

**The Royal Horticultural Society
Minutes of the 213th Annual General Meeting – 12 July 2017**

**Minutes of the 213th Annual General Meeting
of the Royal Horticultural Society**

**held at 2pm on Wednesday 12 July 2017
RHS Garden Rosemoor**

Members of Council present:

Sir Nicholas Bacon (President)

Mr Sandy Muirhead (Treasurer)

Mr James Alexander-Sinclair

Mrs Lorna Parker (Chairman of the
Nominations, Appointments and
Governance Committee)

Mr Dennis Espley

Prof Peter Gregory

Mr Mark Porter

Mr Matthew Lindsey-Clark

Dr David Rae

Mr Neil Lucas

Mr Jon Wheatley

Dame Mary Keegan

Also present:

Ms Sue Biggs (Director General)

Mr Matt Rooke (Director of Technology and
Editorial)

Mrs Ruth Evans (Director of Education,
Fundraising & Communities)

Ms Lucy Semmens (Director of People)

Dr Alistair Griffiths (Director of Science)

Dr Tim Upson (Director of Horticulture)

Ms Hayley Monckton (Director of
Communications)

Mr Tom Shelston (Director of Members &
Marketing)

Mrs Jan Nix (Director of Risk and
Governance)

Ms Moira Malcolm (Company Secretary,
Minutes)

Mr Mark Norman (Director of Finance)

A total of 93 members were present.

Welcome

The President welcomed members to the 213th Annual General Meeting of the Royal Horticultural Society.

The President noted that the quorum for the AGM was 100 members. As 93 members were present the beginning of the formal AGM would be adjourned for 30 minutes and preceded by reports from the President, Treasurer, and Director General. The AGM may then, under the RHS Bye-Laws, be reconvened with the quorum being the number of members present.

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The President gave apologies for absence from the following members of the Society:

Presidents Emeritus

Elizabeth Banks, Richard Carew Pole, Giles Coode-Adams and Robin Herbert

Vice Presidents

Michael Balston, Lawrence Banks, Chris Brickell, Count Andre de Kerchove de Denterghem, Vicomte Philippe de Spoelberch, Raymond Evison, Jim Gardiner, The Rt Hon the Lord Heseltine, Brian Huntley, Roy Lancaster, Jekka McVicar, Henry Oakley, Jane Pepper, John Ravenscroft, John Sales, Kiat Tan, Alan Titchmarsh, Harold Tukey and Richard Webb

Council Members

Chris Blundell, Mick Crawley, Mark Fane, Sarah Raven and Xa Tollemache

Members

Alison Brimelow, A J Brebner, J Plews and Mary Shirville (VMH)

1. President's Report

- 1.1 The President reminded the meeting of the generous donation of Rosemoor to the RHS by Lady Anne Palmer in 1988. Lady Anne and her husband Eric now live in New Zealand but remain supporters of the RHS.
- 1.2 The President went on to provide a synopsis of the main achievements of the RHS in the preceding twelve months, commenting that this was his fourth year as President, and that there had been many highlights.
- 1.3 In 2016 the Chelsea Flower Show celebrated Her Majesty the Queen's 90th birthday and her 62nd visit to the Show.
- 1.4 Plans to open RHS Garden Bridgewater had progressed and were being supported by Carol Klein as the Ambassador for RHS Bridgewater and by Baroness Floella Benjamin as an RHS Ambassador for community horticulture.
- 1.5 The power of community horticulture to address violence and isolation is of increasing importance. The RHS's work with residents of the Angell Town Estate in Brixton, officially opened by the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, demonstrated the positive effect that horticulture has on communities.
- 1.6 The President thanked Sue Biggs, the Director General, for her contribution to the RHS and horticulture. A contribution that was recognised by her appointment to C.B.E. in the Queen's New Year's honours. The Director General has provided a unifying voice for the horticulture industry, working closely with colleagues from the across the sector on the Ornamental Horticulture Roundtable Group.
- 1.7 It was a strong year for the RHS across a range of areas: 2 million visitors were welcomed to RHS Gardens; 600,000 school students engaged with horticultural science through the Rocket Science project; online retails sales exceeded £2m for the year; and the Society's membership had reached a record 478,000 (as at 31 January 2017) and continued to rise (to more than 485,000 as at 12 July 2017).
- 1.8 Sir Nicholas recorded his thanks to the RHS Council, Committees, and staff for their contribution to the Society.

