

KTE Annual report – for AGM

The Board met on 8 occasions since the AGM of 8<sup>th</sup> April 2023: meetings duly minuted.

## **Finance**

The financial year for the Kemptown Enclosures runs from 1st April through to the 31st of March. We began the 2023-2024 year with audited reserves of £67,000. Our budget was set at £117,000 and we currently anticipate an underspend of approximately £5,000, with less having been spent on staffing costs due to staff turnover and savings made on the need for contracted labour, and less required for painting and repairs to railings and gates.

However, expected income, largely accruing from Garden rates (with lesser amounts from party rentals, book sales, lost keys, and donations), has been £7,000 less than expected. Arrears from garden rates currently stands at £3,760. Some of this may still be recovered, but the current shortfall will necessitate £2,000 needing to be transferred from reserves to cover the difference between expenditure and income. We anticipate starting the new financial year with a reserve of £65,000.

The 2024-2025 budget is expected to be similar to 2023/2024 and the Board has recommended a 10% increase (appropriately £100 per Freehold) in garden rates (which has not been increased in the last two years) to retain sufficient funds in reserves for future major projects.

## **Staffing and the gardens team**

Appointment of Jason Saul to Head Gardner

Appointment of Alfie Baker as Assistant Gardner (commenced 18<sup>th</sup> September 2023)

Whilst the last AGM saw the announcement of retirement of Jeremy as Head Gardener resulting in the subsequent receipt of many applications for the Head Gardener's role, this was narrowed down to four candidates. Two male and two female. Jason Saul the previous assistant gardener stood out head and shoulders above the others. Interviews of all candidates were held on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of April 2023. The Board wishes to express their thanks to June Mawby and Lucy Graubart for the time they have dedicated to recruiting. The resulting appointment of Jason Saul, who had previously worked as assistant gardener has proved to be an extremely popular appointment, this time to Head Gardener and Jason has made a huge impression both on the management of the gardens and the residents. The Board thanks Jeremy for his work and dedication to the selection of his successor and the smooth handover to Jason. As thanks to all of Jeremy's hard work and dedication, the Board agreed that a lifetime key and signed bicentennial book was appropriate as a parting gift.

Jason has continued to manage the gardens in a manner sympathetic to their listed Regency heritage, whilst being mindful of the issues presented by climate change and the need to provide wild areas of the gardens to encourage biodiversity and provide a welcoming habitat to the many insects and wild animals in the gardens. The increased areas of meadow land have seen the arrival of many butterflies and other welcome pollinators.

## **Key Change Proposals**

Following the AGM last year and having taken a vote/show of hands with those present, the Board has decided not to pursue the proposal to change from a key system to an electronic fob system further at this time. There were a number of concerns raised from residents and indeed the Board themselves, that there was no other garden with such a system, nor were there many alternative contractors who could carry out the work and supply the system, whilst the costs and disruption involved were significant. Without a ringing endorsement over safety and reliability of the system, the Board agreed no further work should be taken into the researching of this. Whilst an electronic system would have been helpful in the management of residents that fail to pay their Garden rates, keys are simpler and it seems were preferred, by most residents. A traditional key and lock change, which had broad support at last year's AGM, was therefore viewed as the right thing to do, and this would be considered later in 2024.

Dockerills have quoted round £10,000 and Haines quoted around £14,000, to replace locks and keys. To allay concerns around the changing of the keys it is intended to obtain a sample key to ensure that it is strong enough and sufficient for the job, before any decision is made.

## **Garden rates**

The Board has given consideration as to whether to raise the annual garden rate. It has not been raised for two years despite inflation being high, whilst overall costs, wages etc. have been rising within that time.

We expect to dip into reserves to cover a shortfall in 2023, and therefore it is felt prudent to raise the garden rates in 2024. It is not good practice to use reserves to cover shortfalls in day-to-day expenditure. It should also be acknowledged that significant expenditure is needed from time to time. The replacement of certain sections of the railings showed how significant those costs can be. Tree surgery works can also be costly, £7,000 being recently quoted to undertake medium risk tree surgery work. As can also be seen by the costs quoted by Dockerills to change the keys and locks, the costs of maintaining and running the gardens must be reflected in the garden rates.

