

West of Scotland
Dry Stone Walling Association
Scottish Charity No SCO 39439

Annual General Meeting
Virtual Meeting via Zoom
Sunday 7th November 2021

Meeting

Sederunt: Norman Muir, Ronnie Reid, Alistair Eadie, Derek Winter, Alan Patrick, **Kenneth**, Colin Nicholson, Rowena Nicholson, John New, John Hendry, Russ Liddell, Crawford Andrew, Dave Barber, Alistair McGeoch

Apologies: Doug and Margaret Nielson, Jeff Hattie, Danny McNaughton

Agenda Item 1 – Minutes for previous Years

Minutes of the AGM 2019. (These were not proposed in the previous AGM (2020) as we had a short-form, off-line AGM using Zoom.)

The minutes of the 2019 AGM held on 3rd November 2019 were proposed by Alan Patrick, seconded by Alistair McGeoch, and passed as a true record of the proceedings.

Minutes of the AGM 2020.

The minutes of the 2020 AGM held via Zoom on 8th November 2020 were proposed by Alan Patrick, seconded by Alistair McGeoch, and passed as a true record of the proceedings.

Agenda Item 2 – Chairperson's Statement

This was given by the chairman as per the Annual Submission to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) for the period 1st September 2020 to 31st August 2021.

2021 has turned out to be a slow year this year. We had a catchup for the backlog created by the cancelled courses in 2020. Overall, we had about 60 trainees come through on training days, which is about right for the numbers in any given year. They did very well, and the feedback was excellent.

In August we had the annual BBQ at Alan and Alison's and once again a great big thank you to them both for their generosity and hospitality. There were over 20 attendees and the sun shone and made it a great event and a great catch-up for everyone.

The only branch event we had was in September at Kilsyth and it turned out an enjoyable, productive day. It was a member's day and they got out of it what they wanted. We rebuilt a cheek-end and a central section of wall, which badly needed it. We also reorganised a lot of the stone and made the site a bit more user-friendly, with

the use of the mini digger. And for those wishing to practise and update their skills, this site is available all year round for practice.

We took part in this year's zoom SLG meeting (Scottish Liaison Group – all the branches of Scotland have a meeting once a year). It was light as most branches have been inactive as we have been. One of the main points to come out of it was the possibility of a joint branch project at Threave Gardens next year. We were going to hold it this June but because of Covid it was cancelled. The idea was the rebuilding of a Galloway Dyke at Threave. I think this would be a beneficial project for us all – it's a wall style we don't have a lot of experience with and I for one would like to try it.

Once again, I'd like to give a big thank you to our resident IT wizard Dave. Dave's been working hard behind the scenes constantly upgrading and improving our website and banking system, improving our exposure on the Social Media platforms. All this work hasn't gone unnoticed and it's resulted in making the committee's work much easier and more streamlined. So once again, thanks Dave.

A mention must go to our enterprising member Jeff Hattie, who unfortunately couldn't manage today. He went to view a competition down at Dumfries and was inveigled into taking part in a walling competition. He came away with a prize for the novices so did very well.

It was with great sadness that we had to announce the death of one of our long-standing members Ian Coultie. Ian was not only a great waller but a lovely individual who brought a great deal to the branch over the years. He suffered for seven years with a debilitating illness which he bore with amazing resilience and a testament to strength as an individual and will be sorely missed.

I'd like to thank all the membership for sticking with us over this year. It's been a tough year for us all and we've become a bit disconnected – especially a lot of the new members because just before all this kicked off, the numbers had gone up and we had a lot of new blood into the association and then this has hit us, and a lot have dropped off and haven't been seen since. So hopefully if we can try and get projects going properly next year, we can get things started and we'll see some of them coming back.

Agenda Item 3 – Finance Report

Chairman John New submitted the annual accounts as per the Annual Submission to OSCR for the period 1st September 2020 to 31st August 2021.

We can see between last year and this year there's a big jump in the figures – mainly due to virtually doing nothing last year - it was an almost dead year. We had taken in money for training courses which had been in the system, and a lot of people just left the money in rather than taking refunds. That's why we show some income. The last year up to August we ran three courses, so we had quite a good income from that of £2942 in total, £2638 just from the courses.

The expenses mainly come down to the van. Insurance has gone up year on year, just for covering EL and PL and that was £506 last year so it's a pricey thing but a necessary evil unfortunately.

Administration costs, the general costs of mostly IT costs which we have to incur, and governance is £360 – that's the cost of getting the accounts done each year, which is necessary for OSCR.

