

**The Royal Horticultural Society**

**Minutes of the 219th Annual General Meeting  
of the Royal Horticultural Society**

**held at 11:00am on Friday 14 July 2023  
RHS Garden Hyde Hall**

**Subject to approval by Members at the 2024 AGM**

**Members of Council present:**

Keith Weed (President)	Lorna Parker
Matthew Lindsey-Clark (Treasurer)	Dr. David Rae
Nick Dunn	Darren Share
Tazim Essani	Prof. Nicola Spence
Wesley Kerr	Lady Xa Tollemache
Tony Kirkham	Ruth Willmott
Baroness Kate Lampard	

**Also present:**

Claire Austin (Council Member Elect)	Mark Norman , Director of Finance and Estates
Sue Beesley (Council Member Elect)	Martine Parnell , Director of Members, Marketing and Digital
Clare Matterson, Director General	Helena Pettit , Director of Gardens and Shows
Carole Goldsmith, Director of People	Jon Simpson, Director of IT
Dr Alistair Griffiths, Director of Science and Collections	Dr Tim Upson, Director of Horticulture, Education and Communities
Hayley Monckton, Director of Communications	Araba Webber, Chief of Staff Stacey Bailey (Company Secretary)

**Apologies:** Mick Crawley, Pamela Maynard, Janet Walker

**Welcome**

The President welcomed members to the 219th Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Royal Horticultural Society at RHS Garden Hyde Hall, 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 reflected on the previous year and provided an overview of the main achievements of the Society noting the continued focus on its purpose in the art, science and practice of horticulture and encouraging more people to garden and be involved in gardening. This ambition has been met in the year 2022/23 with increases in membership, visitors to gardens and shows, partnerships, and work in communities and with schools.

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- 1.2 The President provided a short overview of a number of key projects and initiatives that took place during 2022/23. The first being the creation of the 'Clear Lake' reservoir at RHS Garden Wisley which is integral to the RHS sustainability strategy ambition to be water neutral across all gardens by 2030. Also at RHS Garden Wisley, the Old Laboratory has been refurbished, restored and opened to the public as exhibition space. At RHS Garden Hyde Hall, the development of the sky meadow has made a significant contribution to flora and fauna biodiversity. At RHS Garden Bridgewater, the landmark of 1million visitors has been achieved ahead of expectations as it continues to grow in popularity. At RHS Garden Rosemoor, there are also investments in biodiversity with its meadow as well as in cultivated plants. At RHS Garden Harlow Carr, the refurbishment of the Harrogate Arms has begun and is an important infrastructure project to connect this building to the garden.
- 1.3 The President provided a summary of shows during the past year. The RHS Chelsea Flower Show was a great success in its the quality of the gardens, the Great Pavilion and the overall horticultural experience with the Horatio Garden being awarded Best in Show. This year also saw the RHS Chelsea Flower Show host its first ever children's picnic with Her Royal Highness The Princess of Wales in attendance. In addition, a number of government ministers attended as well as several senior public and horticultural figures. The highlight of the week was the visit from His Majesty King Charles III and Her Majesty Queen Camilla who both thoroughly enjoyed the show and engaged well with the gardens. To honour Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, a new medal was created and launched at the show this year named the Elizabeth Medal of Honour to recognise contributions to horticulture. Winners for this inaugural year were Baroness Fookes, Judy Ling Wong and Piet Oudolf. The RHS Hampton Court Palace Garden Festival was also a great success with Carol Klein being given the Horticultural Hero Award.
- 1.4 The President highlighted the importance of reaching more gardeners and as such the RHS has focused during the course of the previous year on its digital capabilities. This has progressed through investment in the RHS website and the development of the RHS Grow App to engage more people in flowers and plants. The App include a plant identifier and care and growing tips and has been popular since launch.
- 1.5 The RHS Science programme continues to be a priority investment area for the organisation and is progressing well amidst industry challenges such as the development of peat-free alternatives. The RHS' work with communities continues to engage with the public at scale through initiatives such as Britain in Bloom, the development of Wellbeing Gardens in hospitals and engaging with school children both at RHS Gardens and in schools through the Campaign for School Gardening. The RHS education offer continues to be popular with a number of horticultural qualifications on offer.

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- 1.6 Finally, the President celebrated the beautiful RHS floral display at the altar of Westminster Abbey including boughs from all five gardens at the recent coronation of His Majesty King Charles III and Her Majesty Queen Camilla.

