

**Minutes of the 220th Annual General Meeting  
of the Royal Horticultural Society**

**held at 11:00am on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> July 2024  
RHS Garden Harlow Carr**

**Subject to approval by Members at the 2025 AGM**

**Members of Council present:**

Keith Weed (President)	Tony Kirkham
Matthew Lindsey-Clark (Treasurer)	Baroness Kate Lampard
Claire Austin	Lorna Parker
Sue Beesley	Dr. David Rae
Mick Crawley	Prof. Nicola Spence
Nick Dunn	Janet Walker
Wesley Kerr	Ruth Willmott

**Also present:**

Clare Matterson, Director General	Helena Pettit, Director of Shows, Commercial and Innovation
Carole Goldsmith, Director of People	Jon Simpson, Director of IT
Dr Alistair Griffiths, Director of Science and Collections	Dr Tim Upson, Director of Gardens and Horticulture
Hayley Monckton, Director of Communications	James Wren, Director of Development and Corporate Partnerships
Sue Moss, Director of Learning & Public Engagement	Araba Webber, Chief of Staff
Mark Norman, Director of Finance and Corporate Services	Stacey Bailey (Company Secretary)
Martine Parnell, Director of Members, Marketing and Digital	

Number of members present: 54

**Apologies:** Tazim Essani (Council Member), Pamela Maynard (Council Member), Darren Share (Council member), Janet Lee (Member)

**Welcome**

The President welcomed members to the 220th Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Royal Horticultural Society at RHS Garden Harlow Carr, thanked them for attending and provided an outline of the meeting.

The President noted that the quorum for the AGM was 100 members, as 100 members were not yet present, the AGM would start after reports in 30 minutes.

## 1. President's Report

- 1.1 The President began by paying tribute to Robin Herbert, former President of the RHS, who had died earlier in the year. Under Robin's guidance, the RHS membership had doubled, RHS Garden Rosemoor and RHS Garden Hyde Hall opened and the very successful Gala night at RHS Chelsea was introduced. The President wished to recognise and thank Robin for all he did for the RHS.
- 1.2 The RHS was delighted that HRH King Charles III had been confirmed as the RHS's new Patron. The President had the honour of taking His Majesty around the RHS Chelsea Flower Show this year which he thoroughly enjoyed.
- 1.3 In the past year, the RHS's Strategy to 2030 had launched with a focus on supporting everyone throughout their lifelong adventure of gardening. Alongside this, a governance review had taken place to ensure that RHS governance best serves the realisation of the strategy, resulting in a simplified structure encompassing three Groups that feed into RHS Council. The three groups are; Statutory groups responsible for governance decisions; Guidance and oversight groups providing professional help and; Expert groups to provide specialist expert plant knowledge.
- 1.4 The President noted that it had been a financially challenging year for the RHS, particularly in relation to the M25/A3 roadworks around RHS Garden Wisley which have severely impacted visitors to the garden. Despite this, the RHS continued to invest in horticulture.
- 1.5 The RHS recognises that if it is to further its purpose of promoting the science, art and practice of horticulture, it needs to reach as many people as possible. With that in mind, the RHS's first Urban show was held in Manchester and was a tremendous success, bringing in a younger audience and those interested in balcony and indoor plants. On the back of this success, the RHS plans to take the Urban show around the country annually.
- 1.6 The RHS Chelsea Flower show was again a tremendous success again and sold out. The main avenue gardens were fantastic and in addition there were also wonderful balcony gardens, container gardens and houseplants contributing to one of the best shows held.
- 1.7 At the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, the RHS engaged with several businesses to highlight the flora biodiversity crisis through hosting the 2024 Responsible 100 meeting supported by Tortoise and the Rothschild Foundation. This event brought chairs and CEO's together from the UK's biggest businesses and enabled the RHS to encourage them to focus the agenda on the biodiversity crisis and so helping to build the RHS's convening power to champion the importance of horticulture.
- 1.8 The President outlined some of the new developments around RHS gardens over the past year, including;