So, the cash-in-bank balance is £4930. The current balance is £4834, and having to pay a few bills, as opposed to £4149 (last year), so we're very healthy with the balance in the bank. The cost of the van still has to be invoiced, with all the MOT work and there were a few other issues with it totalling around £700-800, so we'll have about £4000 when that's taken into account.

We've had to pay for the Portaloo, and a minor amount for tools, and we've had to pay out some course refunds of £342. All in all, the accounts are sitting quite healthy.

John then asked for any questions: There were no questions.

Recommendation of the balance sheet as a true record of the accounts was proposed by Derek Winter, seconded by Crawford Andrew and passed unanimously.

On the Zoom call last year, we didn't have the 2020 accounts proposed or seconded, and we didn't have copies of those at the current AGM, so it was decided to Propose the 2020 accounts at next year's AGM, along with the 2022 accounts.

Agenda Item 4 – Election of Office Bearers

At this point the committee demitted office and the election for 2021/22 office bearers took place.

Chairperson: John New was re-elected to post after being proposed by Alan Patrick, seconded by Alistair Eadie and approved unanimously by the meeting.

Deputy Chairman: Gordon Gray was re-elected to post after being unanimously endorsed by the meeting.

Treasurer: Chairman John New was appointed acting treasurer after being proposed by Alan Patrick, seconded by Alistair Eadie and approved unanimously by the meeting.

Secretary: Dave Barber was re-elected to post after being unanimously endorsed by the meeting.

All other existing members, (had agreed previously or) agreed to stand for re-election. All nominations were approved unanimously by the meeting.

It was found that Crawford wasn't registered as a trustee with OSCR. He is on the website and will be added to the OSCR listing.

Agenda Item 5 – 2021 Courses and IT

Dave Barber gave a quick update on the 2021 courses and IT.

The 2021 April course was moved to June 2021. Because of Covid we decided to split that course to reduce the numbers for safety. So, we ran Course 1A which was attended by 10 people. Course 2 at Cardross ran successfully. Course 1B was going to be at Helensburgh but we didn't have enough wall for a full course, so we moved Course 1B to Cardross as well (which was our 3rd course of the year). We finished with Course 3 at Kilsyth (which was our 4th course of the year).

The number of attendees over the last 2 years of Covid meant we had a large set of waitlists. When we started contacting the reserved people a month before the course, a fair proportion of them had changed circumstances (had become ill, broken limbs, moved away etc.) and couldn't attend. We had a full waitlist list so we could take people off the waitlist list to populate the reserved attendees who could not make it. We have about 5 people left on the waitlist and every week we get at least another 2 enquiries, so we will have a large list of email addresses to alert when we get the 2022 course dates and locations.

On the IT side, we haven't had a lot of change. With Covid, Dave decided not to implement the new Credit Card payment system on the website as it was uncertain how many courses would go ahead, and it would be easier to request the money once we had confirmed courses. This turned out to be very efficient as we didn't need to refund lots of people if they couldn't make the courses. Refunds were mentioned on the Scottish Liaison Group call - the other associations had to make many refunds which took some time. We took the right decision there.

The payment system will need re-testing and implementation once we know the courses have a good probability of going ahead. We may use a couple of the waitlist people as early releases to test the new system.

Agenda Item 6 – 2022 programme

There was a discussion about the programme timing this year. We generally decide the events in the committee meetings, but we haven't had many of those in the past 12 months. We plan to release the first cut of the programme in the first 2 months of 2022.

John said we had several builds to look at next year. We have one small cairn to be built on I Vow Island in the middle of Loch Lomond. It's a quite a logistical exercise, and Russ has been on the ball with it. One of the locals has a barge who can help move a tonne or two of stone over for us. The ancient MacFarlanes clan have a keep on the island, and we can't use any of the historic stone on the island for the keep. There were discussions on mortaring it as there are concerns it would be destroyed or vandalised by campers but we're generally loath to do that. We have found a source of stone at Inveruglas, and we may do a small mock-up of it on the bank, so we know how much stone to be carried over. An interesting wee project.

Another project for 2022 or the following year is to create another Moongate and related feature around Dewers Whiskey on London Road. The red sandstone we can get would look superb. We have to confirm the terms of the build to ensure there's no conflict of interest and it is a community or charitable build. We will be putting a banner up to highlight who we are etc. It's a closed site with strict rules like the site

at the Ocean Terminal. That's another interesting build for the newbies who haven't constructed anything like that before. We still have the old formers at the stables for putting it together. This project could take several weekends – there's a lot of stone cutting and chipping. It may mean some mid-week working as well to keep it moving along.

