

DRAFT Minutes of the 221st Annual General Meeting of the Royal Horticultural Society

held at 2.00pm on Tuesday 8th July 2025 **RHS Garden Rosemoor**

Subject to approval by Members at the 2026 AGM

Members of Council present:

Keith Weed (President) Tony Kirkham Matthew Lindsey-Clark (Treasurer) Liz Nicholson Claire Austin Dr. David Rae Sue Beeslev Darren Share

Mick Crawley Prof. Nicola Spence

Tazim Essani **Ruth Willmott** Wesley Kerr

Also present:

Clare Matterson, Director General Helena Pettit, Director of Shows, Commercial Ingrid Fernandes, Director of Finance and Innovation and Corporate Services Jon Simpson, Director of IT

Carole Goldsmith, Director of People Dr Tim Upson, Director of Gardens and

Richard Green, Director of Visitor Horticulture

Experience & Estates Araba Webber, Chief of Staff

Dr Alistair Griffiths, Director of Science Vanessa Kemp (Company Secretary) and Collections

Hayley Monckton, Director of

Communications Sue Moss, Director of Learning &

Public Engagement

Martine Parnell, Director of Members,

Marketing and Digital

Number of RHS members present: 49

Apologies: Baroness Kate Lampard (Council Member), Pamela Maynard (Council Member), Raymond Evison (RHS Vice President), Vivien and Rachel Oakley (RHS members),

Welcome

The President welcomed members to the 221st Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Royal Horticultural Society at RHS Garden Rosemoor, 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 looking back at the meetings of Council and statutory groups that had taken place at RHS Gardens across the year giving Council members opportunities to visit the Gardens, talk to staff and volunteers and meet members.
- 1.2 The President noted the work done by the RHS Vice Presidents, in particular Baroness Floella Benjamin and Alan Titchmarsh across what has been a particularly challenging period due to the M25/A3 roadworks outside RHS Garden Wisley. Their work in highlighting the challenges and impact on the RHS with the public and Government has been hugely appreciated.
- 1.3 Against a challenging financial backdrop, the RHS has continued to invest in the RHS and engage people in horticulture.
- 1.4 The RHS Chelsea Flower Show was yet again a huge success and sold out with the BBC reporting record viewing numbers. The inclusion of the Monty Don Dog Garden captured audiences, allowing us to engage with the public, promote horticultural excellence and reach gardeners.
- 1.5 RHS Malvern Spring Show and RHS Hampton Court Garden Festival had both been wonderful shows with the latter 'touring' around the country in future years to engage more people and audiences.
- 1.6 The President noted developments across RHS Gardens including the completion of the Piet Oudolf Garden and the Ellen Willmott Oakwood pavilion at RHS Wisley, the alpine glass house at RHS Harlow Carr and garden events such as the 'Guess How Much I Love You' activities and Easter Egg hunts during school holidays.
- 1.7 The Future of National Gardens Group, a collaboration of organisations with links to gardens and plants, has been focussing on creating an agenda of priority issues including the environment and social sustainability, training and education, tourism and attraction of people to the UK and engaging with Government.
- 1.8 The President highlighted progress with RHS trials, including updating the trials webpages and engaging more people.
- 1.9 Science and Advisory investment continued last year with the RHS providing over 110k pieces of individual advice. RHS Garden Harlow Carr became the first garden to be awarded DEFRA's 'Plant Healthy' certification demonstrating the RHS leading from the front.
- 1.10 Championing the role of gardening with children continues to be a priority with more than half of UK schools registered for the Campaign for School Gardening, the joint initiative between the RHS and The Natural History



Museum. There have been 40k school visits to RHS Gardens over the last year.