- i. At RHS Garden Harlow Carr the wonderful streamside garden has taken shape, and the Harrogate Arms has very recently opened;
  - ii. At RHS Garden Wisley, over 30,000 plants have been planted in the newly opened Piet Oudolf borders;
  - iii. At RHS Garden Bridgewater, the Chinese Music Pavilion is now complete with more development to come;
  - iv. At RHS Garden Hyde Hall, the new sewerage plant has been installed and very valuable learnings have come from this important infrastructure project;
  - v. At RHS Garden Rosemoor, the new entrance and restaurant are complete and open.
- 1.9 The President highlighted the new RHS Grow App allowing access to RHS help and advice for those not close to one of the RHS gardens. This is in its early stages but is promising to be an exciting and popular additional offering.
- 1.10 This has also been an interesting year for trials and this year the RHS experimented with an online trial which was launched at the Urban Show. This looked at orchids on windowsills and engaged with people online and more trials of this nature are planned.
- 1.11 The RHS continues to invest and learn in horticultural science and this year provided a record 115k pieces of advice in addition to the 90k separate website visits. The Society has 18 PHD students and 22 partners that it works with to invest in and build expertise further. The RHS's catalogues have been made available online to further aid learning and access to information.
- 1.12 The President outlined the newly established department of Learning and Public Engagement and Learning headed Dr Sue Moss. During the course of the year, they have overseen 50k school children visiting the gardens, continued work with the Natural History Museum on the National Education Park and continued work on community wellbeing gardens at hospitals.
- 1.13 The President concluded that although not without its challenges, the RHS had successfully delivered its aims in 2023/24 and continued to promote the importance of horticulture and its benefits.

## **2. Treasurer's Report**

- 2.1 The Treasurer presented a summary of the RHS Annual Report and Consolidated Financial Statements 2023/24.
- 2.2 The Treasurer explained that the RHS had entered the year with a cautious outlook with income of approx. £120.5mn and a deficit of £4.3mn before movements on investments. This reflects the difficult economic backdrop of higher inflation, higher interest rates on discretionary spend and the cost-of-living crisis. The RHS's financial results have further been compounded by the major roadworks around RHS Garden Wisley.
- 2.3 The Treasurer highlighted that despite these challenges, the RHS remains committed to sustain and grow investment in its charitable purposes,

reaching a record £94mn last year, £4mn up on the prior year and £24mn more than five years ago.

- 2.4 The Treasurer noted that membership held at around 626k in line with the prior year. The membership team and front of house staff had done a wonderful job adding 116k new members, however a similar number chose not to renew citing personal financial reasons and difficulties getting in and out of RHS Garden Wisley.
- 2.5 Garden visitors had dropped back by 5% to 2.95mn, predominantly at RHS Garden Wisley. At the other gardens, visitor numbers had been broadly maintained. On occasion, bad weather also closed the gardens.
- 2.6 The Treasurer outlined some financial highlights including the sell out success of the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, and visitors to RHS Hampton Court Palace Garden Festival up on the prior year. Whilst show visitor numbers increased, the retail operations fell mainly due to lower visitor numbers and lower than anticipated transaction values. However, online retail increased by 25% on the prior year. The RHS launched The Plant Space retail shop at Bluewater shopping centre, increasing brand awareness and elsewhere, catering income had increased by over 12%, helped by the opening of the new restaurant at RHS Garden Rosemoor.
- 2.7 For expenditure, the Treasurer noted that investment in learning, public engagement, gardens and science had increased by almost 5% compared to the prior year to total £52mn. RHS outreach programs inspire millions of people to grow, helping over 100k volunteers greening spaces up and down the country. The New Shoots initiative was launched, aiming to create a new generation of horticulturists and the wellbeing garden at NHS University Hospital Lewisham was completed. Within science, the RHS now has over 80 scientists working alongside 18 academic and industry partners delivering over 30 research programmes.
- 2.8 The Treasurer outlined some of the other activities throughout the year including continued investment in gardens and estates, the restoration of the Harrogate Arms and embarking on upgrading behind the scenes horticultural buildings at RHS Garden Harlow Carr. RHS Garden Bridgewater opened the Chinese streamside Music Pavilion, and the next phase of the streamside scholars garden will begin in the Autumn. At RHS Garden Wisley, the Orchid House and Old Lab have re-opened as well as the new Piet Oudolf borders.
- 2.9 The Treasurer highlighted the impact of the A3/M25 roadworks around RHS Garden Wisley noting that the National Highways Agency is not expected to complete the works until spring 2026, a delay of at least 6 months. The roadworks and resulting congestion have been the most commonly cited reason why people have been visiting less over the last 12 months. Lower visitor numbers mean lower paying visitors, fewer transactions in shops, and a reduced ability to recruit new members. The total cost to the RHS is currently estimated at just under £5mn and will undoubtedly increase, with the financial effects expected to continue throughout this next year and beyond. The RHS will seek compensation, however the recovery process will be slow and costly.

