

Minutes of the **Annual General Meeting** held at **2pm on Thursday 2 July 2009** in the Events Barn at RHS Garden Hyde Hall, Essex

Present:

Mr G Coode-Adams (President and Chairman); Mr G Anderson; Mr M E Balston; Mrs E C Banks; Mr C N Beard; Mr L N Colborn; Mr R J Evison; Mr R T Hillier; Prof J MacLeod; Mr D J Morrison; Mr A W Muirhead; Mr D R G Philip; Mrs P P Scarlett; Mr E A P Sells and Mr W R B Webb.

Also present:

Ms I Grimsey (Director General); Miss S A Buxton (Director of Finance); Ms J Cherry (Director of Gardens and Estates); Mr G Seabright (Commercial Director); Mr A W Smith (The Secretary); Dr S Thornton-Wood (Director of Science and Learning) and Mr D Wolfe (Director of Marketing, Membership and External Communications).

165 members of the RHS were present.

1 Welcome

- 1.1 The President welcomed members to the 205th Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the RHS.

2 Minutes of the Meeting held on 1 July 2008

- 2.1 The minutes of the 204th AGM held on 1 July 2008 were confirmed as a correct record.

3 Matters Arising from the Minutes

3.1 Minute 3.1 – Public Transport to RHS Garden Wisley

The Director of Gardens and Estates reported that National Express continued to be reluctant to stop its services in the lay-by on the A3 near RHS Garden Wisley. However the Society continued to operate a pick up and drop off bus service from and to Woking Station, which for 2009 was free of charge.

3.2 Minute 3.2 – Use of 0870 telephone number for show tickets booking line

The Meeting noted that the show tickets booking lines had been switched to 0844 telephone numbers for the 2009 season. Although these numbers cost the caller 4 pence per minute, neither the RHS nor its ticket agency made any profit from these lines.

3.3 Minutes 3.4 and 5.11 – Gift Aid

The Director of Marketing, Membership and External Communications reported that, from 1 August 2009, RHS membership would be changing to enable Gift Aid to be claimed on membership subscriptions. While the new terms of membership would apply immediately to all new members, they would be optional for existing members.

3.4 Minute 5.7 – London Flower Shows

The Commercial Director reported that consideration had been given to the suggestion of enlisting the support of Westminster Council to promote the Vincent Square flower shows. However, it had instead been decided to approach a number of voluntary bodies in Westminster to invite them to

participate more directly in the shows. This had resulted in fresh content and helped achieve record visitor numbers in February and March 2009. The possibility of securing the support of Westminster City Council at a future date would be kept under review.

3.5 **Minute 5.10 – The Use of Metric Measurements in *The Garden***

It was noted that *The Garden* had reverted to use of imperial and metric measures from the April 2009 edition.

3.6 **Minute 5.12 – Communication between Council and the membership**

The Secretary reported that consideration had been given to the introduction of a President's blog on the RHS website. However, with the recent and proposed increase in information on the website, the introduction of an email newsletter and the opportunity for members to contact the President and members of Council direct, a blog was felt to be unnecessary.

3.7 **Minute 5.15 – Traffic Noise at RHS Garden Wisley**

The Director of Gardens and Estates reported that a number of options for reducing traffic noise at Wisley had been explored. However, none had been pursued due to high cost and questionable effectiveness.

4 Trustees' Report and Consolidated Financial Statements 2008/09

4.1 The Meeting received the Trustees' Report and Consolidated Financial Statements for 2008/09 as attached at the Appendix to the signed copy of these Minutes.

4.2 **President's Address**

The President reminded the Meeting of the sad death in office of the previous President, Peter Buckley, in December 2008.

