

Sunnyhill Nature Garden Consultation Report

Lambeth Parks Department

October 2020

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Sunnyhill Nature Garden lies over the railway tunnel between Sunnyhill Road and Wellfield Road, in Streatham Wells. Lambeth holds a long lease on the land which has briefly been used by different groups for vegetable growing. The last use was in 2015, and the area has not been accessed, it has become overgrown with dense brambles among the plum and apple trees. Behind the double gates on Sunnyhill Road is an area, around 1100 square metres in size. It is a local Site of Importance for Nature Conservation. In 2020 Sunnyhill Nature Garden has just been passed from Lambeth Housing to Parks, catalysing this consultation towards a sustainable future.

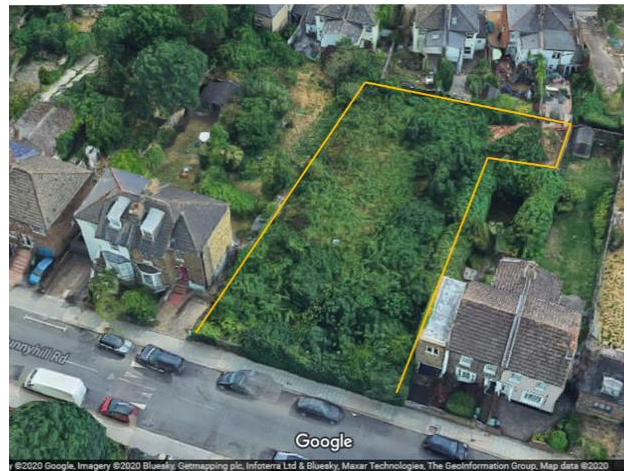
1.2 Our Proposals

Through discussions with stakeholders a set of priorities emerged, which were reiterated throughout the consultation process and became core aims for the project.

- forming a safe, natural, outdoor community resource for local people
- educational use for nearby Sunnyhill School
- protecting ecology and creating wildlife habitat that might be vulnerable in an open environment (e.g. pond, ground cover)
- protecting user and neighbour security

We agreed at this stage that we are not aiming towards a public park here but would assess the interest among local people for a managed-access community-lead Nature Garden, with a pond, meadow, shrubby cover for birds, small woodland, and other habitats. The Nature Garden would be managed by local volunteers, with initial professional co-ordination from SCCoop who are widely respected locally. It would have a clear schedule of use with different keyholders accessing at different times.

With help from the Councillors' at this stage, we had 4 residents interested in driving the project forward and 3 partner groups. The idea of a Steering Group became viable with the first task of distributing an online survey through residents' social media.



2. The Consultation

2.1 Consultation Objectives:

The objectives of the consultation were to assess:

- Initial support for a community nature garden including discussing opportunities to participate in future workshops
- Volunteering - Garner champions for the nature area, including potential volunteers for practical work, publicity, and local stewardship
- Develop a Steering Group for the project
- Realise a practical solution for local participation
- Assess need and support for site and local opinion on detail including habitat types, usage, rules around entry etc.

2.2 Who we consulted

Our aim was to reach and gather views from the key stakeholders:

- Those who live in the local area
- Local groups
- The School in the area

Staff consulted stakeholders by email, phone and in person, and knocked on the doors of the eight adjoining households to discuss priorities, leaving information where there was no answer.

| Group Name |
|-------------------------------|
| Sunnyhill Primary School |
| Streatham Common Co-operative |
| Liveable Wells |
| Earthwild Forest School |
| Railside Community Garden |
| Ward Councillors |

2.3 When we consulted

The consultation ran between 19 September to 4 October 2020.

2.4 How we consulted

2.4.1 Digital activity

Residents, local groups, and schools were directed to the online survey which was accessed through consultation pages on Lambeth council website. The survey was promoted via an email sent by local partners to residents and groups who live and have an interest in the local area, the Council also promoted it on their social media platforms.