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- 1.9 The President concluded by thanking the Members for their continuing support for the work of the RHS.

2. Treasurer's Report

- 2.1 The Treasurer presented a summary of the RHS Annual Report and Consolidated Financial Statements 2016/17 – which would be put before Members for formal approval during the AGM – and was pleased to report a financially success year.
- 2.2 The Society achieved a £6.1m surplus before gains on investments.
- 2.3 The Society's income increased by 7.8% to £82.5m. This was supported by increases in the income derived from shows, gardens, donations, legacies, trading and sponsorship.
- 2.4 Expenditure increased by 7.4% to £76.4m as the Strategic Investment Programme (SIP) progressed. Expenditure on RHS Gardens increased by £2.9m to £22.1m, reflecting increased investment in the four RHS Gardens and the impact of increased salaries for horticultural staff as part of the Horticulture Matters initiative. Membership and Marketing spending also increased during the period to support the Society's growing membership base. The Treasurer noted that investment in the Society's Science and Collections would also continue.
- 2.5 The Society's investment strategy continued to prioritise stable growth and low risk. Investment performance was strong during the year and exceeded targets.
- 2.6 The year was also successful in non-financial measures. Increases were seen in the membership, the number of garden and show visitors, and in social media interaction.
- 2.7 The Treasurer noted that the level of reserves shown on the balance sheet were very healthy and that they would be utilised to fund the SIP. Project risks and maintenance of the Society's 'business as usual' activities would continue to be closely monitored.
- 2.8 The Treasurer concluded by stating that, with another successful year behind us, the RHS looks forward to the rest of the year and beyond.

3. Director General's Report

- 3.1 The Director General reminded the meeting of the RHS Vision: 'To enrich everyone's life through plants, and make the UK a greener and more beautiful place'.
- 3.2 The report looked to the future and presented some important highlights of 2017 so far, including: the continued growth in membership, with increasing diversity, to over 485,000; 33,471 schools and groups signing up to the Campaign for School Gardening and engaging in horticulture; the launch of the RHS Climate Change Report on 26 April; the industry's collaboration through the Ornamental Horticulture Roundtable Group; and 30 years of RHS Plant Finder, a resource for the entire industry. The first Chatsworth Flower Show took place in early June and saw excellent exhibits in a wonderful setting however, poor weather contributed to problems with parking and access. These areas will be much improved for the next show. And finally, at Rosemoor the new Garden Room and Shepherds Hut had been officially opened.

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- 3.3 The RHS SIP continued to develop and will take us closer to realising our vision. The Director General noted that the SIP, and realisation of the vision, would not be possible without the support the Society's members.
- 3.4 Several projects had progressed significantly since the 2016 AGM. The Lindley Library Key Investment Project (KIP) was now complete. Investment in the Horticulture Matters KIP, including raising the salaries of horticultural staff, had also begun and all future funds for the project were allocated.
- 3.5 The Wisley KIP continues to develop. The Barn building had been completed and Library relocated to Gardiners' House, improving facilities and making way for the new Welcome building. It was also noted that the Science and Learning building, to be built on the hilltop site, will be the only National Centre for Horticultural Science and Learning in the UK and a vital modern facility.
- 3.6 At Hyde Hall there had also been significant changes. The new Welcome Building was recently completed; the Witan Global Growth Garden, designed by RHS Council member Xa Tollemache, would be opened tomorrow, 12 July 2017; and the hilltop buildings of a new restaurant, activity and events building and Learning Centre are now under construction.
- 3.7 Work at Harlow Carr would focus on delivery of Nigel Dunnett's masterplan for the garden and the conversion of the Harrogate Arms and Bathhouse.
- 3.8 In addition, plans for the fifth garden at Bridgewater were well underway. Tom Stuart-Smith had created an inspiring masterplan utilising the remnants of the Victorian estate and walled garden. A large amount of work remained to be done but initial clearances of the site had taken place to prepare for the next phase of development.
- 3.9 The Community Outreach and Urban Gardens KIP aimed to bring gardening into more people's lives by transforming shared spaces. The Greening Grey Britain campaign continued to draw attention to the loss of horticulture in urban and sub-urban environments and emphasised the importance of reintroducing plants to front gardens and streets in order to reduce pollution and improve conditions for pollinators and people.
- 3.10 The Director General concluded by thanking our Patron, Her Majesty the Queen, and all of the Fellows, members, and volunteers who support the work of the RHS.
- 3.11 The meeting was then shown the RHS *Grow* video, encouraging everyone to take part in horticulture.

