

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



MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2024

Tuesday 26 November 2024 at 7.30pm

Trustees (and Committee members) present:

Hilary Kemp (Chair), Marian Adams (Secretary), Alan Higbey (Treasurer), Stephen Charles (Vice Chair), Marine Boulter, Nigel Carrick, Collette Hoefkens, Nick Skinner (Manager and ex-officio)

Settlement Members present:

William Armitage, Elizabeth Barber, Pat Baskerville, Ken Chapman, Barbara Heaton, Jackie Gough, Maureen Higbey, Alan Lupton, Ian Scripps, Praful Soneji, David Tinney, Charles Vickers

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The meeting was confirmed quorate (ten Members of whom two must be trustees).

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Val Aitken, Katherine Alcock (trustee), Jasmine Dorricott, Roger and Liz McIntyre Brown and Ian Mutton.

3. Approval of minutes of the Annual General Meeting on 21 November 2023

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:

“Thank you for taking time to attend the Letchworth Educational Settlement AGM. I would like to share the highlights of the 2023 -2024 year with you.

First some context. This has been the first year since I have been the Chair of Trustees that has not been adversely affected by the pandemic. Which means it has been the first real test of how sustainable the Settlement is in a financial sense – can we generate sufficient income to cover our costs? Costs have risen substantially over recent years, especially energy for heating and lighting - and these form a significant proportion of the cost of running a busy venue operating seven days a week, throughout much of the year. I am pleased to say that we have had a successful year despite these cost pressures. More details of our financial position will be provided by Alan, our Treasurer, in his financial report to follow.

I would like to pick up on two other themes in my report.

- The first is the work that we have done this year to understand how we can improve the use we make of the Settlement's capacity. And how we can monitor this in a way that enables us to create better plans, that support our primary role as an adult education centre, and also continues our place as a community hub.
- The second theme is the investments that we have made in the Settlement's future. I'd like to explain what these are, why the time was right this year to invest in these changes, and how they will set us up for the future.

I will start by focusing on the challenge of how to make the best use of the capacity of our building. It is not a one-off problem that can be “solved” in a single year and then set aside. A key strategic goal is for the Settlement to have greater financial security in the future. This is in spite of a backdrop of rising costs that we have limited control over. We recognise that for the Settlement to thrive, we need to grow year on year. This means expanding the range of courses offered in our programme, and increasing the number of learners and tutors we attract.

We have been successful in growing both the number of courses run during the 2023-2024 academic year, and increasing the enrolments by 12% compared to the previous year. This is an achievement that we are proud of and is the result of hard work by the Settlement manager, Nick Skinner, and his team of two part-time assistant managers - with support and guidance from the Trustees.

Adding new course subjects and tutors presents a higher risk than just offering the tried and tested favourites. Therefore part of the capacity planning work has looked at what makes a viable size of class – and when to take difficult decisions such as cancelling undersubscribed courses, or asking learners in small classes to pay a little extra to enable their course to run without the Settlement having to absorb a loss.

In addition, we have sought to reduce the risks associated with bringing in new tutors and subjects by introducing them to our learners via one-off workshops and lectures. We schedule some of these during the year, but have found that the Easter and Summer Schools are most effective because we can market them as a collection of “taster” workshops. We are still experimenting with the most effective durations and dates for the Easter and Summers Schools as the enrolments this year were slightly down on the previous year (by 5%). In addition, we need to ensure that the considerable effort that goes in to running these schools during the holiday periods is helping to drive course

enrolments. Which is why we are monitoring a new metric introduced in the previous year - the total guided learning hours – which is the sum of all the hours actively taught to learners across the full set of courses and workshops that ran. This amounted to 4,158 hours in 2023-2024, a 9% increase over the previous year.

In this year's annual report you will find more detailed information about these metrics, broken down into three classifications – arts and crafts, languages and humanities courses. Creative writing courses and workshops are still offered but are now combined with the old "special interest" category under the new classification "humanities".

The Settlement is not just an adult education centre, it is also a community hub and performing arts venue. We believe this is an important and complementary use of the building's capacity. The organisations that use the Settlement bring a wide range of people and experiences to it, which enriches the cultural life that we can offer. The hiring income generated by these organisations also contributes to our finances, with hirers making use of the Settlement capacity at times when we are less likely to be able to run courses.

