

Report to RCC from GAG

May 2021

The gradual easing of lock down is very welcome – especially for GAG members undertaking the second quarter round of inspections. The current rules on social distancing enable GAG volunteers to meet in pairs to inspect each of the four quadrants of the Barbican Gardens including the Thomas More and Speed gardens. The inspections were conducted in the latter part of May and reviewed at a GAG meeting on May 27th.

Dealing first with the private gardens, the improvement highlighted in our last report has continued. Despite a very dry April and a cold wet May the improvements are increasingly visible. The shrubs and bushes that had been heavily pruned are displaying lots of new and vigorous growth e.g. the hydrangeas near the entrance to Speed Garden. Existing plants have been split and moved to fill in empty spaces. Plants have been recycled from other ornamental beds in the City and planted in both gardens. The colour contrast between the existing and the recycled plants benefits both. New plants, especially shade lovers, have been located to fill in empty spaces. Filling in empty spaces not only looks better but also provides less opportunity for weeds to flourish.

Moving plants to more suitable locations not only promotes better growth but also can be used to deter the creation of unauthorised paths. Residents have been complimentary about the clear designation of some paths through the beds to better protect plants – old and new – and the shrubs. Consideration is being given to covering these paths with wood chip to make them more visible and user friendly. The lawns have suffered in places from extreme weather and very intensive usage. They are recovering. The lawn verges have been left unmown in May to encourage the narcissi, croci and any wild flowers that may be present. It is planned to keep the grass a little longer this summer to help protect it against possible drought and consideration is being given to making a bigger acknowledgement of ‘No Mow May’ next year to encourage any wild flowers that may be lurking.

Not all planting is successful. Some experimentation is needed to see what works best where. Beth and the gardening team are trying lots of new things. The results are showing to real advantage in most cases but there is more to do. GAG is fully supportive of their efforts and, like many of our residents, very appreciative of the results of the additional investment in gardening time.

Detailed inspections of the different areas revealed many areas that can be admired and appreciated. The additional attention paid to the Dunnett designed beds on the highwalk has seen real improvements. The change in approach to the beds beside Breton House has resulted in a welcome increase in bird life. Some specific areas for improvement e.g. the little garden beside White Lyon Court on Aldersgate were identified and shared with the BEO and the City Gardens team.

Concern was expressed about the state of some of the allotment planters. GAG’s understanding is that the BEO has given up responsibility for organising the allotment planters – consequently there is no check on whether the planters are being looked after and no mechanism to allocate vacant planters to those who want to take them on. GAG decided it would offer to take responsibility for organising the allotment planters itself. The BEO has been informed of this offer. Concern was expressed that some of the wooden planters used by the allotmenters were approaching the end of their lives and would need replacement.

Some other concerns were raised which do not seem to fall under GAG's remit but do need attention. These include the flooding which regularly occurs across the southern end of Thomas More Gardens and at the entrance to that garden from the Lakeside Terrace after heavy rain. Clearly some work is needed on the drainage in both areas. Other issues concerned the podium area near Cromwell Tower where the netting on the vents, taped up light fittings etc reflect neglect. It was hoped that these latter matters might be dealt in the refurbishment of the highwalk in that area.

Overall GAG is pleased to report that the additional spend on gardeners is having a very marked and positive impact on the gardens. Beth's knowledge, hard work and enthusiasm has been very well received by residents.