

Friends of Old Durham Gardens

Registered Charity no: 1164516



Annual Report 2025

Approved by Trustee Members

10th February 2026



1. Introduction

This fifteenth Annual Report is an account of the activities of the Friends of Old Durham Gardens for the calendar year 1st January to 31st December 2025. 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 such as Music in the Gardens in the summer and our winter Wassail. The gardens were available throughout 2025 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 Thursdays and Sunday afternoons throughout the season from Spring to Autumn. In 2025 we were able to extend Thursday opening of the walled garden to a full day.

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:

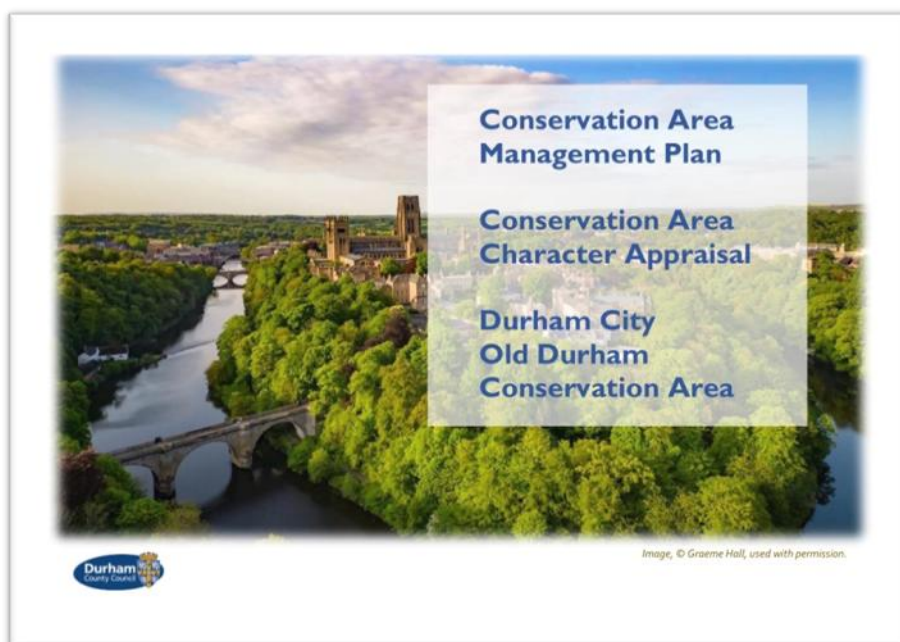
- The Trustees and other volunteers, whose physical and administrative work has kept the maintenance and development of the gardens on track, and helped increase accessibility and use of the gardens by the public
- Durham County Council staff, who continue to support us in our efforts
- The local organisations 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, performances, 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 fifteenth Annual Report, and hope that you find it interesting. 2025 saw a full programme of gardening, volunteering and events. The dry summer posed a challenge to some of our plants, but we still enjoyed a bumper crop of fruit. Our Phillyrea hedge, planted as part of our project to improve the walled garden parterre in 2024, has flourished with careful watering, and we will continue to take care of it in 2026. Our next gardening project is to replant the long border on the terrace at the top of the lower garden steps, and we began this in 2025 by clearing the old planting.

During 2025 Durham County Council, the owner of Old Durham Gardens, consulted on a new Conservation Area Management Plan for the city of Durham, which proposes to designate Old Durham as one of seven new conservation areas in the city, and recognises the gardens as a publicly accessible heritage and Green Infrastructure Asset.¹ The Character Appraisal for Old Durham describes the gardens as the historical focus of the area and acknowledges the importance of the Friends as partners in restoring, managing, and maintaining them since the group was formally established in 2010.² During 2025 we welcomed this report and contributed to the consultation, and we look forward to working with the Council in 2026 as part of its plans to strengthen partnership and management arrangements for the gardens to support their role as a local asset, and their conservation in the future.

