



Blacket Association Newsletter

November 2024

AGM WEDNESDAY 6 NOVEMBER

The 55th Annual General Meeting of the Blacket Association will be held on Wednesday 6th November 2024 in the upper room of the Old Bell Inn, Duncan Street, with the AGM starting at 7:00pm. A free drink for those attending will be available from the downstairs bar from 6:30pm. Copies of the minutes of last year's AGM and the reports from the various committee members are given below. Please bring this newsletter with you, although there will also be a few printed copies available at the AGM. All members, prospective members, friends and residents in the Blacket area are welcome – new members particularly so. All are invited to raise any points of interest that they would like to discuss.

Agenda

- Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting (15 November 2023);
- Election of committee members and office bearers;
- Chair's report;
- GPCC report;
- Treasurer's report;
- Shrubbery Working Party report;
- Neighbourhood Watch report;
- Website and Database report;
- Planning report; and
- Any other competent business.

OFFICE BEARERS AND COMMITTEE 2023 - 2024

CHAIR/COMMUNICATIONS	Susan Hezlet
VICE CHAIR/ GPCC	Ian Chisholm
MINUTES	Hazel Clark
TREASURER	Anne Henderson
NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH	Stanley Bird
NEW RESIDENTS/CARDS	Arlene Doherty
PLANNING	Richard Scothorne
SHRUBBERY WORKING PARTY	John Usher and Stewart Whiting
SOCIAL CONVENOR (to 04 09 24)	Doug Thomson
WEBSITE	Colin Blair

THE BLACKET ASSOCIATION

(the “Association”)

MINUTES OF THE 53rd ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE ASSOCIATION

Held on 15th November 2023 at The Old Bell, Duncan Street at 7pm

Present:* Susan Hezlet – Chairman and Communications (“SH”)
Ian Chisholm - Newsletter Editor (“IC”)
Anne Starsmeare – Sustainability group representative (“AS”)
Arlene Doherty – New Residents (“AD”)
Anne Henderson - Treasurer (‘AH’)
Richard Scothorne – Planning (“RS”)
Hazel Clark – Minutes and Social Convener (“HC”)
Bertram Zank – 8 Dryden Place
David Starsmeare – 13A Blacket Place
Caroline & John Sibbald – 50 Blacket Place
Kevin Moore – 30A Mayfield Terrace
Pina Galluci – 32 Mayfield Terrace
Doug Thomson & Mandy Rhodes – 4 Blacket Place
Anne Sturrock – 34/1 Mayfield Terrace
Simon White – 19 Blacket Place
Charles and Caroline Ross-Stewart – 13 Blacket Place

Apologies: Colin Blair – Website Co-ordinator (“CB”)
Stanley Bird – Neighbourhood Watch (“SB”)
Bill & Janice Gemmell
David Stevenson
Robin & Liz Wickes
David & Janet Jenkins
Martin & Patricia Cacho
Joanna Chisholm

* More residents were present but the attendance form was mislaid. Please let us know via the Blacket email address if you would like the record corrected.

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

SH, as Chair, welcomed everyone to the AGM. Copies of the Annual Report had previously been circulated by email and in printed form as the November Newsletter. SH advised that apologies had been received from those listed above.

2. MINUTES

The 2022 AGM minutes, as published and circulated in the AGM papers, were agreed as an accurate record.

3. OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

The list of open actions was discussed. IC advised that the location of EV charging points was a frequent issue on the GPCC agenda but it still wasn’t high on their list of priorities due to the lack of funding. The table of actions at the end of these minutes has been updated accordingly.

4. ELECTION of the ASSOCIATION'S COMMITTEE (the "Committee")

SH advised that the only Committee member due to be re-elected was Hazel Clark, Minute Secretary and Social Convenor. SH proposed that Hazel be re-elected for another 3 year term. Her nomination was seconded by RS and IC. Anne Starsmeare advised that she was stepping down as the Blacket Sustainability group representative, but that no one had offered to replace her so far.

SH was delighted to inform the meeting that Doug Thomson had agreed to join the Committee and also to host the drinks reception at the end of the 2024 Open Gardens event. Doug's appointment to the Committee was nominated by IC and seconded by Caroline Sibbald.

IC highlighted the fact that the Association's constitution states that it can have office bearers plus no more than 7 other members, which meant that there was room for one more person to join the Committee if they were interested.

5. CHAIR'S REPORT

SH delivered her report. She highlighted the importance of the recent consultations, especially the local government ones, but reminded the meeting that the Association is an apolitical body who will not respond - it is for residents to respond to consultations individually. The re-surfacing of Mayfield Terrace was wonderful, although the recent rain had shown the need for a gully. Anne Sturrock advised that she had taken photos of the excess water to the Council and had been told unofficially that a gully would be constructed. She suggested that more residents make the same complaint on the Council website in the hope of speeding up the process.

