

Garden Report – January 2026

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During January 2026, the Kemp Town Enclosures team prioritised the maintenance and improvement of the garden’s horticultural and ecological integrity. Significant undertakings included winter cutback of herbaceous perennials, targeted rose pruning, and timely hedge cutting, in accordance with environmental legislation, ahead of the bird nesting season. Targeted management of Elder (*Sambucus nigra*) was implemented to support plant health, facilitate site access, and enhance wildlife habitats. Lawn areas remained dormant; however, sections experiencing high footfall became muddy as a result of exceptional rainfall during the reporting period.

INTRODUCTION

This monthly garden report has been restructured to support transparency and engagement, as it is now also published on the organisation’s website. The revised format reflects best practice in public-facing horticultural and environmental reporting, clearly distinguishing between operational horticultural activity and internal organisational matters. This approach ensures the report remains informative and accessible to a wider audience while continuing to meet the Board's governance and strategic needs.

1. HORTICULTURAL PRACTICE AND OUTCOMES

The first section focuses on horticultural activities in the garden during the reporting period. It outlines key tasks undertaken, the horticultural and ecological rationale behind them, and the resulting benefits for plant health, biodiversity, sustainability and visual quality. This section demonstrates how professional horticultural practice underpins the site's long-term resilience, ecological value, and presentation, and is suitable for publication on the website.

1.1. Lawns

Lawns have needed no maintenance this month. Certain areas with high footfall have become muddy. This is due to January 2026 in Brighton being notably wet, with over 79mm of rain recorded by the end of the month, already exceeding the long-term average for some parts of the Southeast. Persistent rainfall, including heavy downpours during Storm Chandra and a yellow weather warning on 26–27 January, has led to saturated soils and above-average groundwater levels for the time of year.

1.2. Hedges

Hedge cutting has been completed in a timely manner ahead of the main bird nesting season (March to August), in line with the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which prohibits disturbing active nests. Just a few outstanding areas need attention due to access issues from the roadside.

1.3. Herbaceous Perennial Cutback

Cutting back herbaceous perennials during the winter or dormant season is a standard practice that aligns with their natural growth cycle and supports garden sustainability. Perennials die back to conserve energy and protect the crown from winter stress, allowing resources to be stored below ground for vigorous regrowth in spring. Intentionally leaving selected seedheads and standing stems over winter supports biodiversity. These structures provide food for seed-eating birds and create habitat and overwintering shelter for beneficial insects, such as pollinators and predatory invertebrates, thereby sustaining ecological functions through the colder months. Moreover, well-established perennial plantings contribute to weed management by occupying soil space and light early in the growing season, reducing opportunities for unwanted species to establish. Research has shown that dense perennial groundcovers can significantly suppress weed biomass over time through competitive exclusion.

1.4. Rose Pruning

The team has initiated the annual rose pruning programme, implementing tailored pruning techniques appropriate to each rose group to maximise plant health and flowering potential for the coming season. Roses are categorised into distinct groups: Hybrid Tea, Floribunda, shrub and bush, and climbing or rambling types, each requiring specific pruning approaches based on growth habit and flowering behaviour.

Pruning is undertaken in late winter or early spring during the dormant period. Hybrid Tea roses are pruned hard to approximately 10 cm, and Floribunda roses to about 30 cm above ground level, encouraging strong new growth and prolific flowering on new wood. Shrub roses receive light renewal pruning to maintain structure and remove old or diseased stems, while climbing and rambling roses are pruned selectively according to their flowering patterns, with ramblers typically pruned after flowering to safeguard next season's buds. These methods enhance air circulation, reduce disease risk, and channel the plant's energy toward productive shoots and high-quality blooms.

Notably, the rose beds remained free from bindweed throughout the 2025/2026 season, reflecting the effectiveness of the revised maintenance regime introduced by the team.

1.5. Elder Pruning

Elder (*Sambucus nigra*) pruning has been undertaken, particularly near the statue (Figure 1). A native UK shrub, it is common along woodland edges and hedgerows. Recognised for its fragrant spring flowers and autumn berries, it supports pollinators, birds, small mammals, and various

moth larvae. As a pioneer species, Elder increases habitat diversity by colonising disturbed areas.

During the Regency period, Elder was seldom used in formal gardens, but was cultivated along garden boundaries for utilitarian purposes, including the preparation of cordials, jams, wines, and medicinal remedies. In Britain, Elder was occasionally planted near privies, with one notable practical application being its ability to mask unpleasant odours. The plant's strongly scented flowers and rapid growth earned it the reputation as a "utility shrub" in areas designated for waste or service functions. Similar to other herbs and shrubs such as rosemary, rue, and sweet woodruff, Elder was valued for its odour-masking and insect-repellent qualities.

Today, winter pruning controls its vigorous growth, maintains access, and enhances its value to wildlife by encouraging flowering and fruiting. This approach respects both its heritage and ecological roles.

Culturally, Elder's flowers and berries remain popular in Britain and Europe for culinary and medicinal uses, with modern research highlighting antioxidant benefits. Its tendency to spread rapidly requires regular winter pruning to prevent overgrowth and preserve the garden's structure, ensuring continued ecological support without sacrificing accessibility.

While pruning the Elder (*Sambucus nigra*) has improved access in the area, consideration should be given to replacing it, perhaps with Oak-leaved hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*), to enhance the space over the long term. Oak-leaved Hydrangea is a deciduous shrub notable for its distinctive, oak-shaped foliage, which develops vibrant red and bronze hues in autumn. The plant produces prominent, cone-shaped white flower panicles that are attractive to pollinators, and its persistent seedheads offer both food and shelter for wildlife. Introducing this species would not only support biodiversity but also provide sustained visual interest throughout the year. Historically, gardens like Kempton typically planted ornamental rather than utility shrubs.



Figure 1 Pruned Elder (*Sambucus nigra*)