



VIEWFIELD GARDEN COLLECTIVE

Minutes of EGM Wednesday 13th August 2025

At Tigh na Drochaid, Portree

Attendance:

The meeting was chaired by Louise Kerr (Ttee) and three other trustees, in the presence of 31 members and attendees.

Note taker: Solomon Azulay

Apologies were received from:

Richard Hiles (Ttee), Menna Augier, Lesley Kirkwood, Jo-anne Ford, Jasper MacDonald and Hugh MacDonald.

Meeting:

The meeting began at 11:10am, the chair welcomed all present and thanked them for their attendance.

Louise Kerr (chair) outlines the financial and administrative challenges the garden is facing at the current time, including no longer having the capacity to offer tailored support for support users and volunteers needing more constant supervision.

The garden is facing closure from current projected figures, by the next AGM - around 5 months of funds remaining on account.

Both members of staff (Menna and Nick) are now resigned, and the garden is looking for ways to continue without paid staff.

Notably, Louise said the garden is a "Huge commitment" and "We want it to continue".

Email from Menna Augier;

Meg Roshier read an email that was sent in by Menna, in her absence at the meeting. The email highlighted that the sense of community is VGC's most valuable asset and among all other qualities, with or without staffing or significant funding, the characteristic we must protect and uphold the most in the garden is a strong sense of community, place and purpose for our members and volunteers.

Action plan;

Louise Kerr tabled the need for an action plan for at least the ensuing 5 months, while more

permanent measures for the gardens management are put in place, noting that some grant funds may need to be returned if we have not been able to meet the outcomes the funding was designated for. Notably, these are the IOSRC grant, around £5000 of which remains, and the remainder of the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund.

Those in attendance questioned if we can repurpose those monies for the same goals without having to return funds to the grantors. - it was highlighted that many funders would rather you keep the leftover funds rather than go through the extra work of having them returned.

Social Media usage;

Jasmine Parker raised the issue that in her 4-5 years of attendance, VGC has had minimal online presence - which has made it harder to attract new members, volunteers, and funding bodies. For the last ~12 months Jasmine has been helping to manage the Social Media (Facebook/Instagram) posts to a small audience, but pointed out she had been asked to not actively spread or promote the garden under the instruction it did not want to become too 'famous or commercial' i.e. to keep the garden a smaller community space.

Nicola Jones agreed with Jasmine's points, stating she was unaware the garden even existed until a medical professional highlighted it to them - saying [about online activity] "It's going to spread, that has got to be a good thing!"

Attendees generally agreed the garden needed to raise its profile if it wished to continue operating in its current model.

Louise Kerr pointed out that maintaining that level of engagement and profile has been difficult for the current committee, and that in order to sustain that kind of activity they would need a new trustee to take that responsibility. Jasmine Parker volunteered herself to take over the activity as 'Social Media Trustee' - she was Seconded by Nick Crutchly, who pointed out that having a neurodivergent trustee would be a benefit to VGC as a whole to better enable us to support a neurodivergent audience and empower such attendees to be 'independent garden managers'.

Funding an OSCR;

Based on overheads of £3000-£5000 a year without staffing, the garden may have between 5 months and a year of funds remaining, with the right management.

The current treasurer, Louise Kerr, stated she has resigned her trusteeship already and stayed on to help us through this difficult time, but will be fully resigned by the end of August. The committee is in need of new volunteers/Trustees who can take over the responsibilities that the current committee is struggling to maintain.

Rosie Somerville pointed out that VGC had financial success in the past when paying a very small number of hours for a 'finance manager' who was able to maintain accounts and secure funding for the garden.

Nick Crutchly suggested instead of paying gardeners with the remaining funds, they could be redirected to a finance manager who would be able to bring new funds into the garden over the coming year and allow it to re-open fully in due time.

The underlying question remained; who will take the garden forward when there are not enough trustees to manage the broad responsibilities?

The committee agreed that keeping the OSCR registration as a Scottish Charitable

Organization brings more value to the garden than it creates in extra work (Annual reports, accounts) - and so it would not be worth rescinding Charitable status for now.

From the above discussion, key points were highlighted:

- New board members/trustees can be appointed to help the currently overwhelmed board and allow those who wish to step down to do so.
- The existing governance could be simplified.
- The constitution may need changing to remove the goal of 'advancing education'
- A safeguarding policy and trustee will still be needed, and most likely so will PVG checks.
- the annual running costs without staff are between £3000 and £5000, plus any additional large projects which may be able to get grants ad-hoc.

Thoughts from Iona MacDonald;

Iona shared her thoughts, echoing the sentiment of Menna's email that community is what drives VGC - that she and her family always loved to see people working and collaborating in the garden, and hopes that in whatever form it takes "The garden will continue as a garden".

