

Gardens Advisory Group Report to the RCC June 2023

The Gardens Advisory Group, working in four teams, inspected the four sections of the Barbican gardens in the period 18 April to 12 May. The inspections took place at 8am once a week over a four week period. This arrangement accommodated GAG members' working requirements and those of the City Gardens team. Nearly all the GAG members were able to attend at least one inspection and we were very pleased to welcome City Gardens Manager, Jake Tibbetts, to every one of our inspections and Helen Davinson from the BEO to one.

The long cold winter and the drawn out Spring meant that when we started many leaves were still only buds and blossom mostly a hope. With the improvement in temperatures plant growth has raced to catch up resulting in greenery everywhere and blossom widespread. We continue to monitor the impact of last summer's heat and drought on our plants, shrubs and trees. A few shrubs and one or two small trees seem to have succumbed and will be removed and replaced. Of the larger trees the chestnuts in Thomas More Garden are doing particularly well. Some concerns remain about shallow rooting trees like silver birch. Unfortunately the nature of our gardens means that many pits are quite shallow.

There has been some extensive planting – the improvement in the bus stop garden in Aldersgate is particularly noticeable - but there have been gains elsewhere including the planting of the new yellow blossom magnolias in St Giles Churchyard. The pruning and shaping work done during the winter and early spring has left many of our shrubs in good shape. Similarly the work on the berms that we mentioned last time has clearly improved their appearance.

The inspections in May highlighted that rapid growth is not confined to the plants we nurture. The wet warmer weather has undone much of the good work in weeding that was undertaken in earlier months. Weeds will now need concerted attention. In line with the national campaign the lawn cutting was delayed in May to provide more opportunity for wild flowers to flourish. We have certainly succeeded with daisies despite the number of daisy chains created during the Coronation party.

Previous reports have highlighted issues with the weir and the igloos in the lake. It is very pleasing to see that work has started on the necessary repairs. We had also highlighted some issues areas that are subject to working at height protocols e.g. the hanging garden next to Thomas More and the bulwarks in the Sculpture Court. Specialist contractors are now working on those areas.

There is an issue of waterlogged areas in the Thomas More Garden which also affects the paved path adjacent to Thomas More House. The problem is caused by the lack of drainage in the garden. GAG, with the BEO and City Gardens, is looking at whether some further tree planting would help to alleviate the problem.

GAG has good relations with the Barbican Wild Life Gardens (BWG), helped by Jo Rodgers' active involvement in both groups. The BWG has organised two talks in its garden. Both will begin at 11.00am and last for about an hour. Refreshments will be served from 10.30 onwards. For the first, on 24 May, Ben Bishop, CoL's Environmental Resilience Officer, will be talking about his recently created role and his interest in urban wildlife and nature in the City. Ben will be joined by Konstantinos Tsiolis, an ecologist working for Pollinating for London Together. For the second, on 28 June, Sarah Hudson, Barbican resident and Friends of City Gardens' Corporate Volunteer and Biodiversity

Coordinator, will be talking about the importance of bees and other pollinators.

Overall GAG remains pleased with the improvements in the gardens and with the cooperation we receive from City Gardens and BEO officers.

Jim Durcan
Chair
Gardens Advisory Group