4.3 The President reported to the Meeting on the Society's activities since the close of the financial year and in particular:

- the difficult decision that the Trustees and Directors had needed to take to reduce overheads in response to the effect of the recession on the Society's activities and finances
- the 22% increase in visitor numbers to the Society's Gardens in the first four months of the new financial year
- the success of the 2009 shows in London and at Cardiff, Malvern, Chelsea and Birmingham
- the continued expansion of the Campaign for School Gardening with over 9,000 schools participating compared with 4,500 at the time of the 2008 AGM. This was one of a number of educational initiatives that reinforced the difference the RHS was making to society

4.4 The President concluded by thanking all those that had contributed to the Society's success during the past year.

4.5 **Treasurer's Statement**

Giving his report on the Financial Statements for 2008/09, the Treasurer highlighted:

- the difficult economic conditions that had contributed to a 2% fall in membership of and a 3% reduction in paying visitors to the Society's gardens. The downturn had also impacted adversely on the performance of the Society's trading companies with a reduction in lettings at the Horticultural Halls and Conference Centre, a decline in retail sales at Gardens and lower than budgeted advertising revenue at *The Garden*. However, shows visitor numbers had held up comparatively well
- over 50% of the Society's net costs continued to be incurred in the Gardens with a further 20% being spent on science and learning. Together these sums reflected Council's determination to continue to focus on delivery of the core charitable purpose of advancing the science, art and practice of horticulture. 2008/09 had also seen considerable investment in the RHS website as a means of reaching out to gardeners everywhere
- the need to rebuild a healthy budgetary surplus was essential to help deliver current projects such as the Learning Centres at Harlow Carr and Rosemoor and the new visitor facilities at Hyde Hall. In 2008/09, despite best efforts to reduce discretionary expenditure, the growth in costs continued to be higher than the growth in income. While financial performance in the first four months of 2009/10 had been strong, this had been helped considerably by the good weather and served to highlight the Society's vulnerability to the weather
- with no major sponsors in place for either the Chelsea or Hampton Court Palace Flower Shows in 2010, further financial challenges lay ahead and it was therefore essential that steps were taken to improve efficiency and to reduce costs still further
- changes to membership subscriptions to allow gift aid to be claimed would be introduced in August 2009 and steps taken to build on the Society's fundraising activity

- 4.6 The President then invited questions from the floor when the following issues were raised/ addressed:

RHS Level 2 Certificate in Horticulture

- 4.7 Responding to concern about the reduction in applications to take the RHS Level 2 Certificate in Horticulture in some parts of the country, the Director of Science and Learning informed the Meeting that the Society would be introducing a new modular, Level 2 qualification from Autumn 2010. This would better meet the requirements of those wishing to study for a qualification in horticulture and also meet the needs of colleges and the government's revised standards and funding arrangements for vocational qualifications.

Horticultural Research and the RHS Library

- 4.8 In response to a request for an assurance that the current financial situation would not pose a threat to the Society's horticultural research and facilities such as the Lindley Library, the Director of Science and Learning explained that all areas of the Society were currently subject to review. In the case of scientific research and advice and the Library, the review was intended to ensure that the level of service provided remained relevant to the needs of gardeners. However, while these activities remained at the heart of the

Society's work, it was not possible to give an assurance that there would not be any change in the way the services were delivered in future.

Cost Reductions

- 4.9 Concerns were raised about the current review of costs and it was emphasised that any reductions should be applied fairly across the Society. While the Director General was unable to answer in detail due to the consultation that was presently taking place with staff, she assured the Meeting that the review applied to all areas of the Society and all levels.

Public Transport to RHS Garden Hyde Hall and Transport within the Garden

- 4.10 The Director of Gardens and Estates advised the meeting that discussions were continuing with the local authority about the provision of public transport to RHS Garden Hyde Hall. A small bus would provide transport between the new visitor entrance and the Hill Top Garden.

Shelves in the Conveniences at RHS Garden Hyde Hall

- 4.11 In response to a question, the Director of Gardens and Estates confirmed that shelves would be provided in the conveniences at the Garden.

Signage to RHS Garden Hall

- 4.12 The Director of Gardens and Estates agreed to review the signage to the Garden on the local highway network in view of the concerns expressed by those attending the Meeting. The inaccurate postcode for the Garden on the Society's website would also be corrected.