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



¹ See <https://letstalkcountydurham.co.uk/en-GB/projects/durham-city-conservation-area-boundary-areas-and-appraisal-documents>.

² Durham County Council, *Conservation Area Management Plan: Conservation Area Character Appraisal: Durham City: Old Durham Conservation Area*, 2025, pp. 82-4.

4. Review of 2025

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 9th June 2017, a ten-year 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.

An associated joint Conservation Management Plan for the gardens has been in preparation for a number of years; the key area to be added is the Durham County Council conservation work to the gazebo and walls undertaken in 2020. The Management Agreement is due to expire in 2027, and the Council’s proposal in the draft Conservation Area Management Plan for Old Durham to establish a formal working group to create maintenance agreements for the gardens provides an opportunity to review these arrangements.



4.2 Funding

Our income during 2025 has come from Friends' subscriptions, events, and donations. Following a year of significant investment in the Gazebo and the Parterre project in 2024, supported by 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, 2025 was a year of consolidation and we did not seek any further grants during the last 12 months. We completed the Gazebo project in 2025 by redecorating the interior. Further funding will be needed to support the projects we hope to deliver in 2026 and 2027, including the restoration of the terrace border and the improved availability of information and seating for visitors.



Gazebo interior work

4.3 Membership and communication

The Friends Group, who each donate an annual subscription to support work in the gardens, currently stands at 172 Friends.

We communicate with our Friends and contacts via newsletters, email and our website and Facebook page.

4.4 Gardening and development of the gardens

4.4.1 Lower Garden

Following the spread of hogweed and other large weeds in the meadow area in 2024, the Council's **mowing regime** for the lower garden was amended for 2025 so that more areas are mown regularly. This is working well. Although it has slightly changed the appearance of the lower garden, the large weeds have been eliminated, making the area easier to maintain and improving the sense of the restored garden as a cultivated space. During 2025 we focused on key maintenance tasks of hedge-pruning, pruning of the fruit trees and maintenance of the rose bushes and other shrubs in the squares. We hope to do some work in 2026 to realign the edges of these. We are in the process of planting a number of historically correct species of **gooseberries** with assistance from the University of Cambridge Botanic Gardens who have supplied cuttings. We are very grateful for this support.



Roses in the lower garden

We have begun a two-year project to replant the **long border** at the top of the lower garden steps to better reflect historical planting. In 2025 the entire area was cleared other than some of the wall planting which we will retain, including two mature quince trees. This involved removing some tough and deep-rooted shrubs, and thanks go to our volunteers for tackling these. During 2026 and 2027 we will develop and put in place a new planting scheme.



The excavated long border before its initial planting, 1990s.

4.4.2 Upper walled garden

Our focus during 2025 has been the management and protection of the new **Phillyrea hedge** in the parterre, particularly given that the season was very dry. The hedge is now growing well and we will continue to nurture and shape it throughout 2026.

The effects of the **dry summer** were particularly apparent in the walled garden, which is on higher ground and exposed to wind as well as heat. Most of the fruit trees stood up well to the weather and were highly fruitful, but two of the pictures below show the large Black Worcester pear tree in August, experiencing what the Met Office called a 'false autumn', shedding leaves and fruit early in an attempt to protect itself from stress by conserving water and energy. This is concerning and we will need to continue to protect the upper garden fruit trees from heat in the coming years, for example by increasing mulching. We also hope to increase seating in the walled garden if funds allow.



August 2025: a bumper crop of greengages, and the effects of heat on the old pear tree.