Iona also highlighted that the land will always be there via 'land agreement' for use as a mental health or community garden, but it cannot be 'leased' in the full legality of the term due to the risk this imposes on Viewfield House as a legal entity.

It was then discussed how there is now greater competition for 'mental health gardens' as a whole, which makes funding more competitive and challenging - it was noted that no secure tenancy without a firm lease agreement may drive away some funders.

It was generally agreed that Skye and Localsh still have a desperate need for organizations like VGC to support mental health rehabilitation.

Attendance figures;

Louise Kerr suggested that lower attendance of neurodiverse or attendees requiring direct support from the garden will have impacted our overall downsizing - noting that many who come to the garden now have a carer or parent with them so the services of our employees are not as essential as they once were.

Nick Crutchly disagreed, stating that the strong work he was able to do with Menna Augier allowed for those who initially needed constant support to work independently which highlights the success and necessity of the garden.

Mennas Email Pt 2;

Meg Rosher read the second part of Menna's email, covering topics of;

The garden will always exist regardless of staffing or resourcing, if people club together to manage it.

Not to commercialize or 'sell out' the garden but to keep it casual and local

Testimony from Chris Wilding;

Chris shared how the garden has inspired and empowered him - and that he believes if it can and has inspired a younger generation that they should be able to take the reigns to carry the garden forward.

- when asked if he felt the garden needed staffing or a community caretaker, Chris answered "both", that the support of constant staffing was valuable to him, but the sense of community is what makes it special.

This sentiment was echoed by those in attendance, balance is key.

Discussion:

The following minutes are elements of discussion in chronological order that do not constitute a full heading on their own

- Support staff/volunteers should always be PVG checked
- 2 support staff cannot realistically support 10 support users- there needs to be a different structure.
- The remaining funds should be used to establish stability for the future
- Funding issues may be at a crunch now, but we have had issues in the past and pulled through
- We must look at the future and build from there, instead of dwelling on past mistakes
- in relation to outreach, Radio Skye, the Echo and Free Press should be utilized
- Produce that continues to grow to the end of summer should be donated such as to St Columbas Church for Wednesday afternoon 'Bread Basket'.

Radio Skye;

Following earlier suggestion, Rosie Somerville and Jasmine Parker agreed to work together to promote VGC via radio Skye, using local contacts - anything from a jingle to an advert or full segment, to attract locals to volunteer, donate, or utilize the services the garden can offer - as well as invite people to apply as trustees to bring outside skills into the garden.

Rolling 8 week plan;

The agreed action to maintain the garden until the end of 2025 was that each day of opening, one volunteer would be the 'responsible person' from 10:30am to 15:00pm. This way in the absence of regular staffing and without depending on the same trustee/trustees every day, the garden can be self sustaining and remain open for general public and volunteers. A list of daily responsibilities will be left for the 'responsible person' of the day, with the intention of having at least 8 volunteers (one for each day the garden is open per month - so each volunteer need only be responsible for one day a month).

An induction day for the group of volunteers was agreed 20th August, 10:30 AM start.

The current list of volunteers for this includes; Jryna, Meg, Louise, Christine, Solomon, Laura, Harriet, and potentially Alexis and Lesley.

Potential new trustees;

Through the discussion of the meeting, Solomon Azulay, Jasmine Parker, Nick Crutchly and Kate Cholerton stated they would be willing to take over as trustees, if the work required of them could be identified before they committed fully.

John Wright asked for clarity on which trustees were looking to step down, aside from Louise Kerr, so we knew who would need to be replaced and how many new trustees we would need to consider electing/co-opting.

Some discussion followed regarding if the responsibilities of each trustee should be defined first, to carry the garden forwards, or if new trustees should be installed first and their work is to reshape and manage the garden into whatever new capacity and form it will take.

At 12:50 the chair moved to summarize key points and actions from the meeting

- The constitution may need amending

- New trustees will need to be co-opted
- A 5 month plan must be created to see the garden to the next AGM
- An 8 day rota for 'responsible persons' shall be created to keep the garden open
- An induction day for this will be 20th Aug 10:30 AM.
- Approx 5 months of funding remain
- Some grant money may need to be returned
- We will reach out to radio Skye to raise profile

- Jasmine will begin working social media more proactively to try and engage a larger audience
- Create an email or whatsapp group for those looking to become trustees or help manage the garden into the future.
- An up to date members register should be created as the current one (black box or one drive) may be out of date.

End;

The meeting was closed by the chair at 13:00. No follow up meeting date or time was arranged.