



EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION PROGRESS REPORT FOR 2024

In the spring of 2024, we created and published our first Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Action Plan to help support our ambition to “Open Tennis Up” in Kent. We enshrined a commitment to openness and transparency within the plan, committing to hold ourselves to account. This progress report is expected to be the first of several annual reports that explain our progress in making tennis more inclusive right across Kent. We are committed to identifying the issues and barriers and taking action to address them so we can create a sport that truly reflects the diversity of our communities in Kent.

Our plan was split into 5 sections that mirror the LTA Inclusion Strategy:

- Inclusive Leadership and Governance
- People Empowered to be Inclusive
- Tennis Looking and Feeling Opened Up
- Targeted Interventions for Greater Diversity
- Holding Ourselves to Account

Overall, the plan initially consisted of 47 separate actions, some of which will necessarily extend over more than just the initial 12 months. However, 30 had been fully or substantially completed by the end of 2024. A further 6 additional opportunities arose during the year and were added to the original plan. These are mentioned in our report, with yet more being added to our 2025 Action Plan which is being published alongside this report.

Taking each of these 5 sections in turn, the Trustees are delighted to provide this progress report.

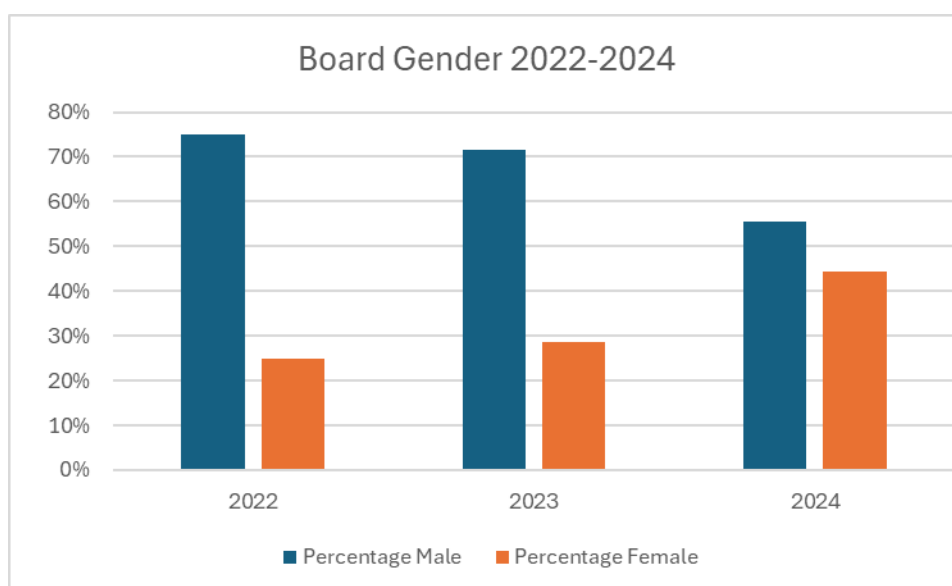
Inclusive Leadership & Governance

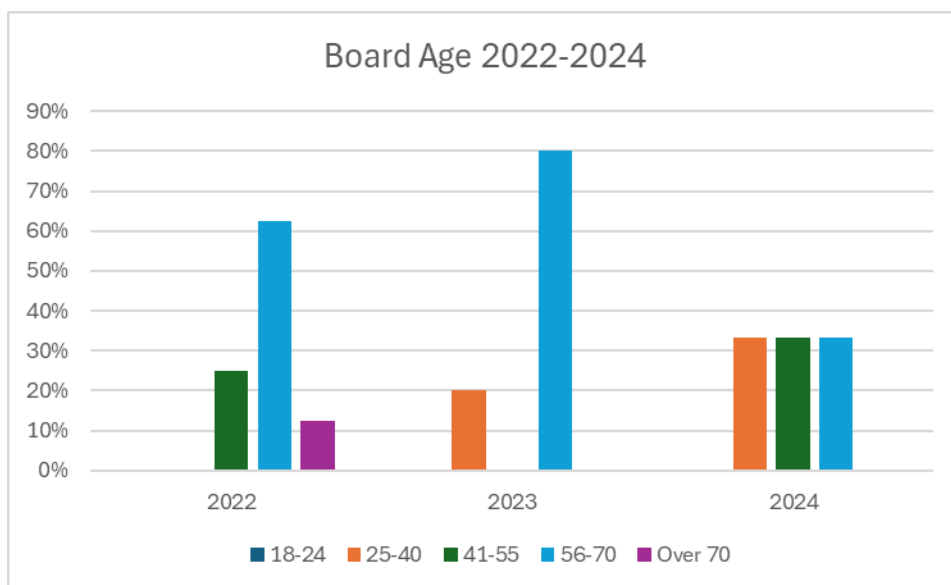
We created and published our first Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Action Plan, and Keith Gill kindly agreed to be our Inclusion Champion at Trustee level. He also established the EDI Working Group and is leading our efforts to drive forward the delivery of the actions within the plan. The group has met 4 times during the year but provides a continuous drive every week to ensure we increase the diversity and inclusion within our sport.

