

Gardens Advisory Group Report to the RCC March/April 2025

The Gardens Advisory Group, working in four teams, carried out their quarterly inspections of the four sections of the Barbican Gardens in March 2025. We were very pleased to welcome City Gardens Manager, Jake Tibbetts to every one of our inspections. Many thanks to GAG members for their active participation in the inspections and for the reports on the areas inspected.

The winter was long, cold and wet. The cold inhibited plants, shrubs and trees from pushing out buds and blossom so the signs of Spring were limited when the inspections were conducted although the recent warm weather has had a very marked and welcome impact. Despite the cold wet days the Barbican gardeners have been very active. Evidence of carefully weeded beds, pruned and shaped shrubs, and selective planting and replanting were evident across the gardens. The overall appearance was impressive. Jake Tibbetts attributed these results to the stability, competence and enthusiasm of the gardening team. Turnover has been actively managed to ensure that there was no loss of gardening knowledge and experience as retirements took their toll.

The scheme to plant new trees to permit the subsequent removal of the existing trees on Speed lawn has gone ahead. The planting scheme had to be amended when previously unidentified concrete slabs were located not far below the surface. The concrete slabs meant that the planned locations were not feasible because the soil was too shallow. New locations were identified and the trees planted. We are still engaged in discussion about the most appropriate locations for the new trees. One possible outcome would be to move one or two of the trees next Autumn if more appropriate locations can be identified.

We also spent some time considering options for the lawn in Thomas More Garden. A path has been worn in the lawn adjacent to the entrance from lakeside as people take a short cut through the bed near the gate. Putting in a further paved path was considered but rejected, at this stage, in favour of installing a short length of fencing and replanting the bed to deter use of that route.

City Gardens has instituted a corporate volunteering scheme – tapping into firms' desire to enable their staff to make a contribution to the community. This year the volunteering scheme is limited to a few pilot efforts. If it successful City Gardens expect to roll out a larger version of the scheme on many more days in its gardens across the City. Volunteers with limited knowledge of gardening and not necessarily able to distinguish plants from weeds are not suitable for all tasks. Volunteers who are reasonably fit, strong and keen to work as a team are well suited to particular tasks e.g. planting bulbs in specific areas. It is not anticipated that this scheme will have much impact on the Barbican private gardens but it may serve to augment the resources currently available in the public gardens.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the support and assistance we received from Helen Davinson over many years. Finding money from non-existent budgets for planting and replanting, responding courteously and appropriately to residents' many and sometimes conflicting proposals and dealing discreetly with a range of emotive issues Helen played a very large role in shaping and maintaining our gardens and will be much missed. Her open-mindedness and enthusiasm enabled a constructive and effective working relationship. We wish her well for the future. We are very pleased by the assurances we have received from Dan Sanders that Helen's garden duties will be picked up by another officer.