

**LETCHWORTH EDUCATIONAL SETTLEMENT**  
229 Nevells Road, Letchworth Garden City, SG6 4UB  
Registered Charity No 311085



**MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2022**

**Tuesday 22 November 2022 at 7.30pm**

**Trustees (and members of Management Committee) present:**

Hilary Kemp (Chair), Marian Adams (Secretary), Alan Higbey (Treasurer), Nigel Carrick, Stephen Charles, Natalie Maguire

**Settlement Members present:**

William Armitage, Teresa Baker, Pat and John Baskerville, Marine Boulter, Ken Chapman, Jackie Gough, Barbara Heaton, Irene Holland, Allan Lupton, Praful Soneji, David Walmsley, Rick Weston

**Settlement staff in attendance:**

Nick Skinner (Manager)

**1. Welcome**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**2. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Val Aitken, Pam and Bob Burn, Louise Jacklin, Angela Louch and Barry Neale. Apologies were also received from Katherine Alcock and Shauna Miller (trustees and members of Management Committee). The Chair noted that Shauna Miller was on holiday but was actively involved in organising the Settlement's Christmas Fayre which would take place on 25 November.

**3. Approval of minutes of the Annual General Meeting on 23 November 2021**

The minutes were approved and signed by the Chair.

**4. Matters arising not covered under other agenda items**

There were no matters arising.

**5. Chair's report**

The Chair reported as follows:

“The academic year from September 2021 to the summer of 2022 was a year of gradual recovery from the disruption experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic – but it was still a year in which the Settlement faced considerable challenges. Even though the majority of courses had returned to the classroom and many (but not all) hiring groups had started to meet again at the Settlement, we still had restricted class sizes and experienced gaps in our schedule as some courses had to be cancelled due to low take up. These factors significantly affected the income generated during the year. (I will let the Treasurer report the financial details). The end result was that we oversaw a carefully managed return to the classroom, which had to strike a balance between low risk operation (to prevent outbreaks of illness, especially with new variants of the Covid-19 virus emerging) and the financial health of our education centre.

It was also a year of major internal changes. We welcomed our new Settlement Manager, Nick Skinner, approximately half way through the academic year. As soon as he joined us, he was engaged in putting together the course programme for the following academic year. This was truly a baptism of fire! His background in adult education management enabled him to rapidly assume responsibility for the planning, and successfully deliver the course brochure and 2022/3 programme on time.

As part of our planning for the Settlement’s future Nick even extended the programme further by introducing a new Summer School to the Settlement. This initiative was welcomed by existing members and attracted an encouraging number of new members (as we had hoped that it would do) - resulting in a well-attended series of Summer School workshops. This meant that the 2021-22 academic year ended on a note of optimism for the future.

The introduction of a new manager saw the departure of Sally Rogers and Jacqui Black, two valued members of staff who had been crucial to the Settlement’s success in weathering the pandemic. Their contribution was marked by the farewell given to them by the Settlement community. The baton passed smoothly to the new office team, and with the current trio of staff – Nick supported by his two assistant managers Julie and Carly – I am confident that we have a strong team in place to face the future and the challenges ahead.

We are now focusing on that future, because recovery following the pandemic is not sufficient to secure the Settlement’s long-term survival. Our aim is to grow and to generate a surplus from the centre. The core of the Settlement’s activity, and the charitable purpose enshrined in our constitution, is to offer adult education. We believe we have an attractive offer – excellent course content, high quality teaching and well-equipped facilities. We aim to drive these assets harder and fill the capacity that we have to the best of our ability – using as much of the teaching space and the spare hours of the week as we can. It means more courses, new subjects and new tutors, and of course more students and Members. We are also trying to make the management and administration of the Settlement as efficient and effective as possible. We have already put in place a new staffing structure and during the current year we will be improving the IT infrastructure and hopefully replacing our old and creaking database.

The Settlement’s ability to grow however is in part limited by our cherished but limited site. We have already shared with you our vision of an expanded site - with space to offer additional Arts and Crafts tuition in particular - combined with an inspiring new building in which to learn. We are currently in the early stages of building a robust business plan that can deliver that vision. There are of course a lot of hurdles to get over before we can even make the decision to go ahead – not least to secure the necessary

funding for the project. But the work being done at the moment will benefit the Settlement even if we have to adapt or delay our vision as it is providing valuable information that is helping us plan for the future. We want to involve you at each step of the journey and welcome suggestions from all those who are part of the Settlement community. Please help us to raise the profile of the Settlement, attract new Members from a wide area across Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire, and source new teaching staff. Together we can really keep the Settlement on the map.

