

Core Arts community garden Jan 2023 – July 2024



Volunteers at Core Arts community garden 2023

Core Arts community garden background

From Autumn 2022 Core Arts is creating a new community garden behind St Barnabas Church on Homerton High street into a beautiful and accessible community garden for all to enjoy, and access green skills in a supportive setting, via its horticultural department Core Landscapes.

The 1,600m² site is a significant green site in a densely populated, urban area. The vision is to maximize the sites beauty, biodiversity and connection with the local community to promote positive mental health for all while showcasing replicable climate change mitigation techniques. The new garden includes an open lawn area for community use and church events, accessible seating, community food growing, micro-plant nursery, and a sheltered teaching space.

With support from Hackney Council, the Mayor of London's Greener City Fund, the Kusuma Trust, and a 6-year lease from St Barnabas Church, Core Art's horticultural department – Core Landscapes, has already worked with over 500 people in the first phase of the project.

Core Landscapes transforms underused land in deprived urban areas into hubs for community engagement through horticulture, design, workshops, training and events – improving mental and physical health, overall wellbeing and community cohesion. The department works with Core Arts members, community and corporate volunteers to maintain and develop a roof garden, garage garden, and street level garden, 7 tree pits and 7 street planters below the roof garden, and a 60m long meadow strip and community orchard in nearby Homerton Grove – and the creation the new 1600m² community garden behind St Barnabas church next door to Core Arts.

Core Landscapes began in 2009 as a “*meanwhile*” project and has relocated 4 times across 3 boroughs in the last 10 ten years using temporarily available land; Harvesting and diverting rainwater, composting, greening up organically and using solar powered irrigation systems wherever based. Core Landscapes is a Core Arts project: a not-for-profit Social Business that promotes positive mental health and wellbeing through creative learning. Core Arts provides quality education, training, employment and social enterprise initiatives that enable people who experience mental health issues to overcome barriers, fulfil their potential and participate fully in their community.



Delivery of Services

Core Landscapes aims to provide inclusive green education and accessible safe green spaces for the local community and targeted engagement with:

Beneficiaries

- Adults experiencing mental ill health referred to Core Arts by the NHS
- Lower income and minoritised communities
- Older residents
- People experiencing social isolation
- Other Community green projects
- The wider community

The creation of the garden is supporting 4-8 weekly facilitated sessions resulting in a co-designed and user-led garden design encompassing poly-pod teaching spaces, accessible pathways and seating, large areas of wildlife-friendly planting, and food growing. Horticultural + landscaping skills have been nurtured through the ongoing development and care for the garden.

Core Landscapes is incorporating its service delivery across the installation phases: 1 - the layout and main pathways, 2 – polypod and raised beds installation, 3 – planting, additional seating, completion of pathways, planting and further engagement with the new garden. This enables everyone accessing the project to be involved with a wide range of new practical and technical opportunities including; design consultation, hard landscaping, tree planting, propagation and planting design input.

- Small group sizes for SMI referrals (4-6 per session)
- Larger group work for community volunteers (8-12 per session)
- Culturally relevant plant choices from community discussions
- Propagation by seed, division, cuttings
- Sustainable organic gardening increasing bio-diversity + climate change mitigation

Number of Face-to-face classes:

- 2 x 2hrs for Community Volunteering 42 sessions p/a
- 1 x 2hrs Progression Gardening sessions for referrals 42 sessions p/a
- 1 x 2hrs rolling weekly Beginner Gardener sessions for referrals 42 sessions p/a
- 1 x full day p/wk volunteer garden builder assistant 42 sessions p/a
- 2 x Support Volunteers for vocational progression 20 sessions p/a
- 10-20 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) days per annum

**Annually = approx 100 x members and community volunteers in total p/a
+ 300 – 450 corporate volunteers p/a**

Additional engagement

While 100m² of flat and accessible garden pathways are being completed, Core Landscapes hosted events for the wider community to attend in the form of tours, workshops and small events. With additional wider engagement for students (Core Arts members), current community volunteers and those with a general interest in the work of Core Landscapes or interested in becoming volunteers.

June 2024 saw the grand opening of the new garden coinciding with Open Garden weekend with over 400 visitors attending during the afternoon. The mayor of Hackney and patron and TV gardener Mark Lane cut the ribbon. Much of the new garden has 24/7 open access for independent use by the local community.