The third possible build is at Threave (Galloway Dyke mentioned before), which might happen in June. It's a good project and a chance to catch up with other Wallers as well. It's supposed to be a lovely estate as well.

There was a discussion on our previous Greenock build with 2 curved walls. We may not get to add anything there in the future. It was the old baths site and was given to a community group for the people of Greenock in Perpetua, but the council have decided to develop it. They may try to preserve the walls we have built but we don't hold high expectations.

The Girl Guides site (South Newton – GG Renfrewshire's camp and Training Centre) have one section left to complete. There's one section which needs a rebuild and there's a gap that needs filling. It is probably a one-day build. There was a comment to make sure the directions/GPS were updated as it's hard to find if you don't know the location.

We also have more walls available at the Blacksmiths.

Dave asked about Rhu, as there are many enquiries for training at Rhu/Helensburgh. John confirmed that there wasn't much wall up there for rebuilding and it was turning into a steep wall build – which is slow and not ideal for training courses. Cardross has plenty of straight wall for training courses and is close to Rhu/Helensburgh.

Cardross will need some stone moved from the further end of the wall.

There is a potential project at Aberfeldy, but it is a long way away and may be good as a joint project with Central branch.

Agenda Item 7 – Van

The Van had a lot of work done on it earlier in the year because it had been sitting for so long during the lockdowns. The brakes were sticking, there were issues with the starter and the alternator stuck – bursting the V-belt. It was towed to the garage and is now running well. A couple of small things still to be tidied up and then we will get the final bill. It's estimated to be around £400-800 work. We may get around 2 years out of it but then will have to think about replacement. Vans have currently rocketed in price (delivery vans are in short supply) and we may have to pay a lot for a replacement. We use the van around 14 weekends a year – around 30 days.

There was a discussion on hire vans and insurance. We are going to have to pay a lot to replace our van, as the supply was interrupted, and the demand has increased - meaning higher prices. So, we'll have to plan ahead and John feels we should build up

the reserves. If we are going to run a van and given the types of jobs and the number of tools we carry, it's a necessary evil.

Hiring for the weekend would mean loading the van with tools and unloading it before taking it back. Alistair McGeoch, said it will be at least £150 hire for each weekend, which will be around \$2,500 a year. You can buy cheap van insurance for hiring, but planning for type of van, pick-up, drop-off will be inconvenient. Alternatives could be buying a box trailer with the tools permanently fitted (meaning a member would require a towbar) or buying a smaller van like we used to have. Also, we must be aware that the Scottish Govt may some point insist on electric vans – and we don't want to be stuck with a good fitted-out van that may not be viable.

John agreed and continued that because were always on the cheap end for our vans, the ongoing costs are becoming ridiculous. Every time they go in its £400 -£800, so there's big chunks out of the bank for maintenance. We're thinking of getting a better-quality van but to do that we need to build up a bit more funds so we can afford it, which means putting the course fees up.

Agenda Item 8 – Course Fees

We're charging £60 for a weekend, which John feels is way too cheap, and he thinks about £100 is realistic. Dave gave approximate prices for other organisations. Southwest branch seems to be the cheapest at £85 and other branches charge up to around £100. Professional companies can charge around £270 for the weekend. We had one attendee who arrived and said he'd paid the deposit and wanted to pay the rest. We have emails asking why we are so cheap.

Alan said we have a good website and a fee of £100 wouldn't be a problem. John said at our current prices, with the waitlist, we can increase the price and still fill the courses. Alan said we should bear in mind that with increased fees, we get a bit more cash in the bank and we can get a better van. At the end of the day, you're making money for the use of the association to do something for themselves. The money doesn't go into charity, we do the work for the charities on site, we're better using the money for a decent van and tools etc.

Alistair M asked what prices we were looking for, for the new course fees. John suggested £100/day and mentioned he was talking to 2 trainee rangers in their early 20s on a tree-planting project and they were asking about the courses. He said it was currently £60 but could be £100 next year and they said it was still cheap. They expect some courses to be £200-£300 per day.

Dave said we must be careful about people who are not professionals who are taking the course as an experience or buying a gift voucher – we don't want to price ourselves out of that market as those people are the majority of our trainees.

