

**Minutes of the 222nd Annual General Meeting
of the Royal Horticultural Society**

**held at 5pm on 1 July 2026
RHS Lindley Hall, 80 Vincent Square, London**

Subject to approval by Members at the 2027 AGM

Members of Council present:

Keith Weed (President)	Wesley Kerr
Matthew Lindsey-Clark (Treasurer)	Tony Kirkham
Claire Austin	Kate Lampard
Sue Beesley	Liz Nicholson
Helen Cox	Darren Share
Matt Davies	Prof. Nicola Spence
Tazim Essani	Ruth Willmott
James Hitchmough	

Also present:

Clare Matterson, Director General	Jon Simpson, Director of IT
Ingrid Fernandes, Director of Finance and Corporate Services	Dr Tim Upson, Director of Gardens and Horticulture
Carole Goldsmith, Director of People	Araba Webber, Chief of Staff
Richard Green, Director of Visitor Experience & Estates	Vanessa Kemp (Company Secretary)
Dr Alistair Griffiths, Director of Science and Collections	
Hayley Monckton, Director of Communications	
Sue Moss, Director of Learning & Public Engagement	
Martine Parnell, Director of Members, Marketing and Digital	

Apologies: Nick Dunn, Pamela Maynard

Welcome

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

The President welcomed members to the 222nd Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Royal Horticultural Society at RHS Lindley Hall, London, thanked them for attending and provided an outline of the meeting. The President also extended a warm welcome to those joining online, the first time the RHS has held a hybrid AGM.

1. President's Report

- 1.1 The President began by thanking the Director General, Clare Matterson, and her team for their commitment to the RHS and to the art, science and practice of horticulture.
- 1.2 The RHS Council had visited RHS gardens during the year to review projects, meet staff, visitors and volunteers, and assess the quality and impact of the Society's work. Visits to RHS Garden Wisley and RHS Garden Bridgewater were highlighted, with the visit to RHS Garden Bridgewater's coinciding with its fifth anniversary and celebration in welcoming more than two and a half million visitors since its opening and becoming the number one visitor attraction in the northwest.
- 1.3 RHS Council have also been working on plans to conserve the future of RHS Vincent Square and the role of the RHS archive and Lindley library.
- 1.4 The continuing importance of engagement with patrons, fellows, vice presidents, ambassadors and other stakeholders was highlighted, including the role of vice presidents in providing expertise and advice from across gardening and horticulture. A particular mention was made to those who had helped lobby Government and National Highways in recognising the severe impact of the M25/A3 works outside RHS Garden Wisley and it is pleasing that there has been some progress with compensation discussions.
- 1.5 The President reported that RHS shows were continuing to evolve, including by taking shows to new parts of the country to reach wider audiences. RHS Wentworth Woodhouse was cited as an example of engaging visitors from regions that do not typically engage strongly with the RHS. RHS Chelsea Flower Show was reported as another successful year, with stakeholder feedback being used to improve future shows.
- 1.6 The meeting noted continued work to strengthen engagement through RHS gardens, displays, Greener-skills gardens, plant trials and awards. The Award of Garden Merit has been repositioned under the clearer public-facing name "RHS Recommended: Award of Garden Merit".
- 1.7 The RHS continues to work with national gardening and horticultural organisations on shared priorities including environmental sustainability, skills and training, tourism and engagement with government through the Future of National Gardens Group. The *State of Gardening* and *Space to Grow* reports were noted as important evidence bases.
- 1.8 The President paid tribute to the late Matt Biggs VMH, recognising his significant contribution to horticulture, broadcasting and the RHS.

2. Treasurer's Report

- 2.1 The Treasurer extended a warm welcome to everyone attending in person and those joining online.
- 2.2 A marked improvement was reported in the RHS's financial performance over the past year. Diverse income streams delivered good top-line growth with total income increasing by 7% to £133.7 million, and net income before depreciation and movements on investments increased to £4.8 million, compared with £0.2 million in the previous year. Coming after two years of

declining performance, this reflects the underlying strength of the RHS's operating model, as well as some welcome relief from some of the negative factors that have been weighing on the results.

