



HANGER HILL GARDEN ESTATE RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION



Princes Gardens restoration project

Frequently asked questions

Why are you doing this project now?

The Princes Gardens central reservation garden is 80 years old and has reached the end of its natural life. Many of the original flowering cherry trees have died. Already gaps are opening up and the “green barrier” is thinner. A tree survey confirmed many of the remaining trees and shrubs were dead or dying and needed to be taken out. The trees and shrubs left needed to be freed of the ivy and brambles that were damaging them, and pruned to ensure healthy growth in the future.

Over recent years our gardeners have replaced some trees and shrubs, but with limited money we haven't been able to keep up with what's required. In discussion with them it became clear a major restoration project was necessary.

The issue was presented at the Residents Association's 2017 Annual General Meeting (AGM) and an outline budget was tabled, alongside preliminary drawings by the Estate's gardener. The meeting agreed restoration of the central gardens should be a priority but that we needed to look for money from outside the Residents Association.

Where has the money come from?

Following the AGM, a crowdfunding campaign was launched under the description Cherry Tree Walk, using the online platform Spacehive which provides access to funding from the Mayor of London and Ealing Council, among others. More than 70 individuals and local businesses contributed amounts ranging from a few pounds to £3,000 from Car Giant (whose land borders our Estate). This helped to unlock grants of £32,600 from Ealing Council and £5,000 from the Greater London Authority – an amazing £51,580 in all, and enough to pay for the project in full.

Who is doing the work?

A working group of volunteers has been working closely with the HHGERA Houses Committee as the project has progressed. The working group meets about once a month to take detailed decisions and move matters forward within the framework agreed by the Houses Committee. We are fortunate to have landscape design and project management experience among the group, which has saved a lot of money and means we are fully in control.

The actual clearance and replanting work is being put out to tender in two phases. Abel Gardeners, who already look after the Estate gardens, were the successful bidder for the pilot section and have carried out the work. The main section will be put out to tender during the third quarter of 2018.

How have you involved residents in the design?

An extensive consultation campaign took place throughout the Summer of 2017. Project flyers and newsletters were circulated to all 619 houses and flats on the Estate, as well as to local businesses which were asked to display a poster. Working group members went door-to-door to all houses that front onto the lower Princes Gardens central reservation and invited comments via an online survey and email address (consultation@hhgera.com). Regular updates have been posted on the HHGERA website (www.hhgera.com/gardens-project). And residents were invited to consultation meetings at the nearby Café 11 and Playstreet events, where updated plans were put on display.

The consultation revealed widespread support for 'cleaning up' the Princes Gardens central reservation, but a range of concerns about the original Cherry Tree Walk concept. Residents of the facing houses had particular fears about the impact of clearance on their privacy and protection from vehicle noise and pollution. Concerns were also expressed about the impact of the work on wildlife and biodiversity if the dense undergrowth was cleared. Inevitably, some tension emerged between the demands of road safety, noise/pollution reduction, visual impact, environmental concerns, security and so on.

What changes resulted from the consultation exercise?

If we learned anything from the consultation, it was that everybody had their own views about the best design. However, some common themes emerged alongside agreement that big improvements can be made that will also make the area more beautiful. Significant changes have therefore been made to the original proposal. The existing cherry trees and ornamental plums will be kept wherever they can be saved, and new cherries will ensure there is still beautiful blossom along the central reservation in Spring. However, the planting now proposed is a lot denser and more varied than just cherry trees, so there will be stunning Autumn colour and help for wildlife as well.

For road safety reasons, we have abandoned the idea of a path running through the central reservation. Keeping all the healthy mature trees and planting new trees and low-growing shrubs will help protect the houses at the bottom end of Princes Gardens from noise and pollution caused by southbound traffic jams during the morning rush.

In recognition of these changes, the project name has been changed from 'Cherry Tree Walk' to the more accurate 'Princes Gardens Restoration Project'.

Why are you doing the work in two phases?