- 1.11 The RHS celebrated the 60th anniversary of RHS Britain in Bloom with gardens at all the RHS shows marking the occasion.
- 1.12 The RHS People Awards 2025 Ceremony was held in March 2025 at the RHS Lindley Hall, London. The annual ceremony champions and celebrates excellence in horticulture as well as recognising the achievement of graduating RHS MHorts who are at the start of their horticultural careers.
- 1.13 The President finished by recognising Sir Richard Carew Pole, RHS President from 2001 to 2006, who had sadly died in December 2024. Sir Richard had given so much time and dedication to the RHS and was instrumental on Council when the Northern Horticultural Society joined the RHS to create RHS Garden Harlow Carr, as well as being a champion and fundraiser for the RHS Wisley Glasshouses. Sir Richard was generous with both his time and knowledge, and he will be sadly missed. The President thanked him on behalf of all the RHS for the legacy he has left.

2. Treasurer's Report

- 2.1 The Treasurer extended a warm welcome to everyone attending and those listening later to the recording online.
- The Treasurer presented a summary of the RHS Annual Report and Consolidated Financial Statements 2024/25 noting that the year had been challenging with a very cautious financial outlook. Income of £124.8mn (3.5% up on the previous year) still resulted in a deficit before movements on investments of £8.2mn compared with £4.3mn the previous year. This was largely due to external factors and economic conditions.
- 2.3 RHS Garden visitors have declined by 2.7mn over the last two years, largely down to fewer visitors to RHS Garden Wisley. The M25/A3 roadworks continued to take their toll and more heavily than last year. RHS Wisley has seen 350k fewer visits than before the roadworks began, having a knock-on effect to gate receipts, food and beverage sales and retail sales.
- 2.4 The increased inclement weather has been a big factor over the last year forcing the closure or part closure for the safety of visitors, staff, and volunteers, for an aggregate of 49 days across all RHS Gardens. There were also an additional seven days closure of RHS Garden Wisley due to roadworks.
- 2.5 Despite the challenges at RHS Garden Wisley, higher numbers of visitors have been recorded at RHS Garden Harlow Carr with RHS Garden Rosemoor, RHS Garden Bridgewater and RHS Garden Hyde Hall numbers remaining approximately the same as the previous year.



- 2.6 The impact of the M25/A3 roadworks cannot be underestimated with member surveys of people living near RHS Garden Wisley who haven't visited in last 12 months citing the roadworks as the reason. Those local members who did still choose to visit, visited far less often (just over one time) during the year.
- 2.7 Membership ended at 609k, down from 625k the previous year. Problems accessing RHS Garden Wisley and pressure on personal finances were the most commonly cited reasons for people not renewing or ending their memberships.
- 2.8 The Treasurer noted that despite the financial challenges, the RHS remained true to its commitment to maintain and seek to grow expenditure on its charitable activities, investing £82mn across the year. Over the past two years, the RHS has dipped into its reserves to achieve this, and is fortunate to have the reserve strength to mark a path through this challenging period. However, the financial situation and levels of reserves are being monitored very carefully.
- 2.9 Trading income was 28% of total income which has been flat year on year. Retail income fell, although online sales did increase, accounting for 24% of total retail sales. Shows income was buoyed by the RHS Chelsea Flower Show once again selling out with 157k visitors. The new Urban show in Manchester welcomed 20k visitors and the RHS will seek to develop this new show concept and in doing so, access new audiences across the country. Membership income accounted for 27% of total income and the rollout of the RHS Grow app saw 12k subscribers at year end, helping to boost overall membership income. Donations, legacies and grants ended the year as £16.5mn, a 10% increase as a result of higher legacy incomes and the Secret Garden fundraising event.
- 2.10 Expenditure increased last year by 6.5% to £133mn due to a range of inflationary pressures across operations as well as additional charitable activities particularly around education (such as the National Nature Education Park), the opening of the second NHS wellbeing garden at NHS Colchester Hospital, celebrating 60 years of RHS Britian in Bloom and increased expenditure on our science and collections and learning and public engagement.
- 2.11 The Treasurer outlined investments made for the future, including the renovation and opening of the Harrogate Arms and the back of house area improvement in the Horticultural Service Yard at RHS Garden Harlow Carr and the introduction of Grab and Go offerings at RHS Garden Bridgwater. RHS Garden Rosemoor has seen improvements to the front of house area and investment in the Winter Garden. Sustainability initiatives include solar energy panels at all RHS Gardens and the progressive electrification of garden machinery and vehicle fleets. Work has been undertaken to ensure that heritage buildings are fit for future use across the gardens.
- 2.12 The first few months of trading this financial year have seen a meaningful improvement, likely as a result of the favourable Spring and early Summer



- weather. RHS Cheslea Flower Show 2025 was again a great success. However, we remain cautious in outlook despite this good start.
- 2.13 The Treasurer extended his thanks to the whole RHS team, and despite the challenging outlook, the RHS remains in a good position to work through the challenges and as a team is very committed to delivering its strategic aims and charitable objectives.

