

Friends of Old Durham Gardens

Registered Charity no: 1164516



Annual Report 2024

Approved by Trustee Members

19th March 2025



1. Introduction

This fourteenth Annual Report is an account of the activities of the Friends of Old Durham Gardens for the calendar year 1st January to 31st December 2024. Old Durham Gardens is an historic 17th and 18th century walled garden and orchard. Originally restored by Durham City Council, it is now owned by Durham County Council and is listed on Historic England's Register of Historic Parks and Gardens (Grade II). Since the formation of the Friends of Old Durham Gardens in 2010, regular maintenance and replacement planting have transformed the gardens. Although much work is still needed, our many visitors have praised the efforts of trustees, volunteers and local groups in maintaining and developing the gardens for public enjoyment, including as a venue for enjoying events with refreshments such as Music in the Gardens in the summer and our winter Wassail. The gardens were available all year as an outdoor space to enjoy exercise, fresh air and nature; visitors enjoyed the lower garden all day and every day, and the upper walled garden was open as usual on Thursday and Sunday afternoons throughout the season.

2. Acknowledgements

As ever, the work of Friends of Old Durham Gardens would not be possible without the significant support and work of many people. We would like to express our thanks and appreciation to:

- The Trustees and other volunteers, whose physical and administrative tasks have kept the maintenance and development of the gardens on track, and helped increase accessibility and use of the gardens by the public.
- Durham County Council staff, who continue to support us in our efforts.
- The local organisations and businesses who have provided us with physical help over the years, including students and staff of Durham University.
- All our neighbours for their continued support, which is much appreciated.
- Lastly, but certainly not least, we would like to express appreciation for the time and support given by our members, friends, volunteers, local organisations, funders and all the members of the public who have enjoyed the gardens and given us encouragement. Whether these efforts were offered in the form of administrative support, gardening and labour, financial contributions or simply enjoying and promoting the gardens – we thank you.

3. Chair's Report

The Friends of Old Durham Gardens welcome you to our fourteenth Annual Report, and hope that you find it interesting. 2024 saw a full programme of gardening, volunteering and events. We had some delicious fruit, especially the apples and pears in the walled garden and a bumper crop of medlars.

The main feature of our gardening year was a project to plant a low hedge in the inner diamonds of the walled garden parterre. This involved a lot of planning, measuring, straightening of edges and installation of metal edging, as well as preparing the soil so that our 430 new plants would get the best start. After much research we chose Phillyrea, a tough plant well suited to windy conditions, as our hedging material. This was an expensive project but a great success, and I would like to thank everyone who donated to the gardens this year, as your contribution allowed us to buy all these plants. As I write, every single plant has survived the winter and seems to be flourishing. Over the next two years we will nurture the plants and gradually turn them into a hedge.



Hedge planting day

2024 has also been a year of maintenance, and we have used some of our funds to improve the gazebo, including some replastering; providing shelving; designing a fire screen; and restoring the floor which involved stripping, filling of cracks and waxing. We also needed to repair the roof of our composting toilet. Although we paid experts to do this work, we have done some maintenance ourselves (for example, repairing the door to our work area), so we have introduced a new category in our statistics to take account of this. We were also grateful for work done by Durham County Council this year, including mending two gates and installing a post and wire fence along the edge of the orchard. All in all, 2024 was a costly year, although all the work was very worthwhile. We plan for 2025 to be a year of consolidation.

We were proud to be invited to tea by the Mayor of Durham this year, and also to be a runner-up in the *Northern Echo* County Durham Together awards in the Community and Voluntary Group category. This recognition is for everyone who volunteers or supports us in any way. We are glad to see our volunteer numbers growing – having many hands is so important in keeping all parts of the gardens in good shape. Let's hope that the gardens will continue to flourish in 2025, and to enhance the lives of visitors and volunteers alike.

Joy Brindle (Chair, Friends of Old Durham Gardens).

