

# **Working Party Updates**

## **Residents Consultation Committee 03 December 2018**

### **Gardens Advisory Group**

#### **GAG meeting held 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2018**

Much of the discussion at this Gardens Advisory Group meeting concerned the unusually hot and dry weather over the summer and well into the autumn. This had had a significant effect on the gardens and had put considerable pressure on the gardening team. It also raises the question of how the gardens should be managed in future given such weather could become more normal.

However, the great majority of plants had survived and recovered once the weather changed thanks to the work of the gardening team. Jake Tibbetts, City Gardens Manager, said the Barbican was the most difficult of the City's open spaces as the Estate was in effect a giant concrete bowl.

The hot weather necessitated a great deal of watering which had stretched the gardening team even with extra staff brought in from elsewhere. Huge volumes of water had been needed to keep plants and trees alive, while the hours of watering kept gardeners from other tasks. The gardeners had prioritised what was watered, and the lawns had turned brown except where there were automatic watering points. Some residents had complained one saying the lawns looked like a "desolate wasteland".

GAG debated what gardeners should do if there is another hot, dry summer. It was agreed that the lawns – which had recovered well and quickly once the drought ended – should be left unwatered so that efforts and water could be concentrated on beds and trees. This would need to be explained to residents through channels such as the Friday email and notices in the gardens. An article will be written to tell residents why the lawns had looked so brown this summer and how watering them would put a strain on resources for no long-term benefit as the grass would not die.

Jake, and Paul Baldassari, head of the Barbican team, said that lessons had been learnt from the summer and they would be considering longer term changes to tackle changes in the climate. For instance, the soil used in planters could be changed to be more water retentive.

The pre-meeting walkaround had focussed on Thomas More garden. Here, Paul explained, gardeners had been working hard over the previous six weeks to bring the garden up to an acceptable standard of maintenance. Dead shrubs had been removed, others pruned and bedding thinned. In particular, the lawn had been scarified and spiked thoroughly for the first time in some years. 2 tonnes of thatch

had been removed. A similar treatment of the smaller Speed lawn had produced 24 green bags of thatch. This lawn treatment would become an annual task.

The three trellises by Lambert Jones Mews that had fallen down are to be replaced, and the wisteria would be put back on the new supports. A replacement for the mimosa tree by the Girls' School, cut down in the spring because of disease, is due to be delivered in November. Another tree, a Gleditsia, beside the path on the north side of the garden, needed to be removed as it was leaning over the path and could become unsafe.

GAG members inspected the area at car park level between Thomas More, Mountjoy and the Girls School which could be used as a nursery to pot on plants and seedlings. This would generate savings in new plants and could be done without disruption to access. It was agreed the idea would be put to the adjacent House Group chairs.

Plans to upgrade Speed Garden play equipment and planting have been put on hold.

A report from the Barbican Wildlife Garden in Fann Street noted that it had won an "outstanding" award in the Royal Horticultural Society's Its Your Neighbourhood scheme. A proposal to reinstate the steps from the car park up to the meadow level is being put together.

The next GAG meeting will be on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2019.

## **Asset Maintenance**

### **Garchey**

Results of the recent survey were discussed. Of the 968 letters sent, 526 were returned 14% of which confirmed they no longer had a Garchey. This potentially means that there are less than 900 Garcheys in place. The future of the Garchey is due to be reviewed in 2020 and the AMWP will start working on a strategy in early 2019

### **Working Party Membership**

Following a resident representative standing down, an email broadcast was sent out seeking new member(s). We now have a resident volunteer who has a good background in asset management, in particular listed buildings

### **Background Underfloor Heating**

The RSG (Residents Sub-Group) have confirmed that the new system effectively mimics the old one. This was done by members the RSG interrogating and analysing over 20,000 records on the control logs.

- **Enhancing the control system**

The RSG have proposed a range of alternative control mechanisms. The one best able to improve residents' comfort using the existing controls is to shift some of the heating usage from mid-winter (Jan/Feb) to the shoulder months (Oct/Apr). The RSG have devised a tool which evaluates the costs/savings of shifting the trigger temperature (resulting in the heating coming on at higher/lower outside temperatures than the current trigger temperatures).

- **Switching Loads**

Various parts of the estate have different timings for heating on/off switching. These cycles do not provide the same number of hours. It seems to the RSG that this might be unfair because in some blocks neighbours who pay the same bills are getting 5% less heat. The origins of these different load timings are lost in time and were probably based on some model of how the heating interacts with the outside temperature.

Members of the RSG have attempted to generate a simple model relating temperature in a flat to the recent heating load and recent and current temperature. This is a non-trivial task.

The RSG and BEO engineers are working to audit exactly which flats are on each of the three load cycles.

- **Load Balancing**

The City's power purchasing manager is pursuing the opportunity to generate revenue by this route.

- **Future work**

Members of the RSG have spent over 200 hours analysing data, proposing and evaluating alternative control mechanisms, and designing primitive models of the heating system. We spend around £2,000,000 p.a. on heating. It may be time to get some external help on these items.

## **Leaseholder Service Charge**

Supplementary notes for 2019/20 Service Charge budget

The following notes are intended to provide RCC members with a resident's perspective of the BRC paper setting out the initial budget for 2019/20.

The BRC papers for the 2019/20 budget are, as normal, set out to produce an overview of the budget for the BRC with the primary purpose of ensuring that the budgeted expenditure is covered by the level of service charges. From a resident's perspective the key issue is not that the Corporation of London recovers their costs, but to understand what the planned expenditure is and the amount of service charge necessary for the Corporation to recover their costs. These notes are intended to enhance that perspective and identify some of the major changes affecting service charges.