6. SHRUBBERY WORKING PARTY REPORT

SH reported that Hugh Mackay was currently in Japan but that she wanted the minutes to record the Committee's thanks for the work done throughout the year by him and his team of volunteers for their planting, pruning, weeding and clearing of leaves in the Blackets. IC added that Hugh had been working tirelessly for the Association for over 40 years. Hugh and his team of Ian Carter and Ian McLeish wanted to retire and were looking for some younger residents to take over. Anne Sturrock advised that she had been approached by Dr John Usher of 36 Mayfield Terrace and Stuart Whiting of 17 Mayfield Terrace who both wanted to be in the shrubbery working party. SH confirmed that she would contact them directly to get the ball rolling as time was of the essence with the leaves falling at the moment.

7. NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH REPORT

Stan Bird had given his apologies but SH highlighted that his report showed that there had been no recent robberies and online crime remained the biggest issue. Discussions turned to some residents being concerned about men on probation doing door-to-door selling of cleaning products. SH reminded the meeting that there is no policy of excluding people in the Blackets and that it was not an offence to knock on someone's door. Residents were advised to ask to see their licence to sell the goods and if they were at all concerned to call the police.

8. TREASURER'S REPORT

AH presented her report and advised that she had used some of the profits from the open gardens event in June to buy drinks for before this meeting. The Association had a bank balance of almost £4,000. Some of that may be used for gardening and/or fencing in the future. Simon White questioned whether the Association should be making money from social events, claiming it should just have used some of its

funds to purchase drinks for this evening. Some residents felt it was more appropriate for the Association to spend its funds on projects within the Blackets, not to purchase drinks. Other residents felt that it was important for the Association to encourage residents to be more sociable. SH requested that if any residents had an idea for a social event, they should let her know.

9. WEBSITE AND DATABASE REPORT

Colin Blair was not present but his report was noted. In response to a question about Committee meetings, SH advised that there were approximately 4 meetings per annum and that previous minutes could be found on the Association's website.

10. PLANNING REPORT

RS presented his planning report. The Thrums Hotel development would be finished soon and the results were much better than residents had initially feared. John and Caroline Sibbald pointed out that the listed wall, which had been taken down due to safety concerns and which the owner had agreed to rebuild, had not yet materialised.

AGM Action 23.01 – RS to find out whether the planning department were going to insist that the Thrums Hotel rebuild the listed wall it had taken down.

Fiona Salzen expressed her thanks to RS for all that he had done to improve the project by insisting that the original plans were toned down. She was worried, however, about whether it would become a homeless hostel (like the one next to it) as opposed to a hotel and about the amount of damage done to the pavement and shrubbery along Blacket Avenue.

AGM Action 23.02 – RS to find out what the new building at the Thrums Hotel would be used for.

AGM Action 23.03 – RS to ask the owners of the Thrums Hotel to fix the damaged pavement and clean up the shrubbery on Blacket Avenue.

RS presented the rest of his planning report. John Sibbald commented that, although permission was ultimately refused, it was disappointing that there were not more objections to the driveway proposal at 23 Blacket Place. He asked whether the Association could raise awareness of the importance of the number of objections to inappropriate planning applications. RS advised that a lot of domestic applications were signed off by planning officers, not local councillors. However, if there were lots of objections, the decision was made by a sub-committee of Councillors.

There was a discussion about the appropriate role of the Association in responding to planning applications. RS set out the way the Association worked on planning applications. Every week the Association reviewed all the local planning applications. If an application was not consistent with planning policy and the character appraisal and where it is detrimental to the area the Association will object as the Association. Similarly, the Association will support applications which enhance the quality of the environment. Clearly residents could object or support in a personal capacity, and for the most damaging applications it was important that residents lodged objections as the number of objections was taken into account in assessing the application - and deciding whether it should be taken to sub-committee. If residents were thinking of submitting a planning application, it is helpful to consult with neighbours, and RS would be happy to offer advice on an informal basis.

Discussions then turned to the lack of electric car chargers in the Blackets. The Council were still no closer to installing any and the fact that new driveways were not allowed to be created meant that an electric car remained impractical for the majority of residents. The charging points at Pollock Halls were either

very busy or broken. RS said that he had heard of a company who can install charging points into existing lampposts or bollards. It was agreed that if the Council was not going to take any action soon then it was worth looking into private options.