Library Hours at RHS Garden Hyde Hall

- 4.13 The Director of Science and Learning agreed to consider the suggestion that the opening hours for the Library at the Garden be changed to 11 am to 3 pm.

Free Admission to RHS Gardens for Children

- 4.14 In response to the suggestion that children should be admitted free to RHS Gardens during all school holidays, the Director of Marketing, Membership and External Communications undertook to consider this when assessing the results of the trial that would be taking place during the 2009 summer holiday period.

Provision of Drinking Water at RHS Garden Hyde Hall

- 4.15 The Director of Gardens and Estates agreed that a supply of drinking water would be made available to visitors at the Garden.

London Shows

- 4.16 Responding to concerns about the reduction in the number of London Shows, the Commercial Director reminded the meeting that the shows had been in decline for a number of years and that a far greater number of visitors were attracted to shows elsewhere. However, the re-launched London Shows with new and innovative content had been successful in increasing visitor numbers in the year to date.

Employment at RHS Gardens

- 4.17 In response to a question about the opportunities for mature students to gain employment in RHS Gardens, the Director of Gardens and Estates replied that, while the Society made great use of volunteers in the Gardens, employment opportunities would continue to be offered.

Fruit and Vegetable Garden for RHS Garden Hyde Hall

- 4.18 The Director of Gardens and Estates confirmed that the masterplan for Hyde Hall included provision for the creation of a new fruit and vegetable garden.

5 Election of President and Treasurer

- 5.1 The Treasurer declared Giles Coode-Adams elected unopposed to serve as President for 2009/10 and paid tribute to his work as President since taking office in December 2008.
- 5.2 The President declared Andrew Sells elected unopposed to serve as Treasurer for 2009/10 and commended to the Meeting his stewardship of the Society's finances.

6 Election to Council

- 6.1 The President announced the result of the ballot for the election of Council Members as follows:

Candidate	No of votes received including proxy votes awarded to and cast by the President	No. of discretionary proxy votes awarded to and cast by the President
Sandra Angadi	583	-
Christopher James Blundell	2,498	1,170
Mark William Fane	2,660	1,170
Jonica Mandeville Fox	1,215	-
Elizabeth Mary Gardam	913	-
The Hon Sarah Joiner	618	-
Brendan Mowforth	250	-
Alastair William Muirhead	2,198	1,170
Dougal Ramsay George Philip	2,724	1,170
Antony Frederick Rogers	1,037	-

- 6.2 Accordingly, the President declared Chris Blundell, Mark Fane and Dougal Philip elected as Members of Council until 2014 and Alastair Muirhead elected to serve until 2013. The newly elected members were presented with their badge of office.
- 6.3 The President then paid tribute to the work of the retiring trustees, Chris Beard and Robert Hillier, and, on behalf of Council, presented them with Cornus 'Venus' and Agapanthus 'Northern Star' to mark their period of office.

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 declared the appointment of Lord Heseltine, Dr Kiat Tan and Alan Titchmarsh as new Vice Presidents of the Society for 2009/10. He also reported that Council had re-appointed the following as Vice Presidents:

Lawrence Banks
Chris Brickell
Robin Compton
Ambrose Congreve
Raymond Evison
Mrs Carolyn Hardy
Prof Brian Huntley
The Count de Kerchove de Denterghem
Roy Lancaster
The Dowager Marchioness of Salisbury
John Sales
Martin Slocock
Philippe de Spoelberch
Princesse Sturdza
Professor Harold Tukey
Fred Whitsey

9 Any other business

9.1 **Sandy Cowan**

The Director General paid tribute to the 22 years service given to the Society by Mrs Sandy Cowan, Manager of the Plant Centre at RHS Garden Hyde Hall. The Director General presented Mrs Cowan with a bouquet of flowers to mark her forthcoming retirement.

9.2 **Annual General Meeting 2010**

The President advised the meeting that the 2010 AGM would be held at RHS Garden Harlow Carr.

The meeting ended at 3.10pm

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Chairman

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Date

For further information, please contact Andrew Smith by email at andrewsmith@rhs.org.uk or by telephone on 020 7821 3034.