4.5 Visits and events

The community uses Old Durham Gardens lower walled garden and orchard all year round, and we saw many people enjoying them this year, making use of the open space to take exercise and enjoy nature. We believe through observation and anecdotal evidence that the gardens continued to be a tremendous asset to local people in 2025. The Council's Character Appraisal for Old Durham recognises its value as public realm, citing its 'feeling of isolation away from the busy urban environment'; its tranquil ambiance; the 'recreational and leisure value of the area that is well used'; and 'the high significance of the gardens being a community heritage asset and accessible to the public'.³

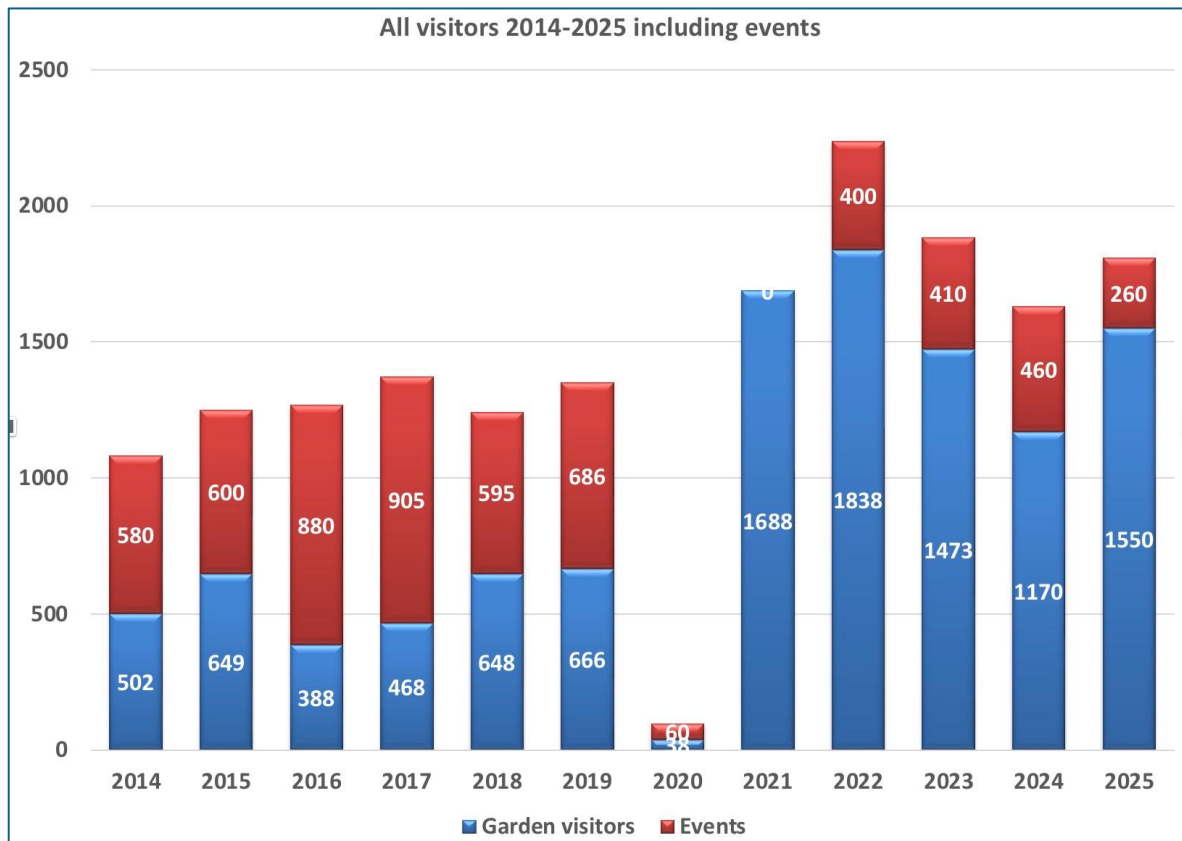
We have good relationships with community groups promoting gardening and heritage, and this year hosted successful group visits from Age UK County Durham and from the Durham University History Department. Several walking groups visited us, and we also enjoyed the company of a group of new postgraduate students as part of their induction to Durham. We had many positive comments about our Wassail, Shakespeare and Music in the Gardens events, a flavour of which is given in the photographs below. All these activities give local musicians, dancers and performers an opportunity to entertain visitors, recreating the sense of the gardens as a place of public relaxation and entertainment following its earlier incarnation as a private garden, and providing a showcase for many talented local people. We very much appreciate the continued support of all our performers.