AGM Action 23.04 – *RS to investigate practices elsewhere re private companies who can install car charging points into lampposts or bollards for details.*

RS said that he was willing to give residents a tour of the Blackets to see the various architectural highlights and learn more about the area and its historical importance. Such a tour could perhaps also include visiting Blacket properties which have been subject to very sympathetic developments. AD reminded the meeting that it was important to let the Committee know about any new residents moving in so that she could drop them in a note about joining the Association and give them links to the website.

11. GRANGE & PRESTONFIELD COMMUNITY COUNCIL (“GPCC”)

IC advised that the GPCC has a statutory function with regard to planning applications and that the volume of planning objections seemed to be taking up most of its time.

There followed a debate as to the role of the Association – should it take a view on whether a planning application is objectionable or not. Doug Thomson, IC and RS felt that it should. Caroline Sibbald commented that the Association had a duty to point out planning applications which go against the Blacket principles. Other residents felt that the Committee should provide residents with the information then let residents decide for themselves as to whether to object. SH made a distinction between the Association as a whole and the Committee who are delegated to put in such objections. Some residents would like the Association to inform and discuss all planning applications with residents so it can take into account their views. This is delegated to the Committee and Committee members are free to put in their own comments, as individuals, to the planning office.

RS expressed his concern that sometimes the Council did not apply the rules strongly enough when the planning guidelines were being broken. IC mentioned the plot at the corner of Duncan Street and South Gray Street, which had still not been developed. The owners needed to be pushed into doing something with it. He agreed to mention it to the GPCC as well as the earlier issue about Mayfield Terrace requiring gutters for the water to run off the road.

AGM Action 23.05 – *IC to mention Duncan Street corner plot and Mayfield Terrace flooding issue at GPCC meeting.*

12. SUSTAINABILITY GROUP REPORT

Anne Starsmeare presented her report and explained that the Sustainability Group had been set up in 2021 in response to COP26. She was stepping down as co-ordinator and therefore, from the Committee, but would remain in the group. If anyone wanted to volunteer to be the new co-ordinator or had any ideas which they would like the group to explore, could they please contact her.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

In response to a query from a resident, it was confirmed that permission had been granted for a pine tree to be removed at Arthur Lodge recently. Fiona Salzen reminded residents that standard telephone land lines would be turned off next year.

The meeting closed at 8pm.

SUMMARY of OPEN AGM ACTIONS:

REF	ACTION	RESP	STATUS
Action21.01	<i>The Committee to come up with policy regarding provision of electric car charging points in the Blacket Area for submission to the Council.</i>	Committee	<i>Council has this under review – ongoing.</i>
Action22.01	<i>SB to ask university residence rep at GPCC meeting to stop blowing leaves onto Blacket Avenue.</i>	SB	<i>Still happening so SB was still asking them to stop</i>
Action22.02	<i>IC to check whether permissions to take down 12 trees at Pollock Halls were given before their removal.</i>	IC	<i>Trees have been replaced – CLOSED.</i>
Action22.03	<i>RS to find out whether planning permission for changes to 16 Blacket Place has been granted.</i>	RS	<i>There had been 4 applications which had all been approved – CLOSED.</i>
Action23.01	<i>RS to find out whether the planning department were going to insist that the Thrums Hotel rebuild the listed wall it had taken down.</i>	RS	
Action23.02	<i>RS to find out what the new building at the Thrums Hotel would be used for.</i>	RS	
Action23.03	<i>RS to ask the owners of the Thrums Hotel to fix the damaged pavement and clean up the shrubbery on Blacket Avenue.</i>	RS	
Action23.04	<i>RS to investigate practices elsewhere re private companies who can install car charging points into lampposts or bollards for details.</i>	RS	
Action23.05	<i>IC to mention Duncan Street corner plot and Mayfield Terrace flooding issue at GPCC meeting.</i>	IC	

2024 AGM REPORTS

ELECTION OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND OFFICE BEARERS

Doug Thomson resigned from the committee as Social Convenor in September 2024 and we have reverted to past practice and Ian Chisholm, Hazel Clark and Susan Hezlet will organise social events. Sadly, Anne Henderson as Treasurer and Arlene Doherty responsible for New Residents and Cards, have both decided to step down. We have two new committee members to be formally elected: Stewart Whiting and John Usher who are looking after the Shrubby Working Group. Anne Sturrock (36/1 MT) has indicated she would be willing to take on the 'New Residents' role but we have had no residents coming forward to take on the Treasurer role. New volunteers are welcome!