- 2.10 With the impact of the roadworks, the wettest 18 months since records began and the continued difficult economic environment, the RHS will continue with a cautious outlook. Thankfully the RHS has strong reserves and a solid balance sheet and remains committed to its strategy of investing in gardens, sustainability, education, science and community programmes. The RHS will continue to innovate and do the best it can to excite and inspire members and visitors.
- 2.11 The Treasurer thanked Mark Norman, Director of Finance and Corporate Services, for his contribution to the RHS during his tenure and wished him well when he moves on from the RHS at the end of the year.

### **3. Director General's Report**

- 3.1 The Director General extended a warm welcome to everyone attending and those listening later to the recording online.
- 3.2 The Director General began by outlining the results of the latest membership survey which highlighted three member priorities to engage children and young people with gardening and nature; develop young people's skills and careers in horticulture; and help children to learn about gardening. Research on biodiversity and promoting sustainable practice came fourth and fifth on the list of priorities for members. The Director General thanked those who completed the survey and encouraged members to take part in future surveys as they provide valuable feedback.
- 3.3 The Director General outlined some of the activities planned to share the joy of gardening, including;
- i. Some changes will take place with RHS shows to open them up to more people around the country. After 2025, RHS Hampton Court Palace Garden Festival will move to Badminton in 2026 and Tatton Park, which celebrated 25 years this year, will move to Wentworth Woodhouse in 2025 and Sandringham in 2026. There will be no changes to RHS Malvern Festival and RHS Chelsea Flower Show;
  - ii. At RHS Garden Bridgewater the Chinese streamside garden is taking shape, celebrating the huge contribution made to UK horticulture by plants of Chinese origin. There will be traditionally crafted Chinese Pavilions covering a seven acre site, demonstrating collaboration between the RHS, the China Flower association and Yangzhou City;
  - iii. At RHS Garden Rosemoor, the Winter Garden design is taking shape and will double its current size by merging it with three Model gardens to create a new unified landscape;
  - iv. Trees are an important horticultural issue and the RHS recognises that it is not the number of trees you plant, but the number that become established which is important. The RHS plans to duplicate 24 carefully selected trees across its gardens and the science team will be working with the horticultural team to understand the right tree for the right area;
  - v. Plans are underway to reinvigorate the RHS head office in Vincent Square, London and return the building to a place for horticultural creativity and exchange.

- 3.4 The Director General outlined RHS activities to deliver science solutions for people, gardens and nature including;
- i. Leading on the transition to peat free in a practical and supportive way for gardeners and horticulturalists;
  - ii. Continuing to make good use of Hilltop at RHS Wisley, through hosting Kew scientists to discuss the future of botanical and horticultural science and the upcoming Collaborative International Society for horticultural science bringing people from across the world to discuss greener cities and improving ecosystem services in a climate-changing world.
- 3.5 The Director General introduced Malcolm Anderson, RHS Head of Sustainability who provided an overview of RHS sustainability work including:
- i. The RHS Sustainability Strategy was launched in 2021 with strong messaging about people, planet and nature;
  - ii. To date, the RHS has undertaken temperature mapping and rainfall patterns to help understand what the future will look like at all RHS Gardens;
  - iii. Biodiversity surveys have also taken place across all RHS sites to understand key indicator species, where the RHS needs to act and what needs to be done. Work is also ongoing to understand the RHS's carbon footprint.
- 3.6 The Head of Sustainability outlined action to date including;
- i. A focus at RHS shows on supporting designers to look at different ways of building;
  - ii. A reduction in waste across all RHS shows by 50% in the last two years with 97% of RHS Chelsea Flower show waste is recycled;
  - iii. Menu choices have been evaluated and recyclable cups introduced across all sites;
  - iv. The RHS is working towards Plant Healthy certification across all sites;
  - v. Investing in buses and active travel routes to RHS gardens.
- 3.7 The Head of Sustainability outlined RHS plans over the next two years including;
- i. Working towards ISO 1401 accreditation which is an externally accredited environmental management system;
  - ii. Looking at solar car ports at RHS gardens and developing current plans for this at RHS Garden Rosemoor;
  - iii. Looking at options to heat the glasshouses without using mains gas including renewable options;
  - iv. Continuing the journey towards peat free;
  - v. Replacing oil and gas boilers across RHS sites.
- 3.8 The Head of Sustainability concluded by emphasising that sustainability will be embedded across the RHS, including in training, education and project management frameworks whilst working with government to make a positive impact on gardeners and the horticulture industry.



