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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 £90 windfall and exemption from maintenance charges.

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

His community-spirited efforts are part of the global guerilla gardening movement which sees environmentalists take over untended 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 Perronet House is also being refunded around £90 – the money they paid for the contractors to carry out the service since 2005.

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 Perronet and I'm no longer a guerilla here, but a voluntary worker. That doesn't mean that I will give up on the guerilla activities and I've been working on Westminster Bridge Road and Blackfriars Road."

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

Councillor David Noakes 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 inquiries, he found Richard had been carrying out the work for years while leaseholders were charged for contractors to do it.

Cllr Noakes said: "All I'm 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



WATER GENT: guerilla gardener Richard Reynolds and, right, the cake of Perronet House he designed with Lyla Patel

Main, HANNAH JONES 27770/3 right, b7635/C