

SEEDING THE GARDEN:
OUR PLACE IN LEWISHAM'S
GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE



Seeding
the
Garden

A REPORT BY
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Seeding the Garden: our place in Lewisham's Green Infrastructure

By Dr Anna Colin

Research assistance by Fatima Alalawat, Olivia Middelboe and Borbála Soós

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Lewisham Way Garden, July 2022

I. Methodology

Research to scope out the future of the Lewisham Way Garden (LWG) was carried out between May and October 2022 by a group led by Anna Colin, Lecturer, MFA Curating, and three Goldsmiths students and researchers: Fatima Alalawat, MA Art & Ecology; Olivia Middelboe, MFA Curating; and Borbála Soós, MPhil/PhD Art. The research and report were commissioned by the lead team composed of Michael Eades, Head of Civic Engagement, and Ros Gray, Programme Leader, MA Art & Ecology.

Eleven individuals with varying connections to community gardening initiatives in and around London, as well as further afield, were interviewed by the group. Interviews were conducted both in person and online, and were typically 30 to 45 min long. See table below for details of the interviews and the appendix for the questions that were asked to the participants, as and when relevant.

The present report highlights examples of practice that Goldsmiths can learn from, while sharing resources that offer additional guidance and expertise on the subject of setting up a garden that will provide a resource for students, staff and local community and enhance biodiversity. The report further provides a set of recommendations for what the future Lewisham Way Garden could be, drawn from the interviews and discussions with the group.

II. Interview Table

Interviewee	Occupation	Interviewer	Date	Location
Rebecca Jacobs	Creative Learning Manager, Museum of the Home, LB Hackney	Olivia Middelboe	28/06/22	Online
Eszter Wainwright-Déri	Ecological Regeneration Manager, LB Lewisham	Anna Colin	29/06/22	Online
Marco Edward Ardani	Director, Edible Landscape London, LBH Islington	Fatima Alalaiwat	03/07/22	Online
Raluca Voinea	Director, transit Bucharest, The Experimental Station for Research on Art and Life, Siliştea Snagovului	Borbála Soós	10/07/22	Online
Luke Payne	Westraven Community Garden, Peterborough	Borbála Soós	15/07/22	In person
James Wheale	The Lighthouse and Gardens, LB Newham	Olivia Middelboe	15/07/22	In person
Ros Gray	In relation to her role in coordinating the Goldsmiths allotment and the Lewisham Way Garden	Fatima Alalaiwat	21/07/22	In person
Giulia Bellinetti	Coordinator, Nature Research department, Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht	Anna Colin	22/07/22	Online
Maria Devereaux	Project Manager, Wildcat Wilderness, LBH Lewisham	Fatima Alalaiwat	25/07/22	In person
Errol Reuben Fernandes	Head of Horticulture, Horniman Museum and Gardens	Anna Colin and Michael Eades	11/10/22	In person
David Dandridge	Garden Project Coordinator, The Albany	Anna Colin	25/10/22	In person

III. Context

The garden is located on 43 Lewisham Way, at the junction of Parkfield Road. A steady flow of articulated lorries circulates on the latter road and comes to a halt at the traffic light marking the junction. Noise is a constant, as is pollution. Both constitute challenges for the Lewisham Way Garden.

The garden is accessible through two entrances: one requires a Goldsmiths card and entails going up a set of steps, walking along a corridor, and going down another set of steps, and the other is directly located on Parkfield Road and currently requires opening from the inside. Access is another noted challenge faced by the Lewisham Way Garden.

The walled garden is approximately 16 metres long by 8 metres wide and is North-West facing. The fixed planted elements consist of a hedge on the left wall, starting after the gate and running through to the back wall, and a tree, which appears to be on a list of trees on Goldsmiths' land to be cut off.

One of the stated aims of the Lewisham Way Garden is to be accessible and relevant to both students, staff and neighbouring communities.