- 3.9 The Director General outlined work underway to build horticulture for the future, including expanding the New Shoots taster programmes across all gardens where the RHS welcomes people to come and work in its gardens and understand what a career in horticulture might look like. More flexible volunteering opportunities, direct work experience and internships have been developed to help guide people into formal training programmes and attract more people from different backgrounds. It has been a successful pilot year, reaching over 69k people.
- 3.10 The RHS continues to champion the essential role of gardening through the National Gardening Group which has identified three key workstreams;
- i) Skills and workforce for the future of horticulture - contributing to the Governments Green Skills agenda;
  - ii) Tourism and heritage - realising the potential of the UK's incredible national gardens to attract international visitors;
  - iii) Sustainability and climate change - developing a project to tackle the critical impact of climate, biodiversity and environmental change.
- 3.11 The Director General noted that the first RHS State of Gardening Report will be published next year and repeated every two to three years. It will look at trends in UK gardening, gardens and gardeners over time, and report on the natural, social and economic value, benefits and health of UK gardening.
- 3.12 Finally, the Director General summarised work underway to open up gardening for anyone, anywhere including;
- i. The NHS Colchester hospital wellbeing garden construction is nearly complete and funding for Leeds St James' hospital is almost in place. The RHS is doing research around this to illustrate the benefits and create a wellbeing garden blueprint to replicate across the UK;
  - ii. The 'No Adults Allowed' garden at RHS Chelsea Flower Show highlighted the importance of the benefits children experience from gardening;
  - iii. The National Education Nature Park provides resources for all schools to document their local open space and help develop plans for wildlife.

#### **4. Annual General Meeting 2024**

##### **a) Minutes of the 219<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting**

- 4.1 The President proposed that the meeting approve the minutes of the 219<sup>th</sup> AGM. The proposal was seconded by Mick Crawley. The meeting then voted, by show of hands, to **APPROVE** the minutes of the 219<sup>th</sup> AGM held on 14 July 2023 which would be signed as an accurate record of proceedings by the President.

##### **b) Annual Report & Consolidated Financial Statements 2023/24**

- 4.2 The Treasurer proposed that the meeting approve the RHS Annual Report and Consolidated Financial Statements 2023/24. The proposal was seconded by Tony Kirkham.

