

Gardens Advisory Group Report to the RCC June 2024

The Gardens Advisory Group, working in four teams, carried out their quarterly inspections of the four sections of the Barbican Gardens in May. We were very pleased to welcome City Gardens Manager, Jake Tibbetts, to every one of our inspections and Helen Davinson, Resident Services Manager, who was able to join two of our inspections. Many thanks to GAG members for their active participation in the inspections and for the reports on the areas inspected. It was particularly pleasing to welcome two new volunteers to the inspection teams. Following news of David Graves' resignation from GAG, as he will be leaving the Barbican shortly, the Group expressed its thanks for his participation and contribution to its work.

Despite the occasional short sunny warm spell the weather since February has continued to be largely cool and wet. While such weather is less pleasant for the gardeners as they work and for leaseholders and residents as they enjoy the gardens, it does have some upsides. In particular the long spell of wet and well above freezing temperatures has helped some of our trees and shrubs as they recovered from high temperatures and drought conditions. In particular the Persian ironwoods in the Beech Street gardens are looking much healthier and many silver birch have benefited too. The jasmine on the pergola beside Speed Gardens has grown significantly since our last inspection.

Since our last report the planned tree pruning has taken place and the specialist 'working at heights' team has cut back and tidied the overhead garden linking Andrewes to the Postern. The reeds in the lake have had their annual haircut. This year the area between St Giles Churchyard and Wallside was also included. The reeds have responded strongly contributing to the improvement in the appearance of the lake.

The overall result is that the gardens are looking good. GAG would like to thank the gardeners for their work in planting, weeding and cutting that ensure the gardens can be enjoyed by all.

Luis, who has been a familiar figure in our gardens for over twenty years, is retiring in July and returning to his native Brazil. Never a man of leisure Luis has already arranged to volunteer in the gardens of his local hospital there. City Gardens arranged for Charlie to work closely with Luis over the last several months to facilitate the transfer and continued utilisation of Luis' vast knowledge and experience of the Barbican Gardens. I'm sure the RCC will join GAG in thanking Luis for his many years of dedicated service and wishing him a long and fulfilling retirement.

Towards the end of 2023 the RCC and, subsequently, the BRC, approved a proposal to ask officers to identify the costings involved in conducting an ecological survey of the private gardens and, on the basis of that survey, of developing a master plan to secure the future of our Grade II* listed gardens. This is in keeping with the recommendation in the Barbican Listed Management Building Guidelines Volume 4 – Landscape which stated that

“the City is encouraged:

- to establish an estate-wide Landscape Master plan in order to maintain consistency of design, specification and detailing;”.

At its meeting on June 5th GAG discussed the progress that officers had made with the proposal for a comprehensive survey and the production of plans.

The costings are:

Baseline ecological survey	£4,000
Development of a master plan	£20,000
City Gardens Project Management Costs	£1,500
Consultation	£15,000
Preparation and Submission of Planning application (it is unlikely that planning approval will be required but this item is included as a risk factor)	£1,500
TOTAL COST	£42,000

The Group discussed these costings and their implications at some length. It was noted that a topographical survey is not required as one is already in existence. The ecological survey would cover not only trees, shrubs and plants but also bio-diversity. Consultation would involve a two stage consultation with leaseholders and residents and other stakeholders. The first stage would aim to gather views about the current garden design and features to be considered for addition or removal. The second stage would gather views about the proposals in the master plan before it was finalised. GAG debated whether it could successfully organise this consultation on a voluntary basis and decided it would be better conducted by an external organisation.

GAG is very conscious of the impact of rising service charges on leaseholders but felt that, at an average cost of approximately £21 per flat, the development of a master plan should be undertaken and requests that the RCC recommend this to the BRC. Officers were thanked for their work in bringing together these costings and proposals.

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, provides a valuable update on the state of the garden and the work of its volunteers.