



Introduction

Welcome to the Winter Newsletter 2020. It seems hard to believe that two seasons have passed since our usual routines were so changed by coronavirus. Staying close to home has become the normal day to day for many of us. In these circumstances, our gardens have been a vital asset, providing a beautiful outdoor space for exercise, relaxation or an appropriately socially distanced chat with friends and neighbours.

We must continue to observe the current rules Government have set as we use the gardens and be considerate of others, younger and older users. There has been an incidence of a larger group of non-feuars gaining access to the gardens and a report was made to the police.

Despite overall reduced hours for a few months from our gardeners, John and Melvyn, when their worktime was staggered and we were not able to bring in extra help in the summer, a great number of improvements have still been possible this year. A brief description of these is included.

We finally managed to hold a short AGM in September 2020, focused just on essential business. As there was not the usual opportunity for questions and discussion, it was suggested that a Question and Answer could be included in this Newsletter. Questions that have been posed in the last few months are set out below.

We also wanted to draw to your attention to our approaching bicentennial year in 2022. Please do complete the short survey seeking your views.

Though it will probably be very different this year, I wish you and your loved ones the very best for the festive season.

Fiona Young
Chair

Question and Answer

Question 1: Why have there been varying increases in fees over the last 4 years, why are these increases not linked to inflation and what rates may be set in the future?

Answer: Great care is taken to keep costs low and to prioritise essential expenditure, over half of which is spent on employment costs for our two gardeners, John and Melvyn. The rest is used for things like garden supplies, insurance, tree surgeon fees, planned maintenance and so on. In 2019/20, our expenditure came to £116,601.

Assessment rate rises have historically been kept to a minimum, which has unfortunately resulted in negligible cash reserves by July each year, which is when income for the current year arrives. In addition, planning has been undertaken on an annual cycle which has meant that higher value items of expenditure anticipated for the year ahead are built into that annual budget and assessment increases calculated accordingly to cover planned costs. There have been instances in the past where cash reserves have been built up over more than one year to cover larger expenditure items such as the replacement of the fence between the Bank Garden and Water of Leith path, but this has not happened in recent years, and as indicated there are negligible cash reserves.

The Committee now are developing five year rolling plans for the gardens that incorporate planned expenditure over a number of years on, for example, maintenance of stonework, fixtures and replacement of equipment as well as routine garden maintenance. In addition, we would like to start increasing the level of cash reserves so that cash does not almost run out every July, and we can meet any unexpected costs should they arise by agreeing a Reserves Policy. This should mean that in due course, future increases would be smoothed, as they will not be calculated based on anticipated expenditure for just one year ahead.

We know now that there are a number of larger items of expenditure needed over the next few years such as repainting Moray Place railings which will cost £17k over 2 years and replacing some now very old essential equipment e.g. the tractor. These costs will be built into the 5- year rolling budget.

Question 2: At the AGM in 2019, the question of increased planting in Ainslie Place Garden was raised. A workshop to discuss options was due to take place in April 2020 and had to be postponed due to Covid19 restrictions. Will this be rescheduled? Could it take place using Zoom or similar if people can't attend in person?

Answer: It is the intention to hold the workshop when restrictions permit, possibly outdoors. Consideration was given to using a digital medium. However, the use of a range of visual aids was planned and a very participative format wouldn't work well on Zoom.

Question 3: A number of trees have been taken down this year. Why was this and what will replace them?

Answer: In the past year three trees have been felled in the gardens – a dead Hawthorn in the central roundel of Moray Place, the large Elm adjacent to the east gate of Ainslie place which had succumbed to Dutch Elm Disease, which had to be felled in August and a semi-mature Lime in the north-east quadrant of Ainslie Place which was impeding and having a detrimental effect on the two adjoining trees, one a very large example of a Swedish Whitebeam and the other a Gean.

There are no proposals to replace the Hawthorn in the roundel or the Lime in Ainslie Place as the adjacent trees fill the space. A Zelkova has been identified and approved by CEC to replace the Elm, which we intend to plant in the early spring.

