

The management of open spaces in the Suburb

An essential and distinguishing feature of the Suburb is its open spaces. Many of these, for example Big Wood, Northway Gardens and the grassy expanse of Central Square, are owned and maintained by Barnet Council. However, much is still owned by the Trust. There are, in fact, about 85 separate pieces of land of which the Trust is the freeholder. These range from 11 allotment sites, 27 unadopted roads, a number of tennis courts, various woodland areas, hidden grassed areas behind houses, lawns and shrubberies in closes, down to several twittens and patches of ground of a few square metres.

All these have to be regularly inspected and maintained. Work has to be planned, overseen, then inspected and comments and complaints from residents investigated. Costs have to be allocated equitably under a variety of regimes and then billed.

Built for horse and cart

The Trust is aware that much of the built infrastructure that it owns - roads, gullies, kerbs, pavements, retaining walls in closes and many other features - is crumbling. The roads in many of the closes were built 100 years ago for nothing heavier than the occasional horse and cart. Now they have to cope with constant use by cars, builders' trucks and Barnet's refuse lorries. Cheap superficial repairs cannot continue to provide a satisfactory solution. More radical refurbishment programmes will have to be entertained and alternative financing solutions considered to reverse this decline.

Unravelling the detail

Cost sharing can be complex whether it involves splitting regular lawn

mowing charges between freeholders and leaseholders or allocating unadopted road repair costs, running into many thousands of pounds, according to percentages laid down in the original house leases.

There is a huge amount of detail to be unravelled and discussion with affected residents needs to be comprehensive. All of this work is exceptionally time-consuming.

Over the years, some of the contractual responsibilities relating to Trust- owned land have been forgotten or become blurred. These situations have to be redefined and agreed pragmatically and diplomatically.

A database, logging details of all the Trust- owned open spaces, has recently been drawn up. This will help the Trust management to be more efficient in the management of open spaces.

However, especially whilst the Trust's resources are so stretched, its most effective eyes and ears are always residents themselves. The Trust office is always glad to have your comments, questions and your complaints too! It is in everyone's interest that one of the Suburb's greatest assets, its open space, is properly managed. An atmosphere of understanding and co-operation between the Trust and residents will remain a key factor in this.



W. I. ASTON 1915

The founding vision – a green landscape

- 146 acres of woodland and open space
- Average density of 8 houses per acre
- Hedges as plot divisions
- Every road lined with trees
- Woods and public gardens open to all
- No house to spoil another's outlook or beauty