4. Review of 2024

As a registered charity, Friends of Old Durham Garden CIO has a constitution which sets out our “charitable objects” as follows:

To promote for the benefit of the public generally, without distinction of sex, sexual orientation, age, disability, nationality, race or political, religious or other opinions, any charitable purpose, within the area known as Old Durham Gardens in Durham City (herein after known as the area of benefit), connected with the enhancement and improvement, maintenance and protection of the environment and landscape. Nothing in this constitution shall authorise an application of the property of the CIO for the purposes which are not charitable in accordance with [section 7 of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005] and [section 2 of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008]

4.1 Friends Group Infrastructure

On the 9th June 2017, a Self-Management Agreement was agreed and signed by the Friends of Old Durham Gardens (FODG) trustees and Durham County Council (DCC). This sets out the role of both parties in relation to the gardens. In summary, DCC continues to own the property and provide infrastructure maintenance, while FODG provides all ‘soft’ maintenance for the gardens except the bulk grass cutting in the lower walled garden. We also make arrangements to open the walled garden to the public, and to encourage visitors and inform them about the gardens and their history.

We are hoping to complete an associated joint Conservation Management Plan for the gardens; the key area to be added is the Durham County Council conservation work undertaken in 2020.

4.2 Funding

Our income during 2024 has come from Friends’ subscriptions, events, donations and a grant, all of which are much appreciated. In 2024 this included a donation from Barratt Homes which contributed to work on the Gazebo, and a grant from Durham County Council Neighbourhood Budget Small Grants fund, which went towards the Parterre project. During 2024 we were also able to buy two replacement benches for the lower garden thanks to the donation made by DPD for this purpose in 2023.



4.3 Membership and communication

The Friends Group, who each donate an annual subscription to support work in the gardens, currently stands at 173 Friends. In 2024 we increased the suggested annual donation for new members of the Friends Group from £5 to £7.

We also have a wider group of contacts, all of whom have registered with us for updates on the gardens, including events. Our current register stands at over 1000.

We communicate with our Friends and contacts via newsletters, email and our website and Facebook page. It is our intention in 2025 to make improvements to our website.

4.4 Gardening and development of the gardens

4.4.1 Lower Garden

Our hedging project in the walled garden meant that we did not prioritise the lower garden in 2024, although we kept on top of the key maintenance tasks of hedge-pruning, pruning of the fruit trees and maintenance of the wildflower area by the North wall and the rose bushes and other shrubs in the squares.

We experienced an invasion of **hogweed** (not the giant type) and other large weeds in the meadow areas of the orchard during 2024; these are common in the surrounding area and were unsightly, as well as making the area difficult to maintain. In discussion with the Council mowing team, the mowing regime has been adjusted for 2025 and we will monitor the impact of this on the appearance of the garden and our ability to maintain it.



