

Château de Péronne
Péronne, Hauts-de-France, France
Hervé Francois, Historial de la Grande Guerre

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award Category: *Habitat Creation: Project of the Year (<5ha and less)*

Project overview

This two-phase project at the 13th century Château de Péronne involved the conversion of the dried-up moat into a public park, and the later redevelopment of the castle courtyard. The key objective was to use biodiversity measures to attract locals and visitors to the previously neglected spaces. The client wanted to emphasise the theme of remembrance due to the site's history, a theme which we chose to convey through our biodiversity scheme.

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

The moat had been dried up for some time and contained only soil and grass. Due to its neglected state, the space was no longer frequented by tourists or locals. The key planning objective was to attract visitors and locals to the space while also enhancing biodiversity on site. In the courtyard, a large, planted bed served as the only green space which had been uprooted due to the roots of two large *Tilia cordata* interfering with the castle structure below. As per the site's protected status, it was imperative that the face of the castle remain unchanged, and any interventions had to be reversible.

What were the reasons behind this project?

The conversion of the moat into a public park began as one of the Gardens of Peace, selected to commemorate the centenary of the Great War and reflect on the area previously marked by political and ecological upheaval. It was also an opportunity to enact key aspects of the Biodiversity Action Plan, published by the Ministère de la Transition Écologique et Solidaire, which encourages municipalities to account for biodiversity when managing public spaces. Within both the courtyard and moat, a greater variety of planting was introduced to provide shade and mitigate heat gain by the surrounding concrete, stone, and brick surfaces.



Château de Péronne, entrance from street



Château de Péronne, moat before intervention

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

Due to the site's history, it was permitted to dig down into the soil during construction. During these excavation works, all soil remained on site and was later reused minimising disruption to soil biology and biodiversity.

All additions to the garden were sourced as locally as possible – ranging from planting, timber, and stone, to engaging with local businesses and contractors. This is exemplified by the picnic benches in the moat. They were constructed from locally sourced pine and used to house apple, cherry, and pear trees. These trees provide shade to the inhabitants below and the fruit, available to the public, has already been used to produce jam by employees of the castle museum. The benefits of the 12m long sandstone seating are twofold, in that it has created a new social space in the moat while providing lodges, shelters, and perches for dorsal basking by butterflies and other insects.

The planting lists were carefully considered to benefit insects as nectar sources and larval hosts. *Crataegus monogyna*, a native species found in the many hedgerows of the Haut de France countryside, supports up to 300 species, including locally resident Light Emerald, Lackey, Vapourer, Coronet, Brick, and Centre-barred Sallow moths. Included in the planting were perennials such as *Nepeta grandiflora*, *Lamium maculatum*, *Rudbeckia nitida*, and *Thymus vulgaris*, and fruiting trees such as Apple, Pear, and Cherry. Evergreen wildlife attractors such as *Lonicera periclymenum*, *Taxus baccata*, and *Sarcococca hookeriana* var. *humilis* provide wintering habitats, nectar, and food. Within the courtyard, a herbarium has been implemented in collaboration with the museum staff who use *Lavandula angustifolia*, *Rosmarinus officinalis*, *Salvia officinalis*, *Viola* spp., and *Aloysia citrodora* to demonstrate to visitors how herbal medicine was used in the years of the Great War 1914-1918. They also run workshops demonstrating botanical methods for drying plants.



Château de Péronne, moat intervention



Château de Péronne, courtyard illustration

Further information

As the site is a listed structure, the proposed intervention had to be reversible and could not alter the castle and moat walls. This significantly influenced the way in which the garden was installed, and consequently the overall design. During construction of Phase 1, all soil remained on site and was later reused. All trees, soil, and stone were craned from street level over the 9m walls and into the garden below. Access to the recreational area is impeded by the main access bridge to the castle. As a result, no large machinery was involved in the installation of this area. In Phase 2, access was a similar challenge as the only entrance was through the castle gate. To counter this, all planters were designed so that they could be manufactured off site and easily assembled in situ. They are constructed with a steel frame and faced with a Medite tricoya cladding, an FSC certified wood product.

The seven *Betula utilis jacquemontii* were a key part of the design. Recognised as symbol of peace, they are also vital in reducing heat gain within the courtyard which had previously reached temperatures of 40°C. They were installed using a rootball anchoring system, allowing them to stand in the main bed without additional stakes or support. Phase 1 of this project was completed in 2018, and its success with the employees of the castle, as well as both locals and tourists resulted in the design practice being invited back to design Phase 2.

Project Team

- Client: Hervé Francois, Director Historial de la Grande Guerre
- Designers: Peter Donegan & Chloe Quinn, Peter Donegan Garden Design

What was the motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

While this project began as a commemoration of the centenary of the end of World War I, a primary motivation for its installation was to lure both locals and visitors to the previously neglected grounds of the castle by using biodiversity as an attractant. Not only does it enhance the ecological value of the site, but it also ties into the theme of memory as many of the plants were chosen for their twofold impact on both sight and smell. This goal ties in well with the museum staff's objectives for on site workshops and for integrating the local community into the project.



Château de Péronne, courtyard main bed



Château de Péronne, recreation area with fruiting trees