Grand opening June 2024 – 400+ visitors attending



Kew gardens trip summer 2023

Summer social in the new garden 2023

Tours

- 20 x tours of Core Landscapes for other projects for ideas + information
- 2 – 8 people per tour / approx 100 people in total p/a
- Specialised tour for Social Farms and Garden on 'sustainable irrigation' x 6people
- Specialised tour for Capital Growth on 'sustainable irrigation' x 12 people

Ongoing...

Events:

- Open Garden Squares weekend (public) for up to 400- 500 people
- Summer social (public) for up to 60 people
- Autumn social (students and volunteers and CL friends) x 20 people
- Winter social (students and volunteers and CL friends) x 50 people

Specialist workshops

- 6 x specialised workshop delivered by Core Landscapes' volunteer coordinator x 30 people
- 1 x specialised workshops delivered by external Fungi expert x 12 people

Extra Volunteering Days

- 3 x Digging days for additional Core Arts members x 8 people
- 5 x additional landscaping days for Core Landscapes students (members) x 20 people
- 1 x Digging day for Daubeney Fields green gym x 12 people

Trips

- 2 x trips to Kew Gardens x 25 people
- 1 x trip to Phytology Nature Reserve in Bethnal Green x 12 people

Off site volunteering

- 1 x Volunteer session alongside Core Arts' boat on the river lea x 8 people



Off-site volunteering

Online Engagement

50+ gardening films are publically accessible via the Core Landscapes website on Vimeo. The Online gardening films cover a range of horticultural areas including, soil management, compost, seed sowing, pricking out, indoor growing, bulb planting, water cuttings, pest control, liquid fertilisers and how not to kill your house plants. These can be also used as a source of revision for the members' beginners' classes.

Remote engagement via online film view

- 1,500 Core Arts students have access to Core Landscapes' online films
- 600 – 13.3K views per film Facebook screening also shared with other green community projects in addition to 800 Facebook followers
- 80 – 120 views per film via Instagram linked to other community growing projects (1,265 followers)

Whatapp groups + other communications

2 groups one for community volunteers (x 12) (and Core Arts members x 6)

Plus calls, texts and emails to volunteers and Core Arts members as required, to inform about events workshops and additional volunteering sessions.

Core Arts community garden 1st + 2nd phases (layout + construction)

1st phase and 2nd phases: have created an operational site that can accommodate regular teaching sessions for all needs with comfortable work tables, flat ground, a sheltered teaching area via the installation of the Polypod and topography altered for accessibility and to increase bio-diversity. In the first 20months we have worked with over 500+ people and shifted 60m³ of soil and aggregate manually. Flower beds have been lain out and partially planted up and soil improved. Some of the key trees and shrubs have been planted and ongoing propagation has been undertaken to fill more of the beds with plants. Additionally;

- 85m of pathways have been excavated and foundations laid in main 1000m² area of the site
- Installation of 1 x 1000litres sunken water troughs + solar irrigation installed
- 14 x Raised food containers installed, planted and clad with recycled timber
- 15m long raised "hot border" installed
- 78m² of SUDS / Gravel garden area installed
- Raised border + gravel garden planted up
- 2 x wild hedgerows planted
- 1 small pond installed

<https://www.corearts.co.uk/core-landscapes/community-garden-st-barnabas-church/>





Sustainability

Core Landscapes is committed to promoting sustainable low, to zero, carbon footprint practices and to promoting environmental awareness + education throughout the project and beyond. Every opportunity has been used to incorporate sustainable materials at the new garden, up cycling and repurposing materials to draw attention to the importance of 'closed loop' systems, permaculture techniques, and organic growing across the site to address the bio-diversity and climate change emergencies the world is facing in accessible and positive ways.

