

Of Soil and Water: The King's Cross Pond Club
King's Cross, London

King's Cross Central Limited Partnership (KCCLP) in partnership with Ooze (Eva Pfannes and Sylvain Hartenberg) and Marjetica Potrc

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category: Temporary Award

Project overview

The UK's first ever man-made fresh water bathing pond is a piece of innovative Land Art, within a working construction site within London's King's Cross development. The 40m long, natural, chemical free pond is purified through a natural closed-loop process, using wetland and submerged water plants to filter and sustain clean and clear water.

With a range of soil zones surrounding the pond, planting has been selected according to the soil type, from meagre soil and pioneer plants to a meadow area of rich soil with grasses, wildflowers and shrubbery. The plants vary with season and act to clean and enrich the soil as they grow.

By swimming and exploring the pond and its environment, visitors participate in a living laboratory that reveals nature's ability to restore itself. The project gives people the opportunity to learn about the resilience of the ecological system through their own direct experience.

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

The development site is on a 67 acre area of brownfield land in central London and its ecology and nature conservation status reflected this. The pre-development environment was categorised as a wasteland habitat, with the high levels of land contamination and a low level of biodiversity.



Photo Description: The brownfield site at the start of project construction November 2014

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

The project was presented as a two-year temporary art installation, commissioned on the basis of delivering the S106 art fund obligations. The installation, however, presented benefits that go above and beyond those required in the S106, generating a multi-faceted enlightenment space, combining art with education and enjoyment of nature.

Due to the temporary nature of the project, BREEAM and biodiversity offsetting obligations do not apply. The project is located in the new Lewis Cubitt Park; with the area being converted to parkland following de-commissioning, the project was recognised as an opportunity to engage visitors in biodiversity enhancement and the appreciation of micro-ecological environments within an urban location.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

At KCCLP, the aim is to work above and beyond requirements set out in the S106, to enhance biodiversity and engage the local community in the process and benefits of doing so.

The 'Of Soil and Water' pond project has been enabled through partnerships with many local organisations. The installation was constructed from materials reclaimed from around the site by one of the developments main contractors, Carillion. The plants that regulated the self-sustaining system are planted and maintained by Global Generation; a charity that provides local children and teenagers with opportunities to work on sustainable projects within the site.

The pond consists of three different zones: a swimmers zone, a regeneration zone and a plant-filter zone. The water is purified by a natural process using water plants, nutrient mineralisation and a set of filters on the edge of the pond that supplement the natural filtration. The number of people bathing per day is restricted according to the level of purification the plants in the pond can manage, so that the pond ecosystem remains in balance with what nature can absorb and regenerate.

The soil zones around the pond are monitored by students from the on-site University of the Arts, London (UAL).



Photo Description: Volunteers from Global Generation planting at the site April 2015

The students conduct ongoing studies of the biodiversity across each soil zone, to monitor the performance of the plants and the biodiversity value added to each area. Depending on the performance reported, management of the zones can be adapted by Global Generation.

The innovative project is the first man-made fresh water bathing pond in the UK, accommodating up to 163 bathers per day. The installation is pioneering the relational experience between swimmers and an urban ecosystem.

How would you best describe the project?

An enhancement.

Further information

The 'Of Soil and Water' Pond Club Project was developed as part of the public art programme RELAY. It was designed by architects [Ooze](#) and artist [Marjetica Potrc](#), and engineered and built by [BIOTOP](#) and its UK partner, Kingcombe Aquacare Ltd. The space is managed by the charity, Fusion Lifestyle and their lifeguards are an ever present support to bathers and site visitors alike.

The site is maintained by [Global Generation](#) as well as other local business and community volunteers, who learn about the project background, the way the Pond works and the planting species and approach as they engage with the installation.

Since opening in May 2015, over 20,000 people have paid the Pond a visit. The project has been extremely popular with visitors taking a dip in the water and learning about the naturally purifying system. Biodiversity of the area continues to grow with 400 plant species to date, with regular sightings of bees, butterflies, dragonflies and other wildlife. It has also been a stop on the King's Cross Bee Trail implemented by the Honey Club (<http://beetrail.co.uk/>).

Now half way through the planned two year project, lessons learnt to date include:

- The challenge of getting a one-off, unique project through regulatory processes – such as Planning, Building Control, Environmental Health and Health & Safety. Key has been to engage and consult from the start.

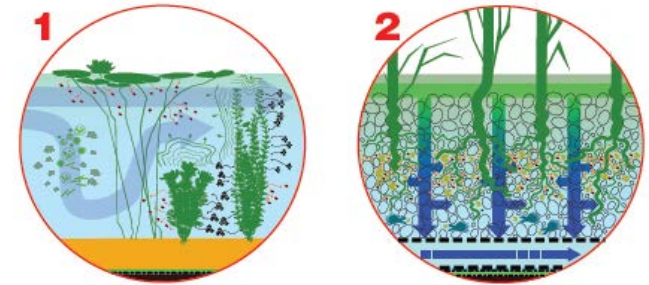
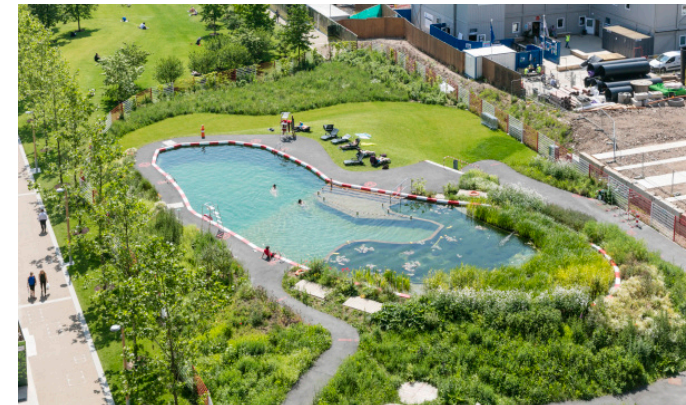


Diagram of regeneration and filter planting



Aerial view of the pond area June 2016

- The need to introduce and integrate artists and architects into the construction site standard practices as early as possible.
- The need for close oversight and co-ordination of the many parties involved in the delivery of the project.

What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

This installation has provided a unique opportunity to enhance biodiversity whilst engaging the local community and attracting visitors to learn about the benefits of urban freshwater ecosystems.

Furthermore, involving local organisations such as Global Generation and UAL gives a broader platform for these groups as well as enabling young people to get involved in exciting local projects.



Photo Description: Open House Tour of the pond September 2015