3. Director General's Report

- 3.1 The Director General shared the results of recent membership surveys which help to determine important topics for members. As previous surveys have shown, children and young people, gardening for wildlife, sustainable gardening, and the health and wellbeing effects of gardening continue to be top priorities.
- 3.2 The RHS set out its vision a few years ago to be there for everyone along their lifelong adventure with gardening. This will be achieved through focusing on key priorities;
 - i. Championing the essential role of gardening
 - ii. Opening up gardening for anyone, anywhere
 - iii. Grow our story to share the joy of gardening
 - iv. Deliver science solutions for people, gardens and nature
 - v. Build horticulture for the future and
 - vi. Unlock our potential.
- 3.3 Some of the RHS activities to 'Build horticulture for the future', include:
 - Over 3k learners in 2024-25 across apprenticeships, diplomas, professional work placements and the RHS's school of horticulture.
 - ii. For the first time, the RHS has apprenticeships not just in horticultural programmes but also in RHS science programmes nine in total
 - iii. The RHS has an extraordinary bursary programme which gives approx. £180k per year through 16 different funds. Over the last year, 250 people have benefitted.
 - iv. 'Green Skills Gardens' are being installed in all RHS Gardens giving people the opportunity to learn sustainable gardening skills. Work on the gardens at RHS Wisley and RHS Bridgewater is due to complete in September, and at RHS Hyde Hall plans are well developed. At RHS Rosemoor, the site has been identified.
 - v. Plans for a new Discovery Centre at RHS Bridgewater are underway. The centre will be used for school visits, providing four learning spaces, an outdoor living laboratory and hands on outdoor space bringing plant science to life.
- 3.4 RHS activities to 'Share our Story of the joy of Gardening', include:
 - i. A new strategy to take RHS shows to different parts of the country, engaging with more audiences. RHS Wentworth Woodhouse flower show is due to start the following week.



- ii. The wonderful Winter Garden at RHS Rosemoor, which Jo Thompson has given so much of her time helping to redesign, is flourishing.
- iii. The cherished Rose Walk at RHS Hyde Hall has been dismantled as the structure beneath was unstable, and work is underway to bring in a new design with a longer wearing structure. The original roses have been propagated and will remain a part of the Garden's collection, maintaining the legacy of the original donation.
- iv. A new fruit garden at RHS Wisley is being planted and will include top and soft fruits, edible ground cover plants, grasses and cut flowers.
- v. The Chinese Streamside Scholars Garden pavilion at RHS Bridgewater, which recognises the contribution of Chinese horticulture in the UK, is nearing completion with the pavilions due to be completed next year.
- 3.5 Work taking place on 'Opening up Gardening for anyone, anywhere', includes:
 - The first ever community gardening survey has completed with 2000 groups responding. Data analysis is taking place and the outcomes will be published with the aim of supporting groups with their priorities.
 - ii. The National Education Nature Park is linked into the school curriculum and funded by Government. It continues to be a great success reaching thousands of school children across the UK.
 - iii. The RHS has invested in free content online, giving gardening masterclasses and yielding a 26% growth in subscribers. The RHS will continue to put high quality, informative information onto YouTube to make it accessible to anyone.
 - iv. There are now 23k paid subscribers on the RHS Grow app, a great achievement and another way to reach new audiences.

