

MINUTES OF THE 2023 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF KENSINGTON GARDENS SQUARE GARDEN ASSOCIATION

Held: Thursday 21 November 2024

St Matthew's Church Room, 27 St Petersburg Place, London W2 4LA
(and on Zoom)

1. The **Rules of the Association** state that a quorum is 7 members. The meeting was therefore **quorate**, with **15 of the 25 paid-up member freeholds**, covering 34 frontages, **represented in person or by proxy**, with some representatives dialled in on Zoom. Four members were in arrears at the AGM date, and so without voting rights. Apologies for absence were received from Margaret Newman of 24-25 KGS, Glen Welford of 42 KGS, Marie-Claire Robilliard of 63 KGS and Guljeet Sahney of 68 KGS. The meeting register is at Annex A.
2. The **draft 2023 AGM minutes** were briefly discussed. Caroline Egan-Strang passed on a request from Adrian Cadbury to amend para 34 to make clear that his objection to the use of the leaf blower was as much on environmental as on noise grounds. On this basis, the minutes were approved. The Committee agreed to Caroline's request that the draft 2024 AGM minutes should be posted on the website once approved by the Committee, so that residents unable to attend the meeting could access them in a timely way. There was no further discussion of matters arising, given that the key issues were also on the 2024 agenda.

Chair's Report

3. The Chair, Simon Glucina, explained that the Kensington Gardens Square Community Interest Community Board of Directors (KGS Garden CIC) had just taken over responsibility from KGSGA for the management and finances of the gardens, as previously agreed by the KGSGA membership. However, the KGS Garden CIC Board and the KGSGA Committee had agreed to wait a few months before winding up KGSGA to allow for receipt of any outstanding invoices. At this final KGSGA AGM we therefore needed formally to elect a KGSGA Committee on 21 November to help wind up the Association.
4. Simon reported that we had had another excellent year, both in terms of life in the gardens and in building a solid foundation for the future. He thanked both the committee and the KGS community for all their contributions. We had tied off many things and established a solid foundation for the future. In particular:
 - With huge thanks to Dieter and Susanne, both **gardens** continued to look fantastic. In Spring, we had enjoyed a stunning selection of bulbs in both gardens. A fabulous summer had been followed by a lovely autumn, with warmer, wetter weather drawing out the change of leaf colour and enabling us to enjoy a prolonged display of autumn colours. Community members had helped us make a success of the new practice of raking the leaves rather than using the leaf blower, enabling us to enjoy some peace and quiet AND the pretty sight of the leaves on the ground. The new trees planted in the winter were thriving and a beautiful catalpa had replaced the ailing holly bush, with excellent work on realignment of flowerbeds in the large garden. New furniture in both gardens had seen a lot of use. (Shaw

Warnock asked about the cost of the change to raking the leaves; Simon said it had entailed adding an extra gardener for 6 weeks of the year at an extra £200 per week – which we felt was worth it.)

- We had maintained an **active garden square social community**, with an established diary of events in the calendar, ably led again this year by Caroline, Emma and Dieter. Back in 2018, the summer party and London Open Gardens had been our only 'events'. When Simon became chair, he had introduced monthly coffee mornings and a bulb planting day. This year we had also enjoyed our annual Shakespeare event, a Christmas festive event in the large garden, and an art installation in the small garden. The survey conducted last year, with Caroline in the lead, had provided valuable feedback from residents. A summary of the findings, and the Committee's response was now available on the KGSGA website; we were grateful both for all the positive feedback and the food for thought it provided. *(Caroline Egan-Strang stressed the importance of continuing to find active ways to seek community views.)*
 - The switchover to **electronic keys** had been very successful, with not a single complaint or malfunction experienced over the first year of operation of the new system. We no longer had problems with missing keys, and they no longer needed to be replaced every 6-7 years for security reasons. The key battery life was 3 years (30,000 usages), and we would be putting a video on how to change the battery on the KGSGA website. We now had 190 registered active keyholders on our system and a much more accurate contact database to allow us to communicate with our keyholders. Huge thanks to Susanne and Mary for the hundreds of hours they had dedicated to getting the new system up and running and to managing the keys.
 - On 21 October, we had finally **transferred the title to the gardens** from KGSGA Trustees to the **KGS Garden CIC**, a fully incorporated company to safeguard title to the gardens for the benefit of the KGS community. We no longer risked a Princes Gardens Square situation, with trustees trying to sell the gardens over the heads of residents for private gain, causing great angst and untold legal fees. This had entailed a lot of work – the May EGM, legal work, new bank accounts, etc – led by Simon, Richard and Wendy.
 - Tonight, at the parallel CIC AGM, we would be electing a new KGS Garden CIC Board to ensure a continued strong foundation for the future. It needed to be a cohesive new team, given new energy by up to three new appointments and able to move on to ever greater things. With Bruce Ritchie of Residential Land (owner of Garden House) on the board, we had a great opportunity to develop that important relationship for the future. *(Bruce Ritchie recalled the scale of the challenge that we had faced 21 years ago – he was pleased at our shared success in registering the land for the community against the odds. Caroline Egan-Strang argued that the Chair should change every 3-4 years to provide a fresh viewpoint. Wendy Wyver noted that constitutionally it was for the CIC Board to elect its own officers. Eilidh Middleton noted that it was a challenge to get qualified people with the right expertise to come forward and that their value should be recognised.)*
5. All these five areas of achievement had provided a great foundation for a flourishing Garden Square. And none of them would have been achieved without the hard work and volunteer effort of the Garden Committee and the many residents who