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4. Annual General Meeting 2017

4.1 The necessary 30 minutes having passed, The President opened the Annual General Meeting.

4a. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 2016

4a.1 The meeting voted, by show of hands, to **APPROVE** the minutes of the AGM held on 27 June 2016, which would be signed as an accurate record of proceedings by the President.

4b. Annual Report & Consolidated Financial Statements 2016/17

4b.1 The Treasurer proposed, and Matthew Lindsey-Clark seconded, that the meeting should approve the RHS Annual Report and Consolidated Financial Statements 2016/17.

4b.2 Members were provided with an opportunity to ask questions of the Treasurer, though no questions were raised.

4b.3 The meeting then voted, by show of hands, to **APPROVE** said Report and Statements.

4c. Election of President and Treasurer

4c.1 There being no other candidates standing for the position, the Chairman of the Nominations, Appointments and Governance Committee declared Sir Nicholas Bacon elected unopposed as President for 2017/18. Sir Nicholas was appointed to Council in 2008 and became President in 2013.

4c.2 There being no other candidates standing for the position, the Chairman of the Nominations, Appointments and Governance Committee declared Sandy Muirhead elected unopposed as Treasurer for 2017/18. Sandy was appointed to Council in 2007 and became Treasurer in 2013.

4c.3 The Chairman of the Nominations, Appointments and Governance Committee thanked Sir Nicholas Bacon and Sandy Muirhead for their ongoing contribution to the RHS.

4d. Election of Ordinary Members to Council

4d.1 The President noted that every year, as part of the democratic running of the Society, at least three Ordinary Members of Council retire and the resulting vacancies are filled by election at the AGM.

4d.2 At the end of this meeting Neil Lucas, Mark Porter, and Jon Wheatley, all of whom were elected at the 2012 AGM, were scheduled to retire. All three were entitled to stand for re-election for a second term of office and had chosen to do so. A brief biography of all three candidates appeared in the Notice of the AGM.

4d.3 As there were three candidates for three available places, the election was uncontested. Accordingly, the President declared Neil Lucas, Mark Porter, and Jon Wheatley duly elected as Members of Council until the end of the 2022 AGM.

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4e. Co-option of Ordinary Members to Council

4e.1 As set out in the RHS Charter, Council has the power to co-opt any Member of the Society who has been a Member for at least three years to serve on Council. Any co-opted member shall retire at the AGM following their co-option.

4e.2 Council has agreed to appoint Kate Lampard as co-opted member of Council until the end of the 2018 AGM.

4e.3 The full list of Council Members for 2017/18 is:

- Nicholas Bacon (President)
- Sandy Muirhead (Treasurer)
- James Alexander-Sinclair
- Christopher Blundell
- Mick Crawley
- Dennis Espley
- Mark Fane
- Peter Gregory
- Mary Keegan
- Kate Lampard
- Matthew Lindsey-Clark
- Neil Lucas
- Lorna Parker
- Mark Porter
- David Rae
- Sarah Raven
- Xa Tollemache
- Jon Wheatley

4f. Appointment of Auditors

4f.1 The meeting **AGREED**, on the invitation of the Treasurer, to re-appoint Grant Thornton UK LLP as the Society's auditors for 2017/18.

4g. Appointment of Vice Presidents

4g.1 It was with sadness that the President informed the meeting of the deaths of three Vice Presidents during the year: Carolyn Hardy OBE, VMH; the Dowager Marchioness of Salisbury VMH; and Martin Slocock VMH.

4g.2 The President announced the appointment of Tom Stuart-Smith and Prunella Scarlett as Vice Presidents of the Society for the year to the end of the 2018 AGM. It was also noted that Council had appointed Jim Gardiner to the office of Vice President in late 2016 following his retirement from the role of Executive Vice-President.

4g.3 The President presented Tom and Prunella with their Vice President badges, and congratulated them on their appointment.