3.6 Activities to 'Unlock our Potential' include;

- i. Several initiatives from the RHS Sustainability Plan have now been implemented across RHS sites including solar panels, work to be water neutral, understanding baseline data on biodiversity, priority species identification at each garden, and alternative forms of gardens transport with the positive impact from these activities published on the RHS website.
- ii. The Curatorial team is developing a 'Living Collections Policy' which will ensure that what we plant today is resilient to future climate change impacts.
- iii. The RHS is working closely with the Future of National Gardens Group to share knowledge and better understand the risks for gardeners in the future due to the changing climate.
- iv. A rare opportunity has been taken to purchase land to the southeast of RHS Wisley with the aim of increasing the site's resilience and secure its future which is under pressure from the surrounding road network, and also provide greater horticultural and sustainability potential.



- v. The role of volunteers and their extraordinary generosity of time cannot be underestimated, enriching the work of the RHS.
- 3.7 'Delivering science solutions for people, gardens and nature' activities include:
 - i. Supporting eighteen PhD students, working in collaboration with universities on a variety of topics and ensuring academic excellence throughout their research;
 - ii. Later this year the RHS will publish a wellbeing garden 'blueprint' to help gardeners and institutions create spaces to maximise the wellbeing benefits of gardens;
 - iii. An updated Plants for Pollinators list will be produced later this year which will also focus on where these plants thrive, helping to support gardeners in their gardening for wildlife choices. This forms part of a wider plants for purpose project.
- 3.8 Finally, activities to 'Champion the essential role of gardening,' include:
 - i. The RHS is a core member of the Environmental Horticultural Group who earlier this year commissioned Oxford Economics to produce an independent report on the economic impact of UK ornamental horticulture and landscaping. This will become baseline data around the issues facing the horticulture industry and a useful tool when approaching Government and industry.
 - ii. The RHS has been lobbying for good quality outside spaces as part of the Government's ambitions to build 1.5mn new homes. Other initiatives include garden performance certificates and partnering with the national network of community gardens. The RHS will also contribute to Home England's 'Building for a Healthy Life' publication.
 - iii. This Autumn, the RHS will produce the first ever UK State of Gardening Report which will be a definitive source on gardening data, statistics and the impact of gardening.

4. Annual General Meeting 2025

a) Minutes of the 220th Annual General Meeting

4.1 The President proposed that the meeting approve the minutes of the 220th AGM. The proposal was seconded by Mick Crawley. The meeting then voted, by show of hands, to **APPROVE** the minutes of the 220th AGM held on 10 July 2024 which will be signed as an accurate record of proceedings by the President.

b) Annual Report & Consolidated Financial Statements 2024/25

- 4.2 The Treasurer proposed that the meeting approve the RHS Annual Report and Consolidated Financial Statements 2024/25. The proposal was seconded by Council member Ruth Willmott.
- 4.3 Members were given the opportunity to ask questions about the Annual Report and Consolidated Financial Statements 2024/25 and no questions were raised.



The meeting then voted, by show of hands, to **APPROVE** the Annual Report and Financial Statements for 2024/25.

c) Election of President and Treasurer

- 4.5 There being no other candidates standing for the position, the Chair of the Governance and People Committee declared Mr Keith Weed elected unopposed as RHS President for 2025/26. Keith Weed was appointed President at the 2020 AGM and will serve for a sixth exceptional term
- 4.6 There being no other candidates standing for the position, the Chair of the Governance and People Committee declared Matthew Lindsey-Clark elected unopposed as Treasurer for 2025/26. Matthew was appointed to the Commercial Board in 2014, Council in 2016 and as RHS Treasurer in 2019 and will serve for an exceptional seventh and final term.

d) Election of Ordinary Members to Council

- 4.7 The Chair of the Governance and People Committee 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 may be filled by election at the AGM.
- This year Janet Walker retires as an ordinary member of Council having completed one five-year term. Mick Crawley and David Rae will retire as ordinary members of Council having completed two five-year terms. Janet Walker was eligible for re-election but chose not to stand for a second term. The President thanked them for their hard work on the RHS Council. These three vacancies will be filled by election of candidates for terms of five years.
- 4.9 RHS members Helen Hutchings-Cox, James Hitchmough and Dominic Rose were recommended by Council and stood for election. However, after careful consideration and by mutual agreement, Dominic Rose has withdrawn his candidacy.
- 4.10 There were therefore, two validly nominated candidates for three vacancies leaving one casual vacancy until the AGM 2026.
- 4.11 Helen Hutchings-Cox and James Hitchmough were therefore duly elected as members of Council until the end of the 2030 AGM.
- 4.12 The full list of Council Members for 2025/26 is:
 - Keith Weed (President)
 - Matthew Lindsey-Clark (Treasurer)
 - Claire Austin
 - Sue Beesley
 - Nick Dunn
 - Tazim Essani