We have carried out an initial assessment of our local demographics, seeking to understand our communities in greater detail. We have identified which areas have the highest levels of deprivation (see chart below) as well as where there is a greater level of ethnic diversity, and where there are gaps in the tennis provision available. This allows us to target our interventions and support in areas where it can provide the greatest benefit.

Kent	Thanet, Swale, Folkestone & Hythe, Dover, Gravesham,
Medway	Gillingham, Chatham, Twydall
London Borough of Bromley	Cray Valley North and West, Mottingham, Crystal Palace, Penge and Cator, Chislehurst North
London Borough of Bexley	Northumberland Heath, Erith, Crays, East Wickham and parts of Crayford
London Borough of Greenwich	Thamesmead, Woolwich, Abbey Wood, Plumstead, Middlepark/ Horn Park
London Borough of Lewisham	Bellingham, Downham, Rushey Green, New Cross

In establishing our first Board of Trustees for the CIO, we have been very mindful to increase the diversity of our Trustees. We have broadened the age profile and increased the geographical base of our Trustees as well as improved the representation of women, the LGBTQ+ community and people of colour. We also made a conscious decision to recruit specialist EDI expertise at Board level.





Our Youth Group has been relaunched under new leadership so that we increasingly hear voices of younger people contributing to our debates, understand their needs and ensure we meet them.

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion has been added to the agenda of every meeting of the Board of Trustees, and all sub-committee meetings end with a consideration of the equity, diversity and inclusion impacts of decisions made and actions taken at that meeting. In this way we have ensured that "Tennis Opened Up" has become central to everything we do, in other words, it is now part of our culture.

We are taking every opportunity to encourage and support our clubs, community venues, parks and schools to open their doors and draw in players from all backgrounds and abilities. Venues installing new facilities because of the rapid growth of padel are also being encouraged to ensure new courts are wheelchair accessible and that coaching programmes for juniors and females are present from the start. For example, Sundridge Park LTC started Learning Disability Padel sessions very shortly after the new courts were opened.



People Empowered to be Inclusive

Staff and trustees have all been required to complete some initial EDI training, and further opportunities are being sought. Looking ahead, we will encourage all our volunteers to complete this training too and whilst most staff have an inclusion-based item in their 2024 work objectives we will look to increase this going forward.

We documented an improved, more inclusive approach to recruitment so that when we are seeking to recruit replacement Trustees or volunteers, we will follow this approach to deliver on our intention of reaching potential volunteers and leaders from under-represented communities.

Coaches and coaching programmes are a key route into tennis for many people, so it is important that our coaches reflect and promote the diversity and inclusion that we are seeking in those who enjoy the sport. Based on our initial analysis, the county coaching workforce includes a significant proportion born outside the UK, often in Eastern Europe – so is very diverse in that sense. But the ethnic diversity doesn't yet reach the same levels as our local population. Female coaches make up less than 20% of the total coaching workforce. We need to improve diversity and continue to ensure they are properly trained to take positive action to avoid unintentional barriers preventing participation by those who are currently under-represented.

Our coach development is delivered by Virtus, with whom we have strong links. We work with Virtus to understand that all coaches coming through the qualification pathway receive face to face training in inclusive tennis as well as online learning units on safeguarding and diversity and inclusion. Virtus continues to work with the LTA to train a Disability Champion (Zane Cheeseman) to provide an expert tutor in the county and use funding to promote coaching qualifications to females, ethnically diverse learners, disabled learners and those from poorer economic backgrounds.