CHAIR'S REPORT

We had a fairly quiet year in terms of planning matters but there were two useful interactions with the Council. Firstly, thanks are due to the current and past members of the Shrubby Working Group for a smooth transition and liaison with the Council Officers. Secondly, a small miracle occurred and the mini-

swamp on Mayfield Terrace has been drained through the building of a new gully. Thanks are due to the persistence of the residents of 36 – 38 Mayfield Terrace. Our Open Gardens Event had three new gardens to visit at Belleville Lodge, Lindsay and Graham Dickson's house on Blacket Place, and finishing with a convivial reception at Hazel and Walter Clark's house at 1 Mayfield Terrace. Thanks are due to all who volunteered to help! Finally, we are looking forward to holding a new social event – a ceilidh - on Friday 28th February with the West Blacket Association. Keep an eye out for further details in my emails from the Blacket Association address.

GPCC REPORT

Ian Chisholm continues to represent the Blacket Association on the Grange and Prestonfield Community Council (GPCC) and is the Chair of the GPCC. Stanley Bird is also an elected member. This link enables us to keep-up-to-date with Council activities. Minutes of GPCC meetings are available on its website: grangeprestonfieldcc.org.uk. Elections to the GPCC are taking place early in 2025. Residents are encouraged to check the functions of the GPCC on the website and consider standing for election.

SHRUBBERY WORKING PARTY REPORT

This year we have had two new committee members who have taken on the joint role of shrubbery working party organisers, John Usher and Stewart Whiting. The shrubbery areas within Blacket are beautiful green areas providing an incredible habitat for all forms of wildlife, and we would love to keep them this way. However, the Edinburgh council park rangers are overrun with work and, without help from willing volunteers, these areas across the city would run the risk of becoming overgrown and unkempt.

Over the past year we have had a number of well-attended shrubbery sessions for general clean up and pruning. In addition, there have been many ad hoc litter picks and pruning; we would greatly encourage this going forward. We have good support from the council who will uplift the cuttings and green waste from our sessions.

We propose 4 dates to put in your diaries for organised shrubbery working parties. It would be great to see as many residents as possible along to help. **Saturday 23rd November** will be a planned meet to hopefully clear as many leaves as possible. Future Saturdays will be **22nd February, 24th May and 30th August**.

Please continue to look after this special area of Edinburgh, simple measures like clearing the leaves from the pavement and gutters outside our own properties from time to time, picking up any litter we see and also please feel free to help with any general pruning/tidying up of the shrubbery areas outwith these organised sessions.

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH REPORT

Although there were some reports of actual physical break-ins and the menacing activities of masked “e-bike” gangs in the vicinity, the indications from Police Scotland are that most crimes, especially fraud, are now conducted “on-line”. Bogus “security” calls and emails from what purport to be people's banks and building societies are the criminals' preferred ways to work these days. It is worth repeating: *Never, ever* give out your security details! The Association receives information from Police Scotland about the emergence of new scams e.g. “squishing” through false QR codes for paying fines or parking fees, and how old ones evolve like viruses. Where we consider that they are relevant we send out alerts to residents. Two of the members of the Committee are also members of the Grange & Prestonfield Community Council which occasionally is attended by local Police Officers. Information gleaned there can then be passed on through the Association. At the end of the day, the watchword is “Be Vigilant”. If you see something you think is “dodgy”, report it!

WEBSITE AND DATABASE REPORT

The website has been kept up to date for all recent news and events throughout the year. We have also improved the process for new members by updating the section on the website and adding a form to collect members' contact details as well as providing bank details for payment of the annual membership. This has allowed us to establish separate databases for members and non-members who still wish to be contacted.

PLANNING REPORT

A quiet year on the planning front. The approval for the careful restoration of Arthur Lodge is notable - the most noticeable aspect of this for local residents will be the restoration of the front garden to the original intent of viewing the house up a sloping lawn with trees. The other positive is the slow but steady restoration of railings with some great examples on Blacket Place, and we look forward to the restoration of the railings and gates at the neighbouring properties at 3 and 4 Alfred Place.

TREASURER'S REPORT

THE BLACKET ASSOCIATION

Summary of Accounts for the year ended 31 August 2024

	2024 £	2023 £
Opening Bank Account as at 1 September 2023	3933.91	3340.96
<i>Income</i>		
Subscriptions	685.00	670.00
Card sales	70.00	20.00
Open Gardens income	345.00	422.00
	<hr/> 1100.00	<hr/> 1112.00
<i>Expenditure</i>		
Printing	57.60	75.00
Landscaping and plants	92.00	73.40
Open Garden expenses	410.70	330.65
AGM drinks	108.35	-
Cockburn Association	40.00	40.00
	<hr/> 708.65	<hr/> 519.05
Increase in funds	391.35	592.95
Closing Bank account as at 31 August 2024	4325.26	3933.91
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Anne S Henderson, 20 October 2024