- 4.3 Members were provided with an opportunity to ask questions about the Annual Report and Consolidated Financial Statements 2023/24 and no questions were raised.
- 4.4 The meeting then voted, by show of hands, to **APPROVE** the Annual Report and Financial Statements for 2023/24.
- c) Election of President and Treasurer**
- 4.5 There being no other candidates standing for the position, the Chair of the Nominations, Appointments and Governance Committee declared Mr Keith Weed elected unopposed as President for 2024/25. Keith Weed was appointed President at the 2020 AGM.
- 4.6 There being no other candidates standing for the position, the Chair of the Nominations, Appointments and Governance Committee declared Matthew Lindsey-Clark elected unopposed as Treasurer for 2024/25. Matthew was appointed to the Commercial Board in 2014, Council in 2016 and as Treasurer in 2019 and is standing for an exceptional sixth year for continuity during a period of strategic and organisational change.
- d) Election of Ordinary Members to Council**
- 4.7 The Treasurer noted that every year, as part of the democratic running of the Society, at least three Ordinary Members of Council retire and the resulting vacancies are filled by election at the AGM.
- 4.8 This year Lorna Parker retires as an ordinary member of Council having completed two five-year terms. Ruth Willmott and Nick Dunn will retire as ordinary members of Council having completed their first terms. Both Ruth Willmott and Nick Dunn are eligible for re-election and have chosen to stand for a second term. The President thanked them for all their work on the RHS Council. These three vacancies will be filled by election of candidates for terms of five years.
- 4.9 RHS members Nick Dunn, Ruth Willmott, Liz Nicholson and Adrian Penrose have put themselves forward for election for the three vacancies.
- 4.10 There were therefore, four validly nominated candidates for three vacancies. Accordingly, the election is contested and an online and in person vote has been held. The voting service has been provided independently by Civica Election Services who are present at the meeting.
- 4.11 The Treasurer announced the results of the online and in person vote as follows;
- Liz Nicholson 1,289 votes
  - Nick Dunn 1,229 votes
  - Ruth Willmott 1,117 votes
  - Adrian Penrose 683 votes



Liz Nicholson, Nick Dunn and Ruth Willmott were therefore duly elected as members of Council until the end of the 2029 AGM.

4.12 The full list of Council Members for 2024/25 is:

- Keith Weed (President)
- Matthew Lindsey-Clark (Treasurer)
- Claire Austin
- Sue Beesley
- Prof. Mick Crawley
- Nick Dunn
- Tazim Essani
- Wesley Kerr
- Tony Kirkham
- Baroness Kate Lampard
- Pamela Maynard
- Liz Nicholson
- Dr. David Rae
- Darren Share
- Prof. Nicola Spence
- Janet Walker
- Ruth Willmott

#### **e) Appointment of Auditors**

4.13 The President proposed, and Wesley Kerr seconded, that the meeting approve the appointment of Crowe Clark Whitehill LLP as RHS auditors for 2024/25.

4.14 The meeting voted by a show of hands to **APPROVE** the said appointment.

#### **f) Appointment of Vice Presidents**

4.15 The President outlined that the role of Vice President is honorary and awarded to those recognised as providing exceptional support to the RHS. He reported that Council had re-appointed the following as Vice Presidents for 2024/25:

- James Alexander-Sinclair
- Rosie Atkins
- Michael Balston
- Baroness Floella Benjamin DBE DL
- Christopher Brickell CBE, VMH
- Raymond Evison OBE, VMH
- Mark Fane
- Jim Gardiner VMH
- Rosy Hardy
- The Rt Hon the Lord Heseltine CH, PC
- Robert Hillier OBE, VMH
- Roy Lancaster CBE, VMH
- Jekka McVicar VMH
- Sandy Muirhead
- Dr Henry Oakeley VMH
- Dougal Philip
- John Ravenscroft VMH
- Prunella Scarlett LVO
- Tom Stuart-Smith
- Vicomte Philippe de Spoelberch
- Alan Titchmarsh MBE, VMH, DL
- Richard Webb VMH

4.16 In addition, Council has appointed Lady Xa Tollemache to the office of Vice President for 2024/25.

#### **g) Close of AGM**

4.17 The President thanked those present and drew the formal proceedings of the AGM to a close.

## 5 Members' questions

5.1 Members attending the meeting asked the following questions, some of which had been tabled in advance of the AGM:

RHS member Kelly Nicholson asked two questions

*Q. I'm on a committee of a local horticultural society, it would be lovely if you had more initiatives for your affiliated societies and groups for example draws for entry tickets for the biggest shows, RHS hosted talks or allow members to attend the smaller shows at the RHS Gardens or anything else.*

The Head of Horticulture and Gardens explained that the affiliated society scheme is open to any horticultural society, costs £45 a year to join and includes a number of good value benefits such as welcoming up to 55 affiliated group members free of charge to any one of the RHS gardens each year, a 50% discount for two members to spend in RHS retail, copies of The Garden magazine, access to RHS gardening advice, information packs and judges and speakers lists. The RHS also offers discounted public liability insurance which a lot of the societies take up and gives a range of certificates and medals to reward members.

