

Developer's funds vastly improve Leinster Square's communal garden

Usually the involvement of a developer in a garden square is a story of trouble – attempted theft of garden land, rogue scaffolding, disruptive basement digging. This time, however, a developer has come to the rescue of a run-down communal garden, and the residents are delighted with the results.

Leinster Square, W2, was a somewhat shabby-looking area with many poorly-maintained buildings overlooking a garden that was adequate but lacking in excitement.

In 2014 developers Alchemi Group, hired by American and Middle Eastern property investors, launched the refurbishment of buildings 7-19 Leinster

Square, almost the whole north side of the square [GSN spring 2014]. The 11 homes within 7-12 are completed and selling at prices ranging from £3.9 million for an apartment to £8.7 million for a townhouse. Houses 13-19 have not yet undergone refurbishment. Of the 11 completed units, four have sold to date.

Spokeswoman Katie Weston said, "It seemed a no-brainer to ensure that the garden matched up to our plans to refurbish the buildings. The garden had been left fairly wild and just wasn't maximizing its potential, in part due to a lack of funds.

"So we agreed with both our investors that they would con-

tribute to a full overhaul, designed to recreate a more Victorian style, on a par with our full refurbishments of the Grade II listed buildings, and to leave the members with a garden which was easy to maintain at a cost they could afford."

She said the most important part was restoring the flaking railings and repairing the cracked paths within the three-quarter-acre garden. The project also included new benches, installation of a water source, laying out an irrigation system, a new pavilion as a focal point for social gatherings, a new gardener's shed, new turf, and new planting.

The developers donated the bulk of the funds for the refurbishment. Although Ms. Weston declined to reveal the figure, it is believed the company spent a substantial six-figure sum. Some £20,000 was contributed by residents.

Although the garden committee had at first been hesitant to join up with a developer in the upgrading of the garden, the developers gained the committee's trust.

Ms. Weston said, "we took the time to meet with them and let them drive the process, we were there mainly as facilita-

tors. Claire Tallis, who chairs the committee, was a driving force for the whole process."

Ms. Weston added, "We worked closely with the garden square committee to agree a design and select a contractor, and monitored the work for the duration. We are delighted with the end result, which is a huge improvement."

Ms. Tallis, chairman of Leinster Square Gardens Ltd., said, "We are very pleased with what Alchemi did, and they were great to work with. We were very lucky to have this amazing opportunity, and I'm glad we took it."

She said the surrounding residents (called garden members) were consulted every step of the way to make sure the end results would be what they wanted. Laura de Beden was chosen as the landscape architect, and she met extensively with residents to get their feedback. "When we were happy with the plan we put it back to the members and they all voted. It was a very collaborative plan," Ms. Tallis said. The whole process took some 18 months.

Six residents had personal involvement through buying six teak benches, each one to com-



Photo by Nick Rochowski

The new Leinster Square. The garden members and other neighbours are delighted with the renovation.



Photo by Alice Shaffer

Unattractive walls surrounded the trees before the renewal.

memorate a specific person. The engraved benches, costing £500 each, were supplied by 4memorialbench. In addition to these standard benches, the developers supplied two special curved teak benches, handmade

in England, which are a key feature in the garden.

Ms. Tallis said Leinster Square Gardens Ltd. has increased its membership fee for the surrounding residents to an average of £175 per floor per year.

Charlie Baxter, managing director and co-founder of Alchemi Group, said the garden refurbishment had been “tortuous” but he was pleased with the outcome. He himself grew up on a garden square – Eccleston Square, SW1 – and worked as a gardener there. He said at the outset that he hoped to incorporate the best qualities of successful garden squares into Leinster Square.

The designer’s game plan

Landscape architect Laura de Beden said she addressed the “rigid” layout of the garden, its patchy maintenance, and the lack of coherence in the planting on its northern side.

She is especially pleased with the improvement she made in the garden’s centre. She said: “I designed some gentle grassy slopes to replace the run-down retaining walls around two central plane trees.

“The idea was to offer both adults and children a direct contact with the earth, which so many seemed to enjoy, and to soften the look of the central area.”

The plants she installed are designed to harmonise with the existing Victorian-style vegetation.

Editorial

Alchemi Group have set a new standard for developers working in garden squares. Congratulations to them.

Working closely and patiently with residents around Leinster Square, W2, the developers have used their money and experience to transform Leinster Square from a rather drab garden into an inviting oasis.

Are you absorbing this, developers? Those of you who consistently attempt to encroach on garden land and give no compensation to garden neighbours inconvenienced by the noise, dust and disruption that accompany building works?

The key to this of course, is profit. Upgrade a garden and the developers can sell their new apartments at a higher price. And existing residents see their property values rise in proportion to the enhanced attractiveness of the garden they overlook. Win-win, and all it takes is a developer that has sufficient savvy to invest for a longer-term gain.



Before and after: The pavilion pictured above was placed where the dilapidated gardener’s shed shown below had been. The photos were taken by garden Chairman Claire Tallis.