In addition to the three trees felled, some substantial essential pruning works were carried out in February to reduce the crown of the magnificent large Elm at the east end of the Doune Terrace strip following a detailed inspection undertaken and recommendation made by an experienced professional arboriculturist. At the same time, pruning works to remove some dead branches from two or three large Ash trees in the Bank garden, which had suffered from Ash Dieback, was undertaken. The necessary remedial pruning work appears to have been successful with all of these trees flourishing this summer.

Question 4: Could the BBQ area in Moray Place garden be improved?

Answer: We have bought stone slabs with a view to installing a worktop type surface on top of the present stone plinth. We also hope to extend the BBQ area during this work which we plan to complete before the 2021 BBQ season.

Gardens and Infrastructure – Mike Baynham, Paul Broda, Ewan Jeffrey, Gregor Henderson

On two of the relatively few very wet days in the Summer, John and Melvyn prepared an inventory of all the trees, shrubs and plants in all of the gardens from which Robert Luther has very kindly prepared a digital database which can be readily and easily updated on a regular basis.

As most Feuars will be aware, the trees in the Feu have been allowed to grow naturally and the practice has not been to shape or manicure them with pruning restricted to primarily essential crown lifting, crown reduction and limb removal.

We follow best practice in managing the trees as set out in the Forestry Commission's publication on behalf of the National Tree Safety Group "Common Sense Risk Management of Trees – Guidance on Trees and Public Safety in the UK".

Unfortunately, the large Elm beside the east gate to Ainslie Place succumbed to Dutch Elm Disease this summer and as a consequence had to be urgently felled in August. At the same time a semi-mature Lime in the north-east quadrant was felled as it had started to crowd and have an adverse impact on the adjacent Gean and Swedish Whitebeam. A Zelkova will be planted to replace the felled Elm in the Spring.

Further tree works will be undertaken in Moray Place in late November. We have recently had a detailed inspection of the large Elm adjacent to the barbecue carried out by an experienced professional arboriculturist. We await his detailed report and recommendations, which will be followed. Fortunately, there is no major concern but some crown reduction works will be necessary. At the same time a dead Hawthorn will be felled, a large lower limb is to be removed from a Silver Birch as a health and safety precautionary measure, a self-seeded semi-mature Sycamore is to be felled and some limb removal of the Kanzan Cherry in the north-west quadrant to alleviate pressure on its root base.

A replacement tree will be planted in the Spring for both the Sycamore [and the hawthorn]. We also plan to plant a tree in the Spring to replace the two young Limes felled two or three years ago.

In the Bank garden the tree surgeons will undertake some crown lifting works on a large Sycamore adjacent to the walkway.

Also, in the Bank garden we will be reinstating the narrow bed near to the gardens bothy which was substantially disassembled for the drainage works required in connection with the improvements to the welfare facilities. We will also be starting the replanting of the steeply sloping bank just above the bonfire site which was first cleared two or three years ago. We will be planting around 18 new Rhododendrons in this area this year together with supplementary planting to keep down the weeds and maintain the stability of the bank whilst the Rhododendrons establish themselves. We also hope to continue with the clearing and substantial pruning of laurel, holly and privet in the Bank garden opening up key views in the Bank garden.

Bench Upgrading

Nineteen benches were upgraded in Sept/Oct 2020. The metal supports were repainted with a red primer and black finish and new larch planks installed. This, along with the nine slatted type benches done in February, completes the planned work and we hope that these benches will be serviceable for many years to come.

Bank Garden Arches Stonework

Consultants David Narro have continued to take 3-monthly readings on the tell-tale devices that were installed in January this year. These are located in arches B14, B26 and B27 (arches are now tagged so easier to locate) and we are pleased to report that no significant movement has been detected to date.

Gardeners' Toilet

The gardeners now have a new, fully plumbed toilet within their bothy in the Bank Garden. Work took place during October and is now complete.

