Royal Botanic Gardens Kew – written evidence (NER0052)

Question 11: Are there any further parts of the Act which are currently in force that need to be re-considered as a result of developments since 2006?

1. Schedule 12 of the Act repeals two Sections (Section 24(7) and (8)) of the Natural Heritage Act 1983 relating to Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (RBG Kew). These two sections originally gave authority over entry times and prices to the Gardens to the Secretary of State. By repealing these two sections, authority over entry times and prices now sits with the Board of Trustees of RBG Kew.

2. In the 11 years since 2006/07 the headline entry price to Kew Gardens has risen from £11.80 for an adult to £15.00 (increase of 27%). Eleven years earlier (1995/96) it had been £4.00 (increase of 195%), indicating that RBG Kew’s Trustees have been highly prudent in the increases in price faced by our visitors. Opening hours have been flexed responsively by RBG Kew’s Trustees in recent times, for example with the introduction of early morning summer entry for Members, late evening openings for all visitors and the introduction of special ticketed events in the Gardens. In 2016/17, total visits to Kew Gardens was at 1.82m, compared to 1.05m in 2006/07 (73% increase).

3. There can be no doubt that the increased decision-making flexibility that has been given to the Board of Trustees has allowed for more nimble and commercially-minded decision-making to be taken. This has then led to increases in the number of visitors able to enjoy the Gardens and to learn about the importance of plants, and the science of plant diversity, to their lives.

4. The Board of Trustees of Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew is continuing to focus on achieving long-term financial sustainability in order to deliver their mission to be the global resource for plant and fungal knowledge, building an understanding of the world’s plants and fungi upon which all our lives depend.

5. The Board of Trustees is currently appealing for increased operational and strategic flexibility over the management of the land on which Kew Gardens sits. A Bill has been drafted in association with Defra, which would provide that the Secretary of State’s powers in relation to the management of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, include the power to grant a lease in respect of land for a period of up to 150 years. This land, Crown Land, is governed by the Crown Lands Act 1702 and currently restricts leases to a maximum of 31 years. The Kew Gardens (Leases) Bill is a two clause Bill introduced to the House of Commons as a Private Member’s Bill by Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger in the 2016-17 session, but did not proceed past the report stage due Parliamentary time constraints. It has been introduced into the House of Lords in a similar fashion in the 2017-19 session by Lord True, but it is unlikely to move past first reading stage due to Lord True’s position in the ballot (60 out of 61).

6. The NERC Act 2006 was used as a vehicle for amending legislation that has led to improvements in achieving the mission of RBG Kew, extending these legislative
amendments and the Crown Lands Act 1702 would create further opportunities to raise non-government investment in the infrastructure of RBG Kew.

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