

Hoxton Street Public Space
London, UK

PEER

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category: Small Scale Permanent Award

Project overview

PEER has transformed the public realm space where Hoxton Street meets Fanshaw Street with trees, new paving, a raised bed of planting, seating and bike parking, as well as public art commissions by Chris Ofili and London Fieldworks. Before these major changes the site was unwelcoming and underused. It was a home to a large and poorly designed raised planter from which the seating was removed because of the anti-social behaviour it attracted during the daytime. At night, the space was insufficiently lit and as a result was intimidating and attracted litter and fouling. The project cost £90,000 and involved 70 people. Hoxton Street Public Space is the only green area on high street open 24/7 with a free and accessible space to rest, meet and contemplate nature. It is situated on a land belonging to Tenant Management Organisation therefore it is both owned and used by local community.

What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?

The site was a home to shrubs and bushes in high raised planter that has not be maintained and a mature tree in ill health. The site was frequented by the birds but **didn't attract pollinators. The site was not used by the local community either.**

Were there any specific conditions that led to you carrying out this work?

This very well situated site was poorly designed and underused. Our aim was to transform a modest piece of land into a pocket park for the enjoyment of local people and benefit of urban wildlife. We replaced a mature tree in ill health with 4 young trees, provided a new habitat for birds and established a flower bed that attracts pollinators and provides food for birds.



Hoxton Street, pocket park view (April 2016) featuring the public clock with designs by Chris Ofili and inhabitable sculpture by London Fieldworks.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

Our approach was to create a haven for urban wildlife and an oasis of green and calm on a busy high street throughout the year. In order to extend the pollinating season and attract insects, we included plants and shrubs that flower either late or early such as Hamamelis Pallida, Anemone blanda, Narcissus Thalia and Hedera helix. A number of decisions have been made to create an ecologically valuable habitat - a selection of simple flowers are used to ensure easy access to pollen; the flower heads are left to encourage shedding of seeds around the area; the green waste is chopped up and left on site to allow nutrients to reinvigorate the soil; mix of trees, shrubs and climbers have been included to provide food and shelter for a number of insects as well as larger species; a few small and hidden areas are kept purposefully untidy to allow for a sufficient habitat for hibernating reptiles and amphibians. PEER staff, as well as local residents, were actively involved in the design of the garden and continue contributing their time towards the maintenance of the area. The garden links in to a number of other green spaces situated nearby and open to occupation by wildlife such as the green square in front of the mews on Fanshaw Street or the community garden on Hoxton Street. The diversity of wildlife extends also to the diversity of the garden users. The garden, thanks to being open 24/7 and placed on a busy high street, attracts a very diverse group of people engaging with it. This approach is replicable and affordable. The innovative and important aspect of the garden is added by an inhabitable sculpture made out of 212 bird and bug boxes specially commissioned for this site by PEER. This inhabitable artwork is a new home to a number of species but also a talking point and a landmark for the local area. The site is maintained by PEER in partnership with local Tenant Management Organisation.



Inhabitable sculpture by London Fieldworks and garden view (July 2016)

How would you best describe the project?

An enhancement.

Further information

The main part of the installation has been undertaken by the skilful contractors. The planting scheme has been designed and planted by an experienced gardener with local people in autumn 2015. The inhabitable sculpture and the clock have been introduced in spring 2016 and both works were installed by specialist art technicians. The inhabitable sculpture install was particularly demanding as we ensured that none of the plants were harmed when installing the 100kg artwork above and around it. One innovative install solution was to create a temporary raised platform that allowed access to the fence on which the inhabitable sculpture has been mounted.

As the plants, shrubs, climbers and trees become more established, they will attract **more diverse species thanks to the garden's ability to provide food and shelter**. The pocket park is already very well used by the local community and we are about to **embark on a year long educational project aimed at increasing local people's** knowledge and familiarity with urban wildlife and biodiversity issues. This programme will meaningfully contribute to further development of the pocket park, awareness of biodiversity issues and we hope that this will lead to the creation of other mini-gardens on window sills and balconies in the local area, helping us extend green corridors around this highly populated area of inner London.



Pocket park view (July 2016)

What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

The pocket park is situated directly next to the gallery and as a result of this enhancement the gallery has gained greater visibility and direct interactions with audiences before they come through the gallery threshold. The garden has also made apparent our interest and support of urban wildlife. Our unique approach to the garden is to see it as a changing painting not a finished design. We will continue to be open, accommodating and flexible in order to enable animals and plants to thrive.