Wood for Sale

We only have two short (2-3m or so) sections of ash remaining. The price is GBP 25 per linear meter and slabs can be viewed by contacting John Hughes the head gardener directly.

Gate Security

There have been a few unfortunate instances of unauthorised entry to the Moray Place and Bank Gardens recently. In an effort to reduce this we have modified all gates to prevent the latch being worked open using credit cards or similar.

Bank Railings

Following the David Narro report findings from late 2019 we have installed two metal clamps at the base of railings in the overhead walkway in the Bank Garden. The purpose of these clamps is to reduce any lateral force being transmitted into the adjacent cracked stonework and to ensure individual vertical rails remain in place in case some stonework does break off.

Bank Garden Steps

The large section of steps leading down from the end of the lime walk at the western end of the Bank Garden are rotten and need to be replaced. Wood has been ordered and the work will be done by the gardeners as time permits. Signs advising of the potential dangerous condition of the steps have been installed.

Moray Feu Bicentennial 2022 – Andrew Dixon

In 2022, it will be 200 years since Francis Stuart, 10th Earl of Moray, commissioned the architect James Gillespie Graham to draw up plans to develop the Moray Feu. This is an important milestone in the history and life of the city, and we would like your views on how we might celebrate the bicentenary with events, commissions and maybe fundraising for legacy projects.

At the AGM, we mentioned the possibility of a survey to ask Feuars for your views. The management committee, and a small sounding board of feuars with event experience, has met to discuss the objectives, scale, design, delivery and funding of a potential programme of events. We now want to get a broader set of views via the enclosed survey which we would encourage you to complete. It can also be completed on-line (link below).

The objectives of the year will be

1. To tell our story and 'Describe our part in the world':
2. To inform residents, visitors and the people of Edinburgh about the history, heritage, architecture of the Feu throughout its lifetime
3. Open up aspects of the Feu to visitors via open days and events promoting our relationship with the people of Edinburgh
4. To capture a creative picture of the Feu's people 200 years on.
5. To bring residents together on a scale never seen before.
6. To position the conservation of the Feu as a major issue for the city and council.
7. To explore funding to commission a permanent legacy for the bicentennial

As Feu budgets are tight, we will have to try and raise funds for the bicentenary from both residents and other sources such as trusts and foundations, sponsors and Lottery. You may have ideas or want to contribute yourself. We envisage a yearlong programme and have floated a few examples to start the ideas flowing.

- A photographer in residence for 12 months documenting the Feu, its people, architecture, and the pleasure gardens 200 years on – the gardeners, the beekeepers, the dogs, the playgroup, The Burns supper, the postman, the film set and the bus lane diversions! The output could be a publication for residents and for sale as well as an exhibition.
- A lighting event in Bank Gardens – like Pitlochry or the Botanics – that highlights the beauty of the architecture and the gardens through a journey and trail projecting moments of history and words onto the arches and trees.
- Design your own Feu – an education project – that invites schools to design their own estate for next 200 years.
- Strictly Feu dancing – a giant ceilidh for residents
- A legacy commission – a new activity space, a conservation project, new garden planting, commissioned benches?

Please take time to complete our survey. For those who receive a printed Newsletter, the survey is enclosed and can be returned to Whitelaw Wells or by email to events@morayfeu.com. It can also be completed using this link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/8GF3S5B>

Support from residents will help us with our fundraising which may be particularly important given the impact of Covid on charities. We hope that everyone will find a way to take part and take pride in the special place in which we live. With the right support, we can also leave a mark in history and some form of legacy for the next 200 years.



Talking Rubbish—Martha Vail Barker

We all do our part to keep our neighbourhood attractive and healthy by managing our household waste responsibly and in line with City of Edinburgh Council regulations. Over the lockdown period, there have been only a few reports of missed collections, scattered bins, etc. Still, it's perhaps worth reviewing the basics, so that we are all geared up for the wet and windy weather that's ahead. Nothing is more depressing than wet rubbish blown all over the pavements and taking up semi-permanent occupation in the gutter.