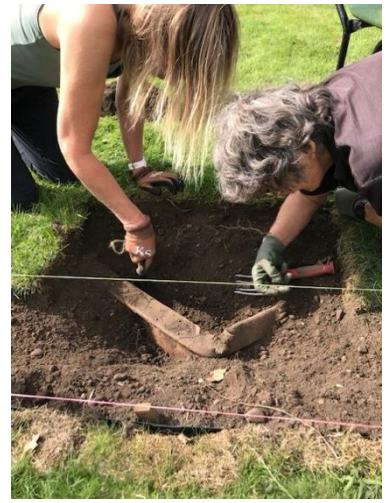
Apple pruning

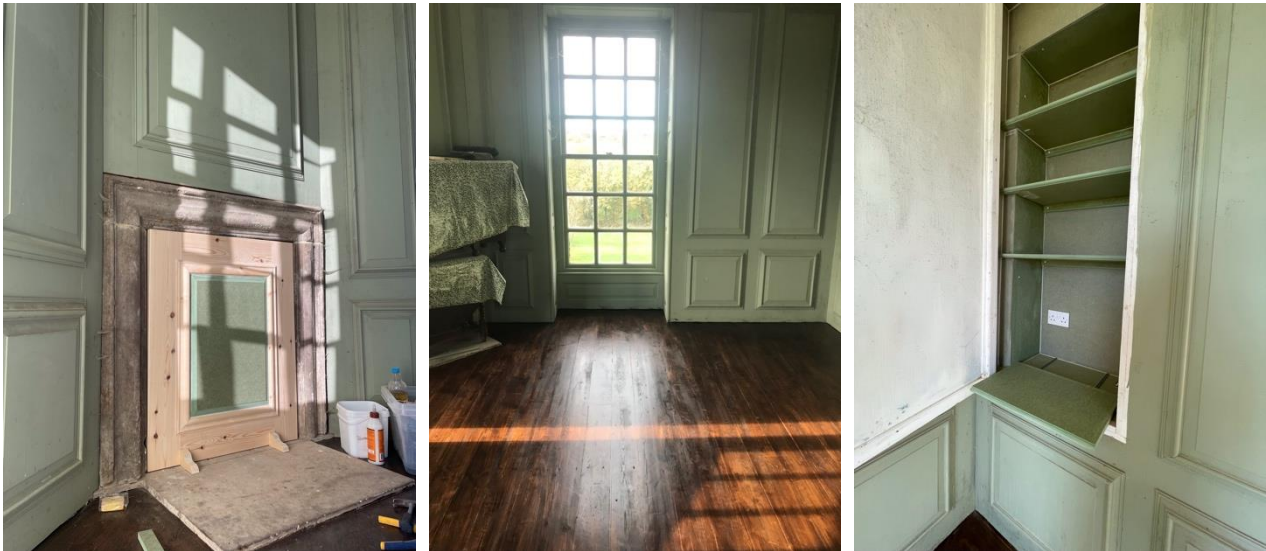
In order to develop the lower garden squares, which combine roses and some fruit bushes, we have been undertaking research on historically correct species of **gooseberries**, and have had assistance from the University of Cambridge Botanic Gardens in sourcing cuttings, for which we are very grateful. The cuttings are currently being sheltered in the greenhouses of various committee members, and will be planted out in the squares once they are established.

Despite much work in the **wildflower meadow** along the North wall, this area was less floriferous than in 2023, so we need to consider what can be done to remedy this. We also plan, over the next two years, to improve the planting of the **long border** at the top of the steps.

4.4.2 Upper walled garden

Between the parterre project and our work to improve the gazebo, the upper walled garden has been our priority in 2024. The pictures below and overleaf show just some of the tasks completed throughout the year to make the parterre project a success.





