



### **Your garden bulletin.**

The first occasional bulletin to tell you about how the garden came into being and how it is maintained.

- **How was it laid out originally in 1999?**

The builders appointed a landscape architect, Brita von Schoenaich, to prepare plans of the garden and she based her conception on the idea of a wandering stream bed of shingle, surrounded by ground cover plants and grasses with silver birch trees at the side. Lining the walls were to be small trees – Amelanchier Canadensis – backed by firethorn (Pyracantha) hedges. The raised beds were to be fitted with irrigation and the canopies were originally to have been glass.

Her planting scheme envisaged the whole area being covered with 'low maintenance' ground cover plants. These plants (for example Euphorbia robbiae and the rapacious ivy) are vigorous species which compete with each other and generally suppress most weeds.

Fairclough homes Ltd, the developers ran into financial difficulties at the end of the building process and cut some corners when it came to finishing off the

garden, with the result that large areas of the planting never succeeded, and other areas had minimal top soil and a liberal quantity of concrete rocks below the surface.

- **What changes were made early on?**

The residents decided very early that the gravel which was meant to evoke a shingly stream bed was to dry and hard, so this was made up and turfed over.

Alongside the garage access road a large area had died off completely and this was turned into a herbaceous bed to add diversity to the garden and where it is not too shady to add some more summer colour.

The Irish ivy appeared to have ambitions to conquer the world and had to be curbed. It has now been eliminated from two large beds but is still present in several others.

There was a call for more seating areas in the East garden and so a new lawn was made, with a network of informal paths weaving in and out of the open spaces. Also some floral planting – lavender etc. was inserted among the ground cover plants.

Some large pots which were kindly left behind by an ex-resident were used to provide features by the steps to the garages. As these require regular watering and attention, they have so far only been provided in the West garden where some residents have volunteered to care for them.

The raised beds outside the back doors originally had to be watered by hand all the summer. They are now planted up with spring and summer bedding flowers and holes in the canopy roofs overhead mean that they receive a little rainwater.

- **How is the garden maintained?**

The garden was originally maintained by a contractor, but the care was unskilled and ineffective as well as expensive. At this time (2001) the Residents Company was taken over by the residents who elected a new Board and ejected the managing agent. At the same time the board agreed to allow myself, Chris Todhunter<sup>1</sup>, to manage and develop the garden on a voluntary basis using volunteer labour and also employing students for the bulk of the work. This has continued until now.

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<sup>1</sup> Note on Chris Todhunter's experience:

Chris is a retired architect and between 1965 and 1981 he managed first an 18 acre garden in Surrey for a School Institution using voluntary labour, and later a 3 acre garden in London on the same basis. This brought him to the study of Landscape Architecture which he did at Thames Polytechnic (now University of Greenwich), gaining a diploma in Landscape design. Later he put this into practice as an adjunct to his architectural work, including working for two years with Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe, one of the great landscape architects of the twentieth century.

The following types of planting/maintenance are current:

1. Low Maintenance ground cover with shrubs.
  - 1.1. This includes the bulk of the original planting carried out by Fairclough to the designs of Brita von Schoenaich.
  - 1.2. Maintenance consists of clipping round the edges about twice a year, dead heading all Euphorbia and Spiraea once a year, dealing with weed growth (grass, brambles, bindweed, prunus seedlings)
  - 1.3. In the beds lining the garage access roads, we have currently settled for
2. Spring/summer bedding.
  - 2.1. This is mainly in the raised beds outside each door from the staircases into the garden. There are twenty of these beds and they provide the colour for the garden. They require planting, weeding and watering. We fill them with bulbs for spring and Impatiens with Geraniums in the summer.
3. Herbaceous beds with roses.
  - 3.1. These were started in areas where the original planting failed due to poor soil or lack of watering in the first years. They provide more diversity and a certain amount of colour in the summer.
  - 3.2. Herbaceous beds require more maintenance, especially weeding, than ground cover. They are concentrated in areas where appearance is especially important such as by the Wibbly and beside the garage access road. Herbaceous beds do look untidy at certain periods in the year. Roses also are relatively high in maintenance, needing weeding, spraying, pruning and dead heading. During the winter months they are bare and dismal so need to have other planting around them. We have introduced quite a lot of roses in the last two years.
4. Hedges.
  - 4.1. The West garden is lined with Amelanchier trees producing blossom and fruit, backed up by Pyracantha hedges. These are struggling in some place because of the competition. While they are there they need clipping once or twice a year. We have no other hedges, although in place the Ivy needs trimming like a hedge.
5. Trees.
  - 5.1. The trees need to be thinned from time to time. Branches sometimes have to be pruned when broken by the wind. The crowns of the Acacia trees in the herbaceous beds need to be raised by thinning out lower branches. We might consider reducing the number of Amelanchier now that they are well grown.
6. Climbers and wall plants.
  - 6.1. Many of the Parthenocissus (Virginia creeper) plants are getting out of hand. They are growing right up the building which is attractive while it is within bounds but will need increasingly to be controlled. On the other hand it is also spreading sideways along the ground and this needs to be carefully watched.