The most significant performing arts organisation based here is the Settlement Players. The Players were founded in 1923, three years after the Settlement itself, and they celebrated their centenary in December 2023. Our relationship with them continues to be of mutual benefit and the Kincaid Hall has again been the venue of three successful productions during the year – The Games Afoot or Holmes For The Holidays, Twelfth Night and Absent Friends. This year, the Green Room was renamed the Baskerville Room, in memory of long-standing Settlement Player and accomplished set designer John Baskerville.

A second example of the Settlement acting as a hub for community arts is our partnership with Herts Visual Arts (HVA), which is now in its second year. This collaboration brings together HVA's 300+ Hertfordshire artists and craftspeople with the Settlement's venue for arts and crafts and its teaching facilities. This partnership has several mutual benefits, including joint marketing opportunities, finding new tutors and providing an exhibition space for the popular annual Open Studios.

I am now going to shift perspective and talk about the investments in the Settlement's future that have been made this year.

Several of these investments have been in the fabric and fittings of the building. The projects have included the installation of a replacement boiler, and the interior decoration of our most visited public area, the Kincaid Hall. The other major investment has been in technology – primarily a new database and website.

We have made a major investment in time as well as money in this new database and website. We had identified the need to replace both of these platforms some considerable time ago as they were becoming obsolete, and it was only a matter of time before they failed completely.

Another objective of this change in office technology was to reduce the administrative burden on the Settlement office. As a small charity with limited staff and other resources, the new database and website were essential to help secure the Settlement's future as they would ensure our existing resources could be used to maximum potential.

Stephen, our Vice Chair and one of the Trustees who steered through the implementation of the database and website, will provide more details in his presentation to follow.

We do appreciate that our new systems have meant changes for our users and we are grateful for how they have embraced them. We are also grateful for the feedback we have had. This has already resulted in helping us to improve the search functionality on the website and the experience for mobile phone users.

I would also like to explain a little more about the refurbishment and redecoration of the Kincaid Hall. If you look around you, you will see that the floor has been repaired and revarnished, the tiled fireplace at the rear of the room has been renovated to make it into a feature once more, a new colour scheme has been introduced to give the room and stage a more contemporary feel, and the arts and crafts heritage has been picked out in the eye-catching sweep of curtains. There is a new interactive screen on the wall for use in classes and lectures, and the audio-visual technology has been upgraded. These are just the most visible changes.

To enable this work to take place, we have committed the funds held in reserves arising from the Save Our Settlement Appeal in 2020 to meet the costs (please note that these will appear in next year's accounts). We felt that this was an appropriate use of these funds because the Kincaid Hall is a showcase for the whole venue. We need it to be a well-equipped and flexible space and fit for the future – and we want it to reflect the image and ethos of the Settlement.

I would like to conclude with some thank-yous and final reflections.

The planning, promotion and delivery of an educational programme that was significantly larger than the previous year - combined with the additional work to select and implement the new database and website, and to carry out a full schedule of replacement, improvements and redecoration - is the result of a huge team effort. I would like to thank the staff and the Trustees involved for achieving so much over this last year. And for planning the changes so that they caused the least disruption to learning and hiring at the Settlement. Well done to you all!

We now want to make these new investments really work for us. Our Fundraising Sub Committee has already planned an increased number of social events for the coming year. The income from these will continue to provide us with much needed additional funds which we can re-invest in the Settlement. We hope as many people as possible will attend these events to support us – and to enjoy the newly refurbished Kincaid Hall. The first of these events is on Friday – our annual Christmas Arts and Crafts Fayre. Please come along – and bring friends and family too. We appreciate the support that you the Members and other users give to the life of the Settlement – whether as learners, tutors, hirers, volunteers, or by taking part in the events staged here.

In summary - we feel that we have achieved a great deal during the past year, a lot of which has been in our plans for some considerable time. We look forward to achieving even more in the coming years.

Thank you.”

