

Bankside Open Spaces Trust

Green Infrastructure Case Study

Turning small green spaces into productive community hubs



Through communal gardening, food growing and outdoor recreation, Bankside Open Spaces Trust (BOST) is bringing people together to create inspirational urban green places. The small pocket parks BOST manages are critical to addressing local deficiencies in access to nature as identified in the London Plan, making it a valuable example of how a small charity working with multiple partners can reinvent green space that would otherwise remain unused.

Snapshot

- By securing a Service Level Agreement with the London Borough of Southwark, BOST is training volunteers from the community to manage parks and green spaces in the area
- In partnerships with primary and secondary schools, BOST has set up 18 family food-growing clubs
- Since 2010, Edible Bankside has established 24 projects on housing estates, equal to 500m² of raised growing beds
- BOST manages three parks including Waterloo Millennium Green and Red Cross Garden, which has, for several years, received the Green Flag Community Award under the national scheme
- In February 2013, BOST was awarded the UK Man and Biosphere Urban Forum's Award for Excellence



BOST has set up a number of family food-growing clubs

Key facts:

- Size of parks that BOST manages and provides services in, within the wards of Borough and Bankside, London Borough of Southwark and Waterloo in Lambeth is: approximately 5 ha
- Parks and gardens supported by BOST include Red Cross Garden, Waterloo Millennium Green, Mint Street Park, Community Garden at Tate Modern, Christ Church Garden, Little Dorrit Play Space, St George's Garden, Nelson Square, Gambia Street Garden, Marlborough Playground, Diversity Garden
- Size of catchment for BOST is: 16,000 adult residents, plus 60,000 daily commuters via London Bridge station and six million tourists per year
- Key partners include London Borough of Southwark, London Borough of Lambeth, Better Bankside, Big Lottery Fund's Local Food, Big Lottery Fund's Ecominds, City Bridge Trust, Heritage Lottery Fund, Lambeth Ward Purse, London Eye, Monument Trust, Natural England, Tate Modern, Tudor Trust and Waterloo Quarter Business Improvement District

Key environmental functions:

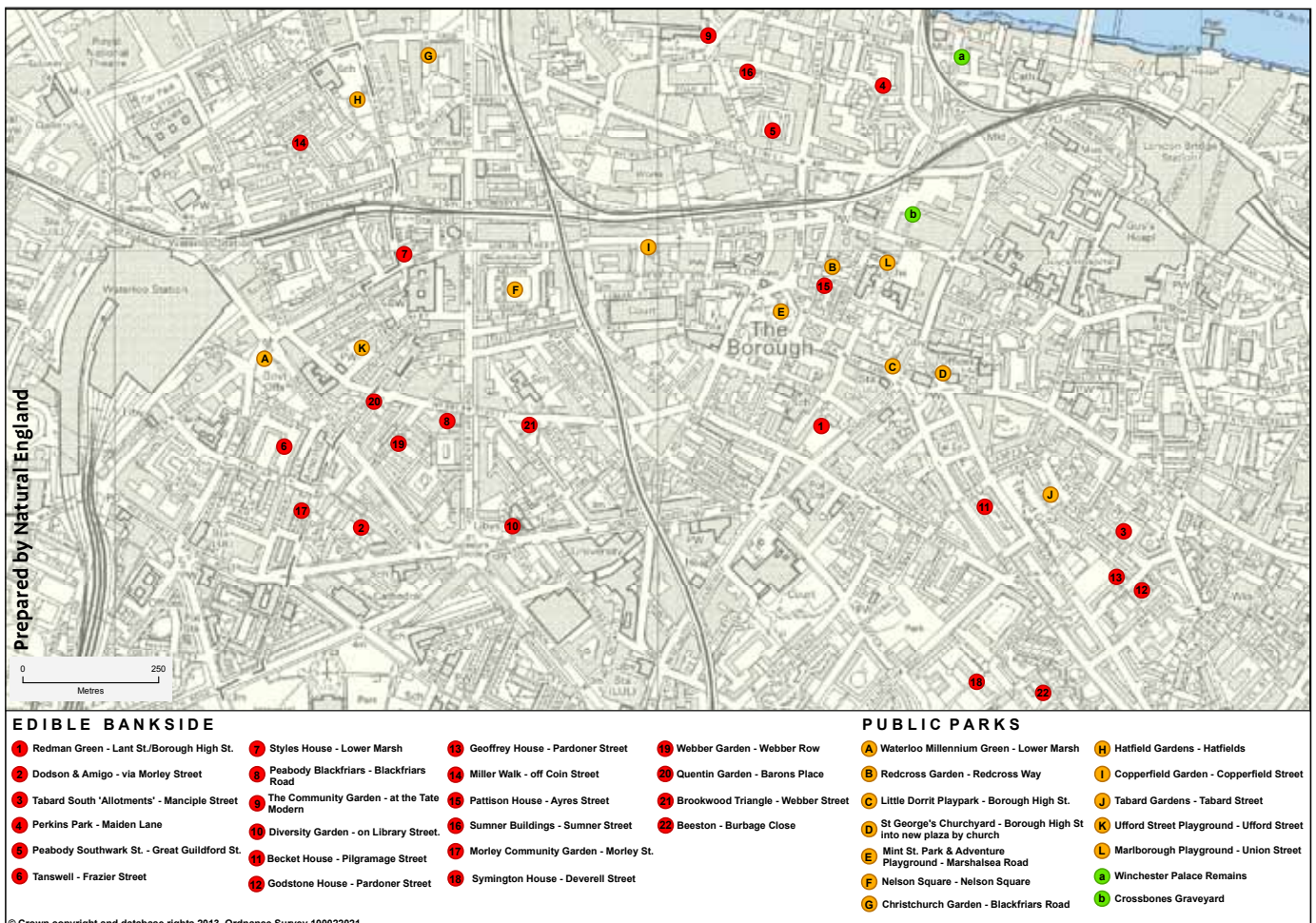
- Supports physical and mental health and wellbeing
- Engages communities with the natural environment
- Provides opportunities for recreation and play

Introduction

Bankside Open Spaces Trust (BOST) is an independent charity that manages a network of green spaces in the north of the London Boroughs of Southwark and Lambeth, where it runs activities to reconnect local people with the natural environment. This network of small but high-quality green spaces is nestled between the Shard and the London Eye, and interspersed between social-housing estates, multi-million pound flats and businesses both large and small.

Established to improve and maintain these precious green spaces, BOST's main beneficiaries include those who live in or are part of communities between London Bridge, Waterloo and Elephant and Castle. Of the 16,000 adults who live in the area, there are both extremes of rich and poor, strong communities where families are playing an increasingly active role, and yet many people who are isolated, have been homeless in the past or may suffer from mental illness. It's not just residents that use the open spaces either: more than 60,000 daily commuters occupy the surrounding offices and six million tourists visit the area every year.

The small pocket parks managed by BOST are critical to addressing deficiencies in access to green space in the local area as identified in Southwark Open Spaces Strategy 2013. The strategy explains that the Bankside sub-area has a total of just 0.25 ha of park provision per 1,000 population (well below the borough standard of 0.72 ha per 1,000 population) and that this is expected to fall to just 0.20 ha per 1,000 population by 2026 as a result of population growth. The sub-area also has just 1.22 ha of green space per 1,000 population compared to the standard 1.5 ha, and this again is anticipated to fall to 0.97 ha per 1,000 population by 2026.



Map showing the community projects and green spaces managed by BOST

Note: Edible Bankside projects are mainly on private land and may be temporary. Please contact BOST for further information

The charity fulfils a valuable role in responding to the needs of the residents and workers for a high-quality outdoor environment in this increasingly crowded urban neighbourhood. BOST has a strong partnership with Southwark Council and is working to build a similar level of partnership with Lambeth Council. It is also a significant partner in the Neighbourhood Plan for Bankside, leading on public realm and open spaces.