4g.4 The President also reported that Council had re-appointed the following as Vice Presidents for 2017/18:

- Michael Balston
- Lawrence Banks CBE, VMH, DL
- Christopher Brickell CBE, VMH
- The Count de Kerchove de Denterghem
- Raymond Evison OBE, VMH
- Roy Lancaster CBE, VMH
- Dr Henry Oakeley VMH
- Jane Pepper
- John Ravenscroft VMH
- John Sales VMH
- Vicomte Philippe de Spoelberch

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- The Rt Hon the Lord Heseltine CH,
PC
- Robert Hillier OBE, VMH
- Professor Brian Huntley
- Dr Kiat Tan
- Alan Titchmarsh MBE, VMH, DL
- Professor Harold Tukey
- Richard Webb VMH

4h. Close of the AGM

- 4h.1 The President drew the formal proceedings of the AGM to a close. Questions from the Society's members would follow.

4i. Members' questions

4i.1 Members attending the meeting asked the following questions, some of which had been tabled in advance of the AGM:

4i.2 I read with dismay two articles in the Daily Telegraph in the week following the 2016 RHS AGM learning that RHS managers had defrauded the charity of £700k. In the light of this revelation I was surprised that financial control had not been considered as an issue at the AGM only days earlier. I wonder if it has been possible to recover any of the money? I note on the Agenda, the proposal to re appoint Grant Thornton as auditors. As Grant Thornton were the auditors when the fraud was perpetuated and undiscovered how can members have confidence in Grant Thornton as auditors? *Tony Rogers, Basildon*

Jan Nix, Director of Risk and Governance responded that the fraud had been uncovered in 2013 and had taken the intervening 3 year period to reach Court due to the workload of the Police and Courts. The case came to Court on 11 July 2016, with the guilty verdicts being returned on 9th September 2016 (The AGM was on 27th June 2016); the RHS was not able to report on this matter until the conclusion of the case.

The individual abused his management position within the RHS to carry out a systematic, sophisticated and calculated fraud over a number of years for relatively small monthly amounts. Since detection of the fraud we have implemented even more robust measures and controls to better protect the Society. We have increased our Internal Audit team to four members of staff so as to conduct in depth audits across all areas of our work and have a robust and effective 'whistle blowing' policy.

The vast majority of the funds lost have been covered by insurance and there has, in addition, been some reimbursement through the Courts. The fraud could not have been detected by either the current external auditors or their predecessors due to the sophisticated and systematic operation used by the Manager.

4i.3 I have spoken to a number of members who have visited RHS shows at Westminster and are unhappy about the charge of £5 for admission when two halls are in use. Is this charge really necessary? *Tony Rogers, Basildon*

Sue Biggs, Director General answered that unfortunately, the change was necessary in order for our London Shows to help us deliver our charitable work and reflect our commitment to grow the next generation of gardeners. These shows cost the RHS £400,000 per annum to operate and benefit less than 2% of our members. All funds from the tickets go towards our charitable work.

The ticket prices (£5 for members and £6 for non-members) are extremely reasonable for events in London, and in the last 25 years we have introduced four new shows, all with discounted tickets for RHS members, and three with exclusive members-only days. We are aware that not everyone appreciates this decision but there are no plans to review it.

4i.4 At the beginning of January my husband's subscription renewal was taken from his account. Then in the February edition of *The Garden* magazine it was announced that members would have to pay to visit "two hall shows" in London. Is this fair when no notice was given prior to renewal and free entry to London Shows was always part of membership benefits? *Mrs B Turner, Essex*

Tom Shelston, Director of Membership and Marketing, added to the preceding response by the Director General (4i.3), noting that the month that a membership will be renewed is based upon the month when it was originally initiated and in this instance, unfortunately this did not coincide with the announcement of the new policy to charge for the London Shows. We made this decision in order to help us to deliver our charitable work and reflect our commitment to grow the next generation of gardeners.

- 4i.5 Why was the decision taken to enforce entrance charges to certain London Shows without prior consultation of the members? This is particularly relevant for long standing Life members, and where a substantial sum has been paid in good faith, to allow admission. *Dr D Hardy, Epsom*

Sue Biggs, Director General stated that the RHS had carefully considered the impact on our members of removing free access to the London Shows and, in part due to the limited number of members attending, made the difficult decision to charge for entry to the shows. This change was clearly communicated through The Garden magazine and other RHS channels. We accept that the removal of this benefit for life members would have a greater value than for annual members but made this decision to help us deliver our charitable work.