The project funding was only secured in mid-October 2017, by when there was simply too little time to do all the detailed planning necessary to carry out the whole of the work before the bird nesting season begins in March. However, the working group identified a pilot section (covering the northern quarter of the central reservation) that was manageable during the five-month Winter window. This would be a chance to learn by experience, in terms of both project implementation and horticultural design. Lessons learned will be taken to the main section, work of which is due to begin around September 2018. The whole project should be complete in the first quarter of 2019, though the new planting will need to be watered at least until the Autumn of 2019. We will also ensure any gaps are filled, if new trees/shrubs fail to survive, and that lots of Spring bulbs are planted to replace any that are disturbed during the work.

How will the project improve road safety and security on Princes Gardens?

One of the main benefits of the project will be to prevent what we fear may be a bad accident waiting to happen. The thick vegetation makes it impossible for drivers to see people who are about to cross the central reservation or for pedestrians to see cars coming. This is, if anything, becoming more dangerous as electric vehicles are much quieter, while the number of children living on the Estate and attending the four local schools continues to grow.

Our local Police and community safety teams advise that opening up an area so that criminals feel they might be overlooked is the best way to combat crime. There's no intention to open it out completely but at least, if there is some line of sight across the central reservation, people walking on both sides will feel safer and there is double the chance that any intruder or antisocial behaviour could be spotted.

Separately from this project, HHGERA is lobbying Ealing Council about the need for a new crossing point at the top of the central reservation and improved street lighting on the northbound side.

Why are you planning to cut down so many trees?

There is no intention to remove any mature trees unless they are unsafe or diseased. We have commissioned a tree survey to ensure we save as many trees as we can, but this showed that the state of the tree stock is worse than we thought. Dead and dying trees must be removed

for safety reasons and to avoid affecting the rest. By replanting with new trees, the project specifically aims to replenish the stock of trees and shrubs in a thoughtful way so that it is there for future generations.

What about all the birds that nest in the central reservation?

It is true that clearing the dense undergrowth may reduce the number of small birds nesting in the area in the short term. But we will minimise any impact by limiting the work to September-March, so nests are not disturbed by the work itself. We will include bird nesting boxes and log piles in the design, and choose trees and shrubs that provide food and shelter for wildlife throughout the year. An environmental survey being carried out in 2018 will provide guidance on nature conservation on our Estate as a whole and will feed into longer term planning for this and the other green areas that belong to HHGE residents.

What about traffic pollution and noise?

It is a key part of the design that it should address the pollution issue. There is evidence that uncut low vegetation in fact absorbs pollution more effectively than tree cover, as it collects exhaust fumes before they reach head height. That is one reason why the design now envisages a mixture of shrubs and wildflower meadow that will be biodiverse, attractive, require little maintenance and absorb vehicle pollution.

Maintaining and renewing the tree stock and selective planting will prevent more gaps in the noise barrier opening up. Electric vehicles are also much cleaner and quieter than petrol and diesel so the situation should improve markedly in the long term.

How will you stop people parking on the central reservation?

The boulders now installed at the top of the Princes Gardens straight and on the roundabout at the top of Monks Drive have all but stopped vehicles mounting the grass. We included boulders in the project budget for this very reason.

How will it be maintained?

The Estate's gardeners already trim the bushes and do urgent work such as removing dead or unsafe trees and branches. Low maintenance is another of the project's design priorities and we do not expect a significant increase in the work needed to keep it looking good once complete.

Maintenance and watering during the first 2-3 years, while the new plants get established, will be paid out of the project budget.

What happens next?

With the pilot section almost complete, the working group is turning its attention to the main work which will be carried out after the bird nesting season in 2018. Updates will be provided to residents at the AGM on 18 April 2018 and via newsletters and the HHGERA website.

How can I make my views known?

Please email consultation@hhgera.com to arrange a time for us to come and discuss the project in more detail. Other open events will be publicised at www.hhgera.com/gardens-project.