*Q. The new Grow app should be part of RHS membership, or very least charge less for members*

The Director of Members, Marketing and Digital noted that the RHS has two apps, The Garden App and the Grow App. The Garden app can be used to look for back issues and contains a lot of shows content. The RHS Grow app is separate from membership due to complicated rules around membership fees, which are a gift aidable donation with strict associated guidance set by HMRC around the level of 'benefits' that can be included within a membership. The RHS Grow app was created to engage with RHS supporters who do not live near an RHS gardens. A number of RHS Grow app features are free to access including maintaining a plant list.

5.2 RHS Life member Guy Robin Williams asked two questions

*Q. I've been life member of RHS for over 10 years and to date I am surprised that apart from the usage of the RHS websites and all its knowledge, members seldom get any special treatment at the flower shows. I would like to know why we don't have a dedicated marquee for members and potentially some form of discount/members day at these events.*

The Director of Shows, Commercial and Innovation explained that there used to be member marquees at RHS shows but now there are too large a number to cater for. Therefore, the RHS introduced members days and discounts to members on public days.

*Q. As a lifetime member of the National Trust too, they give free entry and facilities so the question is why have our investments not given any real return for what is a relatively large payment and value for money.*

The Director of Members, Marketing and Digital thanked Mr Williams for being a life member, they are incredibly important to the RHS. There is a balance that needs to be struck between the charitable donation of membership and the amount the RHS is able to provide in benefits as per the HMRC rules around charitable donations and Gift Aid. The RHS is hosting the National Trust next month, so will ask them what their life membership provides and see if there are any learnings from that.

5.3 RHS Life Member Dr Annis May Timpson asked a question

*Q. Given stated statement to inclusion why does the RHS not make its AGM available to members by live stream with opportunities for members who cannot get to the meeting to participate remotely. What actions will the RHS take to make remote access to the AGM at the time it is taking place possible for members in future years.*

RHS Member Cath Sanderson asked a similar question

*Q. I've been interested to read the details about the AGM business and Council elections and pleased to see taking part in the Northwest at RHS Harlow Carr and I would have liked to attend. Why does the RHS not offer to host the AGM using the Zoom facility this year.*

As the two questions are similar, they were taken together for a response. The President noted that all members can engage in the active part of the AGM online, for example at this meeting in voting for Council members. The AGM is currently being recorded and this will be shared on the RHS website afterwards. There is a considerable cost to streaming live and Council considers that the cost of a live stream versus a recording is currently not viable. This will continue to be under review.

5.4 RHS member Janet Coe asked a question

*Q. We visited the Harrogate Arms just after it had opened and when we went to pay, they told us they were cashless so we left the restaurant. Is this something that is planned throughout the RHS and if it is, a referendum should be held of members.*

The Director General explained that the Harrogate Arms upon first opening had some operational issues and had no safe way of holding cash. The Harrogate Arms would prefer cashless payments at the moment but will take cash if this is all people have on them. Going forward cash will be accepted.

5.5 RHS member Richard Huddleston asked two questions

*Q. The one-pound entry fee to RHS Gardens for those receiving various benefits entitles up to 13mn people plus five each accompanying at the expense of the 625k paying society members. Who mandated this policy and was there any membership consultation?*

The Director of Members, Marketing and Digital explained that the RHS launched this scheme as a trial over a year ago. There are many families with no access to outdoor space who are not being introduced to the importance and value of growing plants and the natural environment. The RHS Executive created this initiative as a means of removing the cost barrier to children and families through a one-pound entry and following other organisations such as RBG Kew and ZSL. The RHS welcomed over 2mn visits from members last year and had around 40,000 visits in this universal access scheme so there is no impact on queuing and access across the gardens for members. The RHS has found that even with a £1 entry fee, travel costs still negatively impact low income families from visiting RHS gardens.

