

**BRYANSTON SQUARE TRUST**  
**(Established by Statute of 1813)**

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2025 at 6PM at the  
Embassy of Switzerland, 16-18 Montagu Place, London W1H 2BQ**

**Trustees Present:**

Ms Debora Del Favero – Co-Chair (DDF)  
Ms Elizabeth Buckley – Co-Chair (EB)  
Ms Judith Burnley (JB)  
Ms Beth Miles Barry (BB)  
Ms Denise Farley (DF)  
Ms Alex Mills (AM)  
Mr Harold Sacks  
Mrs Amy Wong

Mr Paul Guider  
Mr Angus Laing  
Mrs Samantha Griffith  
Mr Stelios Solomou  
Mr Malcolm Lindsay  
Mrs Lynn Lindsay  
Mrs Emily Barnes  
Mrs Cecily Smith

**Others Present:**

Cllr Barbara Arzymanow, Mr Thomas Wagner (Swiss Embassy), Mr Mark Chapman (Managing Agent), Mr Marc Forestier (MF, acting on behalf of Westbourne Management (WBM) as Clerk to Bryanston Square Trust)

**Apologies:**

Mrs Raffaella D'Angiolino-Bush (RB), Ms Suzanne Goodman (SG)

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The Bryanston Square Trust (BST) Committee began the meeting at 6PM, welcoming all those present. DDF and EB thanked all Trustees and other attendees for their interest and thanked the Swiss Embassy for its generous hospitality in hosting the AGM.

**1) Approve the Minutes of the 25<sup>th</sup> March 2024 AGM**

Prior to the AGM, the Minutes of the 2024 AGM were circulated to all Trustees together with the Notice, Agenda and Accounts for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024 for Bryanston Square Trust.

No questions or comments were raised regarding the Minutes of the 25<sup>th</sup> March 2024 AGM which were unanimously approved.

**2) Approve the Accounts for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024**

EB reminded the AGM that the Trust's *raison d'être* is to maintain the Garden for the enjoyment of the Trustees who reside on the square. All Bryanston Square Trust Committee members work as volunteers, and they manage the Trust on a break-even basis, setting Garden Rates at the level required to cover operating costs including an allocation to reserves for necessary long-term capital expenditures/special projects in the Garden.

**2024 Financial highlights**

The main 2024 highlights were: 1) higher 2024 Garden Rate collections than in 2023, 2) fewer arrears collected during 2024 for 2023 and prior years, after exceptional catch-up collections in the course of 2023, 3) generation of £2,500 in interest income, 4) stable operating costs year-on-year, and 5) execution of several important capital expenditure projects.

At the March 2024 AGM, the BST Committee announced it had accumulated sufficient funds in its Maintenance & Development Reserve Fund to refurbish the wrought iron railings around the Garden Square – a necessary capital expenditure project carried out on a ten-year cycle, with the last refurbishment done in 2014. The Trust had accumulated £51k for this project, and the capital expenditure costs at the bottom of the 2024 P&L show the Committee was able to refurbish the railings and install a new, more robust gate lock system for the £51k that had been set aside for the railings refurbishment project alone.

2024 Revenues were better than budget due to concerted efforts on collections, and underlying 2024 operating costs were lower than expected. The 'surplus/deficit' line at the bottom of the P&L shows a 2024 net result of -£16.6k. This negative result is due to the fact that Bryanston Square Trust's accounting is carried out on a modified cash basis, where all multi-year capital expenditures are fully deducted in the year they are incurred, and not depreciated over the expected useful life of the investment.

Looking at the Balance sheet, the Trust ended the year with £105k of cash, of which £40k is ring-fenced in a Long-Term Tree Reserve Fund, another £21k is accumulated in the Trust's Maintenance & Development Reserve (for future other capital expenditures), leaving \$43k in cash, of which £20k is required for annual working capital. This implies the Trust has c. £20-25k in free cash to spend on projects the Trustees would like to see implemented. The Committee invested all excess cash in 2024, generating £2,500 in interest income for the Trust.

As of 31<sup>st</sup> Dec., there were still £12k in unpaid Garden Rates from prior years. By 25<sup>th</sup> March 2025, the Committee succeeded in reducing this to c. £3k owed by only a handful of Trustees.

To prevent the Bryanston Square Trust finding itself in the predicament it was in in June 2023, where unpaid Garden Rates reached £35k - equivalent to c. 1/2 year of Trustee Garden Rate revenues - the Committee proposes to automate collections and implement a new £25 fee for each reminder letter. In other words, those Trustees who do not pay their Garden Rates within the 6-week period after the 2025 Garden Rate invoices go out will see a £25 fee added for each reminder letter issued until the invoice is settled.

In 2024, the Bryanston Square Trust Committee also voted to institute a £100 fee to replace any lost key fob. This policy was enacted because the new gate lock system's key fobs are more expensive; the fobs are far more sophisticated and hard if not impossible to copy. When the new gate lock system was installed in September 2024, each Trustee was asked to return their old Salto fob in exchange for their new fob. No fees were charged to Trustees in the vast number of cases; out of the new key fobs delivered to Trustees in 2024, only 6 paid the £100 fee. To avoid paying this fee, the Committee advises any Trustee who vacates their property to give their fob to the new occupier.

