

FRIENDS OF EASTER CRAIGLOCKHART HILL

Annual General Meeting

Monday 03 July 2023 at Meggetland Sports Complex

1. Welcome and Apologies

Jim welcomed everyone to the 24th AGM of Friends of Easter Craiglockhart Hill. There were numerous apologies in advance of the meeting and Jim acknowledged them without reading names individually.

2. Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 20th June 2022 were taken as read and approved.

3. Chairman's Report

Jim thanked Ewan Davidson and Hilda Henderson for their commitment as Chair and Secretary respectively, highlighting how they had left the group in a very good place having contributed many years of hard work to ensuring FECH remains a wonderful place for people to enjoy and nature to thrive. He also thanked Alastair MacBeth and Graeme Hastie, who also both resigned their positions as Trustees during the year, after putting in many years of work running the group and helping to shape the work we all do on the hill to make it a place we all can enjoy.

Jim then outlined how he saw the role of FECH and its interaction with Edinburgh Council who own the land. He discussed how FECH are able to manage certain aspects of the hill through voluntary work but this is mostly nature based work, monitoring and small maintenance tasks. He also highlighted how FECH have installed some infrastructure on the hill such as the hilltop panorama boards and children's play areas and continue to be responsible for the upkeep of these areas.

Jim then took the opportunity to clarify some issues that would fall outside of FECH's responsibilities. Issues such as checking the safety of trees, removing any fallen trees, fixing or installing paths, or dealing with anti-social behaviour. He encouraged those present that if anyone discovers anything that warrants attention to contact the council directly or, where appropriate, the police.

Jim then proceeded to give updates on the small projects that have been worked on and small projects that are also planned:

- The most recently completed project was the plant sale in May 2023 which raised a total of £1,160.00 profit. A tremendous achievement by all the people who helped with the planning and grew plants at home as well as the volunteers who made the

day so successful. Some of this money raised has been spent on a refreshment kit for our volunteers and we hope to fund some more planting effort and other conservation initiatives from the money later in the year.

- The Happy Valley welcome garden project - funded by lottery money the area will have new benches installed, planters fixed and filled with sensory and wildlife-friendly plants, a small area of wildflower meadow and some more information signage to help visitors enjoy the space and the hill. The work is proceeding as fast as possible but relies entirely on volunteers, most of which are young people doing their Duke of Edinburgh awards and this can be sporadic during school holidays.
- 450 small trees have been planted on the hill in the last 6 months or so. The intention is to introduce more biodiversity to parts of the hill and most of the trees will mature into bushes rather than huge single trees providing cover for small mammals and insects leading, hopefully, to a more diverse range of birds and animals too. The tree locations and species are all planted according to the Council's management plan and with the consent of the Council's natural heritage officer.
- 400 wildflower plants have also been planted around the meadow areas, the steps, the bankings and along-side paths. Again, this is intended to boost the biodiversity on the hill so that we see more varieties of creatures living there.
- Dry hedges have also been built which, as well as providing a safe hibernation habitat for numerous creatures, provide a barrier to stop dogs going into the mud.

Future projects being considered with the help of the volunteers.

- Widening and rerouting of the stream from the causeway as per the management plan.
- Removal of gorse to make way for an experimental patch of blaeberry to be planted in the hope of attracting rarer butterflies and moths to the area. Gorse can be a fire hazard in summer and the management plan details the need for breaks in the gorse at the top of the hill to mitigate risk of large scale fires.
- Removal of invasive species – we do not have too many problems with invasive species found elsewhere in Edinburgh's wild spaces but there are a lot of few-flowered leek and recently we've identified a small patch of around 2,000 small balsam plants which we have been trying to remove with volunteer help. The removal of Ponticum Rhododendron is ongoing too as we have a few bushes of this tricky plant on the Craighouse side of the woodland.

Jim then thanked Katie for the work she has put in to raise awareness of what is happening on the hill by constantly posting stories and pictures taken by people walking on the hill. Thanks to Katie, FECH maintains an almost daily presence on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook to enable us all to see what is happening on the hill.

He also gave a big thank you to Dan Rayner who is our only employee. He is very dedicated and puts in a lot of time caring for the place, organising all of the volunteer efforts, removing graffiti, carrying sofas, burning Rhododendron etc. His energy and enthusiasm is a massive benefit for FECH and for all those that enjoy the hill.

Jim finished by thanking everyone who enjoys the hill and helps to look after it. He then introduced a five minute video showing some of the people who help look after the place and some of the residents who live on our 35 acre local nature reserve.

4. A Year on the Hill

A 5-minute video showcasing the hill and some of the activities undertaken by FECH over the last year. The video was thoroughly enjoyed by those present.

5. Volunteering

Dan Rayner introduced himself to the meeting and set out all the varied tasks that have been carried out on the hill over the past 12 months.