Hard Landscaping

- 11m x 5m Polypod installed using sustainably sourced larch from UK woodland
- Accessible exterior workbenches from FSCS sourced timber
- Interior work tables made from up-cycled and recycled materials
- Edging for pathway is made from recycled plastic
- SUDS grid is made from recycled plastic
- Capacity to collect 6,000litres of rainwater
- Recycled cedar cladding installed on food growing containers – waste material from a Hackney housing estate
- Recycled concrete pavers utilised to support 4,000litres of harvested rainwater
- Food containers and rain collection uses recycled bowsers



Soft Landscaping:

- Soft Landscaping incorporates plants from Chelsea Flower Show 2022
- Generating additional plants via propagation
- Organically grown food throughout the seasons
- Drought resistant planting
- 7 x compost piles installed across the site
- 3 x leaf mould piles
- Bokashi compost system used
- “No dig” flower beds
- Mulches
- ‘Right Plant Right Place’

Key Outcomes:

- **Strengthen climate resilience** by utilising closed loop systems: rainwater harvesting + diversion, solar power, sustainable growing techniques + repurposing bio-mass and increase bio-diversity
- Strengthen community engagement
- Benefits to mental and physical health
- Increase capacity to develop green skills and gardening for self-care to greater numbers to address health inequalities + create green sector jobs within the project



Chats Palace on a visit to the new garden 2023

Advice Support and Training

Core Landscapes is a beacon of good practice in combining community outreach with referral systems to offer a range of inclusive horticultural and wider green education opportunities around climate and ecological emergency mitigation, with clear progression routes for referral beginner gardeners and support volunteers alike that support individualised learning.

Organisations, individuals and other community projects use the experience and knowledge gained by Core Landscapes’ unique experience of developing and relocating the project across 4 sites in 3 boroughs over the past 10 years. Our experience has proven useful for other statutory based organisations and community projects looking to set up, or run, similar green engagement projects for mental health and community wellbeing and we have been passing this information on in the form of tours, advice and training.

Key Partnerships/Links:**Tours of Core Landscapes included:**

- Woodshop of Earthly Delights
- Social Farms and Gardens
- St Barnabas Church
- ELFT
- Queer as Fungi
- Chats Palace

Consultation undertaken for:

- Springfield Park
- Mulberry School for Girls
- Capital Growth
- Social Farms and Gardens
- St Mary the Virgin Church garden
- Oru Gardens

Future Developments

Due to popular demand Core Landscapes reinstated its micro community plant nursery in Spring 2024 to supply plants to local people who can benefit from having the project on their doorstep and locally grown plants for windowsills and balconies.

We are looking forward to the rest of 2024 and beyond with plans to widely promote the new garden now most of the pathways are completed and much seating has been installed.

Core Landscapes continues to maintain its green corridor running between Homerton hospital and Homerton high street that includes the roof garden, members' garden, garage garden, and the entire street planting along Wardle Street, the 60m long meadow strip and orchard in Homerton Grove.

Awards in 2023 + 2024

Core Landscapes received several awards including overall winner for the roof garden. Once the new garden has been largely planted up we will submit the garden for awards also.

Awards so far received in 2024:

- **Green Flag award**

Awards received in 2023:

- **GOLD + OVERALL WINNER 'Roof Garden' Award 2023 L in Bloom**
- **OUTSTANDING 'It's Your Neighbourhood' Award 2023 L in Bloom**
- **GOLD 'Our Community' Award 2023 L in Bloom**
- **Green Flag Award 2022/23**

Self-Generated Income

Core Landscapes' has a successful track record in with Corporate Social Responsibility as a means to self-generate income and lever further funding. Additionally Core Landscapes can deliver;

- Alternative CSR engagement Webinar package around sustainable food production and home growing
- Consultation package developed to support other green projects
- Donations received from organisations requiring our consultation and advice
- Plants sales

Feedback

"This is a wonderful initiative. The workout in nature is absolutely therapeutic, and as we did together we bonded well. Beautiful DAY. "

"Really enjoyed volunteering for such a good cause. Really felt my mental health was nourished."

"Very enjoyable day at Core Arts to help assist with your project!"

"Great day with the Core landscapes team. Very well organized and felt like we achieved a lot for the charity."

"I really enjoyed volunteering with Core Arts. It was nice to make an impact and connect with colleagues."

"Really enjoyable day and great to help make a difference to the garden. I would 100% come back!"

"Well organized and managed by Nemone and Matt. Good health and safety talk at the beginning , very accommodating and appreciative, and the work done was for a wonderful cause."

"Great experience. Thoroughly enjoyed landscaping. Great facilities and what they offer the community."

"It was a great experience and I enjoyed it very much!"

"Great day out, lovely and fulfilling to give something back. The Core Arts team were amazing and very accommodating!"

Case studies from members and volunteers are also available on request.

Report updated by Nemone Mercer - Core Landscapes project director updated July 2024
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