Collections

There are collections of sacks, bins and recycling boxes every weekday except Tuesday. (I am hoping that the Council will consider consolidating collection days in our area, so that we do not have the visual pollution and clutter so continuously.)

- Please do refer to the Council web site to ensure you are putting out the right receptacles on the right days. www.edinburgh.gov.uk/bins-recycling
- Note: the “blue and red box collection calendar” will indicate a different day for blue box collection than on the “recycling and bin collection” calendar. The box collection calendar is correct!
- Please use only the designated receptacles. Workers are now instructed not to uplift items not set out in the proper bins
- Bonus points if you use the “modesty caps” to contain items that might blow away!
- Do not place loose items in the gull proof sacks; they will not be uplifted. Use black bin liners to contain your rubbish and then place these in the gull proof sacks
- Please set your recyclables and rubbish out no earlier than the night before collection. Passers-by will often dispose of their litter in recycling boxes and in the gull proof bags, and the Council will not uplift as a result
- Missed collections should be reported at www.edinburgh.gov.uk/bins-recycling/report-missed-bin Please do not report a missed collection until after 10am on the day of scheduled collection

I suspect that one reason the neighbourhood has been less beset by litter in recent months is that holiday lets haven't been operating as usual. It is often visitors who leave rubbish on the pavement

any old day and any old way. If you own a holiday flat, or do home exchanges, or simply have tenants, please make sure that the collection calendars (downloadable from the CEC website above) are available to them, as well as black bins liners to put in the gull proof sacks.

Bins

There is a dearth of street bins in the Feu. This means A) that pedestrians often toss their litter on the pavement and B) users of the gardens often toss their detritus in the bins located in each of the gardens. We can all work on Problem A by picking up litter and disposing of it ourselves. (You may have seen me out with my tongs, gloves, and bag doing a bit of a clean-up—feel free to join in!) As to Problem B, perhaps you don't see it *as* a problem: bins are there for litter, right?

To a point, yes. But our gardeners have very limited capacity to store rubbish in the gardener's bothy. Two bin bags-worth a week is all that can be stored and uplifted. So, whenever at all possible, please take your own rubbish home and dispose of it there and deposit only wind-blown litter in the garden bins. And *please* use the specially designated (and handy) depositories for dog poo bags. If these are instead put in the bins, the gardeners have to live with a stinky mess until collection day.

Digital – Blair Finlay

During the summer lockdown, we saw a sharp increase in residents using the **Moray Feu Closed Group Facebook Page**. With the ease of up-to-date information being so accessible and being able to stay in touch with other residents during this socially distancing period, it proved a useful tool for many. Numbers are still growing with 183 members currently. Top-Tip, if you wish for your post to be seen quickly, Mondays 5:30-6:30 pm is the most popular time in the week for members to be interacting with the page!

There have been some changes made to the website, these include an updated **HANDBOOK** which can be downloaded and printed if you wish.

Getting in touch has become simpler. If you have a need to **CONTACT** the committee, simply click on the 'Contact' tab on the homepage of the website. Your email will be forwarded on to the appropriate committee member.

The **COMMITTEE** page has also seen a few changes. We sadly say goodbye to Enid Holman Arthur and Fiona Jarvie and happily welcome Andrew Dixon as members. This seemed a good opportunity to tidy up the email names and make committee responsibilities clearer. Head to Committee Members to see what each member is responsible for. From this page, you can simply click CONTACT US to send your email.

Along with the Facebook page and website is our Instagram page used to keep a visual record of the changing seasons and beauty of our gardens and streets.

If you are not following but would like to, please find the links below.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/282104212712221/?ref=share>

https://www.instagram.com/moray_feu_gardens/

www.morayfeu.com

Finally, if you are receiving this Newsletter in hard copy, please do consider receiving future communications by Email. It is better for the environment and costs less! Just drop Sandra at Whitelaw Wells an email to let her know - sthomson@whitelawwells.co.uk