

KTE – Head Gardeners Report – December

2025

Lawns

Lawns have not needed much cutting in December. They have been trimmed as needed, but growth has slowed due to colder, wetter weather. The team is prioritising high-traffic areas, and this is working well.

Hedges

Progress on hedge cutting is proceeding well. The team has cut nearly all perimeter hedging, leaving only the tops along the southern boundary. There are, however, a few hedge cutting jobs inside the garden, mainly around the Gardeners' Enclosure, and some other jobs around the woodland. The team will aim to complete these by the end of January. The RSPB advises that the main bird nesting season in the UK typically runs from March to September, during which all wild birds, their nests, and eggs are legally protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Disturbing, damaging, or destroying an active nest is an offence. Activities such as hedge cutting and vegetation management should be carefully timed and managed to avoid harming nesting birds. In line with this guidance, hedge cutting occurs only after the team has conducted a thorough survey for nesting birds, regardless of the time of year, to ensure nests are not disturbed, and wildlife is fully protected.

Staff

The head gardener conducted one-to-one meetings with staff. These regular, private discussions focus on employee development, well-being, feedback, and support, rather than on tasks alone. Consistent meetings help build trust and engagement.

Summary from Recent One-to-One Meetings

Staff generally enjoy their roles and feel positive about work. There is an ongoing effort to improve confidence and hedge-cutting quality. Some concerns include attendance, work pace, and timekeeping, which could impact efficiency. Questions about pay and advancement indicate a need for more transparent communication. All issues are being handled through standard management processes; no board action is needed currently.

North Garden

The team has completed most of the hedge cutting in the North Garden. The boundary along Eastern Road has been levelled as far as practicable. In several areas, hedging has encroached significantly inward, making maintenance increasingly challenging. During this process, a birdbath was uncovered, having been entirely engulfed by the overgrown hedge. Similarly, a Lilac (*Syringa vulgaris*) that had become overwhelmed by the advancing hedging was released; unfortunately, the prolonged lack of attention had left the shrub in a rotten state. All decayed material has now been removed, and a prop has been installed to ensure safety.

The team plans to gradually restore hedging to a more manageable position, though this is a substantial undertaking and not an immediate priority. Additionally, the presence of a small compost area within the North Garden limits the amount of green waste that can be processed on-site, which in turn affects the pace of hedge reduction.

Play Area

The slide in the play area has been replaced. Under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, there is a duty to keep all play equipment safe for users. Although no law sets specific inspection intervals, best practice from BS EN 1176 suggests a structured inspection routine. This includes regular visual checks by trained staff, documenting all inspections, promptly reporting faults, and removing any unsafe equipment until repairs are made. In addition to annual detailed safety and compliance inspections, the team will conduct and record weekly inspections to maintain the play area.

Secret Garden

The team has released a *Quercus ilex* (Holm Oak) previously intertwined with *Euonymus* near the Secret Garden. After cutting back the *Euonymus*, it will regrow and be kept at an appropriate height, while the Holm Oak fills out as a specimen tree. Turfgrass installation is planned for spring when conditions improve. The project, taking a couple of seasons but with no cost so far, will simplify maintenance and restore the area's historic look.

Tree Work

The request for tree work was submitted to the council by Connick, who were advised that a response would be provided within six to eight weeks. As the request was lodged around 31 October, the eight-week timeframe concluded on Boxing Day. Connick will notify us upon receipt of any information, and the Head Gardener will follow up with them in the new year if no communication is received.

Compost Area

Updating the compost area will require clearing and constructing bays suitable for composting. Previous reports have highlighted the potential long-term benefits of such improvements. To move forward, we will need to obtain quotations for the proposed works. The Head Gardener will proceed to obtain quotes in the New Year.

January

The team will proceed with the tasks outlined in this report, beginning with pruning herbaceous borders and implementing targeted adjustments to planting schemes. Updates regarding quotations for the compost area improvements and progress on tree work requests will be communicated and reflected in subsequent reports. Weekly inspections of the play area will remain a priority, thereby contributing to the continual enhancement of site safety and overall presentation throughout the season.