- 6.2. There are also several trained wall plants which need regular pruning and tying in. These include roses, a fig and the yellow flowering Fremontodenron which grows up the flank walls of the East block.
7. Paths.
  - 7.1. We are cautious about using too much weedkiller on the paths because it is nigh impossible to prevent weedkiller drifting onto the adjacent planting beds. So we use it down the middle of the paths only. We also take the mower over the paths and about once a year have a major clearance. The edges are trimmed at least twice a year, in some places four to five times.
  - 7.2. The paths are being undermined by ants nests and in due course will need to be lifted and re-laid with some added cement in the base layer. The Fire/refuse engine path in the West garden may need re-laying with a concrete base to take the lorry load.
8. Fruit (vegetables)
  - 8.1. A new initiative this year has been to clear one area of ivy and prepare for planting fruit bushes. This year potatoes were grown as a way of clearing out the weeds from the soil. We would like to construct raised beds containing a less alkaline soil mix and fill this area with blueberry bushes. These are attractive shrubs all the year and they also produce good fruit which could be shared among the residents. However they will need good irrigation and netting for the fruit season to keep the pigeons off.
  - 8.2. In the same area a plum tree and a pear tree have been planted. The perimeter will be marked by gooseberry bushes grown as espaliers.
9. The garage.
  - 9.1. Garage maintenance consists of sweeping about four times a year. This job takes two days for one person.

### **Current maintenance costs.**

Our gardener for the last year has been Elin Simonson. I am glad to say that she will continue with us for at least another year. She works three days a fortnight, or about seventy five days a year.

She is nominally employed by myself and I am nominally engaged as a contractor to Wood Management, although I take no profit and the accounts are totally transparent. I have employers liability insurance and pay National Insurance. She also has statutory holiday pay which amounts to 14 days per annum.

This method results in a saving of about £2000 per year as against employing a contractor.

### **The future:**

The current maintenance regime is not perfect but nevertheless seems to be well appreciated by the residents. It is also saving money.

It would be worth while to take a poll of the residents before the AGM to find out what you like and what you dislike about the garden. Positive criticism is very

welcome. It is good that some residents have been offering to help with the maintenance this year, and that the gardens are being used more when the weather is good.

However it would be prudent to prepare a contingency plan in case I should be run over by a bus or be otherwise taken out of service. We have begun to consider this and to discuss with contractors how they would go about it and what changes would be necessary to the style and infrastructure of the garden.

### **Future bulletins**

I have been asked to provide regular (monthly?) bulletins to let you know what work is being undertaken, on this web site.

**During August**, we had our first 'Big Lunch' on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup>. This is an initiative founded by Tim Smit of Eden project fame whereby street parties were held all over Britain where people brought home grown produce to share with their neighbours. Apparently over two million people took part. We did not hear about it until rather late and so ours was not held on the proper date (July 19<sup>th</sup>). In spite of a certain amount of rain, about 45 people came and shared food and drink, met their neighbours, played ping pong and a good time was had between 12 noon and 6 p.m. Many thanks to Ivor and Dorothy Batten and Alfredo and Ana Bianco for organising this; also to Sushmita Dutta and to Elin for growing the potatoes. Several people were keen to have a bring and share lunch more often.

After that Elin was on holiday for three weeks and when she came back a great effort was needed to tidy up and clip edges in the area between the blocks, which accumulates a lot of rubbish from the general public passing through. We have been battling with bindweed throughout the summer using a technique of growing it up bamboo poles and then smothering it with Roundup, which ought to penetrate down and kill the roots. You may have noticed the plants trained up the end walls of the East block which produce lovely yellow flowers all the summer long. These have been tied in and pruned as they climb ever further up the walls.

We are conscious that the vines (*Parthenocissus henryana*) planted on the North walls of the garden need to be controlled. I hope that anyone who is worried about this plant growing into or over their windows will let us know and we will cut them back during the autumn.