6. Treasurer's report

The Treasurer reported as follows:

“The accounts for the year ended 31 July 2024 have been independently examined as required by the Charity Commission. There were no changes from the draft report and accounts approved by the Committee on 7 November and made available on the

Settlement's website. The report and accounts have now been signed and the draft version has been replaced with the signed version on the website.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to formally record our thanks to Roger McIntyre Brown for once again independently examining the accounts. He does so for no fee which saves us a not inconsiderable sum and we are very grateful.

The accounts show a surplus of £4,713. The surplus arises after an accounting adjustment of £18,445 for asset depreciation, which means our cash surplus was £23,158.

Although we continue to depend on income from our fundraising activities to support our charitable (adult education) activities, what we term "the funding gap" between the income we raise from our courses and the cost of them (including the running costs of the Settlement) has reduced considerably over the past few years. We will continue to work to eliminate this gap so that our courses at least break even and that any additional income raised can be used to improve the Settlement's offer and facilities.

During the year the Committee approved expenditure on a range of projects that had been under consideration for some time. We still had a large cash reserve following the Save Our Settlement Appeal and it was agreed that using the funds for these projects was a suitable use of them as they were either needed for operational purposes or would improve the existing facilities, both helping to secure the Settlement's future. We felt that having stabilised the Settlement's financial position since the Covid pandemic, the time was right to undertake these projects.

Projects completed during the year were:

- The replacement of the database and website, both of which were becoming obsolete and it was only a matter of time before they failed completely. The new systems now in place give us a better platform to manage the Settlement's activities, improved financial and management reporting and has relieved some of the pressure on the Settlement office. Stephen will provide more information on the new systems in his presentation to follow.
- We replaced our boilers, which were getting to the end of their useful life. The new boilers should help reduce energy costs as they are much more efficient. We are also continuing to look at further measures to improve our energy efficiency and costs.
- Our piano was also damaged beyond repair, and after research and advice from professional musicians, we bought a new Yamaha clavino, a digital piano, which is very versatile and which will feature in a number of forthcoming events.

Much needed work to the buildings started during the year and has now been almost completed. This included new audio-visual equipment to enhance the learning experience and the refurbishment of the Kincaid Hall, including redecoration, repairs to the floor, new blinds and curtains and better sound proofing.

Looking forward, the Committee has had to increase course and hiring fees for the current year to cover increases in our operational costs, but we will make every effort to hold the level of course fees for two years as we recognise the financial pressure that our learners also continue to be under. But we do feel that we have more breathing space now as we continue to work to increase our capacity on existing courses and introduce

new ones as well as trying to contain our operating costs and improve our efficiency to make the best use of our staff resourcing.

The Fundraising Sub Committee continues to look at ways to supplement our income from our educational activities. This year included several music events covering an eclectic mix of styles, and our successful and enjoyable annual quiz, thanks to our Quizmasters.

We are planning to put on more fundraising events in the coming year. We have already booked four musical events for the spring and have two more planned, with most artists new to the Settlement. Please do try to come along if you can as we need your support to make our fundraising events a success. Nick will ensure that you are kept abreast of forthcoming events via his regular news updates so please make a note in your diaries.

The Christmas Fayre and Raffle (both this coming Friday) will be an imminent chance to support the Settlement, and we have a Christmas song event from the gentlemen who brought us “Flanders and Swan” on 14th December. Do come along, enjoy some mince pies and tea/coffee as well as a sing along to get you in the festive spirit.

We are very lucky to have a small group of loyal and dedicated volunteers who continue to support our fundraising efforts, and we would welcome anyone who has any ideas for fundraising events, or better still is prepared to help to organise such events. Alternatively, if you are unable to support our fundraising events in any way, you can always make a donation – and if you can Gift Aid, this will increase its value by 25%.

It would also be remiss of me not to mention the huge support we get from the talented Settlement Players. They have just put on another excellent and sold-out production (The Flint Street Nativity by Tim Firth of Calendar Girls fame). The Settlement benefits from a share in the profits of the Players’ productions in addition to their regular rental payments for the hiring of the Kincaid Hall, so I urge you to provide similar support for their next productions in March (The Girl on the Train, based on a best-selling novel) and June (Haywire by Eric Chappell who is best known as the writer of Rising Damp).