Finally I should record our thanks to those who support the Settlement and its activities. Staff, past and present; students, tutors and other users of the Settlement's facilities; Members; volunteers and other supporters including the Heritage Foundation; and my fellow trustees. Without the commitment and support of all of these people the Settlement would not survive – with it we can look forward to the challenges of the future.”

There were no questions.

Irene Holland noted that the Settlement's office staff, past and present, were always friendly and helpful. The other Members present concurred and a vote of thanks was given to the staff.

## **6. Treasurer's report**

The Treasurer reported as follows:

“The accounts for the year ended 31 July 2022 have been sent for independent examination as required by the Charity Commission, before being formally published. We had hoped to have the examined report for the AGM, but our Examiner has been ill and this has delayed matters. We remain, however, well within the Charity Commission's deadline for submission.

In the meantime, the unexamined accounts (together with the annual report) have been approved by the Management Committee, subject to there being no changes to the figures in the accounts, and they have been published on the Settlement's website. We expect the examination of the accounts to be completed early next year at the latest. The draft accounts show a deficit of £41,531 of which £19,123 is represented by depreciation and a loss on the disposal of some obsolete fixed assets, making the actual cash deficit some £22,500.

The performance continues the trend of the past few years – certainly since 2012/13 - where the Settlement has run at a deficit every year if other income is excluded (and in some years even if it is not), at levels varying in line with the costs of maintaining the historic buildings.

The Management Committee is looking at ways to try to reduce the deficit, rather than rely too heavily upon donations going forward. This has resulted in an increase in both course fees and hiring fees, with further increases likely next year. For information these fees had not been increased since before the pandemic. We are also trying to keep a tight rein on expenditure where possible. By forward planning we were able to cap our energy costs for the next year, but notwithstanding this they will still be higher than in previous years.

We introduced a successful Summer School in August and we are looking at ways of introducing further courses and workshops outside of our traditional hours to make more use of our buildings.

We are planning to put on more fundraising events to take some of the financial pressure off of our students and hirers as we recognise that the cost of living crisis is impacting all of the Settlement community. However, we do need your support to make these events a success. The Christmas Fayre and Raffle (both this coming Friday) together with a quiz and other events in the New Year, will be a chance to support the Settlement.

The Settlement Players' talented team have just put on another excellent play (The Accused by Jeffrey Archer) and it was encouraging to see that the show more or less sold out. The Settlement benefits from a share in the profits of the Player's shows, so I urge you to provide similar support for their next play in March (The Importance of Being Earnest).

Our aim is to reduce, and ultimately eliminate, the level of the annual deficit. We are fortunate to have sufficient funds to give us breathing space to do this – these funds having been raised by way of various grants, the generous donations of Members and other supporters and the building up of reserves in the past. However, we cannot go on depleting our reserves so if anyone has any ideas for fundraising events, or better still is prepared to help to organise such events, then we would be delighted to hear from you. We would also welcome anyone who would like to make a regular donation to the Settlement if they are unable to support our fundraising events. The economic climate is very difficult at present, so I do appreciate that this plea may not necessarily be welcome. I do, however, have to be open and honest with you as to the issues facing the Settlement.

At the end of July 2022 the bank balance stood at £163,500 (last year £180,700) so there is no immediate cash flow concern. However, as I have just noted, we cannot continue to do what has been done in the past, as over time the bank balance will just reduce and any reserves will be used up. If last year's deficit of £22,500 continued in future years we would be facing a very serious situation in 5 years' time.

To summarise, the Settlement is surviving but needs your help, support and ideas, if we are to still be here at the end of this decade.”

