



Trustees' Annual Report for 2025/26

The year, which runs from April 2025 to the end of March 2026, has been most successful and enjoyable. As always, it has been a joy to see our members at our events and talks.

I can only reiterate my message from last year that we could not do what we do without the support from the members and the dedication of the Trustees. I would like to thank the owners of the gardens for their generosity and hospitality in arranging for us to visit. Thank you to all our speakers who have been happy to share their research and knowledge with us either in a Zoom talk, at our in-person meetings at Purley Barn, or as an introduction to the gardens we visit.

BGT President: You will, of course, remember that Dr Christina Hill Williams, our past President, passed away last year. I am delighted to be able to tell you that Phil Jones, CB, CBE, DL, Constable and Governor, Lieutenant General (Retd) at Windsor Castle and his wife Denise have most kindly agreed to take on the honorary role of Joint Presidents during their time at Windsor Castle. This is subject to the Members approval at our AGM. I will ask you shortly to vote on the appointment of Phil and Denise as our honorary Joint Presidents of in accordance with 11.10.7. of the Articles of Association. Sadly, they cannot join us today.

Phil has been in post for four years following an army career. Phil and Denise have a very keen interest in history and, in Denise's case, in gardening - Phil says he knows the difference between the pot and the plant in it! They both have welcomed us to their beautiful garden, the Moat Garden, at the Castle for two years running and hosted a reception with us in June last year. I look forward to welcoming them to a BGT event.

Charitable Status and Governance: Our updated Data Privacy Policy and Small Grants Scheme Policy are now posted on the website.

Finance: We have continued to run on a well-managed financial basis under the able guidance and administration of our Treasurer, Hugh Simon. I would like to thank him for his continued support and commitment. My thanks to Brian Tubman for carrying out the examination of the 2025/2026 accounts. Hugh's detailed report will follow shortly.

Planning matters: The Government has decided to remove The Gardens Trust (GT) as a Statutory Consultee. The Government's intention is for legislative change to take place over the autumn and be in place by end-2026. The Gardens Trust says: *Thanks to our collective efforts over the past year, some protection for historic parks and gardens will still be provided by our being notified of planning applications within parks and gardens but it is of deep concern that this will not include applications affecting the setting of these special places.* The government has confirmed that GT will become a 'notifiable body', meaning that local planning authorities will be obliged to inform GT of development within the parks and gardens, but not if it affects the setting. A new way of working has now to be worked out with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and Historic England. This will potentially result in a significant reduction in our opportunity to influence planning decisions, especially within the setting of parks and gardens. However, I understand that money is being provided for additional training for local planning authorities. The new NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework is now in place). Watch this space!

With the Gardens Trust's support, we responded to 26 planning consultations in the year 2025/2026 in our role supporting the statutory consultee status of The Gardens Trust. This reflects an increase on 2024/2025 but a significant downturn in the number of applications affecting our parks and gardens in 2023/2024. This number also includes our comments on the Reading's Update to the Local Plan (where I gave evidence to the hearing), and the Wokingham Borough and West Berkshire Local Plan Updates; and the proposed extension of Christchurch Conservation Area; and Hungerford Neighbourhood Development Plans. The current list of planning cases up to September 2026 can be read on the BGT website.

Support for projects: We have now supported two further projects in 2025/2026. In May we agreed to financially support the Gardens Trust in their fight to retain their status (and indirectly ours) to remain as Statutory Consultees (see below). In July we offered financial support to eminent garden historian Sarah Rutherford to assist in the writing and publication of her forthcoming book on grottos. We have an excellent example of one at Ascot Place and another at Whiteknights, Reading. Sarah will be giving us a Zoom talk on her findings in November – do sign up for this. Hugh will cover the sums involved as part of our financial budgeting.

Membership: The membership has decreased over the year from 95 at the end of March 2025 to 81 at the end of March 2026, primarily owing to an increase in subscription rates from April 2025, the first increase since the Trust was founded in 2009. Do continue to spread the word on our wonderful trips and lectures and how important our historic parks and gardens are for our well-being, wildlife and the continuity of our valued garden and parkland history. For an update, please see the Chair's Update.

Trustees: BGT continues to have 5 Trustees.