Our Coaches Network uses a WhatsApp group to publicise learning opportunities for coaches. This is how we promoted the sessions we provide for coaches, such as one in December 2024 on how to lead a session for those with Parkinsons.

We also promoted another learning opportunity on how coaching programmes can become more inclusive of people from lower income backgrounds. The county provided 50% funding for coaches to attend 'How

to Coach the Person, not the Disability' course. Coupled with 50% support from the LTA this meant coaches were able to access this course at no cost!

Coaches played a key role in helping our Walking Tennis initiatives to flourish. Most inaugural sessions were coach-led, and coaches typically ran the group for about 6 weeks, helping players to set up their own WhatsApp groups so it became self-sustaining.

Looking ahead, we are actively working on plans to run Visual Impairment coach training in East Kent during April 2025.

We have recruited **5 EDI mentors** who are already helping clubs, venues and community programmes to become more inclusive. As a group, they come from diverse backgrounds with expertise across the whole tennis landscape, from schools, park sites and traditional clubs. They cover both urban and rural areas, and understand tennis either as coaches, volunteers or as teachers. We are supporting them with materials such as a simple EDI policy that clubs will be asked to adopt, an initial set of actions each club or venue could consider taking to open up to a wider audience.

We have already identified 14 clubs that our mentors will support initially - giving them guidance and support as they work towards becoming more inclusive. And we will further review the club landscape as the mentors build up their networks.

We are already planning a series of Venue Forums for clubs and venues in 2025 that will focus on EDI – outlining both the benefits of doing so in terms of community engagement and the financial rewards alongside giving practical tips on how they take the first or next steps.

Whitstable Tennis Club hosted our first **East Kent Network Day** in April. The club showcased why they were our 'Tennis for All' LTA award winners in 2023 with demonstrations of Learning Disability, wheelchair and Walking Tennis to 12 clubs in the Thanet and Canterbury areas. This subsequently generated strong links between the University of Kent and Whitstable LTC disability groups who gained access to the University's indoor facilities as a consequence. The University of Kent has now started a disability tennis programme. Kent Tennis was able to assist in the purchase of two sports wheelchairs through the Dan Maskell Trust to encourage more players by providing access to the correct equipment. Feedback from the day was

excellent and two clubs subsequently started their own Walking Tennis groups.



We held our first ever **Weald of Kent Network Day** in October at Paddock Wood Community Centre. The event focused on making tennis inclusive for all ages, abilities, and backgrounds, with attendees sharing ideas and participating in a range of activities. Clubs, venues, and coaches from Tunbridge Wells, Sevenoaks, and Maidstone attended the event.



Tennis Looking and Feeling Opened Up

We have reviewed our website and our external communications such as Kent Tennis News to ensure they look and feel (and are!) inclusive – and this will remain a focus as we move forward. There is more work to do.

We developed an EDI events calendar which was shared with clubs and venues and will be issued quarterly. The calendar sets out upcoming events, such as Mental Health Awareness Week or Black History Month, that clubs might wish to celebrate or at least reference in the social or tennis events they organise, or their social media. It will also contribute to increasing the visibility of our message to grass roots venues about helping us to open tennis up further.