To date, the garden has been the object and/or site of several core activities:

- The lecture and workshop series 'What Can a Garden Be?', held online during the pandemic, with the final workshop held in-person in the garden post-lockdown (2020-21);
- The Sensing Soil residency held by Harun Morrison and accompanied by workshops and events (2021-22);
- Workshops and events connected to the MA Art & Ecology curriculum (2021-22);
- Occasional events and performances by the Art PhD programme.

III Findings from the Interviews

Drawing from the interviews, the findings presented in this section are organised into several categories, each complete with a set of recommendations relevant to the possible future development of the Lewisham Way Garden. This section focuses primarily on the natural environment and its maintenance, reflecting responses that were given by the interviewees. It provides a framework for the next main section, which concentrates on possible approaches to pedagogical outputs, knowledge and cultural production and dissemination, and their entanglements.

1. A Resilient and Biodiverse Garden, Part of a Habitat Corridor

The very fact that Goldsmiths has chosen not to develop this land is already a mark of its engagement with biodiversity. From then on, different actions can be done to sustain nature and make it a part of the students' learning.

Eszter Wainwright-Déri, Ecological Regeneration Manager, LB Lewisham

Many of the interviews took place on the eve of and during the summer drought. Water was high on the agenda as was the need for shade and habitat creation to protect the endangered and shrinking wildlife populations. Starting with resilience, this notably entails building autonomy through water, soil and vegetation management; from collecting water, to composting, through to enriching the soil and ground covering. Biodiversity can be achieved through different means, in the same way that wildlife protection may focus on specific species, for instance, birds, bats, pollinators, insects and small mammals. The questions that we asked ourselves were: How can a garden of this size contribute to sustaining and increasing wildlife? What are adequate approaches to the changing climate? What resources might the garden need to flourish?



Horniman Museum and Gardens micro-forest, October 2022

As stated in the Lewisham Biodiversity Partnership document 'A Natural Renaissance for Lewisham (2021-2026)', 'Trees, hedgerows and woodlands offer opportunities to mitigate against the impacts of climate change. Trees deliver a range of benefits including: storing carbon; improving local air quality; drainage and resilience to storm events; shading and reducing the urban heat island effect; biodiversity; and making places look and feel nicer to be in" (2021: 24).¹

The suggestion of a forest garden was made by several of the interviewees who praised the model as relatively low-maintenance: drought-resistant, providing that the right species of trees, shrubs and

¹ <https://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/documents/s91062/A%20Natural%20Renaissance%202021-2026.pdf>

herbaceous plants are planted;² able to attract and retain wildlife, providing that the soil is enriched and that areas dedicated to the flourishing and protection of non-human activity are created. Beyond woodland, one such area is the pond which, in a garden of that size, can attract insects and frogs, provide freshwater for birds, and help the collection of water (ground and rainwater). Creating a pond or connected set of ponds was deemed to be of primary importance by the majority of the interviewees.

In 2022, the Horniman Museum and Gardens planted a micro-forest using the Miyawaki method, involving dense tree planting, whereby trees grow at a faster rate than they would in a typical human-made woodland, as they compete with each other for light and nutrients.³ This method enables the fast establishment of woodland that, in the case of the Horniman, was planted to shield the garden from ambient noise and pollution coming from the adjacent main road. It represents a 300 m² area and involves 190 trees of 35 different species. This model could easily be replicated in the Lewisham Way Garden, which is equivalent in size, and faces similar noise and pollution problems.

Understanding not only what is already in the garden, but also what is around it, and thinking of the Lewisham Way Garden not as a lone entity, but as an element of an ecosystem with fixed boundaries that are transcended by animals and plants/seeds is, according to biodiversity expert Eszter Wainwright-Déri, key to the development of the LWG. Indeed, the LWG is located on the far corner of a cluster of gardens situated in a perimeter demarcated by: Lewisham Way, Parkfield Road, Amersham Road and Mulberry Mews. As such, it is part of a defined, though not designated, habitat corridor, itself surrounded by two conservation areas: New Cross to St Johns railway, a designated secondary woodland area, and New Cross Cutting, a designated green space that runs alongside the East London Line between Brockley and New Cross Gate.