RHS member Richard Huddleston's second question and RHS member Ann Myatt's question were related so taken together

*Q. Richard Huddleston asked, the UK has more than 27,000 public parks and green spaces, at least 1mn hectares of open access land, most if not all of which you can use to exercise dogs. The RHS has only five gardens. Most of us have witnessed the destructional behaviour of dogs in botanical gardens, especially National Trust ones. Can the RHS management assure members that the occasional 'walkies' evenings will not prove to be the thin edge of the wedge which ends up with dogs being allowed in our gardens at all times.*

*Q. Ann Myatt asked, what plans do you have to further encourage visitors with dogs?*

The Director of Gardens and Horticulture noted that it is important to take these two questions together as they demonstrate the very differing views on allowing dogs into the gardens. The balanced view is to allow dogs in at specific times and this has been working well. It is important to note that the 'walkies' times are not about exercising dogs and allowing them to run around the garden. Dogs must be kept on short leads at all times and so far, the dogs have been very well behaved and kept under control by their owners. This will remain under review, the RHS does not wish to exclude people who want to bring dogs but is not planning to make any major changes to the current arrangements.

5.6 RHS member and Vice-President Dougal Philip asked a question

*Q. The amount of work and achievements we have heard about are amazing but we do brand ourselves on being the leading Horticultural charity in the UK. Would you care to comment on the very low level of membership amongst the population of Scotland and does Council have a strategy for gaining more membership in Scotland which has several large urban areas that you're very interested in but also vast amounts of rural areas full of keen and budding gardeners and potential horticulturists.*

The Director General explained that the strongest clusters of members tend to be around RHS gardens, showing that access to a garden is a very popular benefit. The RHS Grow app provides a good opportunity to get great gardening advice and information at your fingertips and this will hopefully be another way to open up horticultural advice in a much more

curated way for individuals than previously. The RHS has been asked many times if it will open more gardens across the UK but financially, it is not possible. However, there are 25 partner gardens across Scotland and the Director of Gardens and Horticulture visited last week to discuss with them what the RHS can do to support and make them feel part of the RHS family. The RHS also partners with Discover Scottish Gardens and hopes to bring the Urban show to Scotland in the future.

The President opened the floor to questions.

5.7 RHS member John Bartlett asked:

*Q. You mentioned in your sustainability goals about heat pumps, are there any plans to install heat pumps in the gardens.*

The Head of Sustainability confirmed that a mixture of air and ground source heat pumps are already used across several buildings and more are planned. The Harrogate Arms and the Bath house are both heated with air source heat pumps and three of the heritage buildings in RHS Wisley and the bicentennial glasshouse are also under consideration. The field research facility also uses heat pumps and plans were underway to review the possibilities at RHS Garden Hyde Hall.

5.8 RHS member Sue Gray asked:

*Q. Thinking of the TV coverage of the shows, does the Society have any input or influence as to the split of the coverage between the Floral Marquee and the show gardens. I don't feel I saw anything of the marquee in the coverage.*

The Director of Communications explained that editorial rights sit with the BBC but the RHS provides regular feedback and pushes for more coverage in the Great Pavilion and the Floral Marquee. The RHS recognises that the Great Pavilion, the Floral Marquee and nurseries are a highlight of RHS shows. The BBC counts the minutes of coverage and it is about a 50/50 split. The RHS felt that there was more coverage of the pavilion this year and was very pleased that the nurseries were credited which it has petitioned for. The Director of Communications is meeting with the BBC next week so will feedback that members would like to see more of the floral marquees.

5.9 RHS member Jean Gi asked:

*Q. Out of the 600,000 membership, what is the proportion of members that are in Scotland to the rest of UK. Are there any working groups in Scotland that we can contact?*

The Director of Members, Marketing and Digital commented that the number of members residing in Scotland is less than 10,000 and as previously stated, members do tend to cluster around RHS gardens. The Director of Learning and Public Engagement added that the RHS has two Community Outreach Officers in Scotland clustered between Edinburgh and Glasgow, who work with groups around that area so there is support that the RHS can offer. There are also the RHS's National Community

programmes and its partnership with Beautiful Scotland to offer Britain in Bloom and Its Your Neighbourhood so several ways to get involved.