Total service charge estimate – (Summary of Table 1 BRC paper)

£'000's	Actual 2017-18	Budget 2018-19	<b>Budget 2019-20</b>
Service charge total	8,919	9,226	<b>9,822</b>

The increase on the original 2018-19 budget is 6.5%.

Nearly 80% of the service charge is made up of frontline staff, energy and repairs.

### **Employees (Table 1 BRC paper)**

At £2,587,000 these costs are 26% of the service charge.

Paragraph 7 has a manpower statement which shows the full time equivalent (FTE) rising from 60 to 61. This is because the BEO have made changes to the number of car park staff allocated to concierge activity.

Taking a simple approach, the average cost per FTE has risen from £40,766 to £42,410. This is an increase of 4%. The rise relates to normal Local Authority pay increases, National Insurance and an adjustment for holiday pay entitlements following legal changes.

These staff costs exclude the BEO staff and the charge for central services in the Guildhall, such as legal services.

### **Energy costs (Table 1 BRC paper)**

At £2,458,000 this is 25% of the service charge and increased by 2.2% on 2018-19

Energy costs are impossible to estimate correctly as they are subject to the weather. This is therefore only a reasonable estimate by the BEO.

### **Repairs and maintenance (Table 1 BRC paper and Appendix 1) Supplementary projects (Table 1 BRC paper and paragraph 8)**

The estimate for repairs is £1,856,000. In addition, work under supplementary projects is budgeted at £910,000. Together this makes up 28% of the service charge.

Whilst the repair line appears to show a decline there is a transfer of some items into longer term project work. An example is the water supply works where the budget now covers the inspection process and the actual cost of any replacement work will only be apparent once inspections have taken place.

Supplementary projects are large projects and one-off items. In 2019/20, as in 2018/9, the main component of this is concrete testing, redecorations and water tank repair or replacement. 2019/20 shows a reduction expected in concrete testing, from

£865,000 to £165,000, but an increase in Communal repairs and redecorations, from £235,000 to £745,000. This represents the restarting of the regular programme of internal decorations which has been on hold awaiting final decisions on the replacement of front doors for fire safety issues.

This paper shows only those supplementary projects for which the BEO have an estimated cost at time of writing. This means that other projects may pass through the Gateway approval process during the next 18 months and appear on our service charge bills. We currently have little visibility of these. Examples might be: repairs to window frame & glass replacement to a penthouse flat in Shakespeare, de-silting the lake (shared with Barbican Centre), and any service charge items coming from the Fire Risk Assessments.

Overall it is difficult to assess what the eventual spend will be in this area as work is generally demand led and changes, as prioritisation changes, during the year. However, the repairs and maintenance contract is in the process of being re-let. In the new contract, the supplier will be required to use standard pricing for common repairs, rather than time and materials as now. With careful management from the BEO, this should give a better control of costs in the future.

However, an area for consideration is the need to complete the asset management programme. Repairs are a key area of costs where residents have no long-term view of the costs to maintain the Barbican Estate. We note that the asset management programme has been delayed. It is important to complete the asset management work if any long-term programme of proactive works, with costs, is to be identified.

## **Conclusion**

These notes are not intended to form a specific conclusion but are provided with a view to converting a Corporation of London paper into something easier for residents to understand.

The three costs noted above cover nearly 80% of the costs making up our service charge. In each case there are specific factors influencing their costs.

- Employers – level of staffing and rate of increase of Local Authority wage costs
- Energy – Weather during the heating period – with the Underfloor Heating Working Party potential providing solutions to improve value for money / costs
- Repairs and maintenance – Cyclical programmes and resident demand for repairs – with the asset maintenance programme requiring completion for a better long-term view of issues and maintenance costs.

The RCC may be minded to re-invigorate the asset management programme, so that service charge payers can be assured that large projects can be planned and budgeted pro-actively, not simply initiated in response to breakdowns.

## **Electric Vehicle Charging**

**Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Points** (update from the Low Emission Neighbourhood (LEN) project manager)

The LEN project has funded the installation of 22 charging units, providing charging capabilities to a total of 30 bays, across 5 carparks on the Barbican Estate, following decisions made by the EV Charging Points Working Party. These charging units went live in May 2018. The charging units are currently available for use by any resident with an EV/plug-in hybrid vehicle.

The LEN project additionally funded consultants to undertake a pilot study assessing resident's usage and user experience of charging points over a 6-month period (May-November 2018). This pilot study has just completed, with just under half of the available EV charging bays used in the trial. The findings are now being drawn together into a final report with recommendations for future-roll out. This will be fed back to the Working Party and presented to Committee.

Due to unforeseen issues regarding the electrical supply, the installation of the EV charging units, and by extension the timeline of the trial, was delayed by some months from those originally stated in the Update reports. With the pilot now just ended, the Consultant's final report and recommendations are due to be completed by end of December this year. The draft report will be shared with the Electric Vehicle Charging Point Working Party for comments before the final report is presented to RCC and BRC committees.

Throughout the trial the cost of the electricity drawn down by the charging points, and any other overhead costs, have been met by the LEN funding. Despite the trial finishing mid-November, the LEN will continue to meet the costs until March 2019, at which point the LEN funding ceases. Post-March 2019, the Barbican Estate will need a management plan in place, including that of how to cover the electricity costs and the assignment of EV charging bays.

Due to the timing of the report, and the need to have a decision in place regarding the on-going use of the electric vehicle charging bays from March 2019, the Electric Vehicle Working Party have requested to present this report as a separate agenda item at the start of the RCC AGM on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2019, and hold a special BRC meeting in early February 2019, with the express purpose to make a decision on the future of the EV charging points management and costings. This request has been granted by both Chairs of the RCC and BRC.