

Minutes of the Berwick Slow Food Annual General Meeting - DRAFT

Wednesday 19th March 2025

Meeting Room, Berwick YHA, Dewar's Lane

Committee Members Present: Laura McGinlay (LMcG) - Chair, Millie McRobbie (MMcR), Vice-Chair and Festival Director, David Simpson (DS) - Treasurer, Ray McRobbie, Festival Director (RMcR), Alison Edwards (AE) - Secretary

Committee Member Apologies:

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

The Chair, LMcG, welcomed everyone to the meeting and confirmed that apologies had been received from a number of Slow Food Berwick members, but that the full committee were present and there were enough members present to make the meeting quorate.

2. Minutes of the 2024 AGM

LMcG confirmed that the minutes of the 2024 AGM had been available on the Berwick Slow Food website for some time and that they had been circulated in advance of the AGM. There were no questions or comments on the 2024 minutes and they were formally approved.

3. Revised Constitution for Adoption

LMcG introduced the revised Constitution document received from Slow Food UK for regional groups to adopt. The main changes to the constitution included:

- The revised constitution is a much simpler and shorter document
- The terminology of 'Convivia' of Slow Food UK has been dropped in favour of reference to regional groups (ie we will now be the Berwick Slow Food group from hereon in, rather than the Berwick Slow Food Convivium)
- Office-holders, once elected, will now hold their post for a 3-year term (unless they wish to step-down earlier) without the need for re-election. Nominations will still be required for members wishing to stand in a new role, or for office-holders looking to serve for an additional term.
- LMcG also confirmed that there are no changes to what happens in the event of the Berwick group winding up and ceasing to exist. All funds will be passed to Slow Food UK.
- Linda Pepper asked if the revised constitution had been 'imposed' or if it had been open for discussion and LMcG confirmed that we had gone back and forward with Slow Food UK on a number of issues where we requested clarity or wanted to amend elements and that this had been well-received by our parent body.
- No further questions were received and Members formally agreed the adoption of the revised Constitution for Berwick Slow Food.

4. Treasurer's Report

DS confirmed that the Accounts had been circulated to members in advance of the meeting. He then ran through the Accounts for the Berwick Slow Food Convivium and the Berwick Food and Beer Festival, highlighting in particular:

- A healthy combined cash balance made up from the Festival Account, the Convivium Account and a separate Savings Account (set up in late 2023 to act as a contingency fund for the Festival in case of bad weather and/or other unforeseen issues causing a drop in footfall and income).
- LMcG also noted that there is a need for the group to maintain a higher cash balance than other Slow Food groups due to the costs involved in putting on the Festival each year (which requires significant funds be available upfront to pay for deposits, etc).

Festival Accounts

- That the 2024 Festival had another profitable year despite rising costs.
 - This was primarily linked to the decision to increase ticket prices (after a period of no/low increases of a couple of years). There was no sense that people felt that the increases were too high on the gates, suggesting that the event is still broadly accessible for people wishing to attend.
 - DS thanked the generosity of our sponsors for another year, which also contributed to the event generating a profit.
 - A number of larger suppliers honoured 2023 prices for hire of things like the marquee.
- As a result, the full honorarium was paid to both the Festival Directors and to the Treasurer in recognition of all of their work on what is an established and popular event for the town, drawing visitors from outside the region, as well as catering to local residents.
- £2,000 of the profits from the event were donated to a number of relevant charities in December, including Northern Soul Kitchen, the River Tweed Foundation, Bees Abroad (a beehive twinning project run by Holy Trinity Church) and 10,000 Gardens in Africa (a Slow Food-supported charity).
- RMcR and MMcR extended their thanks to DS for all of his work on the Festival accounts in 2024.

