

Chair's letter *Caroline Harcourt*

To be or not to be, that is the question! Every now and again, the Executive Committee is asked why The Cottage Garden Society is not a charity. After a considerable amount of research, I have come to the conclusion that the simple answer is we don't do anything charitable and would not, therefore, be eligible to register. Although '*the promotion of agriculture and horticulture*' is counted as a charitable aim, it has to be explicitly demonstrated that this aim is for public benefit. In our case, it is, more or less, only our members who benefit from our activities, apart from the recent provision of a Kenneth Black Bursary. Our regional groups deal with all their own finances and meetings and so these, as is the case with the Hardy Plant Society, could not be considered as part of the charity. The activities of the Executive Committee are to provide a magazine for members, merchandise for members, a seed exchange for members and AGMs with talks and garden visits for members. Although we have displays at shows and other places that are open to the general public, these would not be enough to make us eligible to be a charitable organisation. In addition, the benefits to the Society would be minimal; subscriptions cannot be gift-aided as they are not donations, and magazines and other services are supplied in return for this money (from the Charity Commission's website: '*The payment of a subscription to a charity to simply receive a copy of its magazine is not a payment to become a member of the charity. Such a payment is the purchase of a magazine subscription and cannot be Gift Aided.*'). Although we do receive some donations and, if we were a charity, these could possibly be gift aided, this would not be much income in return for the considerable extra input in terms of form-filling that would be required. Anybody who is interested in these requirements might like to look at the Charity Commission's website - do let me know if you think differently.

A quick mention of other things. Apologies that there is no room in this magazine to have a nomination form for anyone wanting to join the Executive Committee - do contact me if you would like one. I'm looking forward to seeing lots of you at the AGM, there is still plenty of room! Meanwhile, I trust you're not suffering too much from the dry weather - here in the west I remain quite damp! *Caroline Harcourt.*