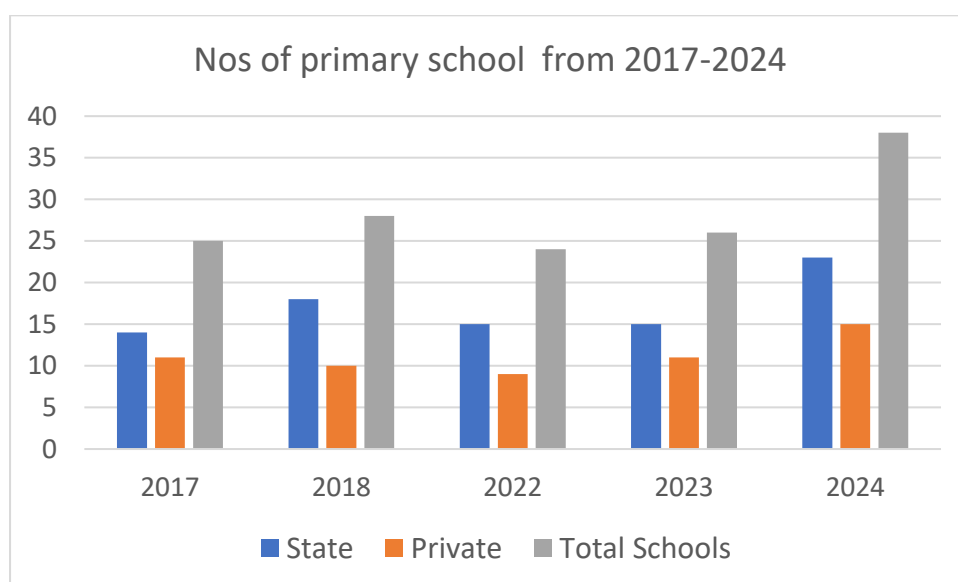
We are organising an exciting and very diverse celebration based around the LTA Awards. That will take place in February 2025 in Gillingham and will put a spotlight on much more of what is great about tennis in Kent than was possible with the previous black-tie dinner event. It will have a significant emphasis on children and young people and will showcase disability tennis and other inclusive activities that clubs and venues can emulate. And thanks to the very generous support of a major Kent Tennis sponsor, Natixis CIB, it will be free to all!

Encouraging clubs to offer their courts up to casual players on a “pay & play” basis is another way venues can help open tennis up to new audiences. It has also been shown to be a great way to recruit new members and increase revenues, so we have been encouraging our clubs to embrace pay

& play". The number of clubs who declared they offer "pay & play" as part of LTA Venue Registration was 24 in the autumn of 2024. We will continue to monitor this as we encourage more clubs to adopt "pay & play".

Clubs and venues running Great British Tennis Weekend events - where clubs and venues open their doors to new players and potential members – increased from 10 in 2023 to 18 in 2024 – an increase of 80%. Again, this is something we need to continue to support and encourage.

We have increased the number of entries to our primary schools' competitions, with a 53% increase in the number of State schools entering in 2024 compared to 2023, the numbers of schools entering each event being higher than pre-pandemic levels.





In our senior schools' competitions, we continue to attract a higher number of schools than pre-pandemic with roughly equal numbers from State and the Private sector and we will continue to encourage more entries from the State sector.



In respect of our **Officials**, we have baselined the existing data. There are limitations around the capture of diversity and disability information at present. We know there are 43 officials in total, of which 18 are female and 25 are male. We also know that 31 are white, none is black, and a lack of precise data means the others are either of mixed ethnicity or undeclared. We know their ages and will create a workforce plan as we go through 2025. That will, of course, include an emphasis on diversifying our workforce of officials.

Targeted Interventions for Greater Diversity

INCREASING PARTICIPATION IN LESS AFFLUENT AREAS

Our Action Plan included interventions in two areas where there is significant scope to expand the provision of tennis and where helping make tennis more affordable by offering free introductory sessions that could help remove barriers to participation. We chose to target Thanet and Lewisham because they are areas with statistically higher index of deprivation scores. These are also the two areas where we considered we could make the greatest impact in the short term. In planning our actions, we also sought not only to increase participation, but to grow and diversify the tennis workforce in Kent– with an emphasis on developing more female coaches and those from diverse ethnicity.

The aim was for both initiatives to run along similar lines for each of the three years 2024-2026:

- **Tennis Leaders programme** - free to candidates – the rationale being to give young people in the area an introduction into coaching. The target was 16 Tennis Leaders aged 11-18 from each local area with one course in Thanet provided by Infinity Tennis, and one course in Lewisham provided by SouthEast London Tennis. The young Tennis Leaders trained are then expected to give back time in assisting at LTA Youth Start courses
- **LTA Youth Start courses** - free to candidates – the rationale being to increase participation in poorer areas, with a target up to 10 people on each of two courses in Thanet and one course in Lewisham

- **Tennis Xpress** – free to candidates, also to increase participation in poorer areas - two courses with 12 places on each in Thanet and Lewisham

The Tennis Leaders programme in Lewisham was very successful with 12 youngsters taking part and then helping with the LTA Youth Start courses. There were 28 juniors taking part in the LTA Youth Start initiative – with Kent Tennis funding the initial 6 weeks of free coaching, with a further 6 weeks of follow-on coaching funded by Lewisham Council, and finally free membership to local park courts also funded by Lewisham Council.