The Bryanston Square Trust's 2024 Accounts and policies were put to a vote and unanimously approved.

### **3) Ratify the 2025 Budget & New Projects**

The Committee prepared the 2025 Budget by forecasting all known expenditures taking into account price increases. It used this to determine the required 2025 revenue cover.

In early 2025, the Committee asked all its suppliers to confirm their 2025 billing rates. The good news is there is no 2025 increase for the 2 largest suppliers to the garden – our Tree expert Tim

George, and our Garden maintenance team led by Joseph Jones. The hanging baskets saw a small increase and the Committee expects some remedial expenses for lighting maintenance in 2025, but the Committee by and large kept 2025 budgeted costs stable on 2024 levels.

The BST Committee is therefore pleased to propose no increase in 2025 Garden Rates.

The 2025 proposed budget was unanimously approved by the Trustees present.

### **Projects**

New proposed capital projects were also discussed. Prior to the AGM, Trustees expressed an interest in two areas: 1) playground Improvements, and 2) garden bench refurbishment to avoid further deterioration. The BST Committee also opened a discussion of BST website improvements to increase traffic on the site. Finally, the Committee asked the AGM to provide input into a proposed 2026 project to update the basis on which Garden Rates are calculated, the current basis being over 50 years old (dating back to 1971).

### **Playground Refurbishment**

The existing playground equipment - climbing station/slide and swing set - are old and near the end of their life. New playground equipment including play surface must meet strict Health & Safety standards and is therefore very expensive: based on two quotes obtained by the Bryanston Square Trust Committee (AM), it would cost £60k to replace the existing equipment. Clearly, this is a large sum the Bryanston Square Trust is not in a financial position to cover. The Committee has the funds to do minor repairs and it plans to replace a broken swing seat in 2025, but like for the garden railings refurbishment project, it would take several years for the Trust to build up the necessary funds to replace the playground equipment altogether.

The AGM deliberated two questions:

- 1) should Bryanston Square Trust replace the playground equipment or remove the playground altogether?, and
- 2) if the AGM decides to replace the existing equipment, how should this be funded?

In February and March 2025, BB sent 2 BST newsletters out to all Trustees for whom the Committee has email addresses with the following playground survey question: 'Should the Trust renovate the children's play space in Bryanston Square Garden?' Of the 15 or so responses received, the majority were broadly in favour of replacing the existing equipment with new equipment, with only 3 Trustees objecting to Trust funds being directed towards this project. A number of Trustees and Non-Trustee Key holders suggested that part of the funds should be raised by way of donations.

The Trustees at the AGM also supported renovating the children's play space, with the majority in favour of replacing the existing equipment. Some Trustees made the point that a playground is a valuable amenity to residents, and that demand will only increase given the growing number of young children around the square. MF shared his experience of other London squares: a children's playground adds value to the properties around a square in addition to keeping young children out of the flower beds.

A majority of Trustees present felt that if this project were to be re-considered for 2026, the funding would need to be split 50% by the Trust and 50% through fundraising, with the Trust bearing only part of the playground renovation cost. EB pointed out that the Trust currently has £20-25k in free cash generated from Arrears collections; the Trust could contribute part of

this to a playground renovation project. Fundraising – from external donors and/or Trustees who are heavy playground users – would be needed to finance the rest.

Mrs Emily Barnes volunteered to help with the fundraising campaign, having experience in this area. The Committee warmly welcomed her offer and it was decided that Emily Barnes and Alex Mills would organise a Playground Fundraising Sub-Committee to raise the donation portion of the playground cost. Volunteers interested in joining this Sub-Committee should contact Emily or Alex. As the Committee member in charge of the BST website, BB agreed to support the Sub-Committee's initiatives via BST website advertising and/or newsletter communications.

Based on today's decisions, EB suggested a Bryanston Square Playground Fund be set up to collect and ring-fence playground donations. She also mentioned that one Trustee already made a generous £500 donation to the playground; this money would be placed in the Bryanston Square Playground Fund. All playground funds collected by way of donations would be invested to generate interest income while waiting for the Playground Fundraising Sub-Committee to reach the fundraising target.

One Trustee asked if the Portman Estate might help. MF stated that Westbourne was not aware of Portman making similar contributions to other squares. He said Portman was keen to see children's playgrounds available throughout the Estate to provide activities for all age groups. Portman had also recently made a substantial investment in Portman Square. The Playground Fundraising Sub-Committee agreed to contact the Portman Estate to see if they could help.

Councillor Barbara Arzymanow suggested the Playground Sub-Committee contact the Baker Street Quarter Partnership. This organisation should also be keen to see a playground available to children in the area. She suggested they could possibly help with fundraising.