In conclusion, at the end of July 2024, the bank balance stood at £160,847 (last year £176,200) so there is no immediate cash flow concern. The balance at the time of writing this report is around £115,000, after paying for the bulk of the improvement works carried out over the summer holiday. Whilst we cannot rest on our laurels, sound financial management and the best use of our resources mean that we can plan for the future and be reasonably confident that the Settlement will still be here, and flourishing, at the end of this decade and beyond.

Information on our financial position is provided in the annual report and the notes to the accounts, but, in the meantime, I am happy to answer any questions.

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

- The “funding gap” between the income raised from courses and the cost of running them for the year ended 31 July 2024 was £15,000, reduced from just over £40,000 for the previous year. The gap had now reduced considerably from the past few years.
- Cash at Bank of £160, 847 as at 31 July 2024 included the funds raised from the Save Our Settlement Appeal in 2020.

- The loss on disposal of fixed assets arose following a review of assets held that were obsolete, including the old boilers and chairs purchased during the pandemic which were no longer fit for purpose.

7. To receive the report and financial statements for the year ended 31 July 2024

The report and financial statements for the year ended 31 July 2024 had been approved by the Committee on 7 November 2024 subject to there being no changes to the financial statements which at the time were still being independently examined. The independent examiner signed off the financial statements, unchanged, on 11 November 2023.

The Members received the report and financial statements for the year ended 31 July 2024.

8. Appointment of independent examiner

Thanks were given to Roger McIntyre Brown for once again carrying out the independent examination of the financial statements. He received no remuneration for the examination and had saved the Settlement around £3,000.

Roger McIntyre Brown had confirmed that he would be happy to undertake the examination for the year ending 31 July 2025.

The Members approved the appointment of Roger as independent examiner for the year ending 31 July 2025.

9. Election of trustees

The Chair reminded Members that trustees now retired by rotation which provided greater continuity for the Settlement as it reduced the potential for a complete change of management every year.

The following nominations had been received:

Name of Nominee	Proposer
Marine Boulter*	Glenys Palmer
Nigel Carrick*	Jean Ellis
Alan Higbey*	Derek Blyth

*Retiring by rotation and standing for re-election

The nominations were all for existing Trustees and no new ones had been received.

The nominations were read out and the election of trustees on bloc was unanimously approved, with no abstentions.

10. Presentation on Settlement's new website and database

Stephen Charles, Vice Chair and one of the Trustees who steered through the implementation of the database and website, gave a presentation on the Settlement's new website and database, including a tour of the website (covering the home page and menu options) and how to book a course.

Key points noted in the presentation were:

- The new website and database were the result of a lot of discussions, planning and reviewing. What we have now is “different but the same”.
- The User Portal has been the subject of some initial confusion which we have tried to address. Via the Portal you can see your personal and membership details, courses, workshops and events you have enrolled on and payments you have made. However, you can do everything you might want to do on the website (join/renew your membership or enrol on courses, workshops or events) without using the Portal.
- The look of the website on a tablet or mobile phone may be different from a personal computer/laptop or because of the constraints imposed by smaller devices.
- It is worth using the filter function when looking for a course because of the volume of them:



- The Vice Chair demonstrated that booking a course and paying for it, even with the repeated data entry required, took four minutes. A Member confirmed that during the presentation he had also booked a course using his mobile, and it had taken him three minutes.

The presentation is attached as an annex to the minutes.

Following the presentation Members raised a number of questions and issues, summarised as follows:

Repeated data entry

Point raised:

- It was not user friendly to have to input the same data three times when enrolling on a course or workshop.
- Users should come first.

In response:

- We appreciate that repeated data entry is frustrating and have tried to address this by:

- (a) using an address look up in the forms (where you start typing the first line of your address and then select it from the list that is displayed. This is common functionality used by a lot of websites in one form or another):

Country [Find your address](#)

GB ▾ 229 Nevells


ENTER Letchworth Settlement, **229 Nevells** Road, Letchworth Garden City, SG6

- (b) Drawing attention to the pen icon to copy your details.

Attendee details

Please click the pen icon on the right of the form to copy your details from above.

Admission - Ticket 1

First name *	Last name *	
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However, we appreciate that this functionality is not currently working and we have been waiting for Beacon to fix the problem. **Post meeting note:** the problem was resolved on 11 December.