Convivium Accounts

- Transition issues between the outgoing and incoming Treasurer did lead to some difficulties in gaining access to the Convivium Account and the Savings Account, but these are now resolved/ready to be resolved.
- Linda Pepper asked if a mechanism was in place to ensure that this does not happen again and was reassured that a plan is in place for a more orderly handover between this year's outgoing and incoming Treasurers.
- In future, if there is a vacancy in the Treasurer role, there is also a plan for recruitment involving approaching Festival sponsors Greaves, West & Ayre and Rennie Welch to see if they can provide someone to volunteer in this role and/or provide interim support, if needed.

- Linda Pepper asked about who Berwick Slow Food banked with and whether we were now subject to bank charges as so many high street banks have moved to charging community groups where previously they didn't. It was confirmed that Berwick Slow Food bank with Bank of Scotland who have introduced charges. The Committee have been in discussion about potentially moving to somewhere like Unity Bank for more ethical banking as well as low/no charges for community group accounts.
- Nothing else of note reported in relation to the Convivium Account.
- LMcG extended the thanks of the group to DS for his time as Treasurer, noting that he was stepping down from the role at this AGM.

5. Festival 2025

- a. RMcR and MMcR noted that the relationships with producers and food and drink vendors that they have cultivated over the past few years of running the Festival are now bearing fruit, with many traders keen to return for 2025.
- b. Currently 27 stalls are booked for the Producers' Market and the Festival Directors are keen to bring this up to 40 again. MMcR noted that it is becoming more difficult to attract food producers to the event as many of them have changed business model post-Covid to run street food-style businesses, or have closed-down completely. However, this is also giving us the opportunity to showcase new producers and suppliers.
- c. Street food vendor pitches are already fully-booked with a wide range of foods on offer and including more coffee vendors.
- d. Seven drink vendors have been booked for the beer tent with another three at application stage.
- e. Simpsons Malt had indicated that they might need to halve their usual sponsorship money this year as they are receiving more applicants to their community fund. Fortunately, when MMcR shared the marquee hire costs (which will be higher this year to reflect the booking of a larger marquee to allow for better access) Simpsons Malt kindly agreed to cover these costs.
- f. LMcG took a moment to commend RMcR and MMcR for their work on the Food & Beer Festival, recognising any number of positive innovations that have been well-received, thanks to their willingness to learn from feedback and experience year-on-year.

6. Chair's Report

The Chair gave a verbal report, observing that Slow Food UK have become more focused in recent years on issues around food poverty and food quality; as well as the precariousness of the current UK food system and issues of food security. You can expect to see some of these themes playing out in our events and activities over the coming year.

7. Election of Committee Members and Officers

LMcG noted that both the current Treasurer and Secretary wished to stand-down at the 2025 AGM and noted that no official nominations had been received for either role, although interested parties were in attendance at the meeting.

Mike Usher indicated that he would be interested in standing as Treasurer and his application was proposed by RMcR and seconded by Linda Pepper).

Carol Alderton indicated that she would be interested in standing as Secretary and her application was proposed by MMcR and seconded by LMcG.

Existing officers were confirmed in post.

It was also noted that the revised constitution document had removed the need for a Vice-Chair role and that the Committee had therefore agreed to get rid of this position.

2025 Committee

- Chair - Laura McGinlay
- Treasurer - Mike Usher
- Secretary - Carol Alderton
- Members continuing on the management Committee: Ray McRobbie and Millie McRobbie (Festival Directors), Alison Edwards (Comms & Marketing) Laura Scruton (Events Coordinator)

8. Any Other Business

The Committee was asked to briefly outline planned events for 2025 and it was confirmed that:

- Unfortunately, the Spring Talk and Dinner on 'Pepper, the Overlooked Spice' has had to be postponed due to unforeseen circumstances. This event will either be held as an opener for the Festival in August, or in the Autumn.
- A series of Foraging Sessions with Jo Thomas will run in May, July and September. These are free to members, £7.50 for friends.
- A brewery tour of the First & Last Brewery will take place in June
- Katrina Reynolds, Director of Borderland Food Tours, was in attendance at the meeting and extended an invitation for BSF members to attend a walking tour of Berwick's food history. Dates and details to be confirmed.
- All forthcoming events are listed on the website at <https://berwickslowfood.org/events/>