

Planting Sub-Committee Report - AGM, 1st September 2022

Louise Corcoran, Secretary, Friends of Denton Gardens

Intro

Friends of Denton Gardens Planting sub-committee has been blessed with having 2 amazingly knowledgeable and talented landscape architects - Jade Goto and Michal Zarzecki, plus invaluable input from Anthony and Dave from the Council Parks team, as well as input early on from our other expert landscape gardener, Jools Owen. This pool of talent has been hugely beneficial and I'd like to thank them all for their time and contributions.

Pergola CIL Project

Very early on, almost immediately after being constituted last September in fact, we had the opportunity to apply for up to £10k of funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy, or CIL, for a one-off project to improve the gardens, but the deadline was ridiculously short. However, we managed to pull together an application centred around the 2022 centenary involving replacing and replanting the pergola area and installing a commemorative centenary stone. We still have a bit more planting to do, in the borders either side of the pergola, and benches to install, but hopefully you have all seen, and many of you have helped with, the amazing transformation we have made so far with this work. So thank you to the volunteer gardeners who have helped make all of this possible.

Sunken Garden

We are hoping to replant the sunken garden area next, and Jade has produced a beautiful planting scheme. We have already drawn on her ideas from this for underplanting the pergola, so the sunken garden would be an extension of this theme. You can see illustrations of the plants in the handouts being displayed this evening.

We wanted to make the space more open and friendly, to encourage visitors and locals young and old, and to reduce hiding places and discourage anti-social behaviour. The concept employs coast tolerant plants that will offer softness, colour movement and openness, with year-round interest. The plants chosen are low maintenance and will attract wildlife, with a mix of grasses and perennials. The plants will flower successionaly from May - October, after which the structure of the grasses and seed-heads will remain. The plants will be at a height that can be seen over, to make the space feel inviting and integrated with the rest of the gardens. Four specimen trees will be planted within the four corners of the beds, positioned to maintain the view through the garden.

We do not currently have funding, but hope to fundraise during the course of the next year to take this forward, probably in a staged approach as we fundraise. Removal of

the phormiums starts this winter in preparation and we would welcome your feedback.

Former Pond

We have also had discussions about the former pond. For the forthcoming season, we plan to plant it up with wildflowers while we consider longer term options. Returning it to a fully working pond looks to be too high maintenance, but installing a water feature could be more realistic. This is something for the new committee to take forward. Any comments or suggestions welcome.

Woodland Border

Our next main project is the Woodland Border, which runs along the length of the western edge of the gardens, which Michal is taking the lead on.

Our initial ideas are based around improving the ecological value of this area, complementing and improving on the existing planting. We are proposing selective clearing, crown lifting and thinning of the understory layer (shrubs and smaller trees) to open up the composition enough to make it unattractive for antisocial behaviour and rough sleeping, whilst also adding some new planting, including native trees and shrubs, to fill in some larger gaps. Some shade-tolerant thorny shrubs could be considered along the edge of properties to act as security buffer if necessary.

The planting scheme could also include herbaceous ground flora, including ferns and flowering perennials, to extend visual interest into the winter months and early spring. The early flowering plants would also provide early-season foraging for insects.

The ecological value would further be bolstered by manmade enhancements, such as log piles for beetles, and bird and bat boxes.

Some interpretation boards illustrating the key features are proposed to raise awareness of the enhancements. We would hope to embark on this next year, and would love your comments.

Eastern Border

The eastern border will continue to be maintained as it is for the time being, but again we would welcome any planting ideas looking further forward.