Recommendations (first steps):

- Carry out a basic identification survey;
- Carry out a habitat ecology survey;
- Carry out a woodland survey in the surrounding area;
- Build compost heaps;
- Install log piles for insect and frog habitat development;
- Set up water collectors;
- Use refuse biodegradable and/or sustainable materials surrounding the garden (e.g. sawdust, wood chips, and offcuts could be obtained from Goldsmiths' wood workshop – useful to feed the compost, mulch, and build compost heaps).

Other easy to implement and relatively non-onerous steps to achieve biodiversity:

- Make provision for freshwater through the creation of a pond, or small connected ponds;⁴

² The Forestry Commission has a useful resource to help identify the right trees for a given environment: <http://www.righttrees4cc.org.uk/members/search.aspx>

³ <https://www.horniman.ac.uk/story/horniman-reveals-design-for-south-london-micro-forest/>

⁴ As mentioned by Eszter Wainwright-Déri, Lewisham Biodiversity Partnership have a team of volunteers who have experience clearing sites and creating ponds, and may be in a position to provide expertise and assistance. See also: <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/habitats/freshwater/ponds>

- Maintain and thicken the existing hedgerow and establish a new one along the uncovered walls (benefits: nesting for birds, habitat for small mammals, nutrition for foraging bats, and carbon storage);
- Place bird and bat boxes, bug hotels, and stag beetle loggeries in different areas of the garden, thereby encouraging wildlife into the garden.

2. Use and Access

The LWG is intended for mixed use by Goldsmiths students/staff and local residents on a regular basis, and by individuals and groups from further afield on a more *ad hoc* basis, who may come for an event, presentation, workshop or short course. If the LWG is to be a biodiverse space, its use and access need to be planned and monitored in order to ensure the protection of its ecosystem.

Opening out the garden initially six times a year to members of the local community could be a reasonable amount of time to develop meaningful connections, create continuity and engage people in the co-creation and co-ownership of activities related to the garden. After an initial pilot year and review, the number of open days for community engagement could be increased, but several interviewees have warned of the workload involved in managing the activities of members of the public/volunteers when on site and in retaining their commitment and/or interest. Opening the garden six times a year, to begin with, would enable staff involved with the garden to offer targeted activities with fixed objectives and to build slow but steady momentum with local residents in the first phase of the garden's development.

Enabling Goldsmiths students to take part in these activities, and allocating, for instance, one day a week for use by students/staff for learning and research purposes, would enable substantial student engagement with the LWG, while not putting too much strain on the necessary development of the planted elements if the scenario of the micro-forest was retained. On that basis, staffing for the garden would be initially envisaged for 2.5 days a week (see 3. Staffing).

Physical access is crucial and in its current configuration the garden doesn't lend itself to use by people with reduced mobility. The land is sloppy, there is no path, and no accessible toilet.

Visibility will also need to be developed in order to bring the LWG to the attention of both local residents and the student population.

Recommendations:

- Open to members of the public 6 times a year;
- Open to structured and/or self-directed learning 1 day a week;
- Garden staff presence when the garden is in use;
- Create an accessible path for wheelchair users;
- Build a wheelchair accessible compost toilet;
- Design and install inviting signage on the Parkfield Road gate, with opening times, an email address, social media handles, and a line on what the garden is and whom it is for;
- A website, a Facebook page and Instagram account to share information about the garden, the schedule of activities, and relevant news.

3. Garden Room

A sizeable garden room equipped with electricity, where learning, research, propagation, and other practical horticultural activities can take place all year long regardless of weather conditions, and where plants and tools can be stored, is an essential component of the Lewisham Way Garden long-term plans. A small greenhouse / shed is envisaged in the meantime (see section IV- 2.) and could become a part of the larger structure moving forward. Tools acquired through the NERC-funded Sensing Soil Creative Climate Partnership (Principle Investigator: Ros Gray) are currently being stored in the small brick outdoor shed that is part of 43 Lewisham Way building.