supported them – from raking leaves to making delicacies at coffee mornings, to dealing with a change in webhost provider; huge thanks to the KGS committee for their support.

6. Simon finally gave a warm vote of thanks to committee members who had left the committee this year, or were now standing down, recalling their distinctive contributions:
 - Caroline Egan-Strang (Oct 2018 - July 2024) had managed party applications, establishing a very effective process. With Emma, she had built up the social and community offer of the Committee, initiating both our participation in Shakespeare in the Square and the residents survey.
 - Richard Morley (Nov 2022 – Nov 2024) had done a brilliant job as Treasurer, getting up to speed with all matters garden and working collaboratively with other members. Despite his busy work agenda, he had always found time for his garden duties and had been highly admired for his common sense in many situations.
 - Wendy Wyver (July 2022 – Sept 2024, and in previous periods, in between stints at the FCDO) had served as Secretary and worked with Simon to help drive through the registration of the title to the gardens and to kickstart the CIC. Wendy would be resigning as a Director of the CIC, but standing again for the KGSGA Committee to help to wind it up.

Horticulture Reports

7. Dieter Wellmann introduced himself and his role, noting that as well as leading on horticulture in the large garden, he also helped with party and events booking, assisted residents to set up for their parties, and helped run the coffee mornings.
8. Dieter reported that he continued to take forward the multi-year strategy to garden management that he had set out at the 2023 AGM, based on the same principles (see report on the KGSGA website). The large garden was in good health, and our focus remained on the health and development of the soil, supporting diverse microorganisms and invertebrate life and on sustainable plant growth cover and distribution to ensure year-round greenery. We continued selective pruning to ensure light, access and good proportions. New colour continued to be introduced through variegated shrubs, flowering shrubs and perennials and bulb planting.
9. We continued to focus on enhancing the biodiversity of the garden, eg with log piles, bird baths and other means of attracts and promoting wildlife. No chemicals, pesticides or herbicides were used, and we continued to process and reuse 100% of the plant materials from both gardens.
10. We would be reviewing and updating our contract with our gardeners for signature by the CIC Board. As previously mentioned, the leaf blower was no

longer in use (to reduce pollution, noise and ecological damage) and other noisy gardening equipment would in future only be used after 9.30am. He thanked those residents who help with the weekly clearing of autumn leaves. Other gardening equipment would remain under review.

11. Dieter summarised the large garden highlights and near-term plans:

- The holly tree had been removed and the plant bed realigned with the others;
- The 7 new trees had all taken well after a full season and minimal irrigation;
- The compost structure had been repaired; the planned replacement would be phased in over the next two years with a planned 20-year lifespan;
- Plant bed edges had been renewed using felled logs from the garden;
- New gravel for the paths would be installed with the gardener in smaller batches, in view of the expensive quotes from external contractors;
- New furniture had been delivered and the existing furniture washed down;
- New gazebos had been bought for social events;
- We planned to build a small storage structure to house children's equipment and toys in a single location;
- Lawn aeration was planned for late spring to promote drainage;

(Caroline Egan-Strang passed on concerns from Adrian Cadbury about the ecological impact of emissions from gardening equipment; Dieter noted that leaf blower use had already been discontinued and the gardeners would soon be getting a new lawnmower. Caroline also asked if the garden had a set of environmental principles. Susanne Gahler replied that these had not yet been formally adopted, but as horticultural leads she and Dieter took ecological preservation very seriously and agreed on the need to preserve the soil and use organic compounds. Simon Glucina noted that it would be for the CIC Board to consider whether to adopt such principles formally. Tim Tasker noted that the survey had shown a high proportion of younger residents in KGS, for whom preserving the environment and tackling climate change was a high priority.)

