



**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
of Caring for God's Acre
Online on Tuesday 21st November 2023
7pm – 9pm**

After the business of the AGM Chris Baines gave a talk on “Natural Progression - Time to Restore and Rebuild”

Present:

There were 79 attendees at the AGM, including Patrons, Trustees, staff, charity members and members of the public.

1. Welcome from the Chair

Oliver Goode welcomed everyone to the fourth Caring for God's Acre online AGM. The format of the meeting allowed for questions to be raised at any time via the Chat function. He reminded attendees that the meeting would be recorded and that if they didn't want to appear, please to turn off their camera.

2. Apologies for absence and approval of minutes from AGM 2022

There were apologies from Penny & Paul Kurowski and Suzi Silva.

The minutes were approved and there were no matters arising.

3. Changes to Trustees

Lisette Davies has resigned as a Trustee after joining as one of the original Trustees at the very beginning of Caring for God's Acre. Her career was in Church Tourism in Shropshire and Hereford and she had a particular interest in lifelong learning. Her provision of delicious cakes at various events will be much missed!

Gill Binks brought her specialism in interpretation to the charity and was very helpful in how we have pursued some of our Lottery funded projects. She has represented CfGA on the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Beauty partnership for a number of years.

Oliver expressed the thanks of the Trustees and staff to both Lisette and Gill for their number of years' contribution to the charity.

Colin Fenn, Vice Chair of the National Federation of Cemetery Friends has recently joined as a Trustee. He has spoken at some of CfGA's webinars and we are delighted to welcome him.

We are looking forward to appointing one more Trustee.

4. Chair's report and questions to the Chair

Oliver stated that after the extraordinary privilege of chairing CfGA for 8 years he is stepping down as Chair at the next Trustees meeting in December and this will therefore be the last AGM that he will chair. He introduced Catherine MacCarthy, who will be stepping up as Chair in December.

In the 8 years he has seen significant changes such as:

- There has been strong growth and an effectiveness in acting as an advocate for nature in burial grounds.
- An ability to build partnerships that achieve so much more than our small organisation ever could by itself and are our route to increasing impact nationally, as well as helping build new ways of working and investigating new areas such as the sequestration of carbon in burial grounds.

He went on to thank those who support the charity by attending activities and events, including running over 800 events during Love your Burial Ground Week that were attended by over 20,000 people. He also thanked the volunteers across the country who work every week in churchyards and burial grounds to establish sustainable burial grounds in which nature can thrive.

A special group of volunteers, God's Acre Volunteers, trial the charity's thinking and establish what works best, and he paid special thanks to one of this group Martin Garland who has completed his 500th volunteer session, with others chasing him hard!

Oliver thanked members and funders who see the value of the charity's work and commit to supporting the activities and the staff who deliver and are making CfGA the "go to" organisation for burial ground conservation and management.

Oliver explained that the Annual Report has been discussed at a full Trustees meeting and that minor amendments have been agreed and added and the Report will be submitted to the Charity Commission in December.

5. Treasurer's report and questions to the Treasurer

The Treasurer, Tony Graham presented the accounts.

The Treasurer's report is on page 30 of the Annual Report and the full set of accounts start on page 32. In 2023 the charity's income continued to be slightly higher than the previous year, with expenditure remaining very close to the previous year. There was an increase in income over expenditure at £36,001 and funds carried forward are again slightly higher than

the previous year at approximately £204,000. Our reserves policy states that we should keep a minimum of 3 months operating costs in reserve or £60,000.

The increase in income is partly due to the draw-down of funding at the ends of various projects, plus increases in membership subscriptions, sales and in donations. The end of the Beautiful Burial Ground project, as well as some smaller projects means that these funded sources of income have come to an end. As a result a considerable amount of staff and Trustee time has gone into researching alternative projects and sources of funding. With an eye to maintain the viability of the charity staffing plans have been reviewed and 4 members of staff have reduced their hours.

Within the last edition of the members' magazine, which has been renamed the Beautiful Burial Ground magazine, there was a summary of the accounts showing that 53% of the charity's income was from the grants. 26% came from sales, 18% from membership and 3% from other, including fundraising.

The charity is in a secure position financially and the staff and Trustees are actively involved in addressing the challenges presented by changing circumstances, giving me confidence that it will continue to flourish.

6. Any other business

There was no further formal business and the meeting was declared closed.

The Chair Oliver Goode welcomed Chris Baines, one of Caring for God's Acre's Patrons and one of the UK's leading independent environmentalists.

Chris is an award-winning writer and broadcaster, an adviser to industry, Government and the National Trust, a champion of wildlife gardening and a pioneering campaigner for nature recovery.

Chris has been awarded the coveted Peter Scott Award by the British Naturalists Association, and the lifetime achievement medal by the RSPB. He is a national Vice President of the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts and Patron of the Countryside Management Association.

A Q&A session followed the presentation and Chris was thanked by Oliver for a fascinating and enlightening talk.