

Elm Village Communal Landscape, November 2017 v2

Overview. 2018 will be the 35th anniversary of the building of Elm Village. A significant number of residents who settled here in 1983 continue to enjoy living on the estate in addition to the many who have moved here since. The architecture won an award and it continues to be a beautiful, peaceful and desirable estate. The green landscape makes an important contribution to the pleasure of living at Elm Village. It no doubt enhances property prices too.

1. THE LIVING LANDSCAPE.

Trees. The trees at Elm Village are now the dominant part of the landscape. They are all deciduous trees – no evergreens were planted. There are some superb, choice specimens. Opposite Camden Garden Centre at the junction of Barker Drive and Rossendale Way is a [fastigate specimen of Common Hornbeam](#) with its peculiarly neat, compact growth habit – seen at its best in winter (picture right). On the

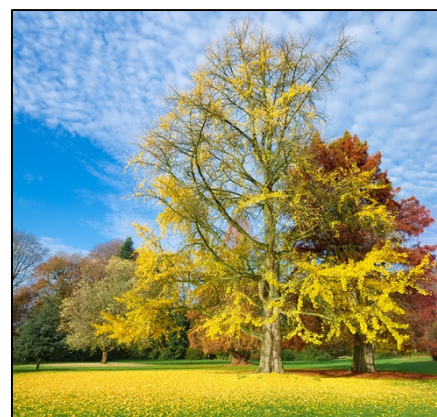


Rossendale Way crescent there is a fine specimen Elm (species unknown), bought and planted by residents to remedy the fact that hitherto there were no elms in Elm Village! These were 1980's plantings. In more recent years I have planted a cultivar of the beautiful [Himalayan birch \(*Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii* 'Grayswood Ghost'\)](#) (left) opp. 113 Rossendale Way. In the gated garden adj. 99



Rossendale, a [Maidenhair Fern Tree \(*Ginkgo biloba*\)](#) (right). The Ginkgo was my choice to replace a Lombardy poplar which had to be felled because its roots were

believed to be undermining a property on the estate behind. Ginkgos have a very distinctive branching habit as they mature and pretty leaves which become butter yellow in autumn. It also has a very interesting history, often described as the fossil tree.



In the winter of 2016/17 I removed a dull and tangled mass of shrubby honeysuckle (*Lonicera nitida*) and planted three different forms of Japanese maple in the bed in front of 2-4 Rossendale Way. They are underplanted with yellow daffodils and blue grape hyacinths for spring colour. In a few years time the maples should be really impressive when they are at their best - at leaf fall in autumn.

The selection of the following trees planted in 1983, when the estate was built, was not the wisest because of their eventual size and prolific self-seeding habits (height x spread)



Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*) 25m x 20m (right)



Field maple (*Acer campestre*) 20m x 20m (left)

False acacia (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) 20m x 5m (right)



Hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*) 15m x 6m (left)

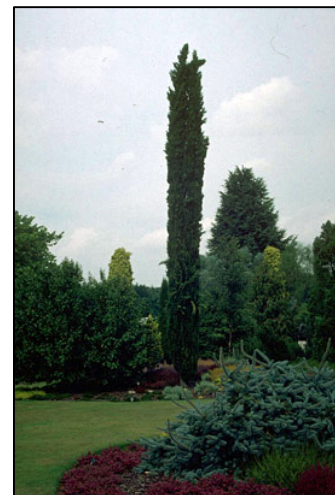
Common ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) 35m x 15m (right)



These trees are becoming middle aged now and are causing paving to lift and walls to crack. Some residents object to the shade that they cast on their property or the moisture which they take out of the ground. The prolific seed production entails me having to pull out tree seedlings of all five species constantly and I see saplings growing in residents gardens knowing that they are going to regret letting them establish there.

Several years ago Tree Preservation Orders were made for all the trees in the communal parts of the estate (trees in private gardens were not included). This requires us to seek planning permission for any tree works such as pruning or felling. Clearly if a tree is potentially in danger of falling over due, say, to fungal attacks at the base of the trunk, then Camden Council will grant permission for felling. They will always insist that it is replaced and they are happy to let us choose more suitable, more choice species.

This winter (2017/18) one ash tree has to be removed near 97 Rosendale Way due to bracket fungi growing at the base. This is one of a line of ash trees cutting across the diagonal of the crescent. They are all struggling, probably because of the poor ground conditions. I have suggested to Places for People (PfP) that each ash, as they die/become diseased, is replaced with a cultivar of Italian cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens* 'Green Pencil' picture right). The form of this cypress, strongly perpendicular and very slender together with the dark green colour will look superb against the white stucco and the shape of the crescent, creating a strong focal point coming down Bergholt Mews beyond the two Chusan palms in planters. These will cast negligible shade.



We have to routinely prune trees to remove dead wood, to allow better light penetration to the properties, to lift the crowns so that vehicles don't damage branches (and vice versa), to prevent branches touching roofs or windows and to create a balanced appearance.

Trees obviously have the longest life cycles of all plants. Some trees have relatively short life spans such as flowering cherries (30-40 years) whilst others such as Ginkgo and Italian cypress can live for over a thousand years. We think in decades in terms of good tree management, including selection and positioning.

Shrubs.