I owe Hugh Simon, our Treasurer and Secretary, a huge thanks for keeping our finances and insurance in order and ensuring we meet the demands of Companies House and the Charity Commission. Thanks to him we will also be enjoying a private visit to Rooksnest in 2027.

Alison Mihail remains a stalwart at coming up with new ideas, making new contacts, in particular with those who manage the Great Park at Windsor, Windsor Castle and the Royal Gardens at Windsor, and ensuring that we have our usual range of refreshments. Thanks to her we visited Windsor Castle again in April and Adam Scott, Windsor Castle and Bagshot Park Garden Manager, gave us a fascinating talk at Purley Small Barn in March. She is again arranging a members only Windsor Castle visit for June next year. Alison has been instrumental in developing contacts with Savill Garden, the Royal Windsor Horticultural Society and staff at Windsor Great Park.

Michelle Leek has been a Trustee now for three and a half years and I hope you will support her application to continue as a Trustee. Michelle has kindly taken over writing the minutes for both our meetings and the AGM, and took on revisions to the Data Protection Policy. Thanks to her we visited Royal Holloway College in September.

Susan Carter was elected as a Trustee at the AGM 2025. Susan has proved to be a great asset and has helped enormously in recruiting new members and helping with the events. Thanks to her we visited Waterperry in August and are holding this year's AGM at Englefield. She has arranged visits to West Woodhay and the Wormsley Estate for 2027.

In case you are wondering what I do apart from my role as Chair, I am a planning advisor and comment on the planning applications and local plans together with Helen Parvin and the Gardens Trust and manage the planning database. I am current events co-ordinator and have been very pleased to arrange Zoom talks and a visit to Compton Elms over 2025/2026. I keep up a close relationship with the Gardens Trust and our colleagues in neighbouring county gardens trusts, including responding to GT consultations and joint county responses to GT initiatives.

Membership support: Kim Hacker remains our stalwart membership secretary. Helen Parvin has long been a great asset on the planning side and juggles planning advice for both us and Surrey Gardens Trust. Many thanks to them both.

Visits: We enjoyed five visits in 2025/2026. In March we visited Compton Elms in Pinkneys Green, the last garden visit Christina was able to join. We had two excellent very well attended visits to Windsor Castle in April and June, under the guidance of Adam Scott with a reception in the Moat Garden with Phil and Denise in June. In May Kim arranged for us to visit Marble Hill and Turner's House (Sandycombe Lodge). In

August Michelle arranged for a visit to Ufton Court near Theale with a fascinating tour of the house and work undertaken by this leading history and outdoor education centre.

Autumn lecture and AGM: Alex Denman gave us a lively and engaging presentation on the History of Chelsea Flower Show and The Royal Windsor Horticultural Show, drawing on her time as RHS Chelsea Flower Show Manager and then Head of Shows Development.

Zoom Talks and Spring Lecture: We resumed our Zoom talks over the winter with two speakers. Our talk in November was by Ursula Buchan, a distinguished writer on gardening and social history, on Valerie Finnis, photographer and founder of Waterperry School of Horticulture for Women. In February we welcomed Jill Francis who spoke to us on Derek Jarman's love of gardens and his extraordinary garden at Gravesend.

Our 2026 programme from April to date is reported briefly in my Chair's Update.

Research: Regrettably, we were not able to make much progress in the year.

Planning matters: With the Gardens Trust's support, we responded to 26 planning consultations in the year 2025/2026 in our role supporting the statutory consultee status of the Gardens Trust. This reflects an increase on 2024/2025 but a significant downturn in the number of applications affecting our parks and gardens in 2023/2024. This number also includes our comments on the Reading's Update to the Local Plan (where I gave evidence to the hearing), and the Wokingham Borough and West Berkshire Local Plan Updates; and the proposed extension of Christchurch Conservation Area; and Hungerford Neighbourhood Development Plans. The current list of planning cases up to September 2026 can be read on the BGT website.

Website: Our webmaster is Rowan Richardson who has been with us for a year now. She is efficiently keeping the website up to date as we send new material to her.

Gardens Trust: We continue to play our part in The Gardens Trust, contributing to the ongoing debate on the future relationship between the GT and the counties.

This year I have again prepared a short separate report on our activities from 1 April up to the end of September 2026. This does not form part of our formal AGM but I hope will be of interest. You will find it online on our website.