- We have already asked Beacon to consider a tick box to confirm that the address details previously entered should be used again and they have confirmed that it is something they will consider, but its priority will be dependent on how many other of their clients have requested it.
- We have also already asked Beacon to see if it is possible to use a membership number only to renew a membership and to link to a enrolment.
- **Post meeting note:** Another way to mitigate repeated data entry would be to use autofill on a personal device. Autofill can be used save passwords, addresses and payment information to fill in online forms automatically.
- We also feel that the time taken to complete a transaction even with repeated data entry is not overly onerous.

Shopping basket

- It was not user friendly to have to have to make multiple transactions and payments if you are enrolling on more than one course, workshop or event.

In response:

- Our system is not an e-commerce platform but a customer relationship management one, used for efficiently managing the Settlement's activities and membership.
- Again, we appreciate that having to make multiple transactions is frustrating.

- We have already asked Beacon to consider introducing a shopping basket and they have confirmed that it is something they will consider but it will require a great deal of work as it would be a significant change to the way their system operates.
- We also feel that the time taken to complete multiple transactions is not overly onerous. Taking out or renewing membership is done on an annual basis. Adding a donation to a membership or enrolment is not a separate transaction.

Priority booking

Points raised:

- Why is there no longer priority booking for existing learners?
- Why is there no waiting list for courses?

In response:

- We took a policy decision to discontinue priority booking to ensure access to our courses was equitable and open to all. Some courses in the past have effectively operated as a “closed shop”.
- However, existing learners do get prior notification, via their tutors, of when the next term’s courses will be published on the website. This information will not be included in one of the Manager’s regular newsletters to subscribers until a few days after website publication.
- One issue noted from the recent publication of next term’s courses was that a tutor was absent so learners on this course did not get the prior notification. We are considering how to deal with this eventuality if it happens in the future.
- We are not aware of any existing learner who was not able to re-enrol on a course.
- A number of our courses do not sell out.
- We also took a policy decision not to have a waiting list for courses because currently we have no process in place to operate it effectively. This will be kept under review.

Potential loss of business/competition

Points raised:

- Concern expressed that the Settlement would lose learners because of the points noted above.
- Concern also expressed that the Settlement would not attract a younger demographic because of these points noted and the fact that younger people were more likely to use mobile devices and different technologies.
- Online language courses could become a real competitor.
- Concern was also expressed that learners could enrol on multiple courses without necessarily intending to take them all (and looking for a refund at a future date), thereby preventing someone else’s enrolment.

In response:

- Our enrolment numbers continue to be maintained so there is no evidence that our new systems are having an adverse effect.
- The website had been tested so that it worked on all devices, even if the view was a little different where devices had smaller screens.
- There was currently no evidence of learners enrolling on courses they did not intend to take, and refunds were only made in accordance with the Settlement's refund policy. However, if this became an issue, we could consider if it was possible to restrict the number of enrolments that could be made.

In conclusion

- The Vice Chair re-iterated that those involved with the website and database would continue to consider the issues raised (and any future ones – feedback was very useful as it helped us to understand the user experience from different perspectives) and make every effort to resolve them where it was possible. However, it was not reasonable to give a categorical assurance that all of the issues would be resolved to any one individual's satisfaction or to give a timeline for doing so.
- The Settlement was now a much more structured organisation, with systems in place to support its future, and hopefully expansion.
- A lot had already been achieved. Although it was acknowledged that there was still more to do, the momentum would be maintained. It was important to take time to achieve the best possible outcome.
- A number of Members expressed their thanks to all involved in putting in place the new arrangements and for what had been achieved in the last year.

11. Questions from Members

In addition to those noted under item 10, Members also raised the following points:

- The Settlement was commended for providing a venue for popular music in Letchworth.
- In response to a question about offering bursaries (an initiative in the original spirit of the Settlement), the Manager confirmed that the Settlement had a concessions policy. He undertook to publicise its existence in one of his newsletters. The Trustees reviewed the policy on an annual basis and they would consider amending it if it was felt there was a need to do so, for example, offering some form of support for young adults.
- The Manager also noted that the Settlement was experimenting with some free events, open to all. Some of these were to introduce new tutors, other would be more community-based activities such as a proposed free monthly craft night.