12. Susanne Gahler, the small garden lead, commented that climate change was already a reality to take into account when managing the gardens, as this year's heavy rainfall had shown – the rhododendrons had survived but suffered. A katsura had been planted in the west corner of the small garden. We were moving to planting more perennials, though would still plant large number of spring bulbs annually. *(Caroline Egan-Strang commented that some residents wanted more seating for drinks in the small garden. Susanne noted that the Committee had been discussing this issue since the summer in response to feedback. There were currently 10 chairs in the small garden. The CIC Board would continue to experiment before deciding on the amount and type of furniture suitable in the light of the differing views expressed by residents. Huw Davies commented that the existing furniture was uncomfortable. Eilidh Middleton, who overlooks the small garden, said that the small garden was already welcoming, and used a lot by residents, who often took their laptops in there, or met there for coffee. She did not*

recognise the problem as described by Caroline. It was important that the large and small gardens preserved their different characters.)

Community and Social Report

13. Emma Fulton gave the **Community and Social report**. She began by flagging forthcoming events. **Coffee mornings in the large garden** would continue to be held **from 1100 on the first Sunday of each month**. But there would be a change to this pattern for this December (**1 December**), when the Committee would be combining coffee at **1400** with a **community bulb planting session**. **On 24-26 January** there would be an event for children to take part in the **RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch**. On **Good Friday, 18 April**, there would be an **Easter Egg Hunt**. We would be taking part again in **London Open Gardens on Sunday 8 June**. There would be a **Shakespeare in the Squares** production in the large garden on **Saturday 21 June**. And the **Summer Garden Party** would be on **Sunday 21 September**.
14. Community and Social events had been very successful in 2024. We had welcomed a record 200 visitors on 9 June when we had taken part in London Open Gardens; huge thanks to Caroline, Tim, Dieter and Tarquin for all their help. Our Shakespeare in the Squares production, All's Well That Ends Well, had been a real hit. And despite the weather we had had a great turn out for the Summer Garden Party in September with special thanks to Dieter for the BBQ.

Financial Report

15. Richard Morley, Treasurer, gave the financial report, noting that the full accounts for FY2023-2024 were available on the KGSGA website. Our income had been £38,855 and our expenditure £76,469, with a deficit of £36,878. This was a planned deficit, which we had anticipated at the previous AGM. There had been a number of one-off costs: the Westminster City Council mandated removal of the old shed and the installation of a new one (approx. £15K); final legal fees in relation to land registration (£7.8K); and the purchase and installation of the new electronic key system (approx. £16K).
16. Looking forward, Richard noted that our gardeners had raised their fees again this year by 10% in response to inflation. Last year we had increased the garden rate per frontage by 8% from £640 to £690, after freezing it for 4 years. He recommended to the CIC Board that they should consider a further rise, to £725 per frontage (with the usual 25% discount for social housing properties).

[The AGM then adjourned to allow the AGM of KGS Garden CIC to be held in the interim.]

Election of Committee Members

17. The following were elected unanimously and unopposed:

Simon Glucina, 26 Kensington Gardens Square (re-elected)
Mary Notaras, 26 Kensington Gardens Square (re-elected)
Emma Fulton, 27-28 Kensington Gardens Square (re-elected)
Susanne Gahler, 58-59 Kensington Gardens Square (re-elected)
Sigrid Thumfart, 60-61 Kensington Gardens Square (re-elected)
Donata Invernizzi, 60-61 Kensington Gardens Square (newly elected)
Wendy Wyver, 70 Kensington Gardens Square (re-elected)
Alexander Peter, 71 Kensington Gardens Square (newly elected)
Dieter Wellman, 72-74 Kensington Gardens Square (re-elected)

Signed as a true record:

(Simon Glucina, Chair)

Date:

Annex A: Attendance Register