

KTE Annual report – for AGM 2024 – 2025

Meeting to take place on the 15th of March 2025.

The Board met on 6 occasions since the AGM in 2024; meetings have been duly minuted.

Members of the Board

Matthew Evans – Jonathon Rolls

Howard Rush – Chair

Amanda Catron – Deputy Chair

Giles Catron - Treasurer

Gildas Ehrman– to be formally introduced at the AGM

Finance

The financial year for the Kemptown Enclosures runs from 1st April through to the 31st of March, which has not changed for 2024/2025 or 2025/2026. We began the 2024-2025 year with audited reserves of £67,000. The budget was set at £123,000 and actual expenditure is anticipated to be slightly below that original budget. Staff turnover has been an issue in 2024, and consequently we have significant savings on staff costs, although these have been partially offset by increased contractors fees to cover hedge trimming and other maintenance to support the garden team through the autumn period when the team was short-staffed.

Expected income, largely the funding from Garden rates, is expected to end at £121,000, slightly down from the budget of £125,000. It is helpful that the lower anticipated expenditure should mean there will not be a need to fund that shortfall from reserves.

During the year, the Railings Reserve Fund was renamed the General Reserve Fund. This reflects that whilst these funds may well be used to cover major railings works, there may also be other demands beyond the routine budget to which these funds could be applied. The General Reserve Fund was transferred to higher interest bearing account with our existing bank, Lloyd's. The funds are now held in a 32-day notice account which delivered an interest rate of 2.53%. A higher interest bearing account was available (at 4.05%), but this required 95 days notice, which the Board considered to be excessive.

The 2025-2026 budget is expected to be similar to 2024/2025 with expenditure of £125,000 in line with projected income. Consequently, the Board has recommended holding the garden rates at the same level as 2024/2025. The main difference in the projected costs compared to 2024/25 is that we anticipate the garden team being at full strength in the coming year.

Staffing and recruitment of the gardens team

Jason Saul - Head Gardner

Appointment of Cesar Goncalves as Assistant Gardner

There have been various changes in staffing over the past year. Following the placement of ads, on Indeed, for an Assistant Gardener, Howard Rush (Chair), Amanda Catron and Jason Saul (Head

Gardener) selected eligible candidates from those who applied and carried out interviews, last summer. Candidates had questions posed such as;

- How they worked in a small team and ability to self-motivate, and how they would resolve potential conflicts.
- Planning how work would be undertaken and the consideration of health and safety of themselves, their team and the residents and guests enjoying the gardens.
- Their career backgrounds and what they felt that they would add to the strengths of the team, and various other questions around their horticultural experience.

Of the candidates interviewed, following a second round of interviews, Cesar Goncalves was offered the position and accepted the job. Cesar joined the team in December, following an already planned leave of absence to visit family in Brazil. Cesar brings a wealth of experience and enthusiasm for the job and has already become well liked and thought of, by the residents.

Alfie, remains part of the team, working 2 days a week. His expertise in hedge cutting, is a boon to the team.

As a result of the various staffing changes, the Head Gardener and Board agreed to engage a contractor (Snappy Gardens) for lawn work and cutting the perimeter hedges and those on Arundel Terrace. Whilst the work was satisfactory, with the strengthening of the team, this will not be necessary in the foreseeable future.

A further appointment of another Assistant Gardener is sought in the near future, to bring the team to full strength.

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.

Significant tree works were undertaken in the last year including the removal of a large dead tree and management of other trees and shrubs.

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 further the proposal to change from a key system to an electronic fob system at this time. There were several 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. 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 further, later in 2025.

There have been several requests in the last year, for the provision of keys to outsiders. The Board wishes to assure residents that keys will not be provided to non-residents.

An exception has been made for Michael Bedingfield (former KTE member of the Board) as without the generous donation to the KTE in memory of his partner, the renovations to the Secret Garden would not have been completed.

Garden Rates

Following the increase in the garden rates as agreed in the 2024 AGM, the Board has given consideration as to whether to raise the annual garden rate. It has been decided to hold the garden rates at the same level as 2024/25.

Garden Equipment

A generous donation of a ride on lawn mower has been given by June and Simon Mawby. The team and Board are very thankful for this kind gesture, and this will greatly aid the management of the lawns and meadows, and reduce the time needed to do so.

Commercial Use of the Gardens

It has come to the attention of the Board that the gardens are being used by a children's nursery. Head Gardner Jason Saul has approached the resident involved, to advise that this is not acceptable and constitutes commercial use – our gardens were being used as a resource by the staff of the nursery. Jonathon Rolls as Managing Agents have also written to the nursery to cease using the gardens, for their benefit.

The Board would like to remind residents that the gardens are for the use of the residents who pay their garden rates and their guests, and not as a commercial resource.

Residents are reminded that exceptions may be made for commercial use, such as photoshoots, but that the relevant fees will apply.

Dogs and Dog Registration

Dog registration for 2025 has so far been poor. Of the 48 known eligible dogs previously registered only 27 people have registered this year. The annual cost of the dog waste bins and collections is £1,900 and only £1,080; a significant shortfall, 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 11th February 2025.

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 always keep dogs on a lead, 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.

Rats and Squirrels

There have been several complaints about the ongoing issues with rats and squirrels in the gardens. Squirrels cause a lot of damage to the trees, and it was suggested by Head Gardener – Jason Saul that come the spring, the Board look to try and reduce the numbers by trapping and culling. In addition, traps have been laid by a pest control contractor to capture rats. This is an ongoing situation that is being closely monitored by the Board.

The Board however wish to appeal to the residents and garden users, not to feed the wildlife in the gardens. Whilst the intention is no doubt to feed the squirrels and badgers, this is also exacerbating the rat problem, as they are attracted by the generous buffet.

Graffiti

There have been a number of incidences in the tunnel to the terrace gate, of graffiti in the last few months. Whilst this has of course been removed, this is at a cost. It is also dismaying that this has happened as the perpetrator evidently has a key to access the gardens. Should this issue continue, the Board has considered whether there is a need for CCTV to be installed in the tunnel. This would not only monitor the tunnel for persons defacing it, but also provide additional safety for residents using the tunnel, in darker months. The Board would therefore like to raise the installation of CCTV to the residents to be considered.

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. Jason Saul – Head Gardener will provide an article in each newsletter about the activities of the team and the changes in the horticulture and highlights that the residents can expect to see in the gardens. The newsletter is the best medium for the Board to inform residents of important news, about the gardens.

Health and Safety

Amanda Catron continued working with Jason Saul to manage and 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.

Re-election and joiners of the Board

Whilst Matthew Evans will stand down and offer himself for re-election to the Board at the AGM, the Board is delighted to announce Gildas Ehrman has officially been accepted to join the Board. Gildas has lived on the estate for 4 years and brings his qualifications in biodiversity to strengthen the Board, which are very relevant to the development and management of the gardens in the face of Climate Change.