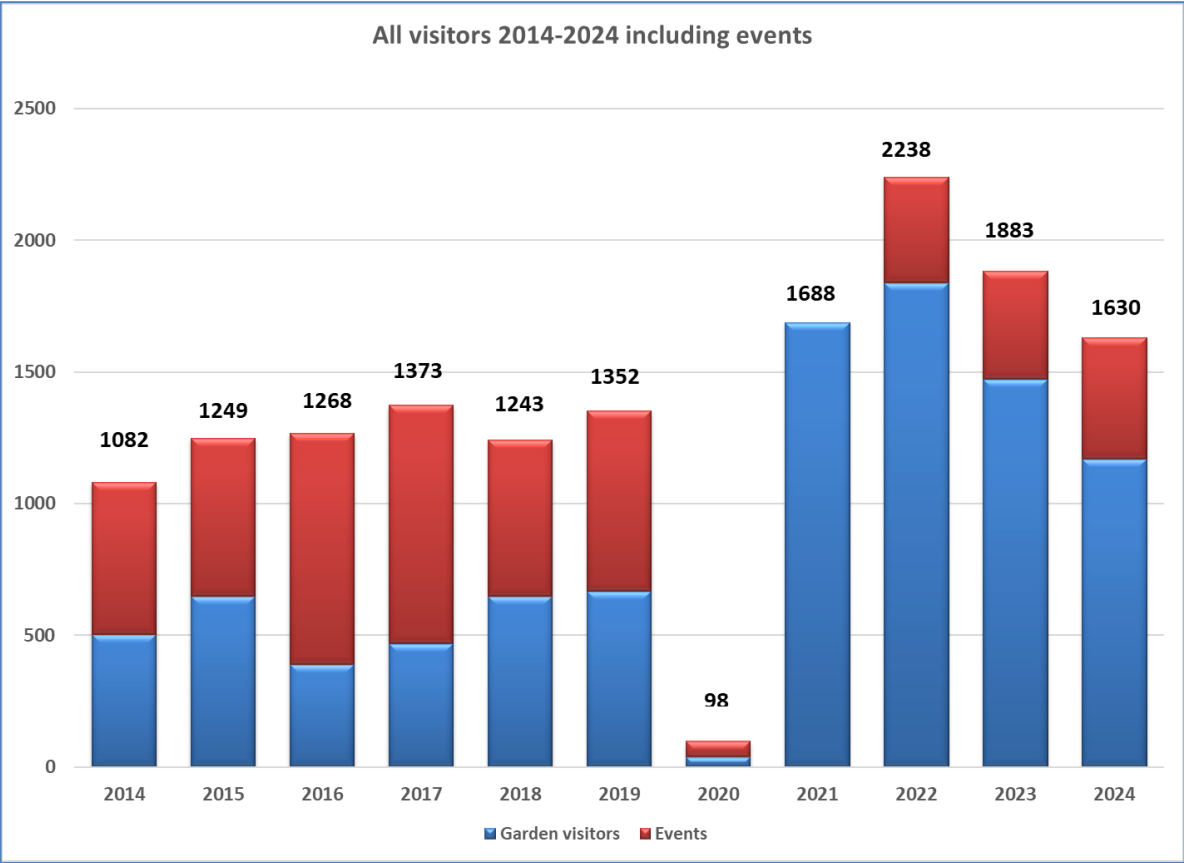
Gazebo interior work

4.5 Open days and events

Old Durham Gardens lower walled garden and orchard are enjoyed by the community all year round, and we saw many people enjoying them this year, making use of the open space to take their exercise and enjoy nature. We believe through observation and anecdotal evidence that the gardens continued to be a tremendous asset to local people in 2024.

We have good relationships with community groups promoting gardening and heritage, and this year hosted group visits from Age UK County Durham and from the Durham University History Department, both of which were enjoyed by all. We had many positive comments about our Wassail and Music in the Gardens events, a flavour which is given in the photographs below. All these activities give local musicians, dancers and performers an opportunity to entertain visitors and local people alike, providing a showcase for many talented people. We very much appreciate the continued support of all our performers.

The table overleaf shows our garden visitors in blue, and those who attended events in red. As ever, the 'blue' figure must be taken as an indication only, and significantly underrepresents the number of people visiting the gardens. This is because the count is taken only on Thursday and Sunday afternoons from Spring to Autumn, when volunteers are available to make the count. 2024 was another good year for visitors, although down on the previous two years especially 2022, the first post Covid year with a full event programme. Our event figure is lower than usual due to the cancellation of the Shakespeare performance because of bad weather. However, the Music in the Gardens event had 400 visitors in 2024, an improvement on the previous year.



4.6 Relationships

The Friends Group has established good links with the Friends of Pelaw Wood, the Friends of Flass Vale, Durham Wildlife Trust, Durham University, East Durham College Houghall Campus, DPD, Barratt Homes, Northumbrian Water, the Department for Work and Pensions, Durham Passport Office and other organisations interested in volunteering. During 2024 we have had particularly strong support from student volunteers from Durham University, several of whom have joined our regular team of volunteers.

Old Durham Gardens is one of the organisations supporting the Northern Saints Trails, and is on the route of the Way of Love (see the Northern Saints Trail website for details including a video showing Old Durham Gardens.