Recommendation:

- An accessible seminar / presentation / indoor growing / storage room made from sustainable materials. Equipping it with a green roof requiring next to no maintenance would further contribute to: providing refuge for wildlife, sound insulation (an important challenge in the garden), increasing air quality (pollution being another noted challenge), thermal insulation, and protection of waterproofing⁵.

4. Staffing

The interviews have highlighted the importance of appropriate staffing – appropriate both in terms of hours of work and in terms of gardening knowledge and skills. Some of the interviewees are operating the gardens on a volunteer basis, while others work part-time, and in some cases full-time. Typically, the person in charge of running the garden and ensuring its maintenance and wellbeing is also involved with making schedules, running weekly or monthly volunteer sessions, and leading on outreach programmes with local schools and organisations.

It is expected that the LWG coordinator will be working on similar tasks. Managing a low-maintenance garden of the like of a garden forest would enable the coordinator to dedicate time for the rest of the activities, including, initially, liaising with contractors in the garden making / facilities building process, coordinating residencies, making the garden schedule, opening the door to members of the public and hosting them, preparing the space for student-based activities, devising and/or running activities including skills-based workshops, and managing assisting staff.

Recommendations:

- A minimum 0.5 appointment for an individual with gardening and coordinating experience, coupled with a junior fellow position to assist this role. Paid apprenticeships may be a further avenue;
- Offer training to staff, for instance through “Gardeniser⁶ = ‘Garden Organiser’ – A key organisational role within community gardens, farms and growing spaces that requires a unique combination of skills”;

⁵ Useful resource: <https://livingroofs.org/>

⁶ <https://www.farmgarden.org.uk/our-work/gardeniser>

- Set up an LWG committee in charge of programming and research (alongside the key member of staff) and overseeing the different steps of the making of the garden and the building of its facilities.

5. Guardianship

In the research process, a number of interviewees addressed the importance of recording each and every step of the making and of the evolution of the garden for posterity and knowledge-sharing purposes. Archiving and passing on knowledge of what exists in the garden (from soil, to plants and wildlife – how it was to start with and what it has become); of what failed and what succeeded (from planting schemes to infrastructures, through to collaborations and projects); and of whom took part and how, was deemed of primordial importance to the interviewees. What does a ‘hand over’ look like in a garden? What system of communication could be used/created to enable the passing down of history/activity of the garden? Should the website store this information? Should there be an annual or biannual handbook documenting the evolution of the garden and its activities?

Recommendations:

- Create a blog on the website to narrate and visualise the LWG evolving biography and processes;
- Keep a log of all plants with their biography (Were they present before? Were they added? What purpose do they serve in the garden?) and share them on the website;
- Put out a publication every 18 months to relate the activities, decisions, and changes that have occurred or were made in the period;
- Create a seed bank as part of the process of documenting the garden and to save seeds for resowing and swapping purposes.

IV- What Could Lewisham Way Garden Be and How Could it Function?

When we think of communities of planting, it's only a short jump to thinking about actual communities.

Errol Reuben Fernandes, Head of Horticulture, Horniman Museum and Gardens

1. Collective Learning

A number of the elements outlined and recommended above offer opportunities for co-conception, collective learning, and raising of awareness of the Lewisham Way Garden. Planning and transforming the garden could entail the passing on and acquisition of new skills and knowledge, problem-solving and critical thinking. A proposed approach is to turn the making of the LWG into a collective learning programme for students and members of the surrounding communities. Each open day could be dedicated to a different aspect in the exercise of making a garden and building its structures, for

instance:

- How to identify plants;
- How to test and enrich the soil;
- How to plant a tree;
- How to propagate plants;
- How to build a compost heap and to look after compost;
- How to make compost tea;
- How to collect seeds;
- How to make a bird box and stag beetle logger;
- How to make a pond;
- How to make a living roof;
- How to make a compost toilet, etc.

