford stepped down after 6 years of service.

David Robinson resigned in February 2025; he has since taken up directorship of Organic Enterprises Ltd (OEL)

Nicola Hope resigned in February 2025; she has since become an associate with the charity

Rhiannon Davies resigned after 3 years of service

Leslie Robinson resigned after 1 year of service

Re-election of Trustees

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.

We currently have two trustees who have reached the end of their initial 3-year term, Angela Wright & Joe McIndoe. We are pleased to formally re-appoint both for a second 3-year term

Appointment of New Trustee

We have 4 new trustees – Nadia Mazza, John Varney, David Bond, and Caroline Boshier.

As the number of candidates was less or equal to the number of vacancies no election was required. The appointment of Nadia, John, David, and Caroline is confirmed. Biographies of all our board members can be found on the website and a link was shared in your joining email

After today we will have a total of 9 trustees. If anyone wants to find out what the role entails, please contact Sharon Butler - SButler@gardenorganic.org.uk

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