In Lewisham the Tennis Xpress courses were so successful that we increased the number of players supported from the planned 24 to accommodate all 60 people from low-income backgrounds who requested a place.

The activities planned for Thanet have been rescheduled for the spring of 2025 so as not to clash with already-planned local activity. In 2025, this initiative will “catch up” by running interventions in both Margate and Broadstairs simultaneously, looking to support youngsters who trigger pupil premium for their schools, building on the achievements in 2024 of the pre-existing initiative.

Another initiative that commenced this year involved **working with a faith community** in Gravesend. This area is among the most deprived in the UK, where 43% of households are in relative poverty. More than 15,000 Sikhs live there, making up 15% of its population. They have typically never engaged with tennis.

There are 2 gurdwara (temples) including the largest in Europe, Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara. Gravesend LTC, supported financially by Kent Tennis, began an initiative to encourage the Sikh community to enjoy tennis by engaging with this Gurdwara.

Following an approach to the Head of Sport, the club participated in the colourful Vaisakhi Festival in April 2024, which attracted 10,000 visitors to the Gurdwara. The club stall distributed flyers and community members were signed up for the club's Open Day in May. The flyer featured a young Sikh role model who has achieved great success as a player at club level. The flyer was entitled "Tennis for all" and the phrase "We look forward to welcoming you" was presented in Punjabi script. 80 new contacts were established that day.

Many of the Sikh community attended the Open Day with 19 of them subsequently taking up the offer of free coaching – predominantly women and girls. The club additionally gave those attendees free access to what is normally pay & play improvers coaching.

In July the club hosted a junior beginner social tournament, which many of the Sikh youngsters attended. By the end of August, the club had 19 adult and 20 junior members from the Sikh community in their programme; many are now club members.

Thanks to the scheme's success, Balwinder Singh Cheema from the Gurdwara has taken the first part of his LTA Level 1 coaching course, with a view to becoming a SERVES facilitator at the Gurdwara sports hall.

The club will attend the 2025 Vaisakhi Festival to build on this success.



The LTA SERVES programme, a leading sport for development programme funded by Sport England, takes tennis and its benefits right into the heart of disadvantaged communities, targeting those aged 5-18 with a clear focus on

individuals living in the top 30% most deprived areas of the country. SERVES uses tennis to promote participation, inclusion, self-confidence, non-violence, gender equality and community cohesion.

During 2024 the number of venues delivering the SERVES programme in Kent increased by 17% from 29 at December 2023 to 34 a year later.

Following the refurbishment of tennis courts in many local parks, Kent Tennis sought to support initiatives such as Free Park tennis on those courts. Clubs in Gravesham were contacted and Park Activators recruited to facilitate Free Park Tennis at refurbished park courts. One of our EDI mentors met with the local authority and LTA Area Delivery team to plan a school's festival and how best utilise the park courts within the community.

Eltham Park tennis courts were supported financially by Kent Tennis. A new programme on Saturdays for children with autism spectrum disorder, working with the local primary school SENCO was launched. The same Park Operator was also assisted in setting up a lunchtime club with young learners from the SEN unit at Shooters Hill Sixth Form College.

INCREASING THE FEMALE COACHING WORKFORCE

At the start of the year, female coaches represented only around 18-19% of our coaching workforce. Through a few interventions, we are already moving the dial, getting a higher percentage of females to enrol on coach qualification courses – up to about 38% on Level 1 although the percentage taking higher qualifications is still much lower than this.

The Female leadership Scheme – subsidised by Kent Tennis and the LTA Tennis Foundation. The goal is to help females, regardless of age or playing ability, to not only overcome any obstacles and improve their on-court coaching skills, but also to meet inspirational women in tennis to open their eyes to potential career paths. The scheme involved a mix of group days and individual mentoring. There was a core group of 7 females who attended every session and received mentoring with an additional 5 female coaches who attended some of the group days.



Training included a session with LUSU inclusive tennis experts:

- Louise Assioun (disability tennis) talked about her journey to becoming team manager of the Invictus Games
- Naomi Cavaday related her journey from a professional player to working in the media with Radio 5 live and Sky Sports
- Sandi Procter talked about her experiences in starting as a tennis coach in Scotland to becoming LTA President and beyond.
- Kate Green described her journey from a pro player to running her own business
- Chloe Ayling - her experiences in going from working full time in the Police, choosing a new career and running her own tennis business.

