

Breathing Space Coventry
Minutes of Annual General Meeting

Sunday 16 March 2025

123B Birmingham Road, Allesley Village, Coventry CV5 9GR

Attendees: John Kirkman (Chair), Peter Sidebotham (Trustee), Crystal Kofie (Trustee), Anne O'Sullivan (Trustee), Dagmer Dias (Trustee), Andrew Gilham (Trustee), Alison Lawn (Trustee), Ellie Rose (Warden and Artist in Residence), Sue and Chris Hitchcock (volunteer gardeners), Julie and Denis Morgan (volunteer gardeners), Anna and Graham Ricketts (volunteer gardeners), Rob (volunteer gardener), Katherine Pickford (friend of BSC), Gemma Curran (visitor to BSC), Andrea Driver (independent examiner of accounts), Rev'd David Mayhew (visitor to BSC), Peggy Sidebotham (friend of BSC), Richard Lawn (friend of BSC, minutes taker).

1 Opening Prayer

Anne opened with a brief reflection "The Heart of the Matter". We were encouraged to be mindful of the love and prayer of one who says 'come, take my hand and do not be afraid'.

2 Apologies

Lois Baldwin, Izzy Clarke, Lizzie Moon, Chris and Graham Edmonds, Fey and Colin Graham

3 Review of 2024 AGM Minutes and Matters Arising

The Minutes were accepted by the meeting as a true record of the 2024 AGM.

Dagmer confirmed the review of Safeguarding has been completed.

Andrew, with others, have refreshed the Risk Assessments, including, with Chris those relating to gardening. They will continue to be reviewed and updated as necessary during 2025.

The guided walk linking the Anderson Memorial Garden near The Elms (Harvester restaurant) with BSC took place in July. Ros, the daughter of former 123b resident Janice, visited Breathing Space.

4 Annual Report for 2024

Ellie presented the report, beginning with a quote Peter has often used 'without God, it would not be possible', and two bible verses 'For the Lord is good, and his love endures for ever; his faithfulness continues through all generations' (Psalm 100, v5) and "Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever' (Psalm 23, v6).

Ellie observed that whilst Peter and Lois have not been living at BSC during the year, they were, and are, always near at hand for their valued guidance and support.

Ellie thanked Alison for her support as buddy and for her help at Breathing Space, including hosting and the beautiful flower arrangements. Peggy, as neighbour, has also blessed Ellie with her visits for tea and a chat.

BSC is open all year, on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Ellie acknowledged Katherine's invaluable help as temporary warden whilst she took a break in September.

The Gardening team have done considerable flower and vegetable gardening, and it has been wonderful to see new faces joining the team, with Chris's horticultural wisdom adding value to the work, not least in preparation for Open Gardens.

There has been an increase in usage since April 2024, and many new people have visited BSC, both as individuals and in groups, with many repeat and regular bookings. John's talk at HOPE has led HOPE to offer their staff 2 hours a week of refreshment and rest at BSC. Word of mouth, and the bookmark, have also led to new visitors, as well as web searches for retreat centres in Coventry. The ripple effect is very effective.

There was a book launch for Golden Threads, bereavement support, health and wellbeing activities, and creative days organised by Ellie and others.

A 3 day retreat for people from Oslo, Sheffield, London and the local area led to very generous donations from individuals totalling £2,000. Fey led a quiet day, and Alison has provided Spiritual Accompaniment at BSC.

Open Gardens in June attracted 150 visitors, including the leader of a community group from Binley, who subsequently bought a group for a bereavement meeting. Open Gardens next takes place on 6 July 2025.

Rob's joinery and creative skills have enabled him to install two lovely features in the BSC garden; Growing Faith and a Prayer Den, both of which readers are recommended to find when they visit.

BSC remains part of the Quiet Garden movement.

2024 statistics

897 people visited BSC, including 150 at Open Gardens.

Regular events held at BSC, though separate to BSC's own activities, include art classes held on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, led by Ellie or Cathy Renken.

Peter highlighted the real blessing it is to have Ellie as warden, with so much visible creativity, art groups, installations and her own art displayed in rooms. He was impressed by the garden when he arrived back in the UK in February, when snowdrops in full bloom.

John formally recognised the substantial contribution of the work of the volunteers, and the presence of Ellie as the lynch-pin.

5 Financial Report 2024

Peter presented the financial report, which should be read in accompaniment to these minutes. The accounts will be independently reviewed by Andrea Driver before final agreement by the Trustees, and submission (well within deadlines) to the Charity Commission. Peter highlighted a few key points.

Donations from groups are 1/3 of total income, with donations from individuals totalling just over 1/3, both of which attract tax reclaim Gift Aid or Gift Aid Smaller Donations Schemes (where eligible).

Income was 33% above budget and expenditure 3% lower than budget, leaving a healthy balance at the end of the year of £4,611. This balance includes the £2,000 donations from the 3 day workshop, which the Trustees may decide to earmark for improvements to the pond and its surrounding area, which is in need of an upgrade.

The Reserves policy is to maintain at least 3 months expenditure, so around £2,700. This was met at the end of 2024 (after deducting the £2,000 for a specific purpose).

Graham asked whether, as a charity, we look for funding bids. Peter responded that the Trustees have decided not to do this. It is a lot of work, BSC do not have employed staff, and BSC is a local charity for local people.

Peter was asked whether Allesley Festival give a contribution to BSC, and confirmed they usually do. He also noted that Garden Walks do not make a donation, as they raise money for other charities.

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Bank signatories. Lois and Peter remain the sole signatories on the account. Online transactions set up by Peter require second authorisation by Richard. Ellie has a BSC debit card, and manages petty cash. Accounts are updated monthly by Peter with Richard providing some oversight.

David asked for confirmation that BSC has all requisite policies, as detailed on the Charity Commission checklist. Peter reassured the meeting that these are all in place, and that charity reporting and other legal, governance and administrative requirements are being met.

6 Plans for Breathing Space for the next 12 months

The Trustees will continue to work with Ellie to review and plan the way forward for BSC.

Peter noted that BSC has significant focus and value as an art hub, particularly inspired by Ellie and Cathy's creativity, and there could be more ideas and opportunities to connect people with God through Art. The Cathedral and Methodist Church in Coventry feature art for outreach. There are potential links with the Christian Artists Association.

Gemma offered to review the BSC website, particularly for ways to increase visibility on the web during searches. Her offer was enthusiastically accepted by the Trustees.

Regarding the £2,000 fund, Chris wondered whether a wildlife pond might be more suitable than a goldfish pond, something to be considered.

Ellie, amongst other ideas, is exploring whether the centre of the labyrinth might feature a mosaic.

7 Breathing Space appointments

John is stepping down as Chairman after one year. Anne and Crystal have volunteered to take over as joint chair, and this has been agreed. Peter will continue as Treasurer. Ellie is the data controller. Dagmar is the Safeguarding Officer.

8 Closing Prayer

Crystal offered a closing prayer.

The meeting was followed, and preceded, by tea, coffee and a fine selection of homemade cakes and scones, thanks to Ellie.