- 2.3 With the long-awaited and much-delayed completion of the A3/M25 reconfiguration, visitor numbers at RHS Garden Wisley, our largest garden, are recovering alongside renewed growth in membership and subscriptions, however total visitor numbers remain well short of the levels achieved before the roadworks, indicating there's real scope for continued recovery over the coming years. During the 2025-2026 financial year, the RHS recorded more than three million garden visitors, an increase of more than 300,000 on the previous year. All gardens achieved growth, with RHS Garden Bridgewater, RHS Garden Harlow Carr and RHS Garden Hyde Hall recording record visitor numbers.
- 2.4 Combined core membership and digital subscribers to the RHS Grow app ended the year at 624,000. Core membership closed at 602,000, reflecting strong recruitment offset by non-renewals linked to pressure on household finances. Membership remained a critical part of the financial model, contributing 27% of total income.
- 2.5 Despite the challenging economic climate, the RHS increased investment in charitable activities to £83 million, including sustained commitments to science, education and communities.
- 2.6 Alongside income growth, the RHS remains focussed on careful cost control and disciplined capital expenditure ensuring a balance between ambition and sustainability within a challenging environment. Total expenditure for the year was £137.5 million, an increase of 3.4%, reflecting sustained inflationary pressures most notably in payroll and associated costs, including the increase in employer's national insurance contributions.
- 2.7 Two good-sized pieces of land have been acquired adjacent to RHS Garden Wisley helping to shape the future of the site as a new masterplan is embarked upon for the site.
- 2.8 The Treasurer concluded that the RHS remains focused on financial discipline, income diversification and strategic investment in order to strengthen reserves and continue delivering its charitable mission
- 2.9 The Treasurer noted that this was his last meeting as RHS Treasurer and thanked the RHS President, fellow trustees, the Director General and the RHS team for being part of a team that enables the RHS to bring so much joy to so many people.

3. Director General's Report

- 3.1 The Director General reported that the RHS remained underpinned by its objective of encouraging and improving the art, science and practice of horticulture. The strategy focusses on the benefits of gardening and on supporting people throughout their gardening journey.

- 3.2 Members consistently identified children and young people, sustainable gardening, plant health and plant diversity in the context of climate change as key priorities and these are intertwined in the RHS Strategy objectives.
- 3.3 The Director General reported on lifelong learning activity, including the National Education Nature Park with the Natural History Museum, school visits to RHS gardens, careers engagement through New Shoots Gardens, apprenticeships and studentships, and horticultural qualifications delivered with further education colleges.
- 3.4 The RHS is reviewing its advice service to ensure that gardeners continue to receive reliable, trustworthy information in a changing digital environment. Science priorities included plant health, climate resilience, water use, biodiversity and the long-term future of gardens.
- 3.5 The RHS had achieved Plant Healthy certification across its gardens and ISO 14001 environmental management certification. Sustainability activity included EV charging, visitor travel initiatives and work with industry and government on reducing horticulture's reliance on peat.
- 3.6 The Director General noted that a new RHS Science Plan will be launched in October 2026, building on previous achievements while introducing new areas of focus to address emerging challenges in horticulture and environmental sustainability.
- 3.7 The RHS has established the Virtual Centre for Environment and Plant Health in partnership with the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA). The initiative will strengthen collaboration between RHS and government scientists, improve the flow of plant health intelligence from the public into national systems, and support innovation and resilience in plant health.
- 3.8 There is ongoing work with partners through the Future of National Gardens Group to develop a Climate Assessment Tool, helping inform decisions on climate-resilient planting and the long-term viability of cultivated landscapes. The tool will support evidence-based decisions on the trees, shrubs and plants best suited to future climatic conditions.
- 3.9 The meeting noted that the RHS has secured funding from Ofwat for new research into outdoor water use, supporting household water efficiency and addressing the challenges associated with climate change and water scarcity.
- 3.10 The Director General introduced The Director of Gardens and Horticulture to outline some of the activities that the RHS is undertaking in its Gardens, including:
- Weather and climate are increasingly shaping how gardens would be managed in future and RHS Garden Wisley's long-running weather records show significant warming trends, with climate change already affecting plant collections and planting decisions.
 - The RHS is using its gardens and collections to understand which plants are resilient in warmer, drier and changing conditions.

Examples included relocating some collections, studying the Jubilee Arboretum at RHS Garden Wisley and trialling drought-tolerant plants such as Persian hybrid roses.

- Ongoing conservation is taking place of cultivated plant diversity, including heritage apple collections at RHS Garden Rosemoor and rose collections at RHS Garden Hyde Hall and elsewhere.
- There is continued development of the RHS Horticultural Hub and associated advice resources, ensuring that research findings, trial outcomes and practical guidance are made accessible to gardeners and the wider public
- RHS Garden Harlow Carr marked 25 years with the RHS, while RHS Garden Bridgewater celebrated five years since opening where the development of the Yangzhou Scholars Garden is also taking place.
- There has been a substantial improvement in biodiversity at Victoria Meadow, RHS Garden Bridgewater, where ecological surveys show an increase from a species-poor grassland to a diverse meadow supporting over 20 plant species.