- 5.10 *Q. RHS Council candidate Adrian Penrose asked:  
First of all, I wish to thank all those members who voted for me and congratulate the three successful nominees and best wishes for all your work going forward. Clare, you mentioned the incoming Government, given their commitments around new housing, building local communities and planning regulation changes, is there an opportunity or are you already pushing the urban regeneration or urban part of the RHS' work? In my area where new developments are everywhere that have barely room for a window box, is there a big opportunity for us to encourage people in these new developments to get involved with horticulture?*

The Director General agreed that there is a big opportunity here, particularly if the RHS acts in partnership with other organisations. The RHS has contacted the newly appointed Government ministers and Secretary of State and will be using its contacts to promote the need to create high-quality environments within new housing developments. This includes addressing what developers leave behind, which is often rubble and sub-standard thin topsoil that are not suitable for growing.

- 5.11 *RHS member Janet Reese asked:  
Q. All the work the RHS is doing with children is done in schools. When they go home they have nowhere to garden or experience gardens. Is there any way the RHS can bring any pressure on planners and developers to allow more space for gardens in their planning?*

The Director of Learning and Public Engagement explained that to date, the RHS has concentrated its efforts in schools as they offer a structured, accessible way to reach children equitably. 80% of people live in cities so the RHS wants to give these young people the opportunity to engage with gardening. A new division has recently been created in Learning and Public Engagement and one area of focus will be around opportunities for young people outside of schools after the RHS has sparked enthusiasm for gardening gardens. Any ideas on this would be welcomed.

The Director General addressed the question about policy. The RHS wholly agrees that whether it is a garden, house or community area, it needs to work. The RHS has partnered with local champions such as the Cloud Gardner who lives in a high rise block of flats in Manchester and promotes gardening in small spaces but also encourages developers to think about green spaces in their planning and responding to the needs of the community. The RHS will continue to engage with the new Government and support champions in their areas.

- 5.12 *RHS member Tony Rogers noted and asked:  
I am always astounded at how few members turn up to the AGM's.  
I have been in communication with Clare Matterson about access to Hyde Hall. The hill at the Garden makes it very difficult indeed to push a wheelchair to the top of the hill. About two and a half years ago I used the golf trolley but the very next time we went, they dispensed with it because*



*it was broken. No replacement was made. We went to a wake at the Garden and the Curator of the Garden did allow me to drive my car up the hill with my wife. Its now been replaced but its been two and half years I haven't been able to take my wife. But it has now been replaced by a Peugeot so I am able to now so thank you very much for that.*

*Q. A great friend goes to the Plant Heritage plant sales at Hyde Hall and has been going for a number of years. In my Hardy plant magazine it says it is going to Marks Hall as Hyde Hall is unable to accommodate them in the Autumn. Please could you let members know that you aren't trying to push them out?*

*Q. What has happened to the Gala evening at Hampton Court? A fantastic evening but didn't happen this year.*

The Director General gave some background on Plant Heritage. It is a small but important charity promoting the conservation of cultivated plants. The RHS has welcomed Plant Heritage at RHS Wisley where they now have office space. The Director of Gardens and Horticulture added that the RHS enjoys a successful working relationship with Plant Heritage. Many RHS employees volunteer with them including the Director of Gardens and Horticulture who chairs their Plant Collection Committee and the RHS Garden Rosemoor curator also chairs the Devon and Cornwall section.

The Director of Gardens and Horticulture explained that unfortunately the RHS Garden Hyde Hall team does not currently have the capacity to support the Plant Heritage plant sale as it has done previously but would like to welcome them back again in the future.

With regards to accessibility, it was noted that throughout gardens and facilities, accessibility is a high priority for the RHS.

The Director of Shows, Commercial and Innovation noted that the Gala used to be held at RHS Hampton Court Palace Garden Festival every Monday evening. The year after the pandemic, there was terrible flooding at the Gala and a resulting drop in ticket sales for the event the following year. The decision was therefore made to cancel the event and concentrate on the content and horticulture at the show. This will remain under review.

There being no further questions, the President thanked all members attending for their support and also shared his thanks to Stacey Bailey, Company Secretary for all the work she has done for the RHS over the last ten years and wished her the best of luck for her new role.

There being no further questions, the President closed the meeting.

**END**