## 2. Treasurer's Report

- 2.1 The Treasurer presented a summary of the RHS Annual Report and Consolidated Financial Statements 2022/23 which would be put before Members for formal approval later in the meeting.
- 2.2 The Treasurer highlighted that during 2021/22, the RHS broke records in almost every area of activity, with a remarkable return from the previous Covid-impacted years. The year to 31 January 2023 also saw some new records but these have been achieved against a much tougher backdrop with all operations being impacted to some degree, either directly or indirectly, by the worsening economic conditions. Council has been very conscious of the financial pressures on staff due to inflation and as a result, made a one off cost of living payment in December and a graduated salary increase effective in April this year which was skewed towards those on lower incomes.
- 2.3 The Treasurer confirmed that for the year ended 31 January 2023, the Society delivered a surplus but saw expenditure rise through an increased cost base as well as continued investment in gardens, communities, education and digital developments. The Treasurer highlighted the importance in support from the membership noting that it continued to climb and ended the year at a record 625,765, an increase of 3.7% during the year. This reflected a slower rate of growth than in the previous year with strong recruitment of new members in the first half of the year, followed by a notable drop off in member retention in the second half. Many people cited financial pressures as their reason for leaving.
- 2.4 The Treasurer outlined that garden visitors increased to 3.1m in 2022/23, 200k more than the previous year, including over half a million visitors to Bridgewater in its first full year, exceeding all expectations. Also the Society's winter 'Glow' event was again a success with 329k visitors across all gardens, an increase of 13% on the prior year. Overall, with the exception of Trading, all areas improved compared to the previous year. Trading Income, which includes income from retail, advertising and venue hire, fell in the year as RHS retail operations, both physical and online, were impacted in line with the experience of high street and online retailers.
- 2.5 Shows grew over the prior year as RHS Chelsea Flower Show returned to its normal May timing and was once again a sell-out and a great success. Donations, legacies and grants also reflected the continuing receipt of pledges towards the Strategic Investment Plan initiative and a higher than usual number of legacies, as a result of an easing of the backlog of probate grants by HMRC. Despite the volatility in the stock markets over the year

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caused by global tensions, inflation and interest rates, RHS investments have held steady at £50.8m.

- 2.6 The Treasurer noted that expenditure for the year to 31 January 2023 has increased at a faster rate than income. This is attributed to inflation and the investment in the Society's digital capabilities and technology including importantly the RHS' new Customer Relationship Management system, which is essential to providing the best service to RHS members, visitors and other stakeholders. An example of digital success is the 60,000 downloads to date of the new RHS Grow App. Finally, expenditure has also grown due to increased investment in gardens, horticulture, science and educational and communities programmes as evidenced with the Society's generation of a record £55m last year to spend on charitable purposes, enabling an increase in charitable expenditure of more than £10m.
- 2.7 The Treasurer outlined that capital expenditure has continued this past year including the refurbishment of the Old Laboratory at Wisley with the creation of a new exhibition and gallery space which opened to the public in March, building a new reservoir named Clear Lake at Wisley, which can store up to 2 million gallons of captured rainwater for use in the gardens and provides an important step towards the Society's sustainability goals and finally refurbishment of the Harrogate Arms at Harlow Carr, to create a new café as part of a redesign and better integration of the landscapes within that corner of the garden.
- 2.8 The Treasurer concluded by saying that whilst the external picture is uncertain, there are many reasons to feel positive as the RHS looks ahead to next year underpinned by the organisation's new Strategy that the Director General will discuss in more detail in her report.

### 3. Director General's Report

- 3.1 The Director General noted that this event marked the end of her first year as Director General of the RHS which has been a great pleasure in particular working with her Leadership Team and other colleagues who were thanked for their support.
- 3.2 The year 2022/23 saw the completion of many large infrastructure projects and therefore provided an opportunity to stand back, reflect and consider how the organisation can move forward to continue to fulfil its charitable objectives.
- 3.3 The Director General provided a summary of the process that has taken place over the course of the previous year to engage with staff, volunteers, members and other key stakeholders to understand what was important to people about the RHS and gardening. As a result of this consultation, a framework strategy was created and launched at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show. The strategy sets a number key themes to take forward to 2030 with its mission to be there for everyone on their lifelong adventure with gardening at the core.