Dan also covered how the volunteering options were reviewed in the Autumn of 2022 and there are now various strands to the volunteering on the hill. These include:

- Hill Patrol – data collection by volunteers in their own time,
- HWS Student and Duke of Edinburgh volunteers who volunteer every Sunday afternoon between 2 and 4pm,
- Volunteering from home by growing plants etc,
- Corporate Volunteering – a new option for this year where Corporates make donations to FECH for assisting their staff undertake volunteering.

The volunteering effort has been very impressive this year and Dan highlighted some statistics to demonstrate the level of effort that has been seen – HWS – 43 volunteers for 2 hours each, DofE – 118 volunteers for 2 hours each, 10 volunteers from home for a 3 month period. A special mention was given to Jim and Erin Jackson who volunteer on the hill daily and will do 30 hours each per week.

6. Presentation of Annual Accounts

Bill Troup presented the annual accounts. He noted that we received a total of £10,250 from grant funding during the year with the largest grant being for £10,000 for the National Lottery Community Fund to cover the costs of the planned new Welcome Hub at the Craiglockhart Terrace entrance to the hill. These funds are restricted and can only be spent on this project.

In addition, FECH received £3,335 in donations during the year of which £2,500 is restricted. The balance of these donations are what are classified as unrestricted and can be used to cover the core organisational costs and to help fund any projects we choose to undertake.

The majority of the £7,966 spend on charitable activities related to community engagement with most of the balance being spent over other live projects.

The unrestricted funds reserve increased by £636 to £4,287 during the year. The Trustees consider holding a reserve fund of £750 to £1,000 to be sufficient and appropriate to meet the day-to-day running costs of the charity.

7. Adoption of Updated Constitution

Iain McLeod introduced himself to the members and mentioned that he took on the role of Secretary earlier this year and one of his first roles was to review the Charity's Constitution.

Iain mentioned that some changes to the charity constitution were proposed by the Trustees and in this section would cover why the changes were being proposed.

As background, Iain covered what the Constitution was there to do and why it is good practice to ensure that it is kept up to date and reflects how the charity intends to operate.

The Trustees had recognised that when COVID hit, the charity had issues with organising and holding Trustees' meetings as there was no provision in the Constitution to allow meetings to be held remotely via video conference.

This issue had affected a number of smaller charities and as such Burness Paul, who provide free model Constitution documents to help charities, amended the model constitution in 2022 by inserting some new clauses that allow charity boards to conduct their activities on a remote basis and also allows, if appropriate, for Trustee and Member meeting participation to be remote i.e. video conference, telephone and also allows email correspondence to be recognised alongside written.

Iain advised that the draft of the proposed revised Constitution reflected all these, primarily, administrative changes.

Iain then advised that the Trustees had received feedback that perhaps the inclusion of other clauses from the model would be beneficial to include whilst the changes were being made and before the final version is sent to the Charity Regulator.

The clauses are designed to cover two areas:

- Potential Conflicts of Interest for any Trustee or Connected Persons of a Trustee, and
- Clarity that Trustees take collective responsibility for all decisions.

Having considered this suggestion, the Trustees have agreed that the addition of the clauses does provide an additional level of scrutiny around Trustee activity that is both helpful and good governance. As such, the Trustees would recommend the inclusion of these points in the final revised version also.

Iain advised that the Trustees recommended all the changes to the Members and if there were no objections would take that as approval for the changes to the Constitution to be made. He clarified that the Trustees had not had time to update the draft to reflect the member feedback prior to the meeting but will do so before the final

submission to the charity regulator, providing the Members in attendance were willing to approve the revised documentation on this basis.

There were no objections so the Trustees took that as a unanimous vote in favour of the changes and will update the Friends of Easter Craiglockhart Hill Constitution accordingly.

8. Re-appointment of the Independent Examiner

Iain thanked Rob Moffat for reviewing the accounts for yet another year and proposed that he should be asked to review the accounts again next year.

9. Election of Trustees and Office Bearers

Iain advised the process for re-electing Trustees. All Trustees at the date of the AGM are automatically re-elected immediately after the AGM unless they have notified the Board that they no longer wish to act as a Trustee.

David Knight advised the Board that he no longer wished to continue as a Trustee so is not re-elected for 2023. The other existing Trustees, Paul Duncanson, Bryce Morrison, Jim Heath, Bill Troup, Iain McLeod and Simon Hart were to be automatically re-elected at the close of the meeting.

The Trustees will appoint the Office Bearers for the coming year after the AGM. They are expected to remain as is with Jim Heath staying as Chairman, Bill Troup as treasurer and Iain McLeod as Secretary.

10. AOB

A question was raised from the floor regarding the maintenance of paths on the hill. Jim advised that the maintenance of paths was a Council responsibility. A discussion ensued on how the paths should be maintained and that as the hill was a Nature Reserve a balance had to be drawn between making the paths safe to use and ensuring the natural habitat is maintained.

11. Close of Meeting

Jim closed the meeting by thanking everyone for their support and for attending the AGM.