Quote from Jenny Chambers who attended every session (pictured 8th from the left in the group photo above):

The female leadership course has been a great initiative to bring female coaches together to share knowledge, ideas, insights and wisdom. Through this course I have encountered and learnt from ex professionals which is a rare opportunity. Meeting Naomi Cavaday was a real treat. To learn from someone who has actually experienced playing at a professional level, and what challenges and issues that she had gave me such a valuable insight. This has really helped me not just as a coach but as a person also. It's a real privilege to be able to participate on this course.

The course inspired one coach to build up the confidence to book onto her Level 4 course whilst another has secured a job coaching mini red players after completing her Level 2. Others have completed their Level 3 qualification; another has set up her own coaching programme and others have gone on to documented success. We intend to run this course again in both 2025 and 2026.

Subsequently, we organised another initiative as part of our commitment to create a pipeline of qualified female assistants at Level 1, before we can expect to see a significant increase in the number of qualified female Level 2 and Level 3 coaches. We launched a **female-only Level 1 Assistant Coaching course** for 16 learners in December which was subsidised by Kent Tennis and the LTA Tennis Foundation. Places were prioritised for those who would benefit financially or feel more confident about a female only environment. We plan to offer this opportunity at least once a year to help build the pipeline of female coaches.

INCREASING PARTICIPATION FOR THOSE WITH A DISABILITY

Our Open Court Programme promotes tennis for those with a disability, impairment or a long-term health condition. During 2024, the number of Open Court venues delivering one or more activity increased from 31 to 44, and the number of players reported at these venues increased by 86% from 193 to 359. A further 6 venues have indicated they will start an initiative in 2025.



A partnership was formed between Blackfen Community Library, which is run by a charity called New Generation Community Trust, and a local coaching provider. The charity supports vulnerable groups in the community, specifically, those with mental health issues, older people, Parkinsons and Dementia. There were 15 people who regularly attended the sessions that were funded initially.

Bexley Mencap Tennis Group continue playing at Bexleyheath Tennis Club thanks to joint funding from Kent Tennis and the Dan Maskell Trust. These weekly sessions attract over 10 players who move into a sports hall in the winter months. This year the group held 2 tennis festivals to attract more Learning Disability tennis players to the game and also participated in the disability event at the County Championships.



Following a discussion with club and venue representatives at a Coffee Morning in February, we offered small grants to clubs that were willing to start **Walking Tennis** sessions for the first time and 15 clubs took up the offer. Further offers will be repeated periodically. Clubs and venues have found these sessions very popular, with coaches typically supporting the sessions initially, and then establishing WhatsApp groups to make them player-led and self-supporting. Initially we will support clubs to play competitively in local clusters but when there is a critical mass, we propose to establish a league competition for Walking Tennis.



In seeking to make our County Championships more inclusive, we ran a festival of disability tennis events in the weeks leading up to the County Championships, with the finals of disability events taking place on the first day of the main County Championship event.

We also offered (discreetly) to provide free entry to any event – in ALL parts of the County Championships – to those from lower income households where the entry fee would have otherwise proven to be a barrier to entry. Working in partnership with Essex, we set up a wheelchair County Championship, which unfortunately failed to run because of unforeseen transportation issues. However, this has been rescheduled for 2025, and Kent Tennis will provide suitable minibuss transport for players to the venue in Essex.



Looking ahead to 2025, we have already started to support further initiatives – such as a new Parkinsons session starting in February 2025 at the University of Kent.

Holding Ourselves to Account

In publishing this report we are demonstrating our commitment to transparency and accountability. We created an “Action Tracker” that allows us to document progress and helps ensure we maintain progress across all the actions and interventions we have started.

The Board of Trustees committed dedicated funds of £13,000 during 2024 to ensure our Action Plan made a real difference. This leveraged further support from organisations like Lewisham Council. During the year, as additional opportunities arose, further funds were made available by the Board. A successful application was also made to the LTA Tennis Foundation to finance the initiatives in Thanet and Lewisham and about £32,000 will be used to drive forward on these initiatives over the next 2-3 years. The Board of Trustees has made a further £30,000 available to support the plan for 2025 which is published alongside this report.