³ Durham County Council, *Conservation Area Character Appraisal*, p. 12.



All three of our events were unfortunately affected by bad weather, and although this did not stop people from enjoying themselves, numbers were lower than in previous years, particularly for the music event, and this affected the donations raised. The table below shows our garden visitors in blue, and those who attended events in red. As ever, the 'blue' figure must be taken as indicative and significantly underrepresents the number of people visiting the gardens because the count is taken only on Thursdays and Sunday afternoons from Spring to Autumn, when volunteers are available to make the count. 2025 was a good year for non-event visitors.



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, and other organisations interested in volunteering. During 2025 we have had particularly strong support from student volunteers from Durham University, several of whom have joined our regular team of volunteers.

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 2026.



Volunteers hard at work in 2025

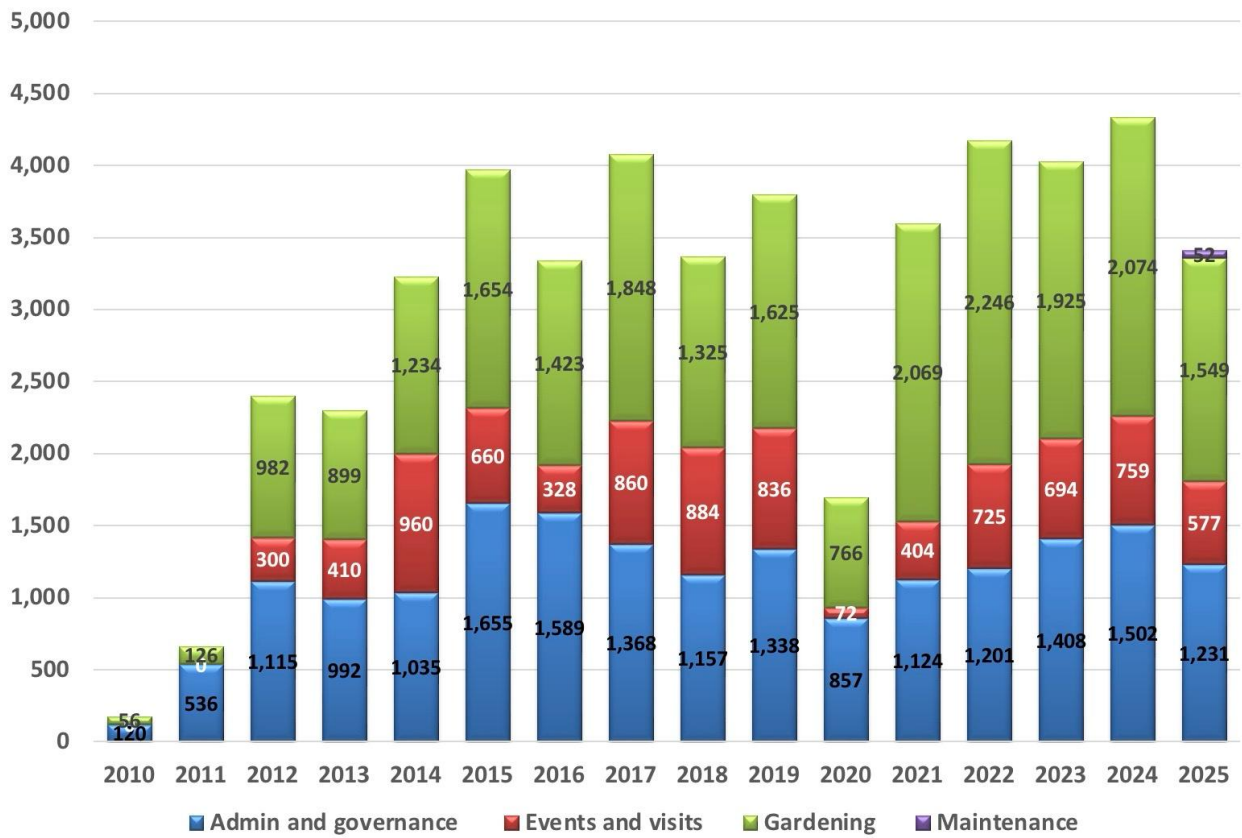
4.7 Public Benefit

The trustees believe that the activities undertaken in 2025 are within their powers and duties and fully support the Objects of the Friends of Old Durham Gardens, thereby increasing public benefit. This public benefit is reflected in Durham County Council's Character Appraisal for Old Durham, which recognises Old Durham Gardens as a publicly accessible heritage asset and Green Infrastructure Asset, and the work of the Friends Group as important in conserving and managing this over the last fifteen years.

Using Heritage Lottery Fund guidelines which assign values to different tasks, we estimate the financial value of our volunteering in 2025 at £60,400. Over the nine years we have been reporting this figure (2017-2025), the financial value of our volunteering is estimated at £553,200.

As the chart below shows, 2025 has been another good year for volunteering, although hours were down on the last four years. Our numbers of regular volunteers remained constant in 2025, but the lower figure for hours worked reflects some health issues and personal commitments in the group, as well as a reduction in the number of corporate groups volunteering with us. This highlights the ever-present need to add new volunteers to our numbers. Thank you to all our volunteers for all their hard work.

Trustee and volunteer hours 2010-25 by task



Volunteers' Thank You event,
Summer 2025

5. Financial Statement

Financial Statement for the period 1st January to 31st December 2025

