

FRIENDS OF EASTER CRAIGLOCKHART HILL

Annual General Meeting

Monday 13 July 2026 at Meggetland Sports Complex

1. Welcome and Apologies

Jim Heath formally welcomed attendees to the 27th AGM of the Friends of Easter Craiglockhart Hill (FECH) and thanked them for their commitment and support over the past year. No apologies had been received before the meeting.

2. Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2025 are available on the FECH website and, unless there are any questions or matters arising, will be taken as read and approved.

3. Chairman's Report

Jim Heath provided his Chairman's Report for the previous 12 months covering a number of topics:

New Website:

- Jim Heath (JH) advised that the FECH website has been redeveloped. Matthew Haggis was thanked for his voluntary work over the last few months in upgrading the website. JH mentioned that there is a desire to increase the content availability and asked all members present to submit thoughts or articles that they would like to see published.

FECH Activity Update

- There have been excellent volunteer sessions twice a month for the last 12 months with roughly 12-15 volunteers attending for every 2-hour session. This equates to a total of over 500 hours of volunteer work on the hill, predominantly to improve the habitat for wildlife that lives on the hill; projects such as the dead hedge and planting trees etc.
- FECH have been running Butterfly and Bumble Bee surveys, and all the data is available for members on request. JH highlighted that the Bumble Bee numbers were very good at c325 which is 50% increase on the previous year.
- 4000 snowdrop and bluebell bulbs were planted last Autumn.
- New species of wildflower were planted on the hill; Stitchwort, Wood Forget Me Not, Crosswort and Wood Anemone.

- 500 young trees, Aspen and Scots Pine included, were planted in the last 12 months.
- Erin has been harvesting wild seeds of the hill, Yellow Rattle, Hairbell, Scabious, Carrot and Viper's Bugloss, which have been propagated in the cage.
- A meadow area has been created outside the Craiglockhart Sports Centre with the agreement of Edinburgh Leisure
- In addition to work on the hill there has been a lot of support for non-hill work such as signage boards, poets post, wildflower of the month report and the regular swan update.
- JH mentioned the newsletter and thanked Nadine for her efforts. He advised that the newsletter is published twice a year and emphasised that all contributions are welcome.
- JH mentioned that he was particularly pleased to hear Grasshoppers on the hill, which have not been heard in a long time, along with Dragonflies on the pond.
- JH expressed his thanks for all volunteer work over the last 12 months, without which FECH would be unable to function.

Council Update

- The path upgrade to the "zig zag" steps, that were mentioned at the last AGM, was going to cost the Council a lot of money so the decision was taken that there was not viable. As an alternative the council have approved an audit of all the steps throughout the hill and intend to improve steps that are potentially unsafe. The hope is that these improvements will be imminent, accepting that sometimes these types of improvements can take a bit longer when the Council are managing.
- Five new informative signage boards will be added to the hill at the entrances to the park and various points around the hill. This has been a work in progress for 18 months and the expectation is that these will be installed in the next month or two.
- Recently the Council voted on the area of Local Nature Reserve to be extended to include the top of the hill which was historically was part of the old asylum and the banking that was part of the Craighouse estate that was gifted to the council by Q-Mile when the property was developed. In reality this makes little difference as these areas have always been treated as part of the LNR by FECH.
- The council have also repaired the wall that was broken on Poet's path.

FECH Future Plans

- There is an intention to improve the marsh area habitat for amphibians. With the help of Lothian Conservation Volunteers, we are going to build a shallow water pond in the marsh area.
- A bird walk is scheduled for 5th September.

- Hopeful to get another bat walk scheduled if the “bat man” is available.
- A mushroom walk with Vladimir also scheduled for the Autumn.

JH finished his update by thanking everybody for looking after the hill and caring for it.

Swan Naming Update

JH announced the results of the Swan naming survey for the 2 new swans on the pond. There were 30 submissions from which Wolf selected the winners. The names are to be Wilfred and Odette. The names are based on Wilfred Owen who was one of the war poets and Odette who is the iconic protagonist from Swan Lake ballet.

4. The Happy Valley History Video (Part 1)

The first half of a short video on the evolution and history of Happy Valley and Craiglockhart from the 18th century, narrated by Bryce, was shown.

5. Presentation of Annual Accounts

John MacKerron presented the annual accounts, noting a modest cash flow surplus of £820 at the close of the financial year. The primary source of income, amounting to £2,359 was generated by events, most notably the Plant Sale in 2025. The other notable sources of income were donations of £885 and a £233 grant.

Expenditure on charitable activities during the financial year was £2,505, with the majority allocated to consumables used in volunteer sessions, event expenses, insurance, stationery, and related items.