Each day could entail a presentation, sometimes led by experts, highlighting the ecological benefits and properties of the above actions, and be followed by the hands-on participation of users in achieving one of the above goals, with the contribution of experts as and when needed; for instance, the volunteers of the Lewisham Biodiversity Partnership when making the pond. A structured programme could be laid out term after term, thus building a team of participants who would come out with skills they can apply elsewhere, and who would co-own the project. This collective learning programme could thus build a community of non-Goldsmiths participants around the LWG from the outset, building on existing partnerships such as the collaboration with Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network established by Sensing Soil (see above). The programme could be advertised through open days, platforms such as Nature Conservation Lewisham and Lewisham Local, door drops, Goldsmiths' networks, social media, etc.

Importantly, the voice of artists and cultural practitioners would be valued alongside those of experts with experience of making gardens. Artists, architects, and designers could contribute to the shaping of the pedagogical methodologies and offer their expertise of working with sustainable materials as well as their critical thinking to enrich the garden's infrastructures and contributions to biodiversity. Being located at Goldsmiths, the LWG is ideally placed to experiment with the possible entanglements of art and nature, and interrogate how art can put itself at the service of nature both practically and conceptually. The LGW could become a model for a highly functional and sustainable garden infused with artistic thinking.

2. Eco-pedagogy

The importance of the role of cultural practitioners in the making of the garden and of their pedagogical input has just been touched on. Continuing the residency programme inaugurated with Harun Morrison as *Sensing Soil* artist-in-residence in 2021, and inviting practitioners to work on a given project and engage, for a period of a year, with members of the public and of the student body, is a natural way forward. For instance, inviting architects to design the seminar room in a collective and eco-responsive manner, and passing on skills along the way; or inviting an artist or designer to address one of the challenges of the garden – e.g. physical access, noise, and ambient pollution – or broader topics such

as resilience may constitute approaches in the exercise of building the garden, its community and identity.

In the context of the present research, artist Harun Morrison has been invited to develop a design and construction method for the provision of two compost heaps, which will be built in early 2023. The compost heaps will be the first artist-designed functional and fixed element of Lewisham Way Garden. Harun Morrison will lead a workshop open to students and local residents to implement the design and construct it; in turn, they will walk away with new skills and a blueprint for making their own compost heaps. The second phase of the invitation to Harun Morrison is to design a plan for a small green house/shed, serving as the basis for fundraising for a second intervention in the garden and raising awareness of the project and its future plans. This design will take into account the proposals and projections made during the *Sensing Soil* workshops and Open Day held in 2022 with participants from the Lewisham Refugee & Migrant Network, students and members of the public, and led by Morrison.

Other forms of eco-learning that could take place within the garden could involve practical sustainable art practice and theoretical and practical explorations of how art and design can put itself at the service of nature and what it can be learnt from it. Sustainability is barely touched on in the learning on offer at Goldsmiths and in the practices at play in the workshops and making facilities. In this way, the LWG could provide space and facilities for art research activities such as work with plant cultivation, grafting and propagation, methods of working with mycelium such as fungi spore printing, ferments, bacteria, low-impact photography, chromatography and more, building on the successful installation of the pigment garden at Goldsmiths Allotment, which is extensively used by the Print and Dye Art Practice Area. The LWG could take on a leading role within Goldsmiths in researching and enacting the university's art production's green transition. Engaging this time with non-material practices, the garden further has the potential of offering itself as a site of study, enquiry and critical meditation for learning and practices associated, for instance, with writing, performance, and filmmaking.

3. Connectivity and Research

Connectivity with local, national and international small-scale research and community gardens is the opportunity for the development of research collaborations. While such prospects have not been scoped out in full in the framework of this research, a number of entities have expressed interest in the potential: in London, the Horniman Museum and Gardens, the Albany, the Lewisham Biodiversity Partnership and The Museum of the Home's gardens; in Peterborough, Westraven Community Garden; in The Netherlands, Nature Research Lab, Jan van Eyck Academy; and in Romania, The Experimental Station for Research on Art and Life.