Receipts and Payments Account for the year ended 31st December 2025

Receipts	2025	2024
Donations	1533	4517
Membership Subscriptions	974	965
Grants	0	999
Events	875	1526
Gift Aid	348	1936
Repayment	25	0
Total Receipts	3755	9943
Payments		
Plants and Maintenance	300	6199
Tools and Machinery	147	307
Administration	961	944
Bank Charges	72	71
Events	579	663
DCC fee – Licence to Occupy for Music in the Gardens	70	0
Infrastructure Projects	0	3826
Capital Items	0	0
Electricity	286	269
Total Payments	2415	12279
Net Receipts/Payments	1340	-2336
Bank and Cash at start of period	1931	4267
Bank and Cash at end of period	3271	1931
Statement of Assets and Liabilities		
Cash Assets		
Current Account	3271	1931
Other Assets		
Tools and equipment purchased since Sept 2010**	15378	15378
Liabilities***	0	0
Net Assets/Liabilities	3271	1931
the second-hand net realizable value of the sheds, tools, equipment, ladders, and gazebos is deemed negligible at £2,900. * the trustees are not aware of any liabilities at 31/12/2025.		

Notes to the accounts for the year ended 31st December 2025

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) 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 in 2024.
- b) Gift aid (GA) and Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme on valid donations were claimed during 2025.
- c) The reduction in donations between 2024 and 2025 reflects a number of larger donations for specific projects in 2024.

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

An additional line has been added to reflect newly required Licence to Occupy fees payable to Durham County Council.

6 Bank

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

Examiner's report for 2025

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 2025 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

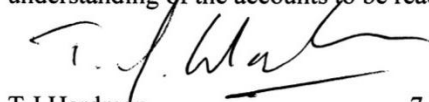
In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention:

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
3rd February 2026

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 five co-opted committee members on 31st December 2025. 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 2025)</i>	Date Joined Trustees	Re-election Date
Joy Brindle (Chair)	July 2016	2028
Angela Lee (Membership Secretary)	September 2011	2026
Chris Lee	September 2011	2026
Martin Roberts	January 2012	2028
Christine Wiecek (Secretary)	June 2014	2028
Eddie Mason (Treasurer)	September 2024	2027

Co-opted committee members (2025)

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 2025 as agreed by Trustees in February 2026.

Joy Brindle

Chair, Friends of Old Durham Gardens.