

Report to RCC from GAG

February 2021

GAG's normal routine of inspections builds from small groups of volunteers, usually accompanied by Jake or Paul from the City Gardens team and perhaps Helen from BEO, reviewing the gardens in each of the four inspection areas. These inspection reports are then discussed by the whole of GAG to ensure a common understanding of any successes and any issues and that common standards are applied in the different areas and by different reviewers. The revised terms of reference for GAG adopted by the RCC at its AGM in Jan 2021 are, where appropriate, being incorporated into the inspections to highlight the needs to support greater bio-diversity.

As we all know, there has been little normal about 2020 and 2021 to date. The various restrictions on meeting and mixing together with some residents' long periods of absence from the Barbican, have played havoc with GAG's operations.

Over the same time frame the Gardens themselves have been adversely affected. The initial lockdown restrictions were very onerous in terms of conditions to be met by those working outdoors including gardeners. Some gardeners were ill, some had to isolate to reduce the risks of infection. Travelling to and from work was impacted by public transport reductions in service. The stop start nature of the lockdowns and tiers has meant that usage of the gardens has varied a great deal and, at times, has been very intensive. For many many residents the gardens have provided a very welcome opportunity to be outside without breaching the restrictions. Such intensive usage has, on occasions, created substantially more litter that had to be cleared up. It has also resulted in more wear and tear on plants and shrubs and the lawns on top of the stress that resulted from a very dry Spring and Summer and, more recently, a very wet winter with its attendant flooding.

GAG has recently resumed its inspection regime albeit working individually not in groups. Many thanks to those hardy volunteers who have taken part. These reports have been shared with City Gardens. The consensus view is that, despite all the challenges, the gardens are in good shape and a lot of work is being undertaken that will result in further improvements. The investment in additional gardening hours – principally in the person of Beth Handley – has had a marked impact. Areas for attention highlighted in the last GAG submission to the RCC have been tackled with a will – dead material has been cut down and removed, shrubs and climbers have been pruned to encourage new growth, gaps have been filled by splitting existing plants and space has been created for new planting when it becomes warmer. The short pieces contributed by Beth to the last couple of issues of the weekly Barbican News are great illustrations of the ongoing progress as a result of the additional spending.

Jim Durcan