



BERKSHIRE GARDENS TRUST (the "Trust" or "BGT")

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at Purley Barn, Purley-on-Thames RG8 8DR, on Wednesday 11th October 2023 at 7.00pm.

1. Chair's welcome

Bettina Kirkham (BK), Chair of Berkshire Gardens Trust, welcomed members, guests Richard Bisgrove and Josie Phillips, Adam Vetere of Old Camps, Headley, chair of the discussion panel to follow the Annual General Meeting, and the panel participants, Willie Hartley-Russell DL of Bucklebury House, Niamh Kendall of Kidmore House, and Bruce Ginsberg of Earlstone Manor. She then introduced the President, Christina Hill Williams DL, Hugh Simon (HS), Treasurer and Secretary, Fiona Hope, retiring Secretary and minute taker, and others on the Committee: Alison Mihail and Kim Hacker; two committee members were unable to attend: Sian Thomas and Michelle Leek. BK then gave a short Health & Safety briefing and outlined the evening's timetable.

Turning to the formal business of the AGM, BK reminded those present that only Members could vote at the AGM, which covered the financial year from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023. She also referred to the Trustee's Report and an informal Chair's update covering April to September 2023, available on the Trust's website.

Kim Hacker (Membership Secretary) confirmed that the meeting was quorate with 16 paid-up members present and 14 apologies and HS noted that he had received one proxy vote.

2. President's address

Christina Hill Williams welcomed everyone and thanked the Committee for their continued hard work during the year in terms of visits, lectures and planning responses. She also mentioned that she was organising the Royal Berkshire Hospital's League of Friends concert at Pangbourne College on Saturday 25th November and would be sharing any donations at this event among the four charities for which she was currently President, including BGT.

3. Minutes of the meeting of 29th September 2022

HS noted that the Minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting had been posted on BGT's website with no corrections submitted.

Helen Parvin proposed and Kaye Warner seconded their adoption. All present were in favour.

4. Chair's report

BK noted that BGT had become a registered Charity in January 2023 following the approval of the Special Resolution at the 2022 AGM, without any queries being raised by the Charity Commission.

Turning next to BGT events, BK referred to the varied programme of garden visits and Zoom and in-person lectures. She went on to inform the meeting that a copywriter had been appointed for a forthcoming Newsletter and invited contributions from members. BGT research is continuing under the coordination of Janet Fuller, with Michelle Leek and Ann Smith. BGT are also currently considering Whiteknights, the 18th century designed landscape now used as the University of Reading's main campus. She added that Andrew Radgick, a long-term supporter and member of BGT, was now helping with tree identification at Bracknell's Lily Hill Park.

BGT is developing a closer relationship with Historic England, who normally restrict their planning application responses to Grade I and Grade II* registered landscapes, especially as BK is currently a member of the national Gardens Trust's Conservation Committee. Over the past year 33 planning cases have been responded to by BGT, including several for Park Place, a Grade II* registered park and garden in Wokingham District near Henley. Most of the rest are housing applications as well as extensions for various institutions such as schools. Two recent applications from Beechcroft, one of which concerns plans for the future use Caversham Park, the Grade II registered ex-BBC site partially designed by Capability Brown. Helen Parvin, a stalwart BGT member, was thanked for her continuing and invaluable contribution to BGT's planning responses, especially in east Berkshire, and support from The Gardens Trust.

BK announced Fiona Hope's resignation after 15 years in the post of Executive Secretary and made a small presentation on behalf of BGT's President, the Committee and members. She then thanked Hugh Simon for taking on the role of Secretary in addition to continuing as BGT's Treasurer. She added that there were currently seven trustees. Deborah James had resigned as a Trustee recently for personal reasons but Michelle Leek and Sian Thomas, who brought different skills and experiences to the Committee and were absent owing to Covid and a pre-booked holiday, had been co-opted since the previous AGM. Kim Hacker was continuing as Membership Secretary and Alison Mihail continued to provide excellent ideas and catering contribution. BK also thanked all the Committee and Janet Fuller's husband, who continued to host, update and maintain BGT's website without charge.

BK then briefly updated the meeting on BGT's activity since 1st April 2023 and referred to the Chair's Update on the website.

The Trustees' Report and update have been put on BGT's website and hard copies are available to members attending the AGM on request.

Questions from the Floor

Richard Bisgrove asked about the relative activity of Historic England (HE) and Reading Borough Council in relation to planning applications such as that regarding Caversham Park. BK replied that The Gardens Trust are trying to ensure that HE refer applications to the County Gardens Trusts and expand on their 'No Comment' responses, which do not necessarily mean that HE has no concerns. Helen Parvin added that it was important for BGT (and others) to talk to the developers where possible as this was an opportunity to make a difference to applications at an early stage, as at Silwood Park.

5. Treasurer's report

HS reported that the full financial accounts for 2022/3 were on BGT's website, having been approved by the Trustees and passed by the Independent Examiner, Brian Tubman, who was thanked for continuing to do this for the Trust.

BGT had a £2,337 surplus for the financial year to 31st March 2023, including a £3,000 bequest from Rodney Stubblefield, a founding BGT Trustee, and £900 having been spent on support and advice for the successful Charity Commission application. Excluding these exceptional items, the surplus for the financial year was £237. Subscriptions, donations and gift aid were the main sources of income with an overall £523 surplus on the seven garden visits, two lectures and three Zoom lectures (the aim being to break even on these). As usual, affiliation to and insurance through The Gardens Trust as well as website hosting were key items of expenditure. BGT's current account remained at NatWest with a deposit account at Nationwide Building Society. The current bank balance was £12,000 at National Westminster Bank, plus £10,000 in the Nationwide deposit account.

Questions from the Floor

David Over suggested that the differential between charges to members and others for events be increased to encourage more guests to become members. HS said this was certainly something to be looked at but needed to take account of the rules for eligibility for Gift Aid claims.

Richard Bennett offered to advise BGT on getting much cheaper website hosting. **See addendum below.*

**Addendum regarding website hosting*

HS said in his Treasurer's report that BGT's website hosting cost was £563 in 2022/3. In fact, this amount included all IT related costs; BGT's website cost for the year was £179 (Hosting £158 and Domain name £21); other IT related costs included Zoom annual subscription £144, a map tool £84 (to contribute to research and planning activities) and Dropbox renewal (for storage of photographs) £96.

Helen Parvin asked if the Committee had any ideas about how to use the deposit funds accumulated by BGT. In reply HS & BK said that there were no decisions as yet, although it was hoped they could be allocated to specific projects. Fiona Hope commented that she hoped that some sort of publication about Berkshire's designed landscapes reflecting research done might be realised in the future, as that was an important aspect of the Trust's objectives.

6. Adoption of the Directors' Report and Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2023

BK put the resolution to adopt the Directors' Report and Statement of Account for the year ended 31st March 2023 to the meeting.

Richard Bennett proposed and Carol Jackson-Doerge seconded their adoption. All present were in favour.

7. Election of Trustees:

BK put the motion to the meeting that in accordance with Article 13.9 Michelle Leek be elected for a term of three years following her co-option by the Committee on 6th March 2023.

Hugh Simon proposed and Kim Hacker seconded the resolution. All present were in favour.

BK put the motion to the meeting that in accordance with Article 13.9 Sian Thomas be elected for a term of three years following her co-option by the Committee on 11th May 2023.

Helen Parvin proposed and Alison Mihail seconded the resolution. All present were in favour.

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

Fiona Hope

Trustee