In response to a number of questions about the Settlement's financial position, the following points were noted:

- The focus was on the Settlement's core activity, that of adult education, and to use its spare capacity to introduce new courses and initiatives. This would result in minimal additional overhead costs.
- The current year budget forecasted a slightly higher loss due to increased energy costs.
- Increasing course fees was a balancing act between the needs of the Settlement and what students could afford to pay.
- The success of the Settlement Players benefitted the Settlement following the new profit share arrangement with them.
- Not of all the tutors had biographies on the Settlement's website. The Settlement office was reliant on tutors providing their biographies, and sometimes courses were added in advance of receiving them. Those missing would be followed up as it was appreciated that students wanted to know about the tutor before enrolling on a course.
- Tutors and lecturers were paid a set fee on an hourly basis. The number of enrolments on a course did not affect the fee but there was a minimal number required for each course to cover tutor and other overhead costs.

- The number of grants received had been fewer than in the previous year. Those had included a grant towards the external redecoration of the building as under the terms of the lease with the Heritage Foundation at a peppercorn rent, the Settlement was responsible for maintaining the outside of the building, excluding the roof. The Settlement would not be able to get grant funding for courses, but could apply for support for specific projects such as improving IT provision. In the current year a grant of £7k had already been received to support marketing, and more grant applications were planned.

Allan Lupton asked why the annual report and unexamined financial statements were not available in hard copy at the meeting. In response the Secretary noted that all of the documentation for the AGM had been made available on the Settlement's website in advance of the meeting. A reminder had gone out to Members a week before the meeting confirming this. However, it was appreciated that some Members might not have, or want to, access the documentation in this way, so in future a copy of all documentation for the AGM would also be made available in the Settlement's office. The Treasurer also undertook to email the report and financial statements to Mr Lupton after the meeting and respond to any questions he might have. **Post meeting note:** following receipt of the report and financial statements Mr Lupton confirmed that he had no questions.

## **7. To receive the report and financial statements for the year ended 31 July 2022**

As noted in item 6, the report and financial statements for the year ended 31 July 2022 had been approved by the Management Committee subject to there being no changes to the figures in the accounts which were currently being examined.

The Members received the report and financial statements for the year ended 31 July 2022 on that basis.

**Post meeting note:** the financial statements were signed off unchanged by the independent examiner (see item 8) on 24 November 2022.

## **8. Appointment of independent examiner**

Although Roger McIntyre Brown had been unable to carry out the independent examination of the financial statements for the year ended 31 July 2022 due to illness, he had confirmed that he would be happy to undertake it for the year ended 31 July 2023.

The Members approved the appointment of Roger as independent examiner for the year ended 31 July 2023.

In Roger's place, the examination of the financial statements for the year ended 31 July 2022 was being carried out by Ken Holden, free of charge, and thanks were noted to Ken for stepping in to do so.

## **9. Approval of updated Constitution**

The Secretary explained the main reasons for proposing that the Settlement's Constitution was updated. The reasons were also set out in the notes accompanying the draft updated Constitution.

The draft updated Constitution, to replace the existing one approved by Members at the Annual General Meeting on 27 November 2017 (the 2017 Constitution), was unanimously approved under clause 9 (Amendments to the Constitution) of the 2017 Constitution, with

its adoption taking immediate effect. A special resolution to record the decision would be signed by the Chair for submission to the Charity Commission.

It was also noted that the terms of office for Trustees elected under items 10 and 11 would be in accordance with the provisions in the updated Constitution.

## 10. Election of Officers

The following nominations had been received:

<b>Nominee</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Proposer</b>
Hilary Kemp*	Chair	Marian Adams
Marian Adams*	Secretary	Elaine Fox
Alan Higbey*	Treasurer	Nigel Carrick

\* standing for re-election

It was noted that all three Officers had been serving since the Settlement was saved from closure in the summer of 2020.

The nominations were read out and the election of Officers on bloc was unanimously approved. Hilary King, Marian Adams and Alan Higbey were therefore duly elected as Chair, Secretary and Treasurer respectively.

## 11. Election of other Trustees

The following nominations had been received:

<b>Nominee</b>	<b>Proposer</b>
Katherine Alcock*	Alan Higbey
Marine Boulter	Hilary Kemp
Nigel Carrick*	Alan Higbey
Stephen Charles*	Natalie Maguire
Natalie Maguire*	Stephen Charles

\* standing for re-election

It was noted that Abigail Huffer, one of the Settlement's tutors, was not standing for re-election as she had recently had a baby. Thanks were noted for Abi's input. Another tutor, Marine Boulter, was standing in Abi's place, and her involvement would continue to provide the Management Committee a link to the teaching side.