- 4i.6 As an exhibitor at the October fruit & vegetable competition at Westminster and a member of the Essex Guild of Horticultural judges, I was surprised and dismayed at the poor standard of judging on some vegetable classes. Some exhibits of cabbages were devoid of outside leaves and had no stalk yet they were awarded a first prize. I did mention this to the judges concerned on the day and was told the exhibits were put in by children from a local school. Whilst I heartily support encouraging youngsters to exhibit in competitions, lowering the bar to this threshold is insulting to the children's efforts. The exhibits should either have been classified NAS not as schedule or classed as a third. Can you assure members that the RHS will uphold the highest standards of excellence for which it is known? *Tony Rogers, Basildon*

Sue Biggs, Director General confirmed that, while the decision had been made by two very experienced judges, they had made the wrong decision on this occasion. They had made this decision out of kindness, but should have upheld the normal high standards.

- 4i.7 When renewing my membership this year, at RHS Wisley, I was appalled to find that my card payment details were written down on a pre-printed form. When I questioned this and asked whether the RHS was PCI compliant I received no concrete reply, nor did my subsequent email directly to Wisley receive a response. With the millions being invested into RHS gardens, such as Wisley, the protection of Members payment details - data protection - should be foremost in the minds of planners. Can you please advise if the RHS intend to become compliant in the near future as I, along with many members I am sure, are keen to protect their privacy and avoid opportunities for fraud. *Ms Jeanette Plews*

Matt Rooke, Director of Technical and Editorial thanked Ms Plews for raising this question and apologised for not providing a timely response when it was raised previously. The process outlined is currently compliant with the rules of the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standards (PCI DSS for short). To be compliant in writing down credit card details on a form, you must have a clear policy regarding the processing of the forms and the process must be audited. I can confirm that we have

a clear process which involves secure storage and transfer of the details and this is audited regularly.

We have a project underway to continually improve PCI compliance across the whole of the Society and since your question was raised, changes have already been implemented at our Gardens. Now, when processing member applications involving a credit card a Chip and PIN machine is used to take the payment ensuring that no card details are written on the application form.

- 4i.8 My concern is about the use of the RHS initials and logo for commercial purposes. I was brought up to think of the RHS as a "learned" society. I now find the RHS logo on the outside of various commercial products. Does this mean that the RHS has tested the product and found it particularly beneficial; believes that the product or service is useful or has endorsed the product because it has received a Royalty?

One evening last Winter I logged onto "RHS Plants" and was presented with the Crocus Catalogue. Surely the RHS should be advising Members where to buy plants and supplies rather than acting as an Agent for one particular Company.
James Bateman

Sue Biggs, Director General, responded that the RHS licensing programme, which has operated for over a quarter of a century, generates substantial income for the Charity every year. This year (2017) the programme won an award for 'Best Licensed Heritage or Institution Brand'. This was awarded because of the quality and relevance of the licensed or endorsed products and the credibility of the organisation.

All licensed or endorsed products are approved by the RHS Licensing team in a 3 stage process - at conception, at pre-production and finally at the production stage. In many instances, especially with gardening products, they have been tested by RHS gardeners and advisors.

Crocus is the supplier of our online plant sales. They are selected via a regular tendering process to deliver logistical services and a great range of quality plants. We also promote many other nurseries across the UK where people can purchase plants through our Plant Finder book and online service and through our Flower Shows across the country. Of course, should there be any issue with the quality of an item purchased from the RHS it can be referred directly to us for the problem to be resolved.

- 4i.9 It is well established that car travel is a major cause of pollution which is bad for the environment. Of particular concern is Wisley which has over a million visitors a year. Just over 20 miles from Central London, it lies adjacent to the A3. There are laybys at Wisley on both sides of the road for coaches.

There is a step free footbridge over the A3 to give access to Wisley. National Express run a coach every 2 hours from London Victoria passing the Wisley laybys. What are the RHS doing to get these coaches to stop at these laybys to enable visitors to travel easily by public transport to Wisley? From experience I know that the local bus service is erratic and unreliable. It does not provide an attractive alternative to the proposed coach service.

Dr Roger Dixon

Dr D Hardy, Epsom had also asked about public transport to and from RHS Gardens.

Sue Biggs confirmed that she agreed with the point made and noted that work was underway for a green travel plan at Wisley and efforts were also being made to grow

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group travel and to explore options for coach travel from Victoria Coach Station in London. Unfortunately, such options were often not commercially viable for the operators.

- 4i.10 Were the rose gloves previously offered in collaboration with Town and Country no longer available, and if so, would they be brought back? *Dr Roger Dixon*

It was noted that these gloves were unlikely to be produced again but that high quality alternatives were available.