- Baroness Kate Lampard
- Pamela Mavnard
- Liz Nicholson
- Darren Share
- Prof. Nicola Spence
- Ruth Willmott



- James Hitchmough
- Helen Hutchings-Cox
- Wesley Kerr
- Tony Kirkham

e) Appointment of Auditors

- 4.13 The President proposed, and Council member Tazim Essani seconded, that the meeting approve the appointment of Crowe Clark Whitehill LLP as RHS auditors for 2025/26.
- 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 2025/26:
 - James Alexander-Sinclair
 - Rosie Atkins EMH
 - Michael Balston
 - Baroness Floella Benjamin DBE
 DI
 - Christopher Brickell CBE, VMH
 - Sarah Eberle
 - 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
- Mark Porter
- John Ravenscroft VMH
- Prunella Scarlett LVO
- Tom Stuart-Smith
- Vicomte Philippe de Spoelberch
- Alan Titchmarsh CBE, VMH, DL
- Lady Xa Tollemache
- Richard Webb VMH
- Jon Wheatley VMH

g) Close of AGM

4.16 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 Gillian Wells asked two questions:

Q1. In line with priorities with three, four and five of the RHS's Sustainability Strategy, the RHS is clearly strongly placed to provide a leadership role in



sustainability and working to mitigate against climate change and threats to biodiversity. This to my mind should include working with, but also sometimes challenging, and working independent of government and sponsors when needed. Considering this and other factors, what apart from scientific research will the RHS do in the year ahead specifically to promote environmental sustainability to the many gardeners across the UK that look to the RHS for leadership and guidance in their gardening practices?

A. The Head of Sustainability noted the holistic approach to sustainability that the RHS is taking across its activities and has incorporated into everything it does. The RHS is working hard with the industry and Government for example on the peat free work, lobbying to get cultivated spaces included in Biodiversity Net Gain calculations and highlighting the ecosystem services of gardens and green spaces. The RHS also works hard to promote sustainable practices through its shows, community outreach work and education work. The RHS Gardens demonstrate sustainable practices and decarbonisation methods such as the use of solar panels and the switching out of diesel vehicles for electric.

5.2 Q2. Will the next AGM be live-streamed to enable more members to attend?

A. The President explained that the cost of live streaming the AGM has in past years been unaffordable. However, with advances in technology the costs are reducing and so this is something that will be kept under review. There is a difference between live streaming the AGM and a virtual AGM which would allow participation from those attending online and this remains unaffordable for the RHS. The situation will be kept under review.

- 5.3 RHS member Paul Dunston asked:
 - Q. Can the AGM be organised outside of the working day to allow more members to attend?

A. The President thanked Mr Dunston for this question and noted that careful consideration would be given to this idea. It was noted that the AGM moving between the RHS Gardens every year will continue to allow members opportunities to attend, but that the timings of these will be considered.

- 5.4 RHS member Frances Sinclair and RHS member Nyree McAleer questions were taken together. They asked:
 - Q. The dog trial at RHS Rosemoor, which is due to end in September, has it been a financial and membership boon or not really? Are there figures showing members who will cancel membership or not visit on dog days? How concerned is the RHS about the damage to the gardens long term? If considered a success, will it be rolled out to the remaining gardens?
 - Q. What is being done to offset the negative impact allowing dogs into RHS Rosemoor on the wildlife living in these grounds?



