

**DRAFT** Minutes of the **Annual General Meeting** held at **2pm on Thursday 1 July 2010** at RHS Garden Harlow Carr

**Present:**

Mr G Coode-Adams (President and Chairman); Mr E. A P Sells (Treasurer); Mr G Anderson; Mr M E Balston; Mrs E C Banks; Mr C Blundell; Mr N Colborn; Mr R J Evison; Mr D Morrison; Mr D R G Philip; Mrs P P Scarlett; and Mr W R B Webb.

**Also present:**

Mr G Seabright (Acting Director General); Mr S Bennett (Director of Shows); Miss S A Buxton (Director of Finance); Mr D Farrington (Interim Company Secretary); Mr J Gardiner (Director of Horticulture); Dr S Thornton-Wood (Director of Science and Learning) and Mr D Wolfe (Director of Marketing, Membership and External Communications).

118 members of the RHS were present.

**1 Welcome**

- 1.1 The President welcomed members to the 206<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the RHS.

**2 Minutes of the Meeting held on 2 July 2009**

- 2.1 The minutes of the 205<sup>th</sup> AGM held on 2 July 2009 were confirmed as a correct record.

**3 Matters Arising from the Minutes**

**3.1 Gift Aid**

The meeting noted that, having reported last year that RHS membership would be changed so as to enable Gift Aid to be claimed on membership subscriptions and the Society having now implemented that change, it estimated that Gift Aid on membership subscriptions would generate £1m of additional income in this financial year.

**3.2 4.7 - RHS Level 2 Certificate in Horticulture**

Last year in response to a question the AGM was told that the Society would be introducing a new modular, Level 2 qualification and this year it is confirmed that this is to be implemented from Autumn 2010.

**3.3 4.10 - Public Transport to RHS Garden Hyde Hall and Transport within the Garden**

Discussions continue with the local authority about improving the provision of public transport to RHS Garden Hyde Hall. Within the garden itself, there is an on site vehicle which has proved useful. Following visitor feedback, improvements are being made both to the vehicle and its operation.

**3.4 4.13 - Library Hours at RHS Garden Hyde Hall**

The Director of Science and Learning informed the meeting that the Society is currently looking at developing all of its libraries. As a result, this year customer surveys have been carried out at the libraries at Wisley and London. The survey included a question on opening hours, which are under review.

- 3.5     **4.14 - Free Admission to RHS Gardens for Children**  
Given the results of the trial that took place during the 2009 summer holiday period, the Director of Marketing, Membership and External Communications has concluded that it would be uneconomic to proceed with this.

3.6     **4.15 - Provision of Drinking Water at RHS Garden Hyde Hall**

It was confirmed that a supply of drinking water is available to visitors at the Garden.

**4     Trustees' Report and Consolidated Financial Statements 2009/10**

- 4.1     The Meeting received the Trustees' Report and Consolidated Financial Statements for 2009/10 as attached at the Appendix to the signed copy of these Minutes.

**President's Address**

- 4.2     The President welcomed Lady Anne Berry, who donated Rosemoor Garden to the RHS in 1988 and had travelled from New Zealand to be at the AGM.
- 4.3     He congratulated Liz Thwaite, Head of Site, RHS Garden Harlow Carr, Lizzie Balmforth, the new Curator, and all the staff and volunteers for the work that they had undertaken.
- 4.4     He paid tribute to the Vice Chairman of Council, Professor John MacLeod, who passed away after a long illness. Professor MacLeod had been a Member of Council for 10 years and served on and chaired the RHS Science and Horticultural Advice Committee for a number of years – the very committee of which Charles Darwin was a founder member.
- 4.5     He noted the resignation last October of the Director General, Inga Grimsey, and he thanked the Commercial Director, Gordon Seabright, for guiding the organisation through the past nine months while the Society recruited for the role. He was pleased to announce that Sue Biggs will be joining the Society as Director General in August.
- 4.6     The President reported on the Society's activities since the close of the financial year and in particular:
- Wisley Garden which has received the accolade of Best Large Visitor Attraction in the whole of England;
  - 2010 Shows where Cardiff produced record sales and Chelsea sold out earlier than ever;
  - the visit by HRH the Duke of Gloucester to RHS Garden Hyde Hall, followed two weeks later by Alan Titchmarsh and the opening of the new visitor centre and entrance to the garden;
  - the opening by Alan Titchmarsh of the new Bramall Learning Centre and Library here at RHS Garden Harlow Carr;
  - the Council meeting in March where staff, Directors and Council started work on the Society's strategy for the next five years. Work is still ongoing but one of the themes that emerged was that greater prominence should be given to horticultural science;

- the Campaign for School Gardening which grows from strength to strength with 12,000 schools now registered and four regional advisors working on the ground to support them;
- the *Britain in Bloom* and *It's Your Neighbourhood* programmes, which have brought over 200,000 volunteers together through gardening to care for their local environment.