#### **Garden Bench Refurbishment**

During 2024, 5 garden benches broke and had to be discarded. 3 of these were memorial benches donated by former Trustees. In 2025, the BST Committee proposes to refurbish the remaining benches to protect and prolong their life. In addition, the Committee will replace the discarded memorial benches with new ones. EB offered to manage this project and will seek Trustee donations for new memorial benches and to the bench refurbishment project. The AGM approved this project. EB will collect quotes from multiple suppliers to refurbish the existing benches and expects to complete this project in 2025.

#### **Website Enhancements**

BB gave an overview of the Bryanston Square Trust's new website. Beth is the Manager of the Bryanston Square Trust website, and she led the new website's implementation during 2024. The website is designed to provide useful information to existing Trustees about the Gardens: Garden usage rules, party guidelines, how to obtain a key fob, and about the neighbourhood (Westminster and Marylebone contact information for the services provided to Bryanston Square residents). The website also includes historical information about Bryanston Square as well as Trustee and archival photos and links to other archival sources. BB emphasised the website aims to be a repository of useful information for all Bryanston Square residents as well as prospective buyers and tenants. The website may be found at [www.bryanstonsquaregarden.com](http://www.bryanstonsquaregarden.com).

BB encouraged Trustees to use the new website and asked them to submit suggestions on what they would like to see on the website and how it should be used. To submit suggestions, Trustees should click on the 'Get Involved' button on the home page.

### **2026 Project: Update the Basis for Garden Rates**

DDF explained that the current system for calculating Garden Rates was based upon a 1971 valuation which was totally out of date and did not take into consideration the way some properties had been reconfigured over the years: e.g. flats joined together or split in two, basements excavated, etc. Meanwhile, flat numbers and Garden Rate valuations had remained the same, resulting in considerable variance in Garden Rates for properties of the same size around the square.

The new approach being considered is to re-allocate the Garden Rates between the 23 residential Buildings which fall under the Trust and then allocate within each Building in the same proportion as service charges. Non-residential buildings do not fall under the Trust (Swiss Embassy and Wetherby Prep School), and will be dealt with separately. Each residential building manager has the most up-to-date information on the property sizes within their building, so relying on these will keep the Garden Rates accurate. This method requires some co-operation from the residential buildings around the Square, but the Committee's preliminary contacts with building managers and their Managing Agents are encouraging.

DDF is spearheading this project. She plans to propose the new basis to the 2026 AGM. She also invites Trustees to contribute their ideas throughout 2025 and early 2026 either via the Bryanston Square Trust website, or by email to [BryanstonSquareTrust@gmail.com](mailto:BryanstonSquareTrust@gmail.com).

### **4) Elect a Committee of Trustees as nominated**

- Debbi Del Favero, Co-Chair
- Elizabeth Buckley, Co-Chair
- Beth Miles-Barry
- Denise Farley
- Alex Mills
- Judith Burnley
- Suzanne Goodman
- Raffaella d'Angiolino Bush

All existing Committee members agreed to run for re-election, and the Committee was unanimously re-elected by all Trustees present.

### **5) Any Other Business**

Trustees raised several additional issues at the AGM: 1) Issue of bamboo taking over the North end of the Garden, 2) Trustees not removing dog waste from the walkways around the square, 3) Taxi drivers parked around the square & using the gardens as a lavatory, and 4) update on the Swiss Embassy renovation.

#### **Bamboo Jungle around the North end of the Garden**

DDF noted that the North end of the square and the playground were being overtaken by bamboo, and that Joseph Jones' team was spending a lot of time simply trying to contain the growth of what has become a bamboo jungle. She proposed to replace these bamboo plants with other less invasive species. This initiative was approved by the AGM.

**Dog fouling the walkways around the Square**

This issue was raised by several Trustees and is notably a problem on the Northeast side of the square. Councillor Barbara Arzymanow encouraged Trustees to take time-stamped photos and report each incident via the Westminster website: <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/report-it>. This was the best way to encourage Westminster to deal with this issue.

**Taxi Drivers parked around the Square**

Taxi Drivers continue to park around the perimeter of the square for hours on end; they sometimes sleep in their vehicles and use the garden as a lavatory. Councillor Barbara Arzymanow encouraged Trustees to leverage the CCTV equipment of several buildings on the square to identify the offenders and raise this issue with the Taxi Driver Association.

**Swiss Embassy Renovation Update**

A question was raised about the Swiss Embassy renovation, and Thomas Wagner provided an update. He said the Westminster Planning Committee accepted the Swiss Embassy's proposal which had been meticulously prepared and presented by the Swiss Ambassador himself. Due to the lengthy planning process, including consultation and all approval phases, the Swiss Embassy anticipates that works would start in 2027 with completion in 2029.

Mr. Wagner said the Swiss Embassy was delighted to have the privilege of overlooking such a beautiful square and assured the Trustees their aim was to further enhance the neighbourhood. He thanked all residents for their understanding and continuous support.

There was no other topic. The AGM ended at 6:30PM, with DDF and EB thanking all attendees for their contributions and the Swiss Embassy and its team for their wonderful hospitality.