12. Any Other Business

Natalie Maguire

The Chair reported that Natalie had stepped down as a Trustee. She had been a Trustee since just after the Settlement had re-opened after the pandemic. Her past experience in education had been invaluable and she has worked closely with the Settlement staff on the course programme and its promotion. The Chair thanked Natalie for her contribution.

Trustee vacancies

The Chair noted that there were currently three Trustee vacancies and if any Member was interested in joining the Committee, please get in touch.

Message from Val Aitken

In her absence, Val had sent the following message:

“Can I add my personal thanks to all Staff & Committee for all they do to keep the Settlement running with openness, a cheery ambience, professionalism, forethought, energy and most importantly vision. It is all much appreciated. THANK YOU ALL VERY MUCH. I do like the new colour of the Hall.”

Message from Jasmine Dorricott

In her absence, Jasmine had sent the following message:

“With my very best wishes and grateful thanks for all the work of the Trustees, the Committee and all the Staff at the Settlement for the great pleasure they provide through the courses and events which are arranged.”

13. Date of 2025 AGM

Confirmed as Tuesday 25 November 2025.

The Chair thanked everyone for coming to the AGM.

The AGM closed at 9.13pm.

**These minutes will be approved at the 2025 Annual General Meeting on
25 November 2025**

ANNEX: PRESENTATION ON SETTLEMENT'S NEW WEBSITE AND DATABASE



Letchworth Educational Settlement

Registered Charity Number: 311085

229 Nevells Road
Letchworth Garden City
SG6 4UB

**26 Nov 2024 AGM
Presentation on
Settlement's new
website and
database**

Historical Context Part 1 (or a Hysterical Perspective)

- 2013: previous database and website designed – bespoke to Settlement.
- 2017: systems passed to individual to maintain as a personal undertaking.
- Summer 2020: new Committee following Settlement closure due to Covid pandemic.
- Aug 2022: individual requested to end 'arm's length' support. The systems were obsolete and not (financial or GDPR) compliant, and with no core support.
- Autumn 2022: new database specification drawn up.
- Worked with individual to 'keep system going for 12 months' to give us breathing space.
- Spring 2023: identified, reviewed and scored potential suppliers.
- Summer 2023: agreed supplier to implement late 2023.
- Winter 2023: supplier no longer met requirements and discussions terminated.

Historical Context Part 2

- Dec 2023: a new review and assessment of suppliers undertaken.
- Spring 2024: completed assessments and signed up with Beacon CRM (Customer Relations Management)
- Mar 2024: started Beacon implementation with consultant project manager with an ambitious go live date of July 2024.
- Apr 2024: identified website designer and developer, Morse Brown Design (MBD) who were already familiar with Beacon. They also committed to our go live date of July 2024.
- **We now had alignment and familiarity between the website design team, our CRM, our payment provider, and a real-world example of a similar organisation that used these providers.**
- **July 2024: Go live target met.**



Letchworth
Settlement

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Today – Tour of
the website



Where are we today?

- The website tour output
- Sep 2024: Beacon consultant handed Settlement team to Beacon customer manager. We are actively engaged with our customer manager to improve and develop our CRM platform.
- Oct 2024: website wrap up for implementation and post implementation improvements.
- Jan 2025 onwards: continue process review, design, test and implement improvements with Beacon and MBD.

The Journey....

FROM in Aug 2022:

- An obselete system which was not (financial or GDPR) compliant, 'arms length' support and with no immediate core system support, no training provision, elements not working or not fit for purpose, containing inaccurate and incomplete data, and limited and inflexible financial and management reporting.

TO in Nov 2024:

- A good ongoing working relationship with two companies experienced in serving the charitable and not for profit sector.
- Systems that are fully supported and which will be kept up to date with technological, regulatory and other changes.
- Beacon - A cloud based CRM, with training packages, regular clinics, quality helpdesk support, a flexible package adaptable to our needs, top charity CRM provider for last 5 years. Able to provide detailed information, analysis & processes which provide accurate and complete data as a base for securing the Settlement's future. Developing and improving their platform to meet future needs.
- MDB – A website designer and developer who have experience of Beacon and other charitable/not for profit organisations with similar needs to us. Provide training, advice, quality support and maintenance.