Moving forward, future research and actions could include:

- Making connections with the following advice-giving and plant- and tool-giving organisations:
 - Buglife: <https://www.buglife.org.uk>
 - Butterfly Conservation: <https://butterfly-conservation.org>
 - Bumblebee Conservation Trust: <https://www.bumblebeeconservation.org>

- Froglife: <https://www.froglife.org/who-we-are/organisational-structure/>
- Visiting and connecting with:
 - St Mary's Therapeutic Garden: <https://www.lewishamparish.com/garden>
 - Nature Conservation Lewisham: <https://natureconservationlewisham.co.uk>
 - Walworth Garden: <https://walworthgarden.org.uk>

V. Further Links

Interviewed Models

- Horniman Museum and Gardens: <https://www.horniman.ac.uk/about-the-horniman/>
- Horniman Museum and Gardens micro-forest: <https://cms.thehorniman.net/project/london-road-forest-border/>
- The Albany Gardens: <https://www.thealbany.org.uk/support-us/the-albany-garden/>
- Edible Landscape London: <https://ediblelandscapeslondon.org.uk>
- Museum of the Home, London: <https://www.museumofthehome.org.uk/whats-on/gardens-through-time/>
- Westraven Community Garden, Peterborough: <https://www.westraven.co.uk/>
- Nature Research Lab, Jan van Eyck Academy, Maastricht: <https://www.janvaneyck.nl/postacademy/nature-research>
- The Experimental Station for Research on Art and Life, tranzit.ro, Silistea Snagovului: <https://ro.tranzit.org/en/project/0/2021-05-01/the-experimental-station-for-research-on-art-and-life>
- Wildcat Wilderness, Catford: <https://wildcatwilderness.org/>

Other Eco-pedagogical Programmes and Models to Explore

- Sakiya - Art | Science | Agriculture, Ramallah: <https://sakiya.org/>
- Prinzessinnengarten, Berlin: <https://prinzessinnengarten.net/>
- Inland — art, agriculture & territory: <https://inland.org/>
- Zoöp, Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam: <https://zoop.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/>

Networks

- Feral Atlas: <https://feralatlas.org/>
- Green Art Lab Alliance: <https://greenartlaballiance.com/>

Practical Resources

- Trees for a changing climate: <http://www.righttrees4cc.org.uk/members/search.aspx>
- Mayor of London Tree Giveaway #TreesForLondon: <https://www.tcv.org.uk/london/mayor-of-london-tree-giveaway/>

- Freshwater Ponds: <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/habitats/freshwater/ponds>
- Living roofs: <https://livingroofs.org/>
- Gardeniser programme: <https://www.farmgarden.org.uk/our-work/gardeniser>
- Lewisham Biodiversity Partnership document 'A Natural Renaissance for Lewisham (2021-2026)':
<https://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/documents/s91062/A%20Natural%20Renaissance%202021-2026.pdf>

Appendix

List of interview questions

General

- How do you describe the garden you are involved with?
- What are the main focuses of the garden?
- How does the garden function on an everyday level?
- How is it managed? By whom? How many paid staff and volunteers?
- What are your opening hours?
- What type of programmes do you run?

Access

- Who comes to / uses the garden?
- What do they come to do?
- How accessible would you say your garden is?
- Who cannot access the garden?
- How do you define access?
- Do users need to have a membership to access / use the garden?
- What would you say are the main barriers for people not to access your garden?
- Do you see discrepancies between what you set out to do and whom you are actually reaching?

Contents and Expertise

- What would you say are the five most important elements to have in a garden like yours?
- What is missing from your garden (facilities, tools, skills, time, hands, etc.)?
- What is your approach to growing?
- What do you grow?
- What wildlife do you specifically work to preserve?
- How is knowledge built and passed on?
- What type of programming do you do (when relevant)?
- Could you give a couple of examples of one-off events and/or medium to long-term activities?
- How do these enrich / inform your processes and ways of functioning and of working with nature?
- What is the ideal staffing and set of skills for a garden like yours?

Goldsmiths-focused

- What do you think is missing in the area that Goldsmiths could cater for?
- Put differently, what could Goldsmiths bring by joining a network of community gardens?
- What would you expect to see in a garden at Goldsmiths?
- What would you want Goldsmiths to contribute / offer?
- On what basis might you be interested in collaborating with Goldsmiths?