<https://www.thisisdurham.com/northernstalks/trails/the-way-of-love-p1054061>).

These relationships are essential in maintaining the gardens for the community, and in providing a wide range of people with the opportunity to make a difference and enjoy themselves by volunteering, and we look forward to working with partners again in 2025.

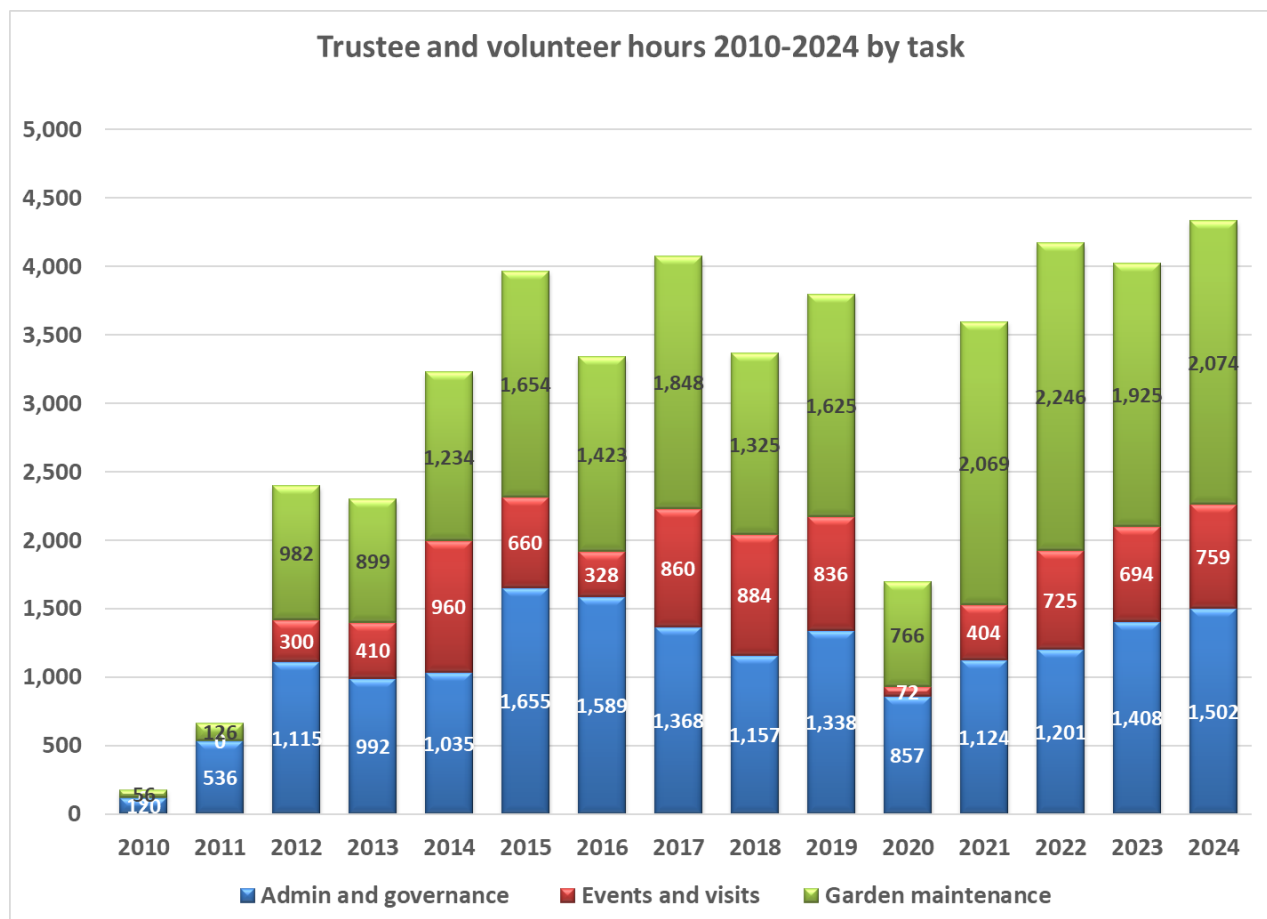


Volunteers hard at work during 2024

4.7 Public Benefit

The trustees believe that the activities undertaken in 2024 are within their powers and duties, and fully support the Objects of the Friends of Old Durham Gardens, thereby increasing public benefit. Using Heritage Lottery Fund guidelines which assign values to different tasks, we estimate the financial value of our volunteering in 2024 at £79,639. Over the eight years we have been reporting this figure (2017-2024), the financial value of our volunteering is estimated at £492,800.

As the chart below shows, 2024 has been another great year for volunteering, with the highest ever recorded number of hours. The increase in our administrative hours is due to our having added some new members to our committee in 2024, which is excellent news! From 2025 onwards we will be adding a new category for maintenance work, to reflect the reality of our workload. This may impact on the figures for gardening, but not to a significant extent since that is our core activity. Thank you to our volunteers for all this hard work!



5. Financial Statement

Financial Statement for the period 1st January to 31st December 2024

Receipts and Payments Account for the year ended 31st December 2024

Receipts	2024	2023
Donations	4517	3347
Membership Subscriptions	965	968
Grants	999	0
Events	1526	1382
Electricity Support Grant	0	201
Gift Aid	1936	0
Insurance Claim	0	0
Total Receipts	9943	5898
Payments		
Plants and Maintenance	6199	2333
Tools and Machinery	307	1985
Administration	944	840
Bank Charges	71	72
Return incorrect donations/GASDS	0	24
Events	663	1037
Infrastructure Projects	3826	1844
Capital Items	0	0
Electricity	269	239
Total Payments	12279	8374
Net Receipts/Payments	-2336	-2476
Bank and Cash at start of period	4267	6742
Bank and Cash at end of period	1931	4266
Statement of Assets and Liabilities		