- 4i.11 Is there any way that staff at Wisley can reserve disabled seating within the restaurant for disabled customers? *June Ellis, Weybridge*

Sue Biggs noted her concern to hear that this was a problem and agreed to look into the matter in order to identify whether improvements could be made. She also noted that Wisley worked closely with Disability Surrey to endeavour to provide the best facilities for disabled visitors.

- 4i.12 What is the RHS doing to bring the standard of catering at Wisley up to the standard now in place at Rosemoor? *RHS Member*

Sue Biggs confirmed that the catering at Rosemoor was excellent and thanked the team for their efforts. Catering at Wisley will be supported by KIP-related investments and the RHS and the catering provider continue to work together to bring improvements.

- 4i.13 Is the RHS concerned that horticulture is not treated as academically significant in schools, and if so, what action are you taking? *Cherry Hammon, Torrington*

The Director General confirmed that the RHS was indeed concerned about horticulture and horticultural science in schools. The Director of Science and the Director of Education, Fundraising and Communities continue to work hard to improve the subject's prominence. The Ornamental Horticulture Roundtable Group, chaired by the Director General, is also addressing the issue within government.

- 4i.14 Why does the Plant Finder tool not list local specialist suppliers? *Jane McPhee, Devon*

Alistair Griffiths, Director of Science and Collections noted that his team work extremely hard to ensure as many nurseries as possible are included (currently 76,000) by writing to them and engaging with connections and contacts via the Plant Committee network. The challenge was to encourage proactive submissions from nurseries. Any suggestions to improve this tool, including submission of the details of specialist nurseries, would be gratefully received.

- 4i.15 The RHS had previously mentioned a plan to improve shaded parking at Rosemoor, yet it has now been eradicated. Are you still planning to improve this? *RHS Member*

Steven Bowyer, Head of Site for RHS Garden Rosemoor, confirmed that work was underway to address this issue, with significant planting and additional shelters planned for the autumn.

4i.16 There were no further questions and the President drew the session to a close.

The following questions were submitted in advance of the AGM but as the Members were not in attendance their questions and the corresponding answers were not handled at the meeting but are set out below:

The unsafe access to Wisley was raised at the 2016 AGM. Has any progress been made in planning to make this safer as more visitors are likely to come and enjoy the new facilities? *Dr D Hardy, Epsom*

Sue Biggs stated that, as per our response to the question at the 2016 AGM, unfortunately the RHS was not able to change the layout of the A3.

There were, however, plans to improve access for visitors under the KIPs programme:

- a. A green travel plan aims to introduce a new bus route and improve infrastructure for cycling and walking to Wisley;
- b. Work had been carried out to facilitate improved car parking capacity and layout;
- c. Extending opening hours would spread the number of visitors more evenly.

Is the Council satisfied that its approach to running the AGM is in line with best practice in charities with a large membership, and if so how is that measured?

Alison Brimelow, Edinburgh

Lorna Parker, Chairman of the Nominations, Appointments and Governance Committee stated that the RHS continually works to evaluate our governance and ensure good governance of the charity and its trading subsidiaries.

We are currently undertaking a benchmarking exercise against the proposed new Code of Good Governance (“the charity governance code”), and are confident that while there is always room to learn and grow, that we are well positioned.

We also note the practices of other large Membership organisations, and, for example, use a comparable process for adopting the Accounts and appointing the Auditors. We also follow a similar format in terms of reports presented to the meeting.

Given that voting is by show of hands present, how can members who cannot attend indicate their support for or opposition to the appointment of the auditors?

Alison Brimelow, Edinburgh

Lorna Parker, Chairman of the Nominations, Appointments and Governance Committee set out that the Society Bye-laws provide that a firm of chartered accountants shall be appointed at each AGM to act as the Society’s auditors for the following financial year (15.1). Following a process of due diligence, the Audit and Risk Committee recommend the appointment of auditors to Council who, if satisfied, recommend the appointment to the AGM. We have great confidence in the process followed by the Audit and Risk Committee, which is chaired by Dame Mary Keegan,

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former Managing Director for Government Financial Management, HMG Treasury Department Finance Director and Head of the Government Finance Profession.

As there is no other nomination for the position, voting has traditionally been by show of hands at the AGM. Those present at the meeting who wish to oppose the appointment can rely on the provision in the Bye-laws which provides that prior to a vote by a show of hands, or before the result is declared, the Chairman or 20 members present may request that a poll be taken. The Secretary shall then arrange for a poll to be taken immediately, at a reconvened time or by postal vote (Bye-law 12.7).