High-quality green space gives people a reason to stay

Once BOST and its community representatives have identified where an intervention is needed, it works with the wider community and other partners to make it a reality. In practice this involves carrying out consultations and supporting steering groups; drawing up plans and carrying out capital improvements; working with partners to improve the safety of sites; running a range of volunteer gardening groups to maintain park lands; and championing outdoor recreation and food growing throughout the area.

Among its responsibilities, BOST directly manages the Red Cross Garden, which was set up by Octavia Hill in 1872 'to provide beauty and fresh air for the tired inhabitants of Southwark', and is now regarded as the birthplace of community gardening. The garden includes a pond, 19th-century style planting, planting for wildlife, a play area, mosaics and a maypole. Funding for the works was raised from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Southwark Council, while the cost of managing the work comes from a mixture of grants from Southwark Council and the Sainsbury family charitable trust. BOST also manages Waterloo Millennium Green and was the driving force behind the creation of the Community Garden at Tate Modern.



BOST's experience in training and supporting volunteers is one of the ways it adds value in its management of parks. By securing a Service Level Agreement with the London Borough of Southwark for managing the Red Cross Garden and herbaceous borders in other parks, has made it possible for BOST to take on and train volunteers. Through on-the-job training and supervision, volunteers have taken on the roles of wardens for BOST's green spaces, and the charity is now looking to develop other opportunities for work experience. These volunteers act as eyes and ears for the charity, monitoring sites and feeding back comments from members of the public, which helps to improve the work they do.

Since its inception, BOST has championed involvement in local parks and gardens from all sectors of the community, attracting approximately 200 volunteers each year. One example is the Putting Down Roots gardening project led by St Mungo's for people who are currently homeless or have been in the past, or who are at risk of becoming homeless. This project offers experience to volunteers that combats the negative effects of homelessness and mental illness, and is an early stage in the transition back into work. The main emphasis is to support volunteers to gain skills, qualifications, paid and voluntary work, and BOST is currently working on an evaluation of the mental health benefits of the scheme.

Volunteers play an important role in managing BOST's parks and green spaces

High demand for open space and a limited range of provision in the Bankside area, means that spaces are used intensely, but despite this BOST aims to squeeze in space for wildlife wherever it can. BOST's successful management of biodiverse wetlands, for example, makes these a key feature at both Waterloo Millennium Green and Red Cross Gardens. The charity regards biodiversity as a marker of high-quality green space and aims to integrate habitat provision in its strategic green space management choices, such as by choosing species for herbaceous borders that provide favourable conditions for birds and insects. BOST has also made great use of climbing plants to create green walls and nesting areas around trees, as well as choosing flowers that encourage pollinators.

Engaging communities through local enterprise

Community gardening is at the heart of a number of BOST schemes and one of its flagship programmes has been Edible Bankside - an ambitious four-year project to bring food growing to some of the hardest-to-reach communities in one of the most built up parts of London. Edible Bankside started in 2010 and, to date, has established 24 projects on housing estates, equal to 500sqms of raised growing beds.



Community gardening is a key part of many of the BOST projects

To invite residents to take part in these local food-growing projects, BOST opted to go door-to-door in the majority of areas or contacted people through tenants associations. More than 800 window boxes have also been supplied to residents through Great Vegetable Giveaways (GVG). In this series of community events, residents from the local neighbourhood who attend a GVG fun day plant a free container with compost, seeds and plants, and take away instructions on how to nurture it on their balconies at home. In total, around 3,000 people participated in these events.