- 3.11 The Director General thanked the Director of Gardens and Horticulture for his extraordinary service and contribution to the RHS, noting that this was their last AGM as they move onto new endeavours later this year.
- 3.12 The development of a new masterplan for RHS Wisley, following the recent land acquisition, to guide the long-term evolution of the estate, including its gardens, scientific facilities, living collections and visitor offer was noted. The masterplan will focus on strengthening climate resilience, biodiversity, sustainability, water management and public engagement, ensuring RHS Garden Wisley remains a world-leading horticultural garden for future generations
- 3.13 RHS Council are also undertaking feasibility work to renew the RHS's London headquarters and library facilities, with the aim of improving access to nationally significant horticultural collections, enhancing public and sector engagement, and securing the long-term sustainability of the site.
- 3.14 The RHS continues to work collaboratively with government agencies, sector bodies and wider partners to advance horticultural priorities and strengthen the sector's contribution to national objectives. This includes engagement on the development of the Horticultural Sector Plan, ensuring horticulture is recognised as a contributor to wider public policy outcomes, including environmental sustainability, housing, climate resilience, biodiversity and health and wellbeing.
- 3.15 The Director General noted the launch of the Bringing Nature Home campaign, which aims to encourage sustainable gardening practices and support biodiversity through public advice, education and behaviour change initiatives.
- 3.16 The RHS welcomed the award of £3.8 million from the National Lottery Community Fund to support community gardening and increase

participation through partnerships with sector organisations and the ongoing success of Britain in Bloom and other community gardening programmes in supporting local environmental improvement and public engagement was noted.

4. Annual General Meeting 2026

a) Minutes of the 221st Annual General Meeting

- 4.1 The President proposed that the meeting approve the minutes of the 221st AGM. The proposal was seconded by Helen Hutchings-Cox. The meeting then voted, by show of hands, to **APPROVE** the minutes of the 221st AGM held on 08 July 2025 which will be signed as an accurate record of proceedings by the President.

b) Annual Report & Consolidated Financial Statements 2025/26

- 4.2 The Treasurer proposed that the meeting approve the RHS Annual Report and Consolidated Financial Statements 2025/26. The proposal was seconded by Council member Tazim Essani.
- 4.3 Members were given the opportunity to ask questions about the Annual Report and Consolidated Financial Statements 2025/26 and no questions were raised.
- 4.4 The meeting then voted, by show of hands, to **APPROVE** the Annual Report and Financial Statements for 2025/26.

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 2026/27. Keith Weed was appointed President at the 2020 AGM and will serve for a seventh exceptional, and final, term.
- 4.6 There being no other candidates standing for the position, the Chair of the Governance and People Committee declared David Mathers elected unopposed as Treasurer for 2025/26.

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.
- 4.8 This year Wesley Kerr, Pamela Maynard and Nicola Spence retire as ordinary members of Council having completed one five-year term. Pamela Maynard was eligible for re-election but chose not to stand for a second term. Nicola Spence and Wesley Kerr have chosen to stand for re-election for a further five-year term.

- 4.9 RHS members Matt Davies and Stephen Hill were recommended by Council and stood for election.
- 4.10 There were therefore, four validly nominated candidates for four vacancies.
- 4.11 Wesley Kerr, Nicola Spence, Matt Davies and Stephen Hill were therefore duly elected as members of Council until the end of the 2031 AGM.
- 4.12 Dame Karen Pierce was appointed as a co-opted member of Council until the AGM 2027.
- 4.13 The full list of Council Members for 2026/27 is:
- Keith Weed (President)
 - David Mathers (Treasurer)
 - Claire Austin
 - Sue Beesley
 - Matt Davies
 - Nick Dunn
 - Tazim Essani
 - Stephen Hill
 - James Hitchmough
 - Helen Hutchings-Cox
 - Wesley Kerr
 - Tony Kirkham
 - Baroness Kate Lampard
 - Liz Nicholson
 - Dame Karen Pierce (co-opted until AGM 2027)
 - Darren Share
 - Prof. Nicola Spence
 - Ruth Willmott

e) Appointment of Auditors

- 4.14 The President proposed, and Council member Wesley Kerr seconded, that the meeting approve the appointment of Crowe Clark Whitehill LLP as RHS auditors for 2026/27.
- 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 providing exceptional support to the RHS. He reported that Council had re-appointed the following as Vice Presidents for 2026/27:

- James Alexander-Sinclair
- Rosie Atkins EMH
- Michael Balston
- Baroness Floella Benjamin DBE DL
- 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
- Jekka McVicar VMH
- Sandy Muirhead
- Dr Henry Oakeley VMH
- Dougal Philip
- Lorna Parker
- Mark Porter
- David Rae, VMH
- Prunella Scarlett LVO
- Tom Stuart-Smith
- Vicomte Philippe de Spoelberch
- Alan Titchmarsh CBE, VMH, DL

- Robert Hillier OBE, VMH
- Roy Lancaster CBE, VMH
- Pamela Maynard, OBE
- Lady Xa Tollemache
- Richard Webb VMH
- Jon Wheatley VMH

5 Members' questions

5.1 The President opened the floor to questions.

Q. David Rae asked how the £3.8 million National Lottery Community Fund grant would support regions across the country, including Wales, the South West and Scotland.

A. The Director General and Director of Learning and Public Engagement explained that the grant had been informed by the *Space to Grow* report, the first major survey of community gardening across the UK. The funding would be delivered across all of the UK in partnership with Social Farms and Gardens and Hubbub to create a national community gardening network, mentoring schemes, digital support, local connections and policy engagement, enabling community groups to thrive.

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

END