

Courtfield Gardens 2015 AGM Minutes

20.00, December 14th Burns Hotel, Barkston Gardens

Chairman: Thomas Schneider

Committee Members present:

Thomas Schneider

Roma Ashworth-Briggs

Candace Wambold

Lauriane Bradford

Lindsay Hampson

Christian Testa

Duncan Hawkins & Barry Simpson-Gray gave their apologies (however, Barry contributed from abroad by Skype)

Copies of the 2014 minutes and accounts were handed to those present. Time was given for residents to review these before the Chairman commenced the meeting.

Itemised 2015 Accounts, Lauriane Bradford – Treasurer

The 2015 precept was £65,000.

Additional Income:

- rental/party revenue, £3,600

Extra Expenses:

- new play area	£10,568.49
- tree surgery	3,672.00
- irrigation repair	2,400.00
- gate repair	1,188.00
- installation of new gate system	4,800.00
- room hire (2 AGM's & 1 EGM in 2015)	800.00

Questions:

Residents questioned the fluctuating electricity & water bills. After discussion it was agreed that meters must be read more regularly and bills queried.

Projected Budget for 2016 includes:

- contingency fund of £6,500 for ongoing legal expenses
- contingency sum to cover proposed remedial works to railings

Chairman of the AGM, Thomas Schneider

- welcomed attendees and introduced the members of the Committee
- outlined why there is likely to be further costs involved in upcoming

repairs to railings on the S/W corner of the garden

The Chairman invited attendees to vote on the Treasurer's financial analysis, proposed budget and precept.

Residents unanimously approved the precept and the budget for 2016

Legal Report, Barry Simpson-Gray – Sub-Committee Chairman (Barry contributed by Skype)

- reported on the High Court Judgment (January 2015), re the legal dispute between the owners of No. 25 Collingham Road and RBK&C, which found in favour of the Council, on the grounds that the owner/developer of the property had breached the terms of the 1931 Act of Parliament by encroaching on communally owned garden land. The owner was ordered to demolish the structure and fully return the garden to its former state. Any further breaches of the Act, during reinstatement, would result in a High Court Injunction being served on the owner
- pointed out that the case had taken 3 years to come to a resolution. He emphasized, that had it not been for the determined pressure of the Committee, garden residents, neighbouring Garden Committees, and the Kensington Society, it is unlikely the Council would have pursued the case to the High Court
- expressed the Committee's gratitude to Courtfield's legal advisor, Robert Barham (Solicitor at Pemberton Greenish) for his advice and the extensive work he undertook over the three years of legal dispute
- special mention was made of the garden's Surveyor, Richard Birchall, for his professional advice and his regular inspections of the site. Richard is closely monitoring the progress of the reinstatement
- offered the Committee's thanks to Holly Smith, Editor of the Garden News magazine, who supported the committee throughout and maintained a constant pressure on RBK&C's Legal Department by featuring the case on the front pages of 3 separate issues of the magazine, in addition to monitoring doggedly the progress of the Legal Department at RBK&C
- Barry added that once the remedial works are completed and signed off by the Council, we will be claiming for the costs incurred by the Committee since 2012

Vote of thanks to the Committee from resident Jean Navassardian, longtime resident and ex-committee member: she congratulated the Committee on its perseverance in fighting the attempted land-grab and for the pressure it exerted on the Council finally to take on the case

Garden Manager Report, Robert Player (Garden Associates)

- the year started with a major project – replanting the dark and uninteresting entrance bed
- the large overhanging holly tree was pruned back and topped off to allow more light into this section and allow plants to thrive
- a wavy yew hedge was planted, in order to bisect the bed and provide more privacy for garden users
- sun-loving plants were planted on one side and shade lovers on the other, reflecting the contrasting growing conditions in the bed

Plants introduced into the bed include:

- Japanese Acers
- Skimmiers
- Unusual ferns and Hellebores
- 50 giant purple Alliums

Spring Planting:

- 1,500 tulips dug into the interior beds (daffodils have now naturalized so well there is no need to plant bulbs in the perimeter beds)

Collingham Road beds tidied up and re-shaped - new plants include:

- Hydrangias
- Tree Peonies
- Fuchsias
- Spring flowering Currents (providing a boost for early insects, which are important for the environment)

Wildlife Garden:

The aim to attract varied wildlife is progressing well. The water attracts dragonflies and mayflies, which in turn attract insect eaters, such as frogs, newts and bats, who have since arrived in the garden. The knock-on effect, thanks to the pond, is that the biodiversity is such we now use no insecticides in the garden. We will continue to maintain a commitment to biodiversity and a balanced ecology

- Courtfield was awarded a 1st prize (scored the highest points) in June's 'Brighter Kensington & Chelsea' competition
- a Silver Gilt prize (one below Gold) was awarded by the London Garden Society Competition (London-wide competition with 70 entrants)
- Courtfield was praised for its diversity, horticultural complexity and amenities for residents
- inspection of sandpit revealed rotting wood, exposed concrete and was therefore condemned
- new sandpit purchased and relocated adjacent to spot selected as potential playground (subsequently voted against at September's EGM)
- earth & mounds relocated and landscaped. High quality Astro-turf professionally laid.
- all lawns scarified, fed and re-seeded with 52 bags of grass seed

Aims for 2016:

- bulk up perimeter planting on the N/W corner to reduce visibility from the road
- gaps to be plugged with thick mixed border shrubs
- fun topiary to be researched for play area
- removal of aged wigwam
- topping-up of thinning gravel
- extra benches to be purchased to render play area for comfortable for parents/carers
- horse manure to be spread (enrichment of soil in flower beds)
- a square woven-willow playhouse to be ordered for small, enclosed area next to playground

The aim for 2016 is to maintain colour and interest in the garden all the year round - unlike most London garden squares which flower robustly from March to late June and then die back, leaving a pleasant but dull green space.