Those not able to attend the meeting will be aware of the proposal to appoint the Auditors (as it is set out in the Notice of the AGM, circulated to all members) and can rely on the same provision by raising a concern with the Secretary or Chairman in advance of the meeting.

When was the last time elections to Council were contested?

Alison Brimelow, Edinburgh

Lorna Parker, Chairman of the Nominations, Appointments and Governance Committee stated that the last time RHS Council elections were contested was 2011, when one of the Council members standing for re-election today, Mark Porter, put himself forward for election.

The RHS takes all governance, including the process of appointments to Council, Boards and Committees, very seriously and invests significant time in ensuring that the processes are as open and transparent as possible. Our Nominations, Appointments and Governance Committee (which we affectionately shorten to 'NAG') oversees all appointments, including those to Council.

We start the process for Council elections by casting our net as widely as possible. We advertise vacancies to Members in *The Garden* in October of each year (publishing a reminder each December). We also invite those we work with across the governance structure (including many non-Council members) to 'advertise' these positions for us within their networks. Our aim in this is to attract submissions from as many people as possible, ideally those who have already worked on one of the RHS Boards or Committees, or with other aspects of the organisation.

Once we have these submissions, we undertake a robust evaluation process for those candidates, having members of NAG interview them. This allows us to ensure that we can make informed recommendations to Council as to which candidates might receive their support (taking into account the skills currently on Council, succession planning, and the fit of the individual).

Of course, we also take great care to ensure that any applicant who does not gain the support of Council, and others who have not been through the evaluation process, are aware of their right to stand nonetheless, and the process requirements for that.

We would welcome more nominations and applications – do please keep an eye out for the reminders in *The Garden*.

I would like to raise my concern about the resale of members' tickets for popular shows such as Chelsea and Chatsworth on secondary websites at inflated prices. These are

available long after the ones through the official website are marked as sold out despite your reassurances in January that you were addressing this problem.

Steps to minimise this fraudulent activity by other organizations include barring members found to be doing this after an official warning or ID checks at point of entry. I realise this would not address the problem of tickets available to the public but you could then raise the price of public tickets, thereby benefiting the society and reducing the profit on resale.

Mrs Pru Dickson

Sue Biggs, Director General, noted that the terms and conditions on the sale of tickets to RHS Flower Shows are very strict in relation to whether they can be re-sold, and those purchased for Members days can only be bought with a valid current Membership number. The reason for these restrictions is to ensure that these tickets cannot be used for gain by organisations other than the RHS and that tickets cannot be resold or auctioned without the explicit consent of the RHS. We have one ticket agent, SEE Tickets, and we make it clear that only tickets bought from our agents are valid.

Unfortunately, there remain websites which purport to sell or re-sell our tickets despite not being authorised to do so. We have written to these organisations many times to ask them to cease this activity. We have had recent evidence that these organisations are unable to fulfil orders for these tickets, which shows that our strict conditions are having an impact on availability for re-sale.

We are not alone in this, there has recently been a large amount of press on this, with other charities being targeted and discussions being held in Parliament on the matter (for example, a recent Teenage Cancer Trust fundraising concert). We have taken legal advice on this issue and are doing what we can to manage the matter. We are keen to see what progress the Major Event Organisers Association can make with their representations to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport on the matter.

Why is it that with over eleven hours of TV coverage from the Chelsea Flower Show this year, no mention, acknowledgement or indeed reference was made to the National Association of Flower Arrangement Societies (NAFAS) Exhibits within the NAFAS Exhibition Marquee? Is this the fault of the RHS or the BBC? Either way, this has to be addressed. The NAFAS Marquee is situated on Main Avenue and draws very large crowds and engenders a tremendous interest from the general public. Far too much emphasis and time is directed towards the show gardens.

Terry M. Blissett, Kent

Sue Biggs, Director General, stated that, whilst we have regular meetings with the BBC to discuss all areas of Chelsea Show Content, editorial control remains with the BBC and they make the final decision on the BBC programmes content.

The BBC did a number of items on floristry this year, including the British Floristry Association and the Floristry College of the Year. Over the years, the BBC has covered NAFAS, but we have raised this question with the BBC and will continue to speak to them about NAFAS. Even with 11 hours of coverage it is not possible for the BBC to cover every society at Chelsea. We are actively looking to generate more coverage and awareness of floristry and cut flowers in all-forms.

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