

The KTE Ltd Board's Report to Members 8 April 2023.

The board has met on 10 occasions since the AGM of 16 January 2022. The statutory accounts for year ending 31 March 2022 were approved by the Board on 8 October 2022 and filed at Companies House on 27 October 2022.

Interpreting our Financial Position

The provisional accounts for the year ending 31 March 2023 suggest an estimated surplus of £15,887. In addition, we currently hold cash reserves of £80,164. In the light of the level of reserves the board recommend we do not increase the garden rate for the current year.

The published accounts for the year ending 31 March 2022 recorded a deficit of £53,876 before tax. The total revenue expenditure figure included £26,308 spent on the secret garden and £49,557 spent on the North Garden railings. Transferring these two items to capital spending and financing out of reserves, generates a revenue account surplus of £17,112.

For the financial years 2022 and 2023, the key point of interest is inevitably the size of the surplus. As a nontrading entity with a predetermined annual revenue received at the start of the year, the surplus wholly reflects the failure to meet budgeted expenditure targets. Interpreting a surplus as a mark of success is a misinterpretation. Consistently missing employment targets is a principal cause of the expenditure shortfall.

Even if we hit the published targets there would be some doubt about the adequacy of labour input to the gardens. At present we employ 3 gardeners – a head gardener and two assistants. One assistant works 4 days, the other 3 days and the head gardener 3 days. Thus from 3 people we obtain two full time equivalent weeks of employment in a single week.

In addition, we suffer from a mix of absenteeism and vacancies. In the last 12 months, one gardener drew 89.9% of his budgeted salary. The other two positions managed a utilisation of 76% and 78% of the budgeted allocation to the respective posts. We also had a groundsman who unfortunately this year only managed 44% of his budgeted time.

On average over the four posts, we have managed to spend 80.9% of the budgeted expenditure (a weighted average with weights equal to the percentage allocated to each post). In other words, we are operating at 81% of our budgeted gardening services supply capacity. We might be 'saving money' but our delivery 'of garden services' is continuously operating below par.

Our diminished labour resource is expected to maintain and develop a garden extending to 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ acres. Or, if you prefer the continental unit of measurement – we have a plot size of 27,300 square metres. Quite clearly a substantial garden which with the lack of appropriate labour supply places a significant burden on our voluntary management – particularly June and Lucy who we unreservedly thank for their contribution.

Hard landscaping

Following considerable preparation in previous years the run of railings and plinths on the southern elevation of the north garden were largely removed and replaced with new railings at the start of 2022. The cost of this work was £49,557, equating to approximately £762.4 a metre. At present we have not allowed for removing and replacing the remaining 3 elevations. It may be the matter needs further consideration.

The redundant southern railings were finally removed, along with an overgrown encasing of Euonymus. A contractor was brought in for

most of this work. A mulch obtained from the plant debris was applied to the paths. A waste disposal company removed the ironwork from site.

Andrew and Matthew devoted a considerable amount of time to managing and delivering the reinstated Secret Garden. I think you will agree a considerable achievement. The quality of the workmanship in coursing and laying the flints is superb. Likewise, the gradient of the camber on the inner surface of the wall to facilitate drainage exhibits true craftsmanship. The cost of the work amounted to £67,625, in part financed by donations of £5,000 and £30,000. We are extraordinarily grateful to the generosity of the two residents who donated.

Andrew had to step down from his 5 years of service on the board last November. I am sure we all offer him our unreserved thanks for his extensive contribution to the work of the board and best wishes for the future.

Regulation

Periodic checks are undertaken to ensure Health and Safety considerations are properly monitored and enforced. The key member of the team is Amanda. This year as the gardeners often work alone, the three gardeners were sent on a first aid course which they have successfully completed.

Our internal deliberations are informed by our understanding of the full implications of managing a Grade II listed garden in a conservation area. No works will be undertaken to the hard landscape without first obtaining the appropriate planning and listing consents. Likewise, no trees beyond a particular girth will be removed without the appropriate consents.

Member Communication and Survey

In September last year the board conducted an email survey to discover the views of members on various options for the gardens. We received just over 80 responses. Members were clear they did not favour wet weather paths or reducing the height of boundary hedges. They were in favour of reducing the frequency of lawn mowing's, improving the path at the back of the tunnel, a limited increase in wildflower plantings and removing self-seeded trees from boundary hedges.

Control and Access to the gardens

Control of entry is the point at which Airbnb interrelates with our remit. Under the Rules of the Enclosures unaccompanied guests of owners are not allowed entry to the gardens.

To achieve a more effective means of controlling access to the gardens we have investigated electronic digital locks facilitating access via electronic key fobs.

At present we are seeking three quotes for installing 7 electronic locks in the southern gardens. The first estimate has come in at a cost of £12k. Once the remaining two estimates are to hand, we will need to complete a thorough review before making a recommendation. If we do go ahead, it will be possible to remotely cancel a fob where a holder has breached the rules of entry.

Neighbourly Matters

In November of last year Brighton and Hove City Council notified us that water was running off the southern part of the garden, cascading through the tunnel and flooding the reading room below. The Council were in the process of converting the space to a

restaurant and requested that we take action to prevent the egress of water from our land.

We explained that we had no responsibility for flood waters leaving our land. In addition, we pointed out that any drainage taking water from our garden and passing through the Council's land, had been in place, and deemed to be known to the Council, from at least 1952 when they compulsorily purchased the lower esplanade.

Subsequently the Council accepted their responsibility and undertook the necessary works on their land.

The Voles

Sadly this year we must record the passing of Anne Antram. Anne founded the Voles in 1992. The group has continued to this day, contributing a significant input to the maintenance of the gardens.

As with previous years a jolly time was had by all at the annual lunch.

Jeremy's Retirement

The young gardener who joined us 18 years ago has announced he wishes to retire with effect from 30 June this year. Jeremy has made a very considerable contribution to maintaining and planting the gardens. His planting schemes focused on the ever-evolving border arrangements moving from perennials, to mixed, to annuals, to wildflowers, to shrubs to just sheer exotica - admired and loved by us all.

The start of annual cycle of Jeremy's accomplished touch is again emerging in the minutiae of horticultural detail. Once again we witness reawakening aconites, narcissus pseudonarcissus and even the cowslips marked with their 'five drops of blood' to greet us on Easter Saturday. As with the cycle of plants nothing lasts forever, and we must now wish Jeremy every success in his new career.