2.4.2 Face to face activity

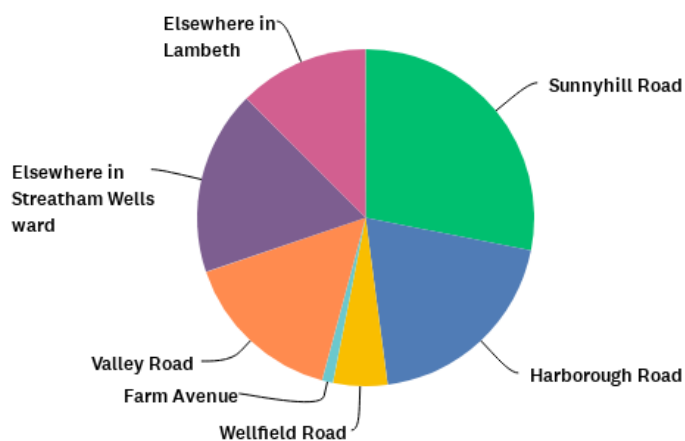
Scoping discussions were held with the groups and individuals in 2.2. These were either by email, phone, or face to face. There was no response from Railside Gardens, or from 4 of the neighbouring households, where information was left.

3. Responses to the Online Survey

3.1 Summary of results

We received 96 responses to the questionnaire. A breakdown of responses is set out below:

- **Area:** 87% of these lived in Streatham Wells Ward, with the vast majority in the immediate local area (shown).
- **Age:** A wide range of ages, with most respondents between 25 and 75. Only 1 under 25, and only 1 over 75.
- **Gender:** A majority of 75% women over 19% men, 1 nonbinary.
- **Ethnicity:** A strong bias towards white British (83%), approximately 10% Black African/Caribbean/Latin/Mixed. We ran a careful check of answers from this group to assess if there was an unwitting bias resulting from the smaller number of respondents.
- **Health:** 8.51% daily activities limited by a health problem.
- **Children:** 25 people also mentioned in the free text that they had young children and would like to enjoy and learn from the Nature Garden with them, we did not ask this question directly.



Responses received were:

'We live very close and pass it on foot with our children most days on our way to school and on trips our at weekends.'

'What is there not to like about this project. These types of spaces a vital in London. I have 3 young children who would love this as would I to enjoy moments of quiet and calm'

Dog owners: Three people also mentioned that they have a dog and would like a space for them.

'I'd like to have a space to visit locally with my dog, like the small garden at Holmewood Gardens.'

3.1.1 Did the comments demonstrate interest in a Community Nature Garden at Sunnyhill?

The enthusiasm of responses demonstrated the need and desire for a space for people to come locally. There were these strong areas of interest:

- Somewhere local **to enjoy nature with small child/ren**

- *'I did not know about this part of nature...Sunnyhill primary school has made me aware of it and I think it is a fantastic idea to use that green space to purposes in relation to children vs nature.'*
- *'Supporting wildlife and bio-diversity is more important than ever. Raised in the countryside and father of two young children, Sunnyhill Nature Garden, would be a great opportunity to contribute towards introducing nature to my children while strengthening community bonds.'* (sic)
- Somewhere to gain **peace and contemplation**, but also **community bonds**
- *'We need all the green Spaces we can get this is a lovely little bit of land would be perfect for nature reserve I think it would get a lot of use would be well loved by the residents around here I won't post it for years and was hoping it would get turned into something like this.'*
- *'I think it's a wonderful idea to create a space for people to connect to nature'*
- **Protection for wildlife** here
- *'I have walked past it on many occasions and thought if left alone it could provide a habitat for hedgehogs, wildflowers for bees and butterflies and a safe nesting area for birds.'*

In summary, of the 96 people, everybody expressed interest, enthusiasm, or support for the Nature Garden. There were varying conceptions of what this looked like, including those who wanted the extremes of either an open park or a closed nature area.

3.1.2 What would residents like us to do at Sunnyhill Nature Garden?

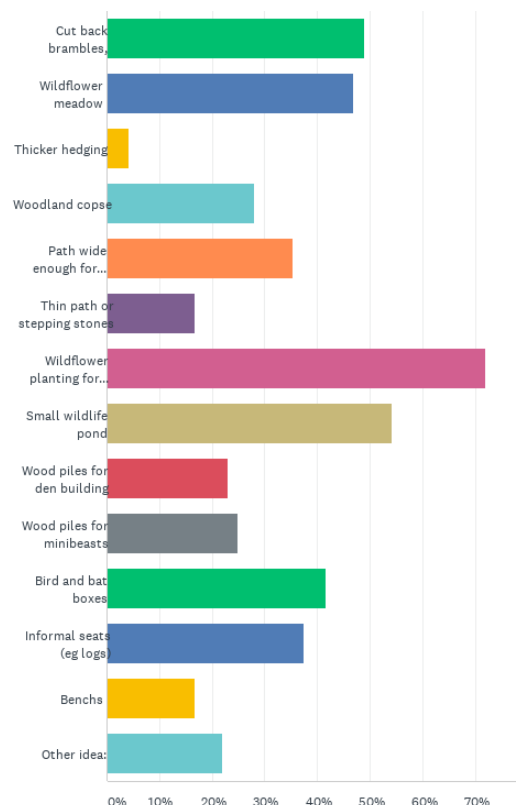
There was general support for all the habitat ideas mentioned, with everyone ticking at least 1 choice, and the top choices (illustrated left) being:

- wildflower planting for bees and butterflies 71%
- small wildlife pond 54%
- cut back brambles 48%
- wildflower meadow 46%

While there was strong support for bird and bat boxes (41%), thicker hedges received only 4% of the vote, perhaps because people did not realise how this might improve bird nesting habitat.

21 people gave additional ideas:

- Communal vegetable beds (2 people, with 5 additional in the activities question): these are now included in the proposal.
- Beehives (1 person), could be included in future, however our resident bee expert isn't keen on the impact on native bees.



- *'I think that it will be a brilliant addition to the community - maybe if there is space there can be a communal fruit and veg plots.'*

Aspects of the value of wildlife here (4 people as additional):

- *'Would like to encourage diversity in plants and animals and provide a nice place for people to visit'*
- *'Re-establish the apple orchard and woodland/site management'*
- *'I think it's important to balance the level of human disturbance against the need for nature to just get on with it, so the site should not be completely opened up'*

There were some additional suggestions which would be extremely challenging to include in their entirety in the very small, and lightly managed, environment of Sunnyhill:

- Play (4 people): two requests for a small play area or house, two for adventurous play equipment such as zip wires: While children are a key audience for activities, we are hoping that this will be through encounters with nature, building their own dens, and balancing on logs in this fairly small area. Moreover, we cannot guarantee the regular safety checks that a formal play area would require. We have included a mud kitchen area, and logs for balancing and hope to develop this in liaison with children and families.
- BMX track (1):
- Dog walking (2):
- A café and shop (1): this might be fulfilled if a resident is willing to provide refreshments for occasional open days.

'Make it a nice garden / public park area'

'A little area for kids to play would be great - swing or little wooden house etc.'

'Fun activities for children - climbing, swings, slides, den building'

3.1.3 Are people interested in helping the Nature Garden and attending events here?

- 71 people left an email address to be informed on future activities.
- 15 people offered to help form a Steering Group
- 68 people offered to help with an aspect of establishing the garden, with 58 of these offering help with practical work or gardening or both.
- 66 people were interested in Training in Nature Conservation Techniques.
- *'I work and have kids but am very passionate about gardening and ponds'*
- *'I am a graphic designer and would happily help with communications, art projects and posters.'*
- *'Happy to go on a local rota for general gardening support on a semi-regular basis.'*



There was strong interest in participatory activities including all the given choices of: Forest Schools, School Activities, Training in Nature Conservation, and most particularly, Community Open Days at 80%, closely followed by Volunteer Gardening Days. These suggest that many people would most like to use the garden to connect with their community.

In the 'Other Ideas' section, 5 people suggested Vegetable growing as an activity, 1 suggested Yoga. Other comments echoed and endorsed plans or repeated themes covered above.

See chart below for full list:

| Activities: Answer Choices | Responses | |
|--|------------------|-----------|
| Forest School activities for pre-school | 46.88% | 45 |
| Forest School activities for primary age, after school | 60.42% | 58 |
| Nature activities and workdays for secondary age, after school | 44.79% | 43 |
| Sunnyhill School arts and wildlife habitat study | 53.13% | 51 |
| Training workshops in wildlife conservation techniques | 68.75% | 66 |
| Workshops in arts, music, or other leisure | 53.13% | 51 |
| Volunteer gardening days | 76.04% | 73 |
| Community open days | 80.21% | 77 |
| Other ideas and comments | | 15 |
| | Answered | 96 |

3.1.4 Are there any concerns?

In answer to the question:

'Do you have any other ideas or concerns about Sunnyhill Nature Garden?'