When I first started managing the estate back in 1999 the shrubs were all typical 'landscaper' shrubs. These are shrubs that are known to be resilient to drought, pests and diseases, trampling, poor conditions, they are readily available and require low maintenance. They include: [cotoneaster](#), [mahonia](#) and [berberis](#) species; [Lonicera nitida](#); [pyracantha](#); [Euonymus](#) and [Elaeagnus](#). They are planted in vast numbers on housing estates, in parks and roadside plantings. Over the years I've been replacing them with more interesting species yet equally tough. One of the first projects I did was the triangle at the end of Blakeney Close. Now there are a young angelica tree [Aralia elata](#) 'Variegata' with its variegated giant leaves; a corkscrew hazel [Corylus avellana](#) 'Contorta' which flowers in January with pendulous golden catkins dangling from extraordinarily contorted stems; shrubby honeysuckle [Lonicera purpusii](#) 'Winter Beauty' which has inconspicuous yet deliciously lemon-scented flowers in mid winter and other interesting species.



The Barker Drive front gardens are part of my remit. They are a challenge because they are largely shady and they slope towards the properties (making watering difficult). I have been gradually adding more shade tolerant species such as this [Hydrangea aspera villosa](#).



Climbers.

Climbing plants have an important role in the built environment – there is often more vertical than horizontal space and climbers economically fill these spaces (walls and fences) in a two dimensional manner if pruned correctly. Where I am able to I'm fitting steel wire rope to eye-bolts in the brickwork. This will last for decades compared with trellis and is almost invisible. I removed a common jasmine ([Jasminum officinale](#)) from the side of 20 Bergholt Mews which wasn't getting enough sunlight resulting in poor flowering. I replaced it, along newly fitted wire ropes, with the star jasmine ([Trachelospermum jasminoides](#)) which is even more fragrant than common jasmine, has a much neater habit and evergreen leaves which turn red in mid winter. Along the top rope I am training Daniel and Sophie's white wisteria which should look beautiful hanging down over the dark leaves of the star jasmine, long before the latter comes into flower. As you come into Rossendale Way from near the garden centre on your left is a large false acacia tree, Many years ago I trained a climbing rose (Rosa 'Kiftsgate') up the tree and it is now creating quite a spectacular display in early summer. The bed below the tree is planted as a winter-interest bed with snowdrops and hardy Cyclamen.

Some climbers can be invasive and become very large – ivy in particular. I am gradually restricting it to areas where it is easy to manage such as the low wall opp. 113 Rossendale Way.

Annuals and biennials.



Around eight years ago giant vipers bugloss ([Echium pininana](#) left) decided to move into the village near the large false acacia tree on the left as you come into Rossendale Way from St Pancras Way. It is happily self seeding and I try and relocate seedlings to places where it can grow fully. A couple of years ago I sowed Californian poppies ([Eschscholzia californica](#) right) and Argentinian vervain ([Verbena bonariensis](#) right below) all around the village. They are now spreading around the estate. The poppy has a very flimsy root system so it can grow in-between pavements without causing any disturbance.



Wildflowers.

In addition to welcoming the giant vipers bugloss, yellow fumitory ([Corydalis lutea](#)) is now quite widespread around the estate and where it isn't going to compete with other plants I let it ramble around. In the same way I let the little blue flowered wall bellflower ([Campanula portenschlagiana](#)) wander around – not a British native wildflower but naturalised here at Elm Village. There was a lot of red valerian ([Centranthus ruber](#)) on the estate back in the early noughties but it has a thick, deep, woody root and I eliminate it where it may damage the paving, elsewhere I let it do its own thing. Our resident beekeepers Helene and Rob are cultivating wild flowers on the vacant land by the vegetable plots (canalside).

Crescent lawn

Several years ago someone planted cowslips ([Primula veris](#)) in the crescent lawn. When the seeds have ripened I scatter them on the lawn to increase the size of the colony. These are now underplanted with [Crocus tommassianus](#), giant snowdrop ([Galanthus elwoodii](#)) and snake's head fritillary ([Fritillaria meleagris](#)), although I have to say that these bulbs struggle in this awful soil.

Pruning techniques

To look their best *some* woody plants require annual pruning, others may need a hard prune every few years. Sometimes we prune plants just because they are getting too large for their space, are spreading out onto the pavement or blocking windows and flues. Some shrubs have stunning form and pruning would ruin this form. As an example of the latter one of my favourites shrubs is Viburnum plicatum 'Mariesii' (photo right). It has a stratified or layered habit and



when it is in flower the flowers sit on top of the branches This beautiful plant proudly won the Royal Horticultural Society's 'Award of Garden Merit'. There is one behind the greenhouse and I recently planted a new one in the Barker Drive bed backing on to 115 Rossendale Way.

Sustainable practices

All green waste is recycled. In autumn I compost most of the fallen autumn leaves. 12 months later I mulch the beds and borders with this wonderful rich leaf mould. We are also very lucky to have access to a free compost hub on Camley Street which I use to thickly mulch the beds with. Thanks go to Alex Smith and his team at Alara Wholefoods for providing this resource.

Propagation

I am propagating plants on site which costs hardly anything but for my time. Plants raised this way are then planted around the village.

Involving children

A new generation of youngsters has sprung up over the past 3-4 years and I would really like them to learn to appreciate plant life and hopefully grow up to respect the plantings. I've previously run practical gardening workshops with kids and they have been very enthusiastic. Maybe we could do this in May planting pots, planters or hanging baskets?

Education

I would be happy to run informal gardening classes or question and answer sessions if there is the demand / interest. Beginner gardeners often go about tasks the hard way and this can be disheartening.

Private realm / communal realm.

Although I am only responsible for the communal green spaces I very much see public-facing private gardens as part of the whole estate and am very happy to advise, encourage or help when I can.