

**REPORT OF MRS. LESLEY MACDONAGH**

**CHAIRMAN, MONTPELIER SQUARE GARDENS COMMITTEE**

This year has seen a number of "non-recurring" (or at least not in the immediate future) items with which the Committee has had to deal - tree pruning, relaying crazy paving, improving soil conditions and planting for the future. In addition we have been working hard to try to achieve the replacement of the railings. It has been a busy year.

The substantial garden and general financial matters with which we have been concerned this year have already been fully addressed in the reports of Lady Marshall and David Eckhardt. I would like to mention the following matters before moving to the "railings", which matter has been passed to me to deal with.

**Summer Drinks Party**

The Committee held a summer drinks party for residents which was both well attended and received. The costs of the refreshments were paid for personally by the Committee Members. If the AGM considers that such an annual party is a good feature of life in the Square, it is suggested that the cost should be in future covered from the general funds.

**Carol Singing**

A carol singing evening was arranged around the christmas tree. Again the evening was well attended and Vivian Eckhardt arranged a charming orchestra to assist. I provided mulled wine and "eats". Again, if this is to be an annual event, it should be covered by general funds.

**Insurance**

The Public Liability policy was inspected and the amount insured increased to £2,000,000.

**Claim**

I received an informal claim for a torn leather jacket from a passer by who caught his jacket on the wire netting. To date no formal claim has been submitted.

**"Gardening" element of precept for next year**

Please see Appendix 1 this sets out the projected expenditure for the next financial year. If we decide to raise roughly the same amount as last year for the maintenance of the square (£15,000) (which we understand will equate to £133 per community charge payer) this will enable, in addition to the normal maintenance, such other items as resolving the flooding in one particular area of the garden and to do a further £4,290 worth of additional landscaping work. (It would not allow for restoration of the paths which the Committee feels should wait until the expenditure associated with the railings has been dealt with and the landscaping completed.)

THE RAILINGS

1. After many years of attempting to get this initiative moving, a unanimous vote to raise the precept to enable the railings to be replaced this year was passed at a well attended Extraordinary General Meeting on 30th November 1989.
  
2. It was agreed that this financial year (April 1990/March 1991) should be the year to replace the railings, in view of the substantial savings which householders would make with the abolition of the domestic rating system and the substitution of the community charge.
  
3. At the E.G.M. it was understood that there were naturally many "unknowns":-
  - i. The level at which firm quotations for the work (as opposed to imprecise estimates) would finally settle. We were working to a guesstimate (after Jeremy, David and Nicholas obtained three preliminary estimates) of between £30,000 and £40,000.
  
  - ii. We hoped, but did not know whether the existing rendered base, could be used to fix the railings.
  
  - iii. We did not know (and could not know until about two days ago) how many people would be liable to pay the community charge in the Square and consequently between how many people the overall cost would be likely to be divided. A sensible assumption was an average of 2 community charge payers per household.
  
  - iv. We did not know what grants would be forthcoming (except that The Knightsbridge Association had

pledged £500). Westminster Council had indicated that "up to 50% of the cost of the railings replacement" might be forthcoming as a grant.

4. Since the mandate given at the E.G.M. to proceed with the preparation for the replacement of the railings, a substantial amount of work has been carried out:-

- i) I asked a well respected firm of Project Managers (E.C. Harris) to assist in drawing up a specification and obtaining quotations from reputable and reliable contractors. Details of the quotations are set out at Appendix 2 to this Report (E.C. Harris are currently performing a very professional service for no fees - I would like us to be able to pay them appropriately).
- ii) Westminster indicated that they would let us have a grant of £20,000 but imposed (without any consultation or discussion with us) a condition requiring public access to the gardens on one day a week during the months of May to September. This is unacceptable to the vast majority of residents.
- iii) Tests on the rendered base (into which the railings will be placed) have shown that it cannot take the new railings. To replace the base would cost a great deal and so the solution proposed is to fix coping stones to the top of it and fix into the coping stones. Even this solution however involves a substantial cost increase of £15,000 to £20,000 (incl VAT).
- iv) After discussions and meetings with Westminster, we have discovered that taking into account the number of occupying community charge payers and those who will pay the Standard Charge (related to second

homes), in order to raise £65,000 (to cover the works to the base, V.A.T. any fees and unforeseen costs) the amount is likely to be £578 per person, assuming no grants will be negotiated.

Equally if we reduce the £65,000 amount by the £20,000 grant (i.e. if we can obtain it without public access) then only £45,000 would be required from the residents and this would involve a likely payment of £398 per person for the railings.

- iv) It should be noted that we will have to have approval from Westminster of the design of the railings - we have been trying to get this for some time. If Westminster require something more complicated than the "arrowheads" which match the majority of railings in the Square, the quotations would be more, but we have no reason to believe that the arrowheads will not win approval.
- v) It must be remembered that replacing the railings is a "one off" charge this year and also the "gardening rate" is likely to decrease as the remedial works are completed.
- vi) In addition to the railings the Westminster community charge figure of £195 and the gardening rate of £133 should be added.

All Community Charge including Garden and Railings

<u>Worst Case</u>		<u>Best Case</u>	
<u>Per Adult Total</u>		<u>Per Adult Total</u>	
At 65,000 for railings with <u>no grant</u>	£578*	At 45,000 for railings (i.e. <u>with</u> grant from Westminster)	£398*
Plus gardening charge of £133		Plus gardening charge of £133	
Plus community charge of Westminster	£195	Plus community charge of Westminster	£195
	= <u>£906</u>		= <u>£726</u>

THIS SHOULD BE CONTRASTED WITH AVERAGE RATE BILL OF £2,250 PER HOUSE LAST YEAR

\*Had it not been for the additional costs to rectify defects in the base, my estimate to residents of 2.11.89 of £1,000 per house to replace the railings (if we had no grants) and £500 per house (assuming a 50% grant) would have proved accurate, assuming, as I did, that there were two charge payers per house.

The A.G.M. should consider whether we pass a precept to raise £65,000 this year for the railings, on the basis that if the £20,000 (or some other grant) is forthcoming from Westminster (and we hope we can negotiate this) we can carry forward any surplus money, so that the gardening liability will be reduced in future years.

If we do not seize the initiative this year - a year when we will all be "in pocket" from the savings on the rates, I sincerely doubt that Montpelier Square will ever have its railings.

I will continue to try to get grants from English Heritage, the European Community and to obtain a grant from Westminster - with no unacceptable conditions.

MONTPELIER SQUARE GARDEN COMMITTEE

BUDGET - 1st April 1990 to 31st March 1991.

Remainder of Landscaping work	4,290
Spikes Annual Contract	3,864
Provision for additional work	1,000
Provision for bulbs, plants for tubs	500
Soakaway (recommended to remove standing water on south patch under chestnut tree)	750
Quotation for shed repairs/painting	327
Christmas Tree expenses (estimate)	200
Misc expenses (plumbing, hosepipe etc.)	1,000
Sundry expenses - to include Electric, rates, bank charges etc	500

12,431

Plus Vat 15%

1,864

\*

14,295

\*

Say 15,000

Additional work desirable but not essential:-

Paths	4,290
Paved area on south side	940
Extension to irrigation system	?

5,230

Plus Vat 15%

784

6,014