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- 3.4 During this strategy development process, the vision became clear that gardening should be a source of joy and happiness to everyone and should be embraced as a way of life that roots us to nature. The concept that if you have plants, you are a gardener has been launched through the strategy to encourage everyone to connect with gardening and plants.
- 3.5 The Director General outlined that against a challenging external environment and climate crisis, there is a fundamental part that plants and gardens can play for everyone as a leveller to connect people and positively influence mental and physical health whilst benefiting nature and biodiversity.
- 3.6 The Director General highlighted the core value of the organisation being the science, art and practice of horticulture remains strong within this strategy. An overview was provided of the RHS vision, the seven stages of gardening and how the RHS could engage with individuals during all life stages.
- The Director General provided an overview of the six priorities to deliver within the strategy including:
- Championing the essential role of gardening
  - Open up gardening for anyone, anywhere
  - Grow our story to share the joy of gardening
  - Deliver science solutions for people, gardens and nature
  - Build horticulture for the future
  - Unlock our potential
- There will need to be changes in ways of working to successfully achieve these priorities by being more sustainable, inclusive, engaging, collaborative, experimental and passionate. Also a number of shifts will need to be embraced including being more urban, involving more young people, supporting beginners, gardening more sustainably and being more digital. The Director General cited a number of examples of where these shifts are starting to already take shape at the RHS including supporting new gardeners, hospital wellbeing gardens and the upcoming urban show.
- 3.7 The Director General also introduced the newly formed partnership with the Natural History Museum for the National Education Nature Park aimed at reaching more children in schools. In the shift towards sustainability, arboretums are being developed in gardens with differing climate ecosystems to help understand how trees grow in different conditions.
- 3.8 Looking ahead, there are more plans to continue to develop the remaining 41 acres of RHS Garden Bridgewater with a focus on skills and education in horticulture, and to consider the potential for the head office of the RHS, Vincent Square to become the future home of horticulture in the capital. The Director General thanked members for their support and showed a short strategy launch film that encapsulated the priorities.

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### 4. Annual General Meeting 2023

#### a) Minutes of the 218<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting

4.1 RHS member Tony Rogers raised two corrections for the minutes of the 218<sup>th</sup> AGM. The first being his name that had been incorrectly recorded in the question section and the second that the reference to Peter Seabrook should be in the past tense.

4.2 With these two amendments agreed, the President proposed that the meeting should approve the minutes of the 218<sup>th</sup> AGM. The proposal was seconded by Wesley Kerr. The meeting then voted, by show of hands, to **APPROVE** the minutes of the 218<sup>th</sup> AGM held on 14 June 2022, which would be signed as an accurate record of proceedings by the President.

#### b) Annual Report & Consolidated Financial Statements 2022/23

4.3 The Treasurer proposed that the meeting should approve the RHS Annual Report and Consolidated Financial Statements 2022/23. The proposal was seconded by Ruth Willmott.

4.4 Members were provided with an opportunity to ask questions about the Annual Report and Consolidated Financial Statements 2022/23 and no questions were raised.

4.5 The meeting then voted, by show of hands, to **APPROVE** the Annual Report and Financial Statements for 2022/23.

#### c) Election of President and Treasurer

4.6 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 2023/24. Keith Weed was appointed President at the 2020 AGM.

4.7 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 2023/24. Matthew was appointed to the Commercial Board in 2014, Council in 2016 and as Treasurer in 2019.

4.8 The Chair of the Nominations, Appointments and Governance Committee gave her thanks on behalf of Council to the President and Treasurer for all they do for the RHS.

#### d) Election of Ordinary Members to Council

4.9 The President 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.

4.10 This year Xa Tollemache will retire as an ordinary member of Council having completed two five-year terms. Sarah Eberle and Kate Lampard will retire as ordinary members of Council having completed their first terms. Kate Lampard is eligible for re-election and has chosen to stand for a second term. The President thanked them for all their work on the RHS



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Council. These three vacancies would be filled by election of candidates for a term of five years.

- 4.11 Claire Austin, Sue Beesley and Kate Lampard have put themselves forward for election for the three vacancies.
- 4.12 There were therefore, three validly nominated candidates for three vacancies. Accordingly, Claire Austin, Sue Beesley and Kate Lampard were elected unopposed as members of Council until the end of the 2028 AGM.
- 4.13 The full list of Council Members for 2023/24 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
  - Lorna Parker
  - Dr. David Rae
  - Darren Share
  - Prof. Nicola Spence
  - Janet Walker
  - Ruth Willmott

### e) Appointment of Auditors

- 4.14 The President proposed, and Ruth Willmott seconded, that the meeting should approve the appointment of Crowe Clark Whitehill LLP as the Society's auditors for 2023/24.
- 4.15 The meeting voted by a show of hands to **APPROVE** the said appointment.