Cash Assets		
Current Account	1931	4266
Other Assets		
Tools and equipment purchased since Sept 2010**	15378	15214
Liabilities***	0	0
Net Assets/Liabilities	1931	4266
** Second-hand net realisable value of sheds, tools, gazebos and equipment is deemed negligible at £2,900. *** The trustees are not aware of any liabilities at 31/12/2024.		

Notes to the accounts for the year ended 31st December 2024

1 Acknowledgements

We are extremely grateful for the support given by our members through their annual subscriptions and their generous donations. We gratefully acknowledge the many hours of voluntary work provided by so many different people and organisations without which the ongoing maintenance and development of the gardens could not be achieved.

2 Receipts and Payments Account

The receipts and payments account summarises the movement of cash into and out of the Friends Group during the financial year. In this context "cash" means the bank account where cash can be paid in and readily withdrawn to pay for debts as they become due.

3 Grants, Donations, Subscriptions and Gift Aid

- a) A grant was sought and received from Durham County Council Neighbourhood Budget and Small Grants towards the cost of the parterre project (Phillyrea).
- b) Specific donations were received for plants and trees, and to cover some of the cost of the gazebo works. We also received donations from visitor groups, Friends and general garden visitors.
- c) Annual membership subscriptions total increased slightly due to more people becoming Friends, which is welcome news. The subscription for new members was raised to £7.00.
- d) Gift aid (GA) and Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme on valid donations were claimed during 2024.
- e) The Government's electricity support grant is no longer available.

4 Administration

This includes: Insurance, web-site name and hosting, Dropbox subscription, fuel, stamps, volunteer refreshments, new door keys and examiner fees, etc.

5 Payments

New yew trees, Phillyrea for the parterre project, the toilet roof repair and works to the Gazebo were all large expenditures in 2024.

6 Bank

Unity Trust Bank Plc, Nine Brindley Place, Birmingham, B1 2HB.

**INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT TO THE TRUSTEES OF
THE FRIENDS OF OLD DURHAM GARDENS, DURHAM**

I report on the accounts of the Friends of Old Durham Gardens for the year ended 31 December 2024 which are as set out on the attached pages.

Respective Responsibilities of Trustees and Examiner

The Charities Trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounts. The Charities Trustees consider that an audit is not required for this year under section 144(2) of the Charities Act 2011 (the 2011 Act) and that an independent examination is needed.

It is my responsibility to:

- examine the accounts under section 145 of the 2011 Act
- to follow the procedures laid down in the general Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the 2011 Act; and
- to state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

Basis of Independent Examiner's Report

My examination was carried out in accordance with the general Directions given by the Charity Commission. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the Charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts, and seeking explanations from you as Trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit and consequently no opinion is as to whether the accounts present a "true and fair view" and the report is limited to those matters set out in the statement below.

Independent Examiner's Statement

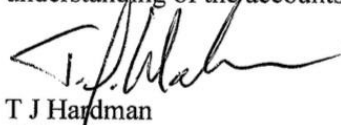
In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention:

1) Which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements:

- to keep accounting records in accordance with section 130 of the 2011 Act;
- to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records and comply with the accounting requirements of the 2011 Act

have not been met; or

2) to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.



T J Hardman
CTA

7 Elvet Waterside
Durham DH1 3DA
29th January 2025

6. Friends Group Trustees

- The Trustees of the Friends of Old Durham Gardens form the Management Group. They attend monthly meetings and ensure that the business of the Friends Group is conducted to meet the aims of the group in a responsible manner. There were six serving trustees and four co-opted committee members on 31st December 2024. We are allowed 15 maximum, and are keen to recruit new Trustees and committee members to spread the load of our activities.
- Under our constitution as a CIO, all Members of the Management Committee shall retire from office by three-year rotation at the end of the applicable annual general meeting, but they may be re-elected or reappointed. Trustees may resign at any time.
- Trustees may be appointed following a review of their application form by the other trustees or by invitation of the trustees as agreed at a meeting of the trustees.
- All trustees are given a copy of our constitution and the Charity Commission document CC3, The Essential Trustee, which details the duties of a trustee so that they fully understand their obligations.
- The new trustees sign the minute book at the meeting they were appointed at, confirming that they have received, read and understand the requirements of being a trustee. Trustees sign the Trustee Declaration of Eligibility and Responsibility Form.
- Trustees are the 'members' of the CIO and have monthly meetings plus other meetings and communications to undertake all CIO activities.

<i>Current Trustees (Dec 2024)</i>	<i>Date Joined Trustees</i>	<i>Re-election Date</i>
Joy Brindle (Chair)	July 2016	2025
Angela Lee (Membership Secretary)	September 2011	2026
Chris Lee	September 2011	2026
Martin Roberts	January 2012	2025
Christine Wiecek (Secretary)	June 2014	2025
Eddie Mason (Treasurer)	September 2024	2027

Co-opted committee members (2024)

Chris Mallia
Irene Cox
Lillian Briggs
Anita Dunseith
Julie Bell

7. Principal Office

The address for postal communication purposes is:

Old Durham Gardens
c/o 10 Durham Moor Crescent
Durham
DH1 5AW

Old Durham Gardens physical location is:

Old Durham Gardens
Old Durham
Bent House Lane
Durham
DH1 2RY

(Please do not send any mail to this address as there is no postbox).

Website: <http://olddurhamgardens.co.uk/>

Email: olddurhamgardens@gmail.com

8. Approval Of This Report

On behalf of the Trustees of the Friends of Old Durham Gardens, this Trustees Annual Report is approved for submission to the Charity Commission as a fair reflection of the charity's activities for the year 2024 as agreed by Trustees in March 2025.

Joy Brindle

Chair, Friends of Old Durham Gardens.