It is therefore proposed to increase the garden rates from £1,000 to £1,100 per household. This to be considered at the upcoming AGM.

## **Dogs and Dog Registration**

Dog registration for 2024 has thus far been poor. Of the 48 known eligible dogs previously registered only 29 people have registered this year (55 registered in 2023). The annual cost of the dog waste bins and collections is £1,771.20 and only £1,160.00 has been collected so far from registrations. It is unfair that whilst some residents pay the registration fee, others do not do so.

The office of Jonathon Rolls has sent an initial email to owners, reminding of the requirement to register dogs and a second reminder was sent at the end of February 2024. The registration list is hosted on the KTE website.

Whilst it is appreciated that Jonathon Rolls office has now moved to Preston Drove, registrations can be easily carried out by email and payment arranged by bank transfer, with the dog tags being sent out by post or hand delivered when the Jonathon Rolls team are in the area. The Board would remind residents to please pay the registration fee for access to the gardens, to display the current dog tag granting access on the dog collar and to keep dogs on a lead at all times, and of course to clear up after them. Regrettably, incidences of dog mess being left for others to clear up, along with dogs

running around off their leads, have continued. The Board wishes to also remind residents that the North Gardens remain a dog-free, tranquil space.

### **Gate signs**

Since the last AGM and following requests from some residents, new gate signs have been put on all the gates, reiterating the requirements for guests to always be accompanied by a resident and for there to be no ball games in the North gardens, with a statement that the full rules of the use of the gardens can be found on the KTE Website. The Board trusts that the new signs have solved the issue of children playing ball in the North Gardens.

### **Newsletter**

The newsletter continues to go from strength to strength under the steerage of Russell Miller, former Sunday Times journalist. The newsletters are popular and a window into the activity in the gardens and all the achievements of the gardening team. This is also seen as the best medium for the Board to inform residents of important news, about the gardens.

### **Bicentennial projects**

2023, saw our long-anticipated Bicentennial with two commemorative projects: the restoration of the secret garden flint walled enclosure and a coffee table book celebrating the history of the gardens and estate residents who used them. The secret garden is now looking splendid and was a fitting tribute to the 200 years that our gardens have been enjoyed. We should thank once again Michael Bedingfield, for his fantastic contribution to enable the completion of the secret garden.

The coffee table book with photos from the Janine Nahapiet and content from Russell Miller, was extremely popular, selling like hotcakes and no doubt graces many coffee tables around our estate.

The Bicentennial Garden party was a tremendous success with many residents dressing for the occasion.

### **Health and Safety**

Amanda Catron working with Jason Saul has carried out a significant overhaul of all health and safety matters in the gardens and the gardener's enclosure and buildings, to ensure that works were carried out safely in the gardens, protecting the residents and the gardeners, themselves. The Board have a duty of care under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act (1974), as well as subsequent legislation, to manage risk. This is a need to do, not a nice to do. There has been considerable progress both from the practical perspective of physical changes such as the wall mounting of machinery, disposal of broken equipment and chemicals, a COSHH assessment and the provision of new/updated personal protective equipment for the gardeners, but also by way risk assessments, documenting of training

records and safe methods of working and undertaking safety briefings, “Tool Box talks”. The health and safety aspects of the gardens risk management are quite considerable and in turn ensure that the residents are safe in the gardens, too. Periodic checks of benches, play equipment and other equipment are undertaken to ensure health and safety considerations are properly monitored and enforced.

### **Your Board needs you!**

Since the AGM in 2023, there have been four resignations from the Board.

- Lucy Graubart (Chair to transition shortly)
- June Mawby
- Michael Bedingfield
- Michael Osborne

The Board and residents want to thank them all for their time, patience, and expertise in the many ways they have contributed to the management of the gardens and the garden team.

Whilst Amanda Catron and Howard Rush will stand down and offer themselves for re-election to the board at the AGM, the remaining 3 Board members can not do everything. The Board therefore welcomes residents interested in joining the board to submit their CV and a statement of what their skills would contribute to the skill set of the board by the 24<sup>th</sup> of March. The Board would also welcome enquiries and would be happy to discuss what being a member of the Board of KTE entails, in advance of the submission deadline.