The nominations were read out and the election of other Trustees on bloc was unanimously approved. Katherine Alcock, Marine Boulter, Nigel Carrick, Stephen Charles and Natalie Maguire were duly elected as other Trustees.

It was hoped that although Shauna Miller had not stood for election due to being on holiday, she would be happy to be co-opted back on to the Committee.

## 12. Looking forward

The Chair reported on some of the things that were being planned, including:

- Enhancements to core course offering to try out new ideas and attract new students who then might become Members.
- Looking at spare capacity, especially in second half of term.
- Major initiative to introduce Easter School in addition to Summer School offering taster sessions as a lead in to courses being offered as part of the Settlement's termly programme, to provide more opportunities for existing Members and to attract new Members. This initiative would increase activity and income.
- Drive to increase efficiency, including replacing the existing database which would making using it easier for both staff and students. Planning for this was ongoing with the aim of implementing a new system in the summer of 2023.
- Securing the Settlement's future by generating an annual income surplus. A detailed business plan was work in progress with background data and information being obtained, the latter being funded by a grant. This work would hopefully demonstrate the Settlement's growth potential and provide evidence for the proposed site expansion, particularly for the arts and crafts offer.
- Progressing the Forum to develop interest in the Settlement community.

In summary, some of the changes planned would be visible, others would be in the background, but the overall aim was to lay firm foundations for the Settlement's successful future.

The Chair noted that the plans she had outlined were wide ranging. The Management Committee was planning another public session in February/March 2023 to provide more information about them.

In response to a number of questions, the following points were noted:

- A lot of work had been done, and was ongoing, in respect of room capacity and the timing of courses including more week day evening and Saturday provision.
- The aim was to have a consistent approach based on sound assumptions.
- Saturday mornings were considered more attractive than Friday afternoons (although other options for this time would be looked at) and four new art courses would be trialled on Saturday mornings in January 2023.
- Currently 15-20% of courses were cancelled due to low take up. A course was only cancelled just before its start date which did not allow any time for putting in place an immediate replacement.
- As a temporary arrangement, spare capacity was being offered to local charities, e.g. Read Easy, so at least it was being used.
- Considering offer reduced rates on Friday afternoons/evenings, with perhaps a more "social" approach.
- Acknowledgement that fees across the board would need to be increased again for the Settlement to break even. But even one extra student on a course would make a real difference.
- Concern that the perception remained that the Settlement was for older people, and that the message about what it offered only reached its existing catchment. It was acknowledged that the Settlement was still a well kept secret and new ways of reaching people were needed, in addition to the increasing use of social media. This included the introduction of the Summer and Easter schools, and perhaps open days showcasing particular activities.

- Data analysis would form part of the planned public session in February/March 2023 to provide information on the basis of the future approach and how marketing could be targeted.
- The Settlement was in the process of being transformed and change, albeit challenging, was exciting. Some of the initiatives planned, e.g. debates on Friday evenings, could complement what was offered elsewhere e.g. by David's Bookshop but would need to attract quality speakers.
- Another "dead" time was the period immediately after Christmas and it was suggested that the Settlement could tap into this.
- Advantage of joint advertising, e.g. with the Settlement Players, so a different demographic reached.
- Membership numbers fluctuated during the year. They were still much lower than the pre pandemic levels. The figures were reported to the Management Committee at every meeting. The latest figures showed that the number of new Members were split 50/50 between standard membership and concessions, as opposed to the existing split of 25/75.

A question was also asked on whether Members paying their fees by bank standing order were paying the increased fees. It was confirmed that these Members had been advised of the increase, but this would be reviewed again.

### **13. Any Other Business**

#### **Message from Val Aitken**

In her absence, Val had asked that the following message was reported at the AGM: "Please add my thanks from an ordinary Member to all staff and the Committee for all they do for the Settlement. It is appreciated."

The other Members present concurred with Val's message.

### **14. Date of 2023 AGM**

Confirmed as Tuesday 21 November 2023.

The Chair thanked everyone for coming to the AGM and for their input and feedback.

The AGM closed at 9.01pm.

**These minutes were approved at the 2023 Annual General Meeting, and signed by the Chair, on 21 November 2023**