

BERKSHIRE GARDENS TRUST (the “Trust” or “BGT”)

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at Purley Barn, Purley-on Thames, RG8 8DR, on Friday 10th October 2025 at 6.15pm

1. Chair’s welcome and apologies for absence

Bettina Kirkham (BK), Chair of Berkshire Gardens Trust, welcomed those present.

She firstly turned to Michelle Leek (ML - Trustee and note taker) to confirm that the AGM was quorate (at least 10 members present in person). ML confirmed this with 15 members present + 10 non-members. ML also gave apologies for absence (12 received) and advised that no proxy forms had been received in advance of the meeting.

BK then gave a short Health & Safety briefing and outlined the evening’s timetable. She informed attendees that after the AGM they would be invited to take part in a short survey to gather feedback on the BGT. She also advised that the AGM would be followed by a talk by Alex Denman.

BK noted that the AGM covered the year from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. She advised that the reports could be found on BGT’s website and reminded those present that only members may vote at the AGM.

BK began by paying tribute to honorary president and Berkshire Gardens Trust founder Chairman Dr Christina Hill Williams DL who died in April 2025. BK made particular reference to the huge contribution that Christina had made to BGT, helping to set it up in 2009; then acting as Chair for 5 years and latterly acting a President until her death, one month short of her 73rd birthday. She brought in new members and new Trustees, presided over the community awards scheme, and made very generous donations to BGT over the years. A full tribute can be viewed on the BGT website.

BK welcomed Christina’s husband Clive as a special guest and thanked him for attending. She also congratulated him on his recent election as Vice-President of the CPRE.

BK went on to welcome three other special guests: Adam and Anna Scott (Adam is Gardens and Nursery Manager for Windsor Castle and Bagshot Park and hosted BGT visits to Windsor Castle in April and June this year); and Bruce Ginsberg (an inspired gardener and expert on the spatial use of topiary).

BK also introduced BGT’s Trustees - Hugh Simon (HS), Treasurer and Secretary; Michelle Leek (ML), note taker and new Trustee, Susan Carter. She went on to thank Trustee Alison Mihail (AM) for making the arrangements for the talk and refreshments.

2. Minutes of the AGM meeting of 9th October 2024

ML noted that the minutes of the previous AGM held on 9th October 2024 were on the website and hard copies had been made available on request to members attending the AGM.

Susan Carter proposed and Kay Warner seconded their adoption. All present were in favour. BK signed the minutes accordingly. There were no matters arising.

3. Chair’s Report

BK noted that there were 95 paid up members in the subscription year ended 31st March 2025, a decrease of 4 members compared with the previous year. Current membership is 72, the decrease owing to a legally necessary change of bank account from NatWest to Lloyds that invalidated old NatWest standing order instructions from members.

Officers for the forthcoming year had been elected by the trustees (BK re-elected Chair, HS re-elected Treasurer), subject to their re-election as trustees at the AGM.

HS wished to continue as Secretary and Kim Hacker (KH) wished to continue as Membership Secretary.

BK noted with sadness that Sian Thomas has chosen to resign as a Trustee and the web manager has decided to hand over the reins after 7 years. Both of them made an important contribution to the running of BGT. On the upside, in July Susan Carter was co-opted as a new Trustee and BK noted that the AGM would vote on her election shortly. The Committee now stands at five Trustees with Membership Secretarial support from Kim Hacker, planning support from Helen Parvin and continuing involvement from Fiona Hope. BK made a plea for further Trustees and volunteers to help ensure BGT stays healthy and thriving.

BK reported that a new professional Web Manager has been appointed, Rowan Richardson, who also looks after Kent and Sussex Gardens Trust's websites.

BK noted that subscriptions increased after April 2025. Unfortunately, this resulted in the loss of 30% of the membership, not necessarily because of the increased rate but more likely due to declining health, lack of involvement in BGT and banking difficulties.

BK reported that since April 2025, BGT have been able to support more new initiatives including the donation of £1000 to support The Gardens Trust in their fight to retain Statutory Consultee status and government support; and £550 to Sarah Rutherford, landscape historian, towards her forthcoming book on grottos (there is a fine example at Ascot Place Grade II* RPG).