One of the goals of Edible Bankside is to ensure that at least 350 participants report that they have seen an improvement in their personal circumstances, such as diet, health, motivation, employability, social inclusion or sense of community, as a direct result of the project. Another is to increase cross-cultural contact and awareness of cross-cultural food and festivals by running 15 cross-cultural harvest events. The project's success will be analysed at the end of its four-year tenure, but anecdotal evidence to date suggests that it is working. Webber Row resident Rachel had this to say:

“It's great that BOST has got involved as we really didn't have a clue how to grow food before this project started. We really rely on the gardening clubs at the moment to learn stuff but we're getting there. I didn't know anything about contaminated land, the different vegetable groups or growing potatoes. We're learning things all the time and the kids love it. It's been really good for getting people involved who otherwise don't have anything to do with the TRA (residents' association) and I've met quite a few people.”

Community engagement can be challenging as well as fulfilling in a mixed area like Bankside, which is why it is helpful to have professionals as mediators and facilitators. Some residents groups are very well organised and simply need a little guidance on gardening and help with purchasing goods. In other cases, BOST has been successful at integrating mixed groups, but these might include speakers of other languages, in which case volunteers sometimes perform the role of translator in Portuguese, Spanish or Bengali.

In other groups there are mixed expectations of what is possible and many people would really like their own individual plots for vegetable growing. Fortunately, the charity been able to work with these groups to find solutions. So, in cases where residents are very keen, smaller groups such as extended family or a group of friends, have adopted individual beds. A prime motive is to make sure as many people as possible have access to healthy fresh food and the satisfaction of growing it.

Connecting children with nature through food growing



BOST takes a proactive approach to education, engaging seven primary schools and two secondary schools in food growing projects, as well as setting up 18 family food growing clubs – one of which is even in an adventure playground. Research carried out by the charity suggests that children are more likely to eat vegetables if they grow them. Children who had participated in gardening also benefited from improved levels of physical activity, mechanical skills and coordination. Growing different foods also provides a good starting point for discussing cultural differences.

Children are encouraged to grow different foods

Many of these children have never had a garden before and so BOST recognises the importance of helping people who are new to gardening to achieve early successes. This has included a partnership with the Young Philanthropy Scheme and a local secondary school to support a small group of their students to compete in a charity fundraising competition to create a new design for one of the green spaces. The group won the competition and donated the £3,000 prize to BOST, which was shared between community gardening and support for homeless people at Waterloo Green.

In summer 2012, BOST also organised the 'Pop Up Olympics' at the little-known Marlborough Playground, transforming a large rectangle of tarmac into a garden using pots of trees, shrubs and flowers, and providing equipment for informal sports from beach volleyball to athletics. Following positive feedback from schools and residents, BOST has since secured funding and is now creating a masterplan for how to deliver mixed sports at the site for local residents.

Recognising that green infrastructure can be a tool for social change

Taking on the management of open spaces is hard work and BOST's success is due in large part to the commitment and imagination of its trustees and staff. Despite BOST's successful track record of securing grants, which is where the majority of its funding comes from, finding money to pay for core costs and the day-to-day maintenance of spaces is difficult. Generating income can also be difficult if, as BOST found at Waterloo Green, a space has strict covenants that make it difficult to put up structures or organise events that might bring in valuable revenue.

While funding remains a challenge, the Trust is increasingly recognised for the social, cultural and environmental benefits it brings to the Bankside area. In February 2013, the UK Man and Biosphere Urban Forum gave BOST its Award for Excellence. The award recognises that the charity's work has given many people in the Bankside area a reason to stay and this in turn has helped to build stability into the community. BOST has also been cited as outstanding in the Royal Horticultural Society's 'It's Your Neighbourhood' award for support to local community groups in cleaning up and greening up the immediate local environment.

Through events and gardening days, many people have met their neighbours, bridged differences and learned about each other's needs. Alongside this, the work BOST has carried out to raise the standard of parks, housing lands and other green places, supports the mental health and wellbeing of local residents – and what's more, many of them have been involved in the process and so can take pride in the result.

For further information

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