Bettina Kirkham

Chair of the Berkshire Gardens Trust

August 2026

BERKSHIRE GARDENS TRUST COMMITTEE

Current Committee members / Trustees are:

Susan Carter

*Michelle Leek

Alison Mihail

Hugh Simon (Treasurer and Secretary)

Bettina Kirkham (Chair)

The Membership Secretary is Kim Hacker

** standing for re-election*

In accordance with the provisions of the Articles the following officers have been elected by the Trustees for the forthcoming year, to take effect at the conclusion of the AGM:

Bettina Kirkham, Chair

Hugh Simon, Treasurer

TREASURER'S REPORT 2025-6

FINANCIAL SUMMARY (financial year ending 31st March)

	£ 2026	£ 2025
INCOME & EXPENDITURE		
Incoming Resources	4,663.41	3,766.34
/less Resources Expended	5,323.71	3,298.55
Interest received	421.45	350.92
Net (outgoing) / incoming resources for year	(238.85)	818.71
NET ASSETS as at 31st March		
Fixed Assets	-	22.44
Cash at bank	7,707.12	7,793.17
Deposit account	15,000.00	15,000.00
Other current assets	1,596.34	939.50
Total Current Assets	24,303.46	23,732.67
/less Creditors	1,719.00	931.80
Net Assets	22,584.46	22,823.31

The Trust's net assets, which are predominantly held as cash and bank deposits, decreased by £238.85 over the year. Subscription income and donations of £1,324.73 for the year (including Gift Aid £62.61), £421.45 deposit account interest received, and a £609.36 surplus on events were offset by operating costs of £1,071.95, a grant of £500 and a donation of £1,000 to The Gardens Trust. Depreciation on fixed assets was £22.44; there was no capital expenditure in the year.

There were 81 paid-up members in the subscription year ended 31st March 2026, a decrease of 14 members compared with the previous year. Subscription rates were increased from 1st April 2025, the first increase since the Trust was founded in 2009.

My thanks to Brian Tubman ACMA, who has examined the accounts for 2025-6. The income and expenditure account and balance sheet are set out in the following pages.

Hugh Simon ACMA, Treasurer

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (see note 1 below)

INCOME & EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT

<i>Financial year ending 31st March</i>	£ 2026	£ 2025
Incoming Resources		
Donations and Gift Aid	142.73	559.35
Membership subscriptions	1,182.00	1,130.00
Events	3,338.68	2,076.99
	<u>4,663.41</u>	<u>3,766.34</u>
Resources Expended		
Website	434.66	394.42
Publications and research	-	277.00
Insurance and memberships	551.29	613.14
Donation – The Gardens Trust	1,000.00	-
Grant	500.00	-
Administration and travel	86.00	210.95
Events	2,729.32	1,780.60
Depreciation	22.44	22.44
	<u>5,323.71</u>	<u>3,298.55</u>
Interest received	421.45	390.92
Net (outgoing) incoming resources for the year	(238.85)	818.71

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31st MARCH

	£ 2026	£ 2025
TANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS	-	22.44
CURRENT ASSETS		
Debtors	1,261.00	588.80
Stock	42.74	38.20
Prepaid expenditure	292.60	312.50
Deposit account	15,000.00	15,000.00
Cash at bank	7,707.12	7,793.17
	24,303.46	23,732.67
LIABILITIES		
Creditors	36.00	12.00
Deferred income	1,683.00	919.80
	1,719.00	931.80
NET CURRENT ASSETS	22,584.46	22,800.87
NET ASSETS	22,584.46	22,823.31
FUNDS		
At start of year	22,823.31	22,004.60
Net (outgoing) / incoming resources for the year	(238.85)	818.71
At end of year	22,584.46	22,823.31

NOTES TO FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

1. **The full Directors' Report and Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2026 may be found on the Trust's website: www.berkshiregardenstrust.org**
2. In accordance with the provisions of the Trust's articles of association, the Trustees have elected for the financial statements for the year ended 31st March 2026 to be examined in lieu of a full audit. Mr Brian Tubman ACMA, the Trust's independent examiner, has certified that in his opinion the financial statements for the year ended 31st March 2026 and the balance sheet as at that date show a true and fair view of the Trust's affairs.