John highlighted that one area of concern for the Board this year was the increase in insurance costs, because of the ongoing insurance provider increasing their rates. This was not down to anything specific to the charity. As a result, the insurance costs increased to £586 from £387 last year with a further increase to £900 forecast within 2 to 3 years. This has prompted the Trustees to look for alternative insurance providers and are pleased to confirm that an alternative insurance provider has been found at a much more reasonable premium of £130 pa, which is a significant saving for the charity.

Following these transactions, the charity maintains reserves of £6,649, all designated as unrestricted funds available for charitable use in accordance with our constitution. The Trustees believe this is a healthy surplus, but it was noted that as there will be no further Plant Sales the Trustees expect this surplus to reduce at a rate of c£400 pa over the next few years.

John finished by thanking all those that had made donations over the last 12 months as these donations are invaluable to the running of FECH.

Two questions were raised from the floor.

Have FECH considered Gift Aid? JM responded that it has been something that the Trustees are considering and will be investigated to determine whether it is viable for the charity to obtain Gift Aid status.

Would it be possible to ask members to provide a voluntary donation as part of their membership to take the reliance off resource intensive one-off exercises such as the Plant Sale? JH and JM responded that without volunteers to run the Plant Sale the work involved was making it unviable going forward. That said, there was a balance to had in that as noted in the Annual Statement the charity is in surplus and as there are no major projects planned there is not a requirement for additional funds at this time.

If more funds were raised, what would it be spent on? Jim responded to the question acknowledging that this was the perennial challenge. Edinburgh Council are responsible for the hill and all infrastructure maintenance, as such FECH have limited scope to spend money, allowing for the fact we are reliant on largely unskilled volunteers. Currently the funds are spent on improving the hill through activities such as planting and propagating which do not cost anything but are resource dependant.

It was highlighted that if there was a larger project in the future that required funding this may provide a greater focus than an annual Plant Sale without a specific objective in mind.

6. Election of Trustees and Office Bearers

Iain outlined the procedure for the re-election of Trustees. All Trustees holding office at the date of the AGM will be automatically re-elected immediately following the AGM, unless they have informed the Board of their intention not to continue in this role.

As there has not been any resignations all the current Trustees will be automatically re-elected at the conclusion of the meeting.

Following the AGM, the Trustees will appoint the Office Bearers for the upcoming year. It is anticipated that Jim Heath will remain as Chairman, John MacKerron will serve as Treasurer, and Iain McLeod will continue as Secretary.

7. The Happy Valley History Video (Part 2)

The second part of the video was shown to the members, and it was highlighted that the video will be available on the FECH website shortly for those that wish to view again and for members unable to make the meeting.

8. AOB

Gavin Scott, Chairman of the Wickets Residents Association, thanked the Committee and volunteers for their hard work on the hill and said local residents were fortunate to have such an excellent facility nearby.

Gavin said his Association had asked him to raise concerns about the Meggetland Terrace entrance to the hill. Although the welcome area had been improved a few years ago, residents felt it had become somewhat untidy. He also noted concerns that the number of nettles may make the area less safe for younger children and asked whether it could be made more welcoming and child friendly.

Jim responded that there was a potential tension between people's use of the area and its value for nature. As the site is a Local Nature Reserve, the hope was that visitors would appreciate the natural environment, while ensuring it did not pose a risk to children. He noted that nettles provide an important pollen source for wildlife but acknowledged that a suitable compromise would need to be found.

Sylvia Stevenson, a Wickets resident, noted that although the Council cuts the hedge along the back wall once a year, it had become overgrown and was obstructing residents' views. She added that several Wickets residents would be willing to contribute to a fund to pay for the hedge to be cut if FECH was unable to act.

Another audience member noted that LNR status had been granted on the condition that the main entrance area would be well maintained and recommended restoring it to its previous condition.

Jim asked those present for their views on what action should be taken. It was suggested that residents' opinions should be sought, whilst Jim noted that FECH did not have the resources to maintain the area to the standard proposed.

Another audience member said she was content with the area as it was, leading to a wider discussion about differing views on how the area should be managed.

Bill Troup noted that residents had been consulted a few years earlier about their views, so there was a risk of revisiting previous discussions. He suggested that the Wickets Association and FECH meet to clarify what residents wanted and what could be done to make the area more amenable for everyone.

Jim noted that most work on the hill is carried out by FECH and volunteers and asked whether anyone would be willing to help with additional work in the relatively small area concerned.

It was suggested that the next newsletter include a call for volunteers to help garden and manage the area, keeping it tidy while remaining sympathetic to its status as a Local Nature Reserve. Jim and Gavin agreed to follow up separately after the meeting.

11. Close of Meeting

Jim closed the meeting by thanking everyone for attending and for their continued support. Attendees were invited to stay afterwards to speak informally with one another and with the FECH Trustees.