### f) Appointment of Vice Presidents

- 4.16 The President outlined that the role of Vice President is honorary and awarded to those recognised as demonstrating achievements in the science, art and practice of horticulture. He reported that Council had re-appointed the following as Vice Presidents for 2023/24:
- 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
  - 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

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- Roy Lancaster CBE, VMH

4.17 In addition, Council has appointed Sarah Eberle, Mark Porter and Jon Wheatley to the office of Vice President for 2023/24.

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

4.18 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:

5.2 RHS Member Stephen Dalziel asked two questions:

- *With the amount of building work going into the show gardens in places such as Chelsea and Hampton Court, how can it be considered ethically justified from an eco-friendly and sustainability point of view?*

The Director General responded that last year a new Sustainability Manager was recruited to the RHS to measure the carbon footprint, energy and water usage across the organisation and gain a clear understanding of the organisation's carbon impact including at the Shows. This work has helped to understand what action can be taken to reduce our impact and increase our sustainable practices. It is now a requirement that all show gardens are repurposed and relocated following the show to a new home to minimise wastage. Work is also taking place to ensure that the construction methods and materials used in shows are more sustainable including for example using alternatives to concrete. This shift in ways of working has encouraged good practice sharing amongst designers to make further improvements in the future.

- *My daughter in law works in forest school teaching, who should I speak to, to find out who she should get in touch with? Everything discussed about schools and starting outdoors young is exactly what she should be doing but she doesn't know about the connection with the RHS.*

The Director of Horticulture, Education and Communities noted that forest education is promoted where possible both in gardens and at shows with a forest school area being in place at the RHS Hampton Court Palace Garden Festival the previous week. It was agreed that further discussions will take place outside of the meeting to discuss potential opportunities for joint working.



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5.3 RHS Member Pauline Butcher asked two questions:

- *I would like to know why one of the pre-AGM tours was lawn care? This seems inappropriate in today's age where the focus is on the need for bugs, wildlife, weeds and no chemicals. Why was this topic chosen?*

The Director of Horticulture, Education and Communities responded that this particular tour was chosen as it would be an opportunity for a long serving staff member approaching retirement who has cared for the lawns around Hilltop at RHS Garden Hyde Hall for many years, to share his knowledge and passion. The managed lawn areas at RHS Garden Hyde Hall offset some of the more intensive areas of horticulture in the garden as well as being managed to withstand the high footfall in this area. When the lawn requires irrigation, this is provided through the garden's own reservoir. Much of the outer estate is managed as long meadow grasslands rich in wildlife including butterflies, birds of prey and seven species of orchids. Finally, the development of the coronation meadow is a haven for wildlife and was developed using seed from a local nature reserve.

- *I'm concerned about the increase in plastic lawns and plastic plants everywhere, what is the RHS doing to stop this trend, because it's an increasing trend at the moment.*

The Director General confirmed that the RHS has been quite public in its stance on this issue and has joined forces with the Society of Garden Designers to campaign further collectively. The RHS campaigns for plastic plants and lawns not to be sold anywhere and also intends to talk more about the dis-benefits of plastic lawns such as heat radiation. The President added that plastic plants and lawns are banned from all shows.

5.4 RHS Member Diane Leigh asked:

*Having visited the Tatton Show in 2022 and Hampton Court last week, both occasions being entirely rainy days, I wonder if the RHS are intending to have more provision for unpredictable wet weather days at the show as there currently seems to be inadequate provision for visitors to seek shelter and sit it out.*

The Director General highlighted that as a predominantly outdoor organisation, the weather is one of the most challenging factors the RHS has to contend with, especially with the currently unpredictable weather patterns caused by climate change which is why the sustainability mapping work has been so important. The Director of Gardens and Shows added that more stretch tents were installed at the RHS Hampton Court Palace Garden Festival this year and more will be installed at the RHS Tatton Park Flower Show as well to help in the event of heavy rain and wind. This was always an area under review for ways to improve but it was challenging given the volume of visitors to shows and that these are temporary attractions.

