

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 1990/1991

1. THE GARDEN IN THE LAST YEAR

Lady Marshall has dealt in detail in her Report with the planting and improvement to the garden which we have achieved in the last year.

All I wish to add is that the planted tubs were particularly well received by Residents.

I am sure everyone will agree that the Square owes a considerable debt to Lady Marshall for her time consuming supervision of the Contractor, the new planting and indeed her organisation of the extra watering over the dry summer to prevent our new landscaping deteriorating.

2. THE RAILINGS PROJECT

At the last A.G.M. there was unanimous support for the restoration of the cast iron railings around the Square. At that time we estimated the contract would cost around £65,000 (plus fees).

We voted a precept which:-

- a) raised £45,000 of the contract sum in the last financial year from residents;
- b) had added to it the sum of £5,000 which would have funded the interest payments on the additional £20,000; and
- c) to that sum was added the £15,000 sum for the maintenance and improvement of the garden itself.

We pursued a grant from Westminster Council and after

submissions, discussions and a great deal of paperwork, we obtained a grant for £20,000. The net result of obtaining this grant, not needing to borrow money and use up the extra £5,000 referred to above and careful management of the gardening projects, means that we have been able to set up a Capital Fund which is earning interest and which will be available to fund some of the required works referred to later.

Following the obtaining of planning consent for the railings and a lengthy tendering process, the contract was let to S. Burvill & Sons of Hersham, Surrey, an old established firm which has, to date, provided a first class service and whose Managing Director fortunately anticipated some of the problems we met on site by virtue of his previous experience in the restoration of the Eaton Square railings.

The Project Managers, E.C. Harris, have been extremely helpful and professional and the fee which we have agreed with them is far below the market rate for the job which they have carried out.

My husband and I spent many hours doing the legal work on the formal contract, free of charge, thereby saving around £5,000 in fees for residents.

David Eckhardt spent some considerable time investigating the possibility of reclaiming the VAT on the project but, unfortunately, David could not find a way round this problem!

Lady Marshall contacted English Heritage and pursued a further grant. In the event we secured a grant for £6,262. This did not lead to an overall reduction in the contract price to residents, because English Heritage would only agree to give us a grant if reconstituted stone (which itself cost £6,000) was used instead of coloured concrete for the base. Therefore, the £6,262 English Heritage grant paid for the stone base and gives the railings a much more attractive finish than the Square otherwise could have afforded.

The contract should be completed, weather permitting, in the next three weeks. There has been some delay because Mr. Burvill was not completely satisfied with a few of the castings of the individual railings and required new ones from the manufacturer. The snow did not help!

The gates and special self closing (but not vicious!) locks will be erected shortly and a new, individually numbered key, issued to each freeholder/long leaseholder against a receipt.

We are planning that this year's social event should be

an early summer party to formally celebrate the restoration of the railings. (I may include a bonfire in the celebrations to get rid of the four files of paperwork I have accumulated on the railings project!!)

3. Next Year's Expenditure

The Committee has thoroughly reviewed the various possibilities for next year and has unanimously resolved, for endorsement at the AGM, that we should raise a sum which equates to approximately £200 per community charge payer for the gardens for the next financial year. Last year's figure was £575 per charge payer because of the funding of the railings and thus £200 is a considerable reduction.

Taking into account our existing accrued capital sum for the capital projects marked * below, a figure of £200 per capita should enable the following works to be carried out or substantially carried out in the next financial year:-

1. Annual garden maintenance and grass cutting (the frequency of grass cutting will be increased over the level of last year);
2. Additional planting, including bulbs in tubs;
3. Christmas tree provision;
4. Usual insurances, water rates etc.; funding of one social event and suitable contingency sum for unforeseen occurrences;
5. Repairs to shed (or replacement if more economical);
- * 6. Provide soakway under chestnut tree;
- * 7. Restoration of the paths, now in very poor state.
8. Remedial works to hedge;
- * 9. Improvement to irrigation system to enable new planting in the flower beds to be watered (including new holding tank);
- *10. Sinking borehole which virtually guarantees the Square providing its own water supply for the gardens. This supply is virtually certain not to be banned when a hosepipe ban is imposed and would mean the plants could be kept alive and the gardens could remain green whatever the weather.

N.B. As to items 8 and 9, the irrigation system at

present serves only the lawn. Last year in order to keep new plants alive, we had to pay the gardener to hand water all the beds. Lady Marshall also hand watered on many occasions in the summer which I am sure everyone will agree was above and beyond the call of duty. The gardener does not "need the business" of hand watering and were it not that he came at 6 a.m. on several mornings in the summer, he would not have been able to help us.

Extending the irrigation system with a reliable water supply is, therefore, of paramount importance if we are to continue to maintain and improve the standard of the Square.

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