These are part of BGT's small student grant scheme, granting sums of up to £1500 over a two year period. The Trustees would very much welcome ideas for this grant scheme from the members.

BK noted that the details of BGT events can be found in the Trustees report and her update, both on the website.

BK invited those present to join the forthcoming Zoom talk by Ursula Buchan on Valerie Finnis in November. It is hoped that there will be a follow up visit to Waterperry next year.

The programme for 2026 is well on its way and will also include:

- Visits to Windsor Castle, Valley Gardens, Savill Gardens, Royal Holloway, and Caversham Court;
- Spring Lecture from Adam Scott on the History of the Windsor Castle gardens;
- a special evening next October in support of Thrive (gardening to bring about positive changes in the lives of people living with disabilities or ill health, or who are isolated, disadvantaged or vulnerable).
- and winter Zoom talks on Derek Jarman's Garden at Gravesend, and the history of grottos.

In terms of BGT's work on planning consultations, BK noted that it's been another relatively quiet year and that the Gardens Trust have taken on some responses which has helped.

BGT have commented on policies and list of non-designated parks and gardens in Local Plans and Neighbourhood Development Plans as well as major applications at Park Place Grade II*, Purley Hall Grade II*, Bearwood College, the Old Rectory, Inkpen, Alexandra Park,

Windsor, Nicholson shopping centre, Maidenhead, and at Bradfield Bore, Benham. BGT have also been involved in the publication of Historic England's report on the Setting of Windsor Castle.

The Government's consultation on their proposed changes to the planning system is still awaited. The Gardens Trust have been robustly campaigning for retention of their status as statutory consultee and with it, the ability for them and county trusts like BGT to influence planning decisions for the better.

Regrettably BGT have not managed to publish a newsletter this year but Susan Carter has boldly offered to pick this up in the new year. Her experience in publishing will be invaluable.

BK opened the floor to questions but there weren't any.

BK now invited HS to present the Treasurer's Report.

4. Treasurer's Report

HS noted that the Treasurer's Report and Statement of Accounts for year ending 31st March 2025 had been put on the website and hard copies made available on request to members attending the AGM.

The independent examiner, Brian Tubman ACMA, had signed the financial statements, which had been approved by the Trustees and signed on their behalf by BK. HS thanked Brian Tubman.

HS reported that BGT ended 2024/5 with a surplus of £819, compared with £213 for the previous year, 2023/4.

The main sources of income during the year were:

- £1,130 subscriptions from 95 members;
- £375 from donations & Gift Aid;
- £296 surplus on 5 garden visits, 2 on-line Zoom talks and one lecture;
- £351 interest received from Nationwide 95 day account.

The main areas of expenditure were:

- £595 insurance and Gardens Trust affiliation;
- £250 En Plein Air sponsorship;
- £251 Wix website hosting (free website design and maintenance from Webmaster).

HS noted the current financial position as:

- Current bank balance £7,400 plus £15,000 on 95 days' notice deposit at Nationwide (current interest rate 3.35%).
- Current deficit £278 (£760 surplus on events). Donation to The Gardens Trust £1,000, Grottoes book grant to Sarah Rutherford £500.

Finally, HS confirmed that BGT's move from NatWest to Lloyds which commenced in April 2024 was completed by November 2024.

BK thanked HS for the Treasurer's Report and invited questions from the floor but there were none.

5. Adoption of the Directors' Report and Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2025

BK put the resolution to adopt the Directors' Report and Statement of Account for the year ended 31st March 2024 to the meeting.

Richard Bisgrove proposed and Alison Mihail seconded their adoption. All present were in favour. BK declared that the Directors' Report and Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2025 were approved.

6. Election of Trustees

BK put the motion to the meeting, that in accordance with Article 13.6, Alison Mihail be re-appointed as a trustee for a term of three years. Peter Thorn proposed and Richard Bisgrove seconded the resolution. All present were in favour.

BK put the motion to the meeting, that in accordance with Article 13.9, Susan Carter be appointed a trustee for a term of three years. Fiona Hope proposed and Alison Mihail seconded the resolution. All present were in favour.

BK thanked the retiring trustee Sian Thomas for her service as a trustee.

There being no further business, the Chair closed the meeting.

Michelle Leek

Trustee