

Breakers Yard Pocket Park, Sutton House

Short description of the project



Party in the rejuvenated Breaker's Yard © Sam Roberts

The Breaker's Yard Community Garden at Sutton House

Local people are at the heart of the transformation of a Brownfield site from contaminated former car breakers yard into a playful events and community pocket park.

Extensive local consultation

The project started in 2011 with intensive consultation to over 1000 local people. Consultation also included specialists from National Trust and beyond including children's play expert Tim Gill. People were asked what their needs and wants were for the new space. Techniques ranged from questionnaires to eight weeks of creative activities with artists and families developing insight into people's favourite childhood games and the value of natural and imaginative play.

External support

The results were summarised in a report (attached) which has helped win over £155,000 worth of external funding from Biffa Award, Mayor of London's Pocket Parks and significant and generous donations.

Community setting the design brief

Feasible outcomes were translated directly into a design brief which detailed the following wishes for a design proposal:

1. That reveals the industrial heritage of the site especially the 20th century use as a car breaker's yard
2. Has play features
3. Is a versatile events space
4. Is a wildlife friendly, community garden

Winning design

The brief went out to competition early in 2012. The winning proposal was by RHS Gold award winning garden designer Daniel Lobb in collaboration with international fine artist Gavin Turk and Deborah Curtis' children's charity House of Fairy Tales. The designs include:

- 'The Garage' – a double-decker caravan with historic house interior
- 'The Rootmaster' – a coach converted into a glasshouse
- 'The Solarium' an ice cream van decorated by Sir Peter Blake's daughter

Embedded community involvement

The community has since been involved in fundraising, building (for example see picture of City Academy teachers helping fit the temporary gate below), testing, promoting and eventually will have stewardship of the Breaker's Yard Pocket Park.

What would have happened without this project?

Without this project the community would have had less opportunity to be involved in shaping their environment and therefore potentially reducing their engagement with Sutton House and its new outdoor space. It is unlikely such a significant amount of external funding would have been won therefore severely limiting the ambitions of the project and the development of the site. There would have been less opportunities for strategic partners to deliver multiple agendas e.g. National Trust 'Getting Outdoors and Closer to Nature' and Hackney's Play Strategy.

Additionally, over 500 years of archaeology found on the site during the construction stage would have been left undiscovered. Most critically a polluted and derelict Brownfield site with a record of trespass, theft and vandalism would have been left neglected and 500 years of industrial heritage would have been forgotten.



A digger on site at Breaker's Yard © National Trust

What has the project achieved, or difference has it made?

A new outdoor space in the heart of Hackney

By taking an inclusive and progressive approach to revealing industrial and recent heritage of the site, the on-going involvement of local people and the imaginative play features a new National Trust garden of 'international significance', Dominic Cole, Landscape Architect and Chair of National Trust Garden's Panel, has been created.

External funding from Biffa Award, GLA Mayor of London Pocket Parks Funding and many generous donations has so far resulted in over £155,000.

The local community, especially those regularly involved in Sutton House's community programme, have been and will continue to be meaningfully involved in shaping the future of Sutton House. As well as giving power to the people involved this should hopefully encourage them to make the best use of this new space. The voice of local people has also acted as a motive force, advocating the project through the National Trust and statutory bodies such as English Heritage and the local planning authority.

The drive local people gave to the Breaker's Yard project has helped maintain momentum during major challenges. A significant hurdle was addressing the contamination that scarred the site since it was used as a car breakers yard. Other challenges include fundraising enough external support to create a new outdoor public space. The 500 year industrial heritage of the site was also revealed as a result of the development when a part of the Tudor tan house was unearthed.

Critically the designer and arts organisation have committed to this project because it is so ingrained in the community.

What were the main lessons learnt or challenges overcome?

Community and specialist consultation has been the key to the success of the project. Not only has the community involvement sought to ensure that local people will engage with the space when it opens in August 2014 it has given so much more.

Essentially the local connection gave the project great appeal attracting high calibre designers such as Daniel Lobb and the House of Fairy Tales. The community support has advocated the project through the National Trust and other professional bodies. Biffa Award, GLA Mayor of London Pocket Parks Fund and many other donors have supported the Breaker's Yard because the community involvement that percolates through the project.

As with many construction projects challenges have ranged from pollution to archaeology from geology to conservation. The project team has had the motivation to weather these challenges because of the integrity the community have given the project.

What is the future of the project?

The Breaker's Yard is due to open to the public on 12th August 2014 with opportunities for stakeholders and interested parties to arrange specialist tours afterwards in August.

People building the Garden

We are hoping that local people and community groups like Goodgym, St Mungos and Sutton House's over 55's group the Elders will be involved in the planting, creation of the tyre sandpit and promoting the opening.

Launching the Garden

Our community groups including families, young people and the Elders are rehearsing in secret for the public launch of the Breaker's Yard.

Local people stewarding the Garden

A great deal of voluntary organisations, primary schools and the local city Academy have expressed interest in growing the community container-based allotments a- 'pot'-ments in the form of car trailers and helping to nurture the formal topiary renaissance themed cloud pruned box hedges around 'The Grange' and espalier apple trees in the urban orchard. The 'Rootmaster' coach converted into a glasshouse will also be a year round space for community to over-winter tender and propagate plants.

London-wide schools engagement

Following consultation at the Headmaster's conference in 2014 The House of Fairy Tales are working with artists and illustrators to create a booklet which will be sent to all London schools. The booklet will creatively and playfully reveals the story of the Breaker's Yard and Sutton House. Activities link the garden to the National Curriculum and will encourage engagement and visits by those children and their families.

The long-term future

A major ambition of the Breaker's Yard is to double the number of visitors 40% of which are community groups that use the house. Projected visitor numbers are hoped to reach 40,000 by 2024.

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