

## **Gardens Advisory Group Report to the RCC Sept 2023**

The Gardens Advisory Group, working in four teams, inspected the four sections of the Barbican Gardens in the week beginning July 24th. We were very pleased to welcome City Gardens Manager, Jake Tibbetts, to every one of our inspections and Helen Davinson, from the BEO, to two of them. Many thanks to GAG members for their active participation in the inspections and for the reports on the areas inspected.

Since our last report in June the combination of rising temperatures and rainfall has enabled plants, shrubs and trees to put on new growth with the result that the gardens are looking much better than they did at this time last year. The new trees in the St Giles' churchyard have overcome the shock of being transplanted and are flourishing.

The contribution of the gardeners to these improvements cannot be over stated. Planting and gapping up, pruning and shaping bushes and shrubs, trimming the lawns and keeping the weeds and over enthusiastic plants under control requires great skill, knowledge and unrelenting effort. We are very fortunate in our gardeners. During the inspections it emerged that many City gardeners are reluctant to be assigned to the Barbican but, once they are here, they enjoy it far more than they anticipated.

Substantial progress has been made in four further areas. We have previously reported on the need for 'at height' work that, in order to comply with health and safety requirements and to ensure the well being of staff, required specialist teams. That work has now been completed resulting in substantial improvements in the gardens beside the waterfall, the hanging garden in front of Thomas More and in the sculpture court. In addition various works on the lake has been completed: the weir wall and the igloos have been repaired and the waterfall and fountains have been restored to full working order. We reported some issues of broken and uneven paving in the gardens. These problems were dealt with very promptly. The shallow pond under Bryer was plagued by blanket weed. Some of the pumps and pipes have been replaced resulting in a much more attractive pond.

We previously reported on the issue of waterlogged areas in the Thomas More Garden which also affects the paved path adjacent to Thomas More House. These problems, which are apparent after spells of heavy rain, are caused by the lack of drainage in the garden. Retrofitting drainage in the gardens would be expensive and disruptive. Alternative options being discussed by GAG, the BEO and City Gardens include some further tree planting of species that would tolerate these conditions and serve to soak up more of the rainwater and considering whether it might be possible to re-route the paved paths away from the worst affected areas. These discussions are at a very preliminary stage.

There is an issue with the three Raywood Ash trees planted on the Speed Gardens Lawn. These trees, as they mature, are prone to splitting and shedding limbs. So far this has been managed by heavily pruning their crowns. This alleviates but does not solve the problem and creates further issues as pruning weakens the trees and limits their new growth. An alternative solution would be to plant three new, more suitable trees e.g. Pride of India trees - *Koelreuteria paniculata* on the lawn. (Pride of India trees are notable for the colour of their leaves and for their blossom and do not split.) Once these had established themselves and spread their crowns the Raywood Ash would be removed. This solution would maintain shady areas on the lawns and lessen the disruption by spreading it over a longer period. GAG will consult the house groups adjacent to Speed Gardens but would welcome comments from other houses too.

Although it is outside the scope of our inspections the Barbican Wildlife Garden (BWG) is part of the Barbican Gardens. The attached note, prepared by the BWG as part of its submission to London in Bloom, provides a comprehensive view of the garden and the work of its volunteers.

Although it is not part of the Barbican we have been informed of a public consultation that is to take place concerning Barber Surgeons Gardens with a view to developing a master plan for the area. A news release to publicise the consultation can be viewed here: [Have your say on improvements to Barber-Surgeons' Gardens \(cityoflondon.gov.uk\)](https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/news-releases/2023/08/23/have-your-say-on-improvements-to-barber-surgeons-gardens). The survey is available here: [Barber-Surgeons' Gardens - Give My View](https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/news-releases/2023/08/23/have-your-say-on-improvements-to-barber-surgeons-gardens).

The survey will close on Wednesday 27 September 2023. Contributions from Barbican residents will be welcomed.

Once again I am asked by the Gardens Advisory Group to highlight the progress that has been made with the Barbican Gardens and the co-operation we receive from City Gardens and BEO officers.

Finally, Elizabeth Simpson from Seddon House has resigned from the Working Party. Elizabeth's contributions were much appreciated and will be missed. Suggestions for a replacement would be welcomed. At present our members are drawn from Andrewes, Breton, Bryer, Cromwell, Gilbert, Lauderdale, Seddon (2) and Shakespeare so a nominee from an unrepresented House would be good.

Jim Durcan  
Chair  
Gardens Advisory Group