John said that meals out for two are at least £60. Alistair E mentioned that tickets for someone like Rob Brydon will be £60 per person. John said people expect a higher price and also £100 is a good amount for a gift. Alistair M mentioned that most companies don't want to hit the £100 mark – they want to keep it under the 3 figures.

Dave mentioned that we could increase this year to under £100 this year and in the future, we can the possibility to have a small jump to £110. The consensus was to go to £95 this year.

Dave mentioned we have around 15 vouchers outstanding at £60, and we have around 20 people on the waitlist from during Covid and it would be good to offer them a voucher at a reduced price – which means we get the money up front. Alistair E warned about people on the course paying different amounts, but they are people who signed up to 2 years ago so it would be explainable. Dave gave the example of a doctor who has been trying to get on a course since the end of 2019 but either we cancelled the course, or he had shift changes which meant he couldn't make a course. Dave wanted to pitch the vouchers at £75 up until Christmas, or £75 for whoever's on the list when we release the course dates. Vouchers will move to £95 after Christmas for new registrations.

The proposer for the new price structure was Crawford Andrew, the seconder was Alan Patrick and it was approved unanimously by the meeting.

Agenda Item 9 – SLG (Scottish Liaison Group)

John New briefed the meeting on the Zoom SLG AGM. (We are not part of the group but are invited to attend). John covered a little of this in the Chairperson's statement.

The test centre in Dunfermline has opened and has started development. John told the SLG members he realised they may conflict with us to some extent as for the last few years (pre-Covid) we were running an annual test for those who wanted it in the branch and any outsiders.

The Scottish branches were sending some attendees to us, but there were some dropouts. One year we had 8-9 people, but we ended up with only 4 on the day. We need 6 to break even so we had a bill to pay to cover the Master Craftsman's fees. In a way we are still promoting walling and having people updating their skills and we don't mind doing that but at the same time we have to be realistic and have as many people taking the test as we can. We currently have around 4-5 people for this season so we should schedule a day.

John said to Richard Love at the SLG that there's no way we want to conflict with them – we're all there to promote walling, get people into walling, get apprenticeships, and get them qualified. Most years we have our test day towards the end of the season, so that candidates have a chance to get up to speed, with a bit of mentoring, maybe do some cheek-ends and feel ready at the end of the season.

Richard said he would probably schedule an early season test day – around June time, which would be good for candidates who are working out in the industry – they're desperate to get qualified – so an early season would be good for them – and maybe they could take their retakes later in the season.

There was a question about charges for using the test site. We don't charge, and we believe they don't do at Dunfermline.

John reiterated that everyone was agreed we can work in tandem and if people want to do their test in May, we will refer them to the Dunfermline site and vice versa.

Most branches in the SLG ran a few courses like we did this year.

Dave mentioned that the SLG were still keen to have a joint day, to get everyone together. The meeting agreed unanimously it would be a great day out.

One last point – the Skye branch has left the DSWA to be independent.

Agenda Item 10 – Any other business

John mentioned that a few years ago, we used to have a talk at the beginning of the AGM, and it would be good to start that up again. He suggested a geology talk would be good as we are working with stone, and it would be an interesting subject. Covering the history of the west of Scotland in geological terms, all the types of stone that are available and why they are available, a 30-minute talk would be fascinating. The meeting agreed it would be good to initiate this. Norman said he'd investigate.

There was a discussion about old style walls and Wallers, the fact that walling was recognised as a dying trade in the 1930s, that the craft was still here and interest was slowly growing, and also the state of the new walls on the A9.

Dave mentioned there was an increasing quantity of emails from people looking to go further than Intro courses and look towards a career in the industry. These people were encouraged to join us for additional practise and were pointed to the DSWA website for more information on professional qualifications.

John said we've got a good stock of tools and plenty of them (John's done a great inventory this year). We have good cutting tools for stone which we bought two or three years ago – we paid a lot of money for those. The only thing we'll have to do is keep them well marked so that when people use them, we get them returned. We'll have to make sure they're all painted. John Hendry volunteered.

Dave showed the latest list of business cards. As well as a couple of old photos coming back for this pack, we have 3 new ones. They are a one-off print (a special edition). The first is the old guard (including Iain Couttie) with the Ocean Terminal Moongate, one from Cardross with some trainees and some photoshopping. And the final new one is a snow-covered scene of the small bridge at Kilsyth Golf Club.

On behalf of the meeting, Alan thanked the Chair and thanked Dave for the minutes, social media, and the website.

Chairman John New thanked members for the good turnout and the meeting closed at 3.40pm.