A. The Director General stressed that this is a trial for RHS Rosemoor and not a trial for all the other RHS gardens.

The Head of Site RHS Rosemoor added that following last year's AGM, RHS Rosemoor was asked to trial dog days at the Garden. All the RHS Gardens have run 'Walkies' evening events since Covid and at RHS Rosemoor they proved to be very popular. The team were getting an increasing number of members and potential visitors asking if they were able to bring their dogs with them in the daytime. Work was done with the curatorial team before the dog days were trialled to check if any areas of the garden needed to be restricted and what any potential impacts may be. Guide dogs and support dogs have always been allowed into the garden and so there was some knowledge around potential impacts.

Wildlife monitoring has been taking place at the garden over the last few years and consultation with the science and horticultural teams took place to ensure the correct data measures were being taken prior to the trial to give accurate baseline data as well as advising on what specifically should be monitored.

Members had been asked for their views on the dog trial before it began via the member survey and local members were asked for their opinions and feedback was gathered from both these communications, as well as from staff and volunteers. Members, staff and volunteer feedback will continue to be monitored and will be assessed upon the trial ending in September as to whether the trial has proved a success or not.

5.5 RHS member Tony Bown asked a question.

Q. What is the RHS doing in relation to climate change, specifically in regards to contingency plans for extreme weather events such as drought and the increased likelihood of wildfires, across all its Gardens?

A. The Director General noted that the RHS teams are acutely aware of the challenges that climate change poses and it is an ongoing priority that the Gardens are here to be enjoyed for future generations.

The Director of Gardens and Horticulture explained that the weather impacts gardens development and limits when planting can take place. Drought is a major topic for the horticultural team and always a concern when the curatorial teams come together. Over a number of years, work has been done to move some collections to parts of the country where the climate better suits them, such as the gooseberry and rhubarb collections moving from RHS Wisley to RHS Bridgewater. Work is also ongoing to create duplicate collections to ensure the longevity of these.

The Director of Science and Collections noted that the Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) climate assessment tool currently has all the RHS plants listed and gives risk ratings and hardiness not just for the cold, but also in terms of limited water and excess heat. The RHS is working with the University of Sheffield, with a PhD student looking at what types of characteristics plants have in order to flourish under different conditions. Water is the lifeblood of any garden and the RHS has recently appointed a Head of Environmental Horticulture who is a water scientist.



They have been appointed to look at, and research, water management techniques.

The Director of Visitor Experience and Estates explained that the RHS has been introducing landscapes in the gardens that react to the changing climate. For example, at RHS Garden Bridgewater, where forecasts say it will get even wetter, a series of swales, ditches and dams have been built in an approach called 'slow the flow'. Permeable surfaces across the whole car park area have been used to avoid surface water run-off.

In the south, where it is expected to get warmer and drier, RHS Garden Wisley's Clear Lake was opened in 2023 to act as an internal reservoir. At RHS Graden Hyde Hall, ebb and flow benches in the retail area are to be trialled, watering plants from below hopefully saving water. Solar panels have also been introduced across all the RHS gardens.

It was noted that the RHS still needs to be reactive, with a smoking ban introduced at RHS Wisley just the day before. With work about to start on masterplans for the future of RHS gardens, climate resilience will be at the forefront.

The President opened the floor to questions.

5.6 An RHS member asked:

Q. Whilst its right to ban the use of peat, I've heard recently that a plant nursery which has been a RHS Chelsea winner in the past, was having difficulty finding a suitable peat replacement. She was planning to give up going to RHS Chelsea. What progress is being made on developing good quality peat replacement?

A. The Director General noted that the RHS is working very hard with nurseries with a team who visits nurseries and aims to support them throughout the process.

The Director of Science and Collections added that the RHS works with growers across the UK and for the first time has brought together growers and ten growing media manufacturers from across the world who are working on the technologies around this. There are some exceptional mixes now available. The RHS wants to support growers and encourages this nursery and any others experiencing issues to make contact. Growers are also encouraged to visit the RHS peat-free hub for support and advice. In October 2025, there will be another conference on peat free where growers are more than welcome to attend. Challenges around how you grow with peat free media as it does respond differently and the RHS wants to help growers with this.

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

END

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¹ A video was shown to showcase RHS Volunteers.