- 4.7 The President concluded by thanking all those who had contributed to the Society's success during the past year and the retiring Members of Council – the Treasurer, Andrew Sells, Richard Webb, and Nigel Colborn - for their contribution to the Society.

#### **Treasurer's Statement**

- 4.8 The Treasurer on behalf of Council and the Society's members, thanked the President for his contribution over his 8 years with the Society and in particular over the last 18 months as President when he had been a hugely enthusiastic and energetic ambassador for it.

- 4.9 In giving his report on the Financial Statements for 2009/10, the Treasurer commented that at the start of the period, the Society had faced the financial uncertainty of the recession and had taken the difficult decision early in the year to re-structure its operations. This led to savings of £1.7m in a full year. The unexpected arrival of the Sams legacy for £1.5m, better trading than expected within the Society's retail and catering operations and successful fundraising led to the Society exceeding budget for the year. He highlighted:

- membership which continues to be the major source of funds. In response to many requests from members the Society launched a range of new subscriptions in 2009 which attract gift aid. This helped secure an uplift in income over last year and stabilised membership numbers;
- garden visitor numbers where, after 3 years of difficult weather conditions, 2009 offered an almost perfect gardening year and meant visitor numbers reached 1.5m in total – the highest ever;
- legacies and donations which have effectively doubled year on year. However, while the RHS works to secure greater continuity in this area, for now it represents an unpredictable, but most welcome, windfall. For the short to medium term the Society needs to continue to fund activities from ongoing operations;
- expenditure, where the RHS's commitment to demonstrating horticultural excellence means that over 50% of net costs continue to be incurred in the gardens, with Science & Learning at 29% of net costs demonstrating the continuing work in extending the Society's charitable activities in this area. The third area of significant investment is the publishing content of 'The Garden' and the development of RHS Online, which aims to reach out to gardeners everywhere through the virtual world;
- the current year, where the weather to the end of May has depressed visitor numbers which in turn has affected retail and catering and slowed membership recruitment. However, advance tickets sales for the July shows have improved, and the Society has been most

fortunate in securing a sponsor for Chelsea for this and the next two years.

- 4.10 The Treasurer concluded by thanking members, volunteers, donors and staff for the support and contributions that each had made to the Society.
- 4.11 The President then invited questions from the floor. The following issues were raised/ addressed:

**Trials at Harlow Carr**

- 4.12 The Director of Horticulture, in response to a question on trials at RHS Garden Harlow Carr, confirmed the Society's continuing commitment to the use of the garden as a venue for its trials programme. However, it is not proposed to allocate a specific plot for the sole purpose of trials at the garden, because it is not believed that this will serve the best interests of either the garden visitor or the variety of plants and cultivation techniques that might be assessed. Currently there is trialling of perennial blue flowering meconopsis. These have been planted in the sandstone rock garden area: 23 entries and 3 plants of each. The trial will be completed in 2013.

**Suspension of Adult Education at Harlow Carr**

- 4.13 The Head of Site, RHS Garden Harlow Carr, reported that the decision to suspend Adult Education was taken because in the past year the building of the Learning Centre had caused constraints to be placed on all the available resources not just the facilities but also the staff. It had been felt prudent to suspend Adult Education rather than try to maintain something potentially not to standard. Now that the Learning Centre was open, the intention was to give visitors access during the Summer and start the Autumn with a full programme.

**Seeds**

- 4.14 In response to a question about seed collection within RHS Garden Harlow Carr the Director of Horticulture outlined the current system. The unique selling point of the seed distribution scheme run by the RHS is that seed is collected from RHS Gardens with the aim of offering seeds that are not usually obtainable so that members have a more accessible way of obtaining such seed and thus develop their gardening interests. To this end every effort is made to prioritise and to collect from all RHS Gardens, subject to the available staff time. Collecting from all RHS Gardens, including Harlow Carr, has permitted an extension of the range of items offered and the number of sachets available. However there are issues about collecting seed from gardens other than Wisley, including the level of documentation, labelling, and verification. When seed is collected from several gardens it is placed in a single batch; keeping seed separate adds to administration and costs. If labelling and seed verification are increased, the opportunity for Harlow Carr and other RHS Gardens to provide seed increases. By working with staff and volunteers in all gardens, sufficient material could be collected locally and sent to Wisley for processing.

**Specialist groups**

- 4.15 A question was posed as to what encouragement has been given to and

facilities provided for specialist groups at RHS Garden Harlow Carr. In his reply the Director of Horticulture stated that there is much the Society can offer specialist groups at all of its gardens. It is important that such events are outward facing, enabling not only members of specialist groups but also visitors to the garden to benefit from them. Looking specifically at Harlow Carr, the Curator and staff are working closely with the Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Groups, and also the local Alpine Garden Society groups, developing a series of shows, lectures and demonstrations, and it is important to build on and widen this existing platform, especially now that the Bramall Learning Centre is operational.

