

## **GAG Report to the RCC 20 Sept 2022**

Any discussion of the gardens – as with so much else over the last three months – is dominated by the weather. The combination of drought and very high temperatures reduced parts of the gardens to a parched landscape that, albeit on a small scale, would not have been out of place in a Sergio Leone Western.

It seemed inevitable that such conditions would produce widespread and lasting damage. The strenuous efforts of the City Gardens team to water had been handicapped by staff shortages – a product of recruitment difficulties and of staff taking accumulated leave – and the sheer scale of the challenge.

The garden inspections undertaken in late August by GAG members and Jake Tibbetts, City Gardens Manager, suggest that the damage has been less than we might have feared. The rainfall in mid August was vital. It is too early to make any final assessment of losses but there are grounds for some optimism. In addition the City Gardens team has been able to fill their outstanding vacancies and stop relying on agency workers.

In general the trees and shrubs went into survival mode – conserving their water and letting their leaves dry and fall. The larger trees are in surprisingly good shape. Smaller trees and shrubs present a more mixed picture. Some are busy producing new leaves to maximise their photosynthesis before the winter. Others are hanging on. Some look as if they may have succumbed but it is too early to decide whether they need to be removed and replaced. The lawns suffered very badly but the amount of new growth is a testament to their underlying resilience. The introduction of a hosepipe ban by Thames Water limits the action that can be taken.

In the short term the priority is to deal with the damage by pruning and removal in the worst cases. This work will enable a better identification of gaps that need to be filled and discussion of the most suitable replacement plants including those that are more drought resistant. When that work is completed GAG will engage with City Gardens and the BEO to estimate the costs of the new plants that are required and to consider whether they can be accommodated within the current budgets. (Robin Lane Fox, writing in the FT Weekend, expressed fears that the cost of plants from nurseries would continue to rise sharply.) It is possible that the RCC will be asked to consider a one off uplift to enable all the planting that will be required. Given how dry the soil is currently and the hosepipe ban that limits the amount of watering for new plants to 28 days any replanting may be delayed until the Spring to maximise the chances of success.

In our last report GAG drew attention to the lake and the continuing absence of the fountains and waterfalls. (As we noted at that time the Barbican Centre is responsible for the fountains and waterfall but part of the running costs is met from the service charge.) Members of the Barbican Liaison Committee received this message from Rebecca at the Barbican Centre on Sept 2<sup>nd</sup>

*“The last update relating to the lake features was that new control panels were to be built and installed by the end of August. Unfortunately, there are a few specialist components that have an exceptionally long lead-in time that have not arrived yet and so the panels can’t be completed. We are chasing the supplier regularly to get a date for likely delivery. We are told that it should not be much longer, probably 2-3 weeks, at which point we can finish the build and arrange the installation.”*

A further meeting of the Barbican Operations Liaison Committee is scheduled for Sept 12<sup>th</sup>. A verbal update will be provided to the RCC.

In our last report to the RCC GAG highlighted the case for a comprehensive design plan, that would accommodate changing weather patterns and support greater bio-diversity, for the gardens that would enable work to proceed section by section thereby spreading the cost and minimising the disruption. The experience of this summer and the widespread predictions that it will be repeated more frequently highlight the need to proceed with the planning as soon as possible.

Jim Durcan  
Chair  
Gardens Advisory Group