Digging for victory

Blooming good work
GARDENER'S GRAFT STOPS BLOCK FORKING OUT

By RYAN KISIEL

A GUERILLA gardener has won the right to tend flower beds outside his home — earning his neighbours a £200 windfall and exemption from maintenance charges.

Richard Reynolds has been secretly watering and planting outside Perrotet House, Elephant & Castle, since 2004.

His community-spirited efforts are part of the global guerrilla gardening movement which sees environmentalists take over abandoned patches of green in big cities and turn them into attractive green spaces.

Now Southwark housing bosses say Richard can legally carry on improving the green areas around the block and they will not charge leaseholders ground maintenance.

Every leaseholder in Perrotet House is also being refunded around £20 — the money they paid for the contractor to carry out the service since 2004.

The council was at war with Richard in May, with one street cleaner accused of dumping green cuttings from a nearby street bin on to the flower beds.

But things have now turned around and Richard — who carries out his work secretly with the help of donations — is delighted.

He said: "We’re moving towards a positive conclusion after the act on the flower beds earlier this summer.

"All my neighbours will save money and it’s not as if the contractor does it anyway. I love gardening and it’s a problem if you live in a tower block.

"I feel privileged to do it at Perrotet and I’m no longer a guerrilla here, but a voluntary worker. That doesn’t mean that I will give up on the guerrilla activities and I’ve been working on Westminster Bridge Road and Blackfriars Road."

Richard, who celebrated his victory by making a chocolate cake of Perrotet House with his friend Lyla Patel, has agreed to give one month’s notice if he wants to stop tending the gardens.

Councillor David Nunns was investigating claims by leaseholders in the tower block that they were being overcharged for ground maintenance and vandalism repairs when he discovered the scale of Richard’s community spirit.

During the inquiry, he found Richard had been carrying out the work for years while leaseholders were charged for contractors to do it.

Cllr Nunns said: "All my trying to do is formalise a situation that has existed for three years. I think that active citizenship is something that we should be encouraging."

To donate to Richard’s movement visit www.guerillagardening.org