#### **Opening Hours at RHS Garden Harlow Carr**

- 4.16 In response to a request that RHS Garden Harlow Carr be kept open for longer, the Head of Site reported that it would, on an experimental basis, be open until 9pm on Fridays and Saturdays throughout the month of July.

#### **Future Plans for Adult Education at Harlow Carr**

- 4.17 The Head of Site at RHS Garden Harlow Carr confirmed that plans for Adult Education within the garden were being finalised and that she expected to publish the Autumn programme within the next two weeks.

#### **Irrigation at RHS Garden Hyde Hall**

- 4.18 Arising from a question about irrigation at RHS Garden Hyde Hall the Director of Horticulture informed the meeting that the Society recognises the need to water wisely and amends its planting practices and procedures appropriately. Where the technology is in place it is beneficial to irrigate at night time. At Hyde Hall this is not the case. However the water used is from a sustainable resource.

#### **Plants in RHS Plant Centres – can they reflect more closely the plants in the gardens**

- 4.18 The Acting Director General confirmed that RHS plant centres do aim to have on display plants which are reflective of plants growing within the relevant garden. To that end retail staff work closely with curatorial staff. However this is subject to the need to forward plan orders coupled with the vagaries of the English climate.

#### **RHS Garden in the Midlands**

- 4.19 A question was asked as to the possibility of providing an RHS Garden within the Midlands or if not, then of having an RHS learning centre like the one at RHS Garden Harlow Carr within an existing garden. In response the Acting Director General confirmed that the Society was actively looking at ways to extend its reach and specifically was examining ways to create a Partner Garden Scheme by way of development of the existing Recommended Garden scheme. This could well include a project such as a learning centre.

#### **Cost of RHS Education programme in Schools**

- 4.20 Following a question on the cost of providing the RHS's educational programme for schools, the Director of Science and Learning reported that Education costs in the order of £2m with schools getting rather less than half of this. While schools programmes within RHS Gardens are core funded, and

so directly supported by RHS members, the Society is grateful for the support of sponsors that enable it to maintain the Campaign for School Gardening, with Waitrose as the headline sponsor. Teacher training is a programme for which charges are made, except where delivered as part of a grant- and donor-supported regional programme, which concentrates on specific schools. Research demonstrates the continuing need for school gardening to be more effectively embedded for the benefit of all children, in spite of the evident proliferation of local gardening initiatives. The RHS Campaign responds to the specific request for help in this arena from schools.

**5 Election of President and Treasurer**

- 5.1 The Treasurer declared Elizabeth Banks elected unopposed to serve as President for 2010/11.
- 5.2 The President declared Sir Nicholas Bacon elected unopposed to serve as Treasurer for 2010/11.

**6 Election to Council**

- 6.1 The President announced that those standing for election were unopposed.
- 6.2 Accordingly, the President declared Rosie Atkins, Professor Peter Gregory and Jekka McVicar elected as Members of Council until 2015, Prunella Scarlett elected to serve until 2012 and David Haselgrove elected to serve until 2011. The newly elected members were each presented with their badge of office.
- 6.3 In addition the President announced that Council had agreed to appoint Sarah Joiner as a member of Council until the date of the next AGM to fill the casual vacancy that arose as a result of Elizabeth Banks becoming President.

**7 Appointment of Auditors**

- 7.1 The meeting **AGREED** to re-appoint PKF LLP as the Society's auditors for the ensuing year.

**8 Appointment of Vice Presidents**

- 8.1 The President announced the passing away of the following three Vice Presidents during the year: Mr Fred Whitsey, Mr Robin Compton and Princess Sturdza.
- 8.2 The President declared the appointment of Robert Hillier, John Ravenscroft and Jane Pepper as new Vice Presidents of the Society for 2010/11. He also reported that Council had re-appointed the following as Vice Presidents:  
Lawrence Banks  
Chris Brickell  
Ambrose Congreve  
The Count de Kerchove de Denterghem  
Vicomte Philippe de Spoelberch  
Raymond Evison  
The Hon the Lord Heseltine  
Carolyn Hardy  
Professor Brian Huntley

Roy Lancaster  
John Sales  
The Dowager Marchioness of Salisbury  
Martin Slocock  
Dr Kiat Wee Tan  
Alan Titchmarsh  
Professor Harold Tukey

**9 Harlow Carr Medal**

The President presented the Harlow Carr Medal to Mr James Akers.

**10 Handover of office to the new President – Mrs Elizabeth Banks**

The President's final act of the AGM was the handing over of office to the newly elected President. He presented the President's badge of office to Mrs Banks.

The meeting ended at 3.30pm

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Chairman

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Date

For further information, please contact The Secretary by email at [secretary@rhs.org.uk](mailto:secretary@rhs.org.uk) or by telephone on 020 7821 3034.