Robert stated that the garden is in very good health, and emphasized that we are lucky to have a great variety of unusual trees and shrubs (many inherited from historical planting). He looks forward to further successes and awards in 2016

Questions/Comments from residents:

- special request for more Lily of the Valley
- request from a resident of a Collingham Road property to have a solid path installed along the rear of the terraces. He commented that (as it is grassed) it becomes too muddy, for six months of the year, to access the garden comfortably. Robert responded that the path had always been grassed but that he was aware of the problem and suggested the Committee should look into providing some slabs of granite or York stone in the middle of the path
- some residents suggested woodchip but this was not followed up as this was deemed also too muddy
- Robert confirmed he would research alternatives and suggested the resident with the request should liaise with him on finding a solution
- a resident commented on the lack of privacy for children in the garden and that they need protection from passers-by looking in
- the Chair responded that blocking or shielding the garden is not the solution
- Robert agreed that it is a little too open in places at present and will do his best to plug the gaps with a variety of large shrubs
- some residents commented that the children should be supervised at all times and therefore should not be vulnerable to unwelcome attention
- the Chair suggested seeking advice on this issue from the local police

The Chairman invited residents to put forward ideas they would like to be discussed:

- Lindsay suggested entering the Wildlife Garden section of the Kensington garden competition in 2016, with the aim of challenging the Natural History Museum, who wins this prize every year
- Christian reminded all present that everyone shares the garden

Chairman invited the attendees to elect a Committee. He stated that as no new applicants had written in to put themselves forward for a place on the Committee (only the incumbent members had formally re-applied within the time limit – with the exception of Christian Testa). He asked residents to vote on their re-election

- at this point Christian interjected and said that it was important to have a parent of small children on the Committee
- all the Committee agreed and Lindsay pointed out that she had personally emailed 3 such residents, asking them to put themselves forward for election but was disappointed by the lack of response
- Christian said the Committee was aware that he objected to the terms set for applications: emailed to the Committee by two weeks before the AGM, with a short statement of intent.
- a discussion followed regarding the best practice for applications to membership of a committee
- it was pointed out, from the floor, that most parents of young children do not have the time to give to committee work. Candace responded by saying that running the garden involved time, much work and commitment. Therefore she was loathe to accept people who did not have the time or interest in applying for election within the terms stated on the Notice, and who, if elected, would be unable to commit to being available at times when there is work to be done
- a discussion ensued as to whether it was good governance to accept a late and ad hoc application from the floor

- some members of the committee felt strongly that residents cannot just pitch up on the night and decide to put themselves forward for election
- Christian's opinion was that this was normal procedure and suggested the committee was rejecting his last minute application because they did not want him on the committee
- members disagreed and reiterated that anyone joining a hard working committee should at least comply with the rules for election
- Committee Chairman, Barry Simpson-Gray suggested that perhaps a parent (of small children) could be 'co-opted' onto the Committee as a non-voting liaison (on issues pertinent to children's usage)

(Chair asked attendees for their approval – a small majority voted for)

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Resident and Paediatric Surgeon Marie-Klaire Farrugia reported on the Annual Summer Party, which she and the Pluto charity for Westminster and Chelsea Hospital arrange each year, to raise money for the hospital's Paediatric Dept. She was happy to announce that the 2015 June party was a great success, enjoyed by a record number party goers and had managed to raise over £13,000. Every penny of this sum is donated for new equipment and facilities to enable parents to stay with their children while they are hospital

Attendees and Committee congratulated her on the success. She stated that his year's party will take place in early June and dates posted on the website

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AOB:

A late suggestion from the floor was that December was not a good time for an AGM and that perhaps January would be a more convenient month for more people to attend. Chairman replied that we had previously held it in January and still got a small turnout. Another resident offered November as an alternative, but the Treasurer replied that we have to hold it as late in the year as possible to be able to reflect the true state of the passing year's budget. Gardens are limited by the Council to a date before 30th January. The garden Precept is applied for in January and received in March/April

Another late suggestion for was AGM notices to be emailed to residents as well as posted on railings and the website. Candace mentioned that residents do not always supply their correct and current email addresses

Lindsay apologized for xnot having mentioned that Duncan Hawkins has done extensive work over the year to replace the old website with a new design. The new version is more interactive, easier to use and contains more information. It is hoped that residents will make more regular use of the website to check for Notices, comments and information

The Chairman thanked residents and committee for their presence and contributions and the meeting was wound up