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5.5 RHS Member Tony Rogers raised three points:

- *The memorial to Peter Seabrook at the Floral Fantasia garden should be changed to state the 'late Peter Seabrook' following his death.*
- *The audio quality at the AGM has been excellent.*
- *The AGM should not start until there are 100 members and I am always astounded that out of 600,000 members, there are so few in attendance.*

The President confirmed that under the Bye-Laws, if 100 members are not present at the start of the meeting, the meeting is adjourned by 30 minutes. Therefore, presentations from the President, Treasurer and Director General were delivered as non AGM business. After this point, the President noted that the AGM officially started and as per the Bye-Laws, it can then be validly held with those present.

5.6 RHS Member Rosy Hardy asked:

*There used to be partner nurseries as well as partner gardens but that disappeared and went out the window about 5 or 6 years ago. Now you're saying everything's about plants, but you don't include and be inclusive with the partner nurseries because you're expecting them all to come to the shows and be part of your big shows. Where do you feel your partnership with the nurseries who are helping you out at the shows is going to go forward?*

The President confirmed that the RHS is very committed to the nurseries and noted that he visits every nursery at every show to find out how they are and how the partnership can be continued understanding that without the nurseries, the RHS shows would be very different. The Director General was not aware of partner nurseries in previous years but this was an interesting concept. The Director General reiterated that nurseries and in particular small specialist nurseries, are some of the most important partners to the RHS and great effort was taken this year to look at the experience for nurseries in the Great Pavilion at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, knowing that this is the best opportunity to highlight to the world the great work of specialist nurseries. A lot of work is also taking place with nurseries outside of shows and through the RHS' work in science and horticulture.

The Director of Horticulture, Education and Communities noted that the Partner Nurseries scheme was impacted by Covid-19 as courses run by nurseries were not taking place so could not be promoted by the RHS. However, as these start to be delivered once again, the RHS could support nurseries once more in this way.

The Director of Gardens and Shows added that there was an active Nursery Representatives Group for shows where this conversation could be continued to see what else the RHS could do to support nurseries. There is also a Specialist Nurseries Team in place for RHS Chelsea Flower

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Show who would welcome further ideas to enhance their partnerships with specialist nurseries.

### 5.7 RHS Member

*I think I'm right in saying that apart from Harlow Carr, virtually all the RHS gardens are actually quite difficult to access by public transport. I'm aware that you've tried different ways of transporting people but do you have any further plans?*

The President began by saying that this was a priority area for the RHS given that it is a commitment of the RHS Sustainability Strategy to make access without a car a lot easier.

The Director General agreed that the locations of the gardens are such that they are difficult to access without a car. However, there is now a Green Transport Manager in place at the RHS with Green Transport plans under development for each garden. This year, there are shuttle bus services running at every garden during peak months including from Shenfield station to RHS Garden Hyde Hall. The RHS is also looking at how to work with local bus providers to improve bus access to the gardens as this was a longer term, more sustainable solution. Other initiatives include working on local cycle routes and making cycling access to gardens safe and easy and promoting public transport links to shows which had a positive impact for example at the recent RHS Hampton Court Palace Garden Festival with an increase in people visiting by bike.

The Director of Horticulture, Education and Communities added that at RHS Bridgewater, public transport links to the garden were integral to the its development including bus, cycle and pedestrian transport routes.

### 5.8 *RHS Member P Cole stated that there is a daily public bus service running to Hyde Hall from Chelmsford bus station.* *P Cole*

The Director General thanked Mr Cole noting that it will be checked if this is clearly stated on the RHS website.

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### 5.9 RHS member

*Allotments are many people's first contact with horticulture but it is a fragmented area in terms of policy and advice to new plot holders. What is the RHS doing to provide advice not just to plot holders but also the organisations responsible for allotments such as Councils?*

Trustee Nick Dunn confirmed that the RHS Fruit, Vegetable and Herb Committee have run an allotment initiative over the past five years where committee members visit allotments and local village halls on a voluntary basis to answer any questions to allotment holders. This has been well received and well attended.

The Director of Horticulture Education and Communities added that the RHS works with the Allotment Society who is often best placed to deal with allotment queries. A number of individual allotment Societies are also affiliated societies of the RHS so are supported through RHS advice and access for garden visits as well as practical support such as affordable insurance. Many RHS community programmes include grants to community groups including allotments as well as other groups wanting to begin growing vegetables.

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

**END**