# KTE – Head Gardeners Report – November 2025

## Lawns

The changes to the mowing schedule, particularly leaving some areas longer between mows while keeping high traffic areas shorter, appear to be effective. Research consistently shows that maintaining a mosaic of sward lengths (short turf, medium meadow grass and taller tussocky patches) significantly increases biodiversity by providing varied habitats for pollinators, invertebrates, birds and small mammals. This also improves ecological resilience and reduces mowing emissions. In public or shared gardens, mixed-height grassland is well accepted when intentional and well designed, for example, keeping paths and key activity areas neatly mown while allowing other zones to grow longer, using rotational or patch mowing. This approach balances environmental benefits with accessibility, safety and the varied needs of different users, making it a practical, evidence-based strategy for enhancing both biodiversity and visitor experience in larger, busy gardens.

Early November 2025 saw unusually warm nights across the UK, with many new minimum temperature records set. This followed a mild October, driven by warm southern air and cloudy skies that trapped heat overnight. Since grass starts growing when soil temperatures reach 5–6°C and thrives between 15–24°C, lawns are still growing well as December approaches. These climate changes make it even more critical to manage the lawns to reduce emissions and increase carbon storage.

# Hedges

Hedge cutting operations are ongoing at this time of year, reflecting the extensive number of hedges within Kemptown Enclosures. The perimeter hedges in the northeast section of the main garden have been trimmed, with additional reductions undertaken where certain hedges were encroaching upon a *Quercus ilex*. This intervention will also provide greater exposure for a large *Syringa vulgaris* (Lilac), enabling renovation work to commence next year. At present, the lilac's blooms are largely inaccessible at height; improved access will facilitate enjoyment of its fragrance in future seasons.

The hedge along Arundel Terrace has also been cut. During this process, a minor height inconsistency was noted due to an oversight by a team member. This was rectified, with guidance provided by the Head Gardener to support ongoing skill development within the team. Rather than reducing the entire hedge, it was decided to level only the affected section this season, while accounting for operational efficiency and composting capacity. Notably, a resident expressed appreciation for the lower section, as it enhanced their view. The team will reassess and address the uniformity of the hedge next year to ensure a consistent appearance.

Hedge-cutting equipment has required considerable maintenance this season, with two machines experiencing recurring issues that have caused some delays in progress. At present, all cutters have been repaired and are fully operational, enabling the team to proceed with their scheduled work more efficiently.

Two major hedge cutting tasks remain this season: the perimeter hedge adjacent to the coast road and the tops of the North garden. These works are scheduled to commence in December.

# Play Area

The recent decommissioning of the play area's climbing frame presents an opportunity to rethink this space. Research suggests that nature-based play environments, using elements such as logs, willow tunnels (see Figure 1), and varied vegetation, can foster richer, more imaginative, and more flexible play than traditional equipment alone, while also supporting children's development and well-being. Although natural features may require regular inspection and maintenance, they tend to be low-cost and blend seamlessly into garden settings. For long-term value, a mix of natural and manufactured play elements could balance safety, cost and play benefits, and may be a practical approach for future renovation.

*Figure 1 A Willow Tunnel*

# Chichester Terrace

Progress continues at Chichester Terrace, where the team will undertake a comprehensive pass along the entire length to restore the area to a manageable condition. The distribution of recent informational materials appears to have alleviated concerns. One resident expressed appreciation for the literature and subsequently sought further clarification, despite the guidance provided in the communication and the request not to approach team members directly. Looking ahead, the team remains committed to achieving the best possible outcomes with the resources available.

# Squirrel Feeding

The Head Gardener engaged in a detailed discussion with the individual who regularly feeds the garden squirrels. During the conversation, it was explained that feeding squirrels can inadvertently attract other wildlife, potentially harming the garden's ecosystem. Notably, while the discussion was underway, squirrels were observed on site, followed shortly by magpies, which then took food directly from the squirrels. This provided an opportunity to illustrate how supplementary feeding encourages the presence of species such as magpies, which prey on the eggs and young of smaller birds, thereby posing a threat to local biodiversity. The exchange was thorough, and the individual demonstrated an understanding of these concerns. While it remains uncertain whether this practice will cease, it is hoped that the individual is now more aware of the potential ecological consequences associated with wildlife feeding in the garden.

# Apprenticeship

During November, the team was visited by Andrew Harwood, an apprenticeship tutor from the YMCA overseeing Cesar's apprenticeship. Cesar is nearing completion of his apprenticeship, with only a limited amount of work remaining. This includes some online learning modules and the acquisition of specific practical skills.

Additionally, Cesar is required to obtain the Level 2 Award in the Safe Use of Pesticides (PA1), the Safe Application of Pesticides Using Hand Held Equipment (PA6), and a Level 3 First Aid qualification. The attainment of the first aid qualification is particularly beneficial for Kemptown Enclosures, as there is currently no recently accredited first aider present on-site.

Upon completion of all coursework and the necessary qualifications, Cesar will participate in an assessment day held in the garden, during which he will be required to demonstrate

proficiency in designated tasks. The Head Gardener will facilitate this assessment and will ensure that the board is kept informed of Cesar's progress.

# Fungi

November brings a fascinating variety of fungi to the gardens, and one standout discovery is the candlesnuff fungus, also called *Xylaria hypoxylon* or Stag's Horn (see Figure 2). This fungus is easy to spot thanks to its upright, forked shape, which sometimes resembles an antler, earning it its nickname. It has black, hairy stems topped with a powdery white tip, often grouped on old stumps or rotting branches from many types of trees.

*Xylaria hypoxylon* is a bioluminescent fungus, and in a dark place, it can be seen to emit light continually as phosphorus accumulated within the mycelium reacts with oxygen and other chemicals in the fungus.

Fungi represent a distinct kingdom of organisms. Unlike plants, fungi do not derive energy from sunlight; instead, they decompose and absorb nutrients from organic matter in their environment. Typically, only the fruiting bodies, mushrooms visible above ground, are observed, while beneath the surface, extensive networks of hyphae permeate soil and wood, facilitating decomposition. These fruiting bodies disperse spores to enable reproduction, though fungi can also propagate through fragmentation.

The candlesnuff fungus is commonly found on decaying wood, a habitat that plays a vital yet often overlooked role in supporting wildlife. While certain garden maintenance practices may favour removing dead trees and fallen branches, retaining this material fosters conditions suitable for fungal growth. This, in turn, sustains diverse communities of birds, insects, and other species that depend on these microhabitats.

*Figure 2 Xylaria hypoxylon at Kemptown Enclosures*

# December

The team will continue hedge-cutting operations to complete all necessary works by the end of January. The process of cutting back perennials will also commence. In addition, planning for adjustments to planting schemes and weed control strategies is scheduled to begin in December, alongside the execution of all other seasonal tasks appropriate to this period.