A) Concerns about people gathering at night, drinking, and/or drug taking (8 people):

Under current proposals: evening use is unlikely, and group use will be under the guidance of the new Steering Group. The garden will be opened by named keyholders for known events. It will not be left open like a public park. The fence at the front is high and the growth here is thorny making illicit entry at night unlikely, although not impossible.

B) Concerns about dogs and dog poo (1 person, although this was mentioned in different ways through the survey.

As the site will be a community garden, not a park, it will be a task for the community and the Steering Group to decide an approach on whether to admit responsible dog owners within activity days. Residents will be expected to take their rubbish and any dog mess away, there is no intention, or resource to install dog bins.

C) Concerns about the act of opening the site up disturbing wildlife

All parties involved support wildlife here and will aim to improve habitat in the long term according to good current practice.

D) Opposing concerns regarding, either the site being seen as only for local residents, or it being open to too wide a group who do not respect it.

We trust that the model of community open days, gardening days, training sessions, school visits, and other activities will allow sufficient involvement of those from across Lambeth who wish to, while respecting the peace here for those who live nearby.

- E) Additional comments were made on the desirability of linking with other local projects, and general good practice in long term management, and the need to begin work soon.

It is hoped that by encouraging community gardening we can create a valuable resource which improves many lives and genuinely brings people together. We welcome input from neighbouring projects too. However all this will be backed by the professional approach of the parks department who hold a 999 year lease for Sunnyhill Nature Garden and will be available to help with recurring problems.

Comments on traffic management are considered beyond the scope of this report.

3.1.5 Does Sunnyhill Nature Garden have potential to impact on Health or Mental health?

We asked an open ended question to encourage reflections around this area, particularly in response to Covid-19.

62 people commented. The strongest themes that came out here were:

- A) The importance of somewhere to bring a local community physically together, providing social contact and a support network. People have either felt isolated at home, or joined online communities through the lockdown, and would welcome the opportunity to meet up in small groups.

'It gives a place for people to gather and to appreciate nature. For those without a green outdoor space an oasis of green is always welcome. For those involved it gives an opportunity to meet and work with new people.'

'Would give an opportunity for me to get to know local people. It might encourage people to spend time in fresh air as it would not be far to go. Though a lot of the houses have gardens round here there are quite a lot of upstairs flats with no access to a garden'

'Sunnyhill Road is almost like two roads due to the hill so a project right in the middle and involving other roads would help to strengthen community cohesion in the whole area. Many people have experienced loneliness and stress during Covid which looks as if it will be continuing for many months to come and for some it will have lasting effects which we all need to be mindful of so a quiet area to sit ponder and meet and make friends would be beneficial to all.'

- B) The importance of peaceful contact with nature to improve mental wellbeing. Many people who made this comment already had some contact with nature, however, they recognised that a local community space would give greater opportunities for everyone:

'With Covid, nature was so important in my mental health. We took a lot of walks during lockdown and it really helped keep our family calm and balanced. I can see this space really helping people'.

'Time in quiet nature is key to aid and maintain good mental health for everyone.'

'Nature is hugely important for mental health. It is also great for walking and exercise. Having more communal space near our houses will enable us to come together as a community.'

'The enforced lockdown protocols were undoubtedly a huge strain on most people's mental health. Feeling out of control, overwhelmed, scared, worried or unstable are all sensations that drive us to seek control, stability, and reassurance. The quickest way to access these values is through nature.'

- C) The importance of spaces for nature, in this age of biodiversity declines. Alongside this, the importance of contact with nature for local people.

'Anything to increase children's access to nature and boost biodiversity given the recent warnings about species loss will help'.

'Apart from providing a home for wildlife especially bee's, it's important to have areas available to the community to look after and be able to use. Residents should have responsibility and access rather than public use.'

- D) People used this as an opportunity to say how much they looked forward to the project and wanted to participate:

'Just somewhere lovely to sit and enjoy nature. A craft course to look forward to! Mental health benefits, most definitely.'

'Just to have a space to come and enjoy is certainly a start. Love the idea of all the above activities'

'Just knowing a nature garden is being developed makes me feel good.'

4. In Summary

There is strong base of enthusiastic support for a community Nature Garden, a base for both educational activities in and out of school time, and managed access to support community bonding through gardening, events, and open days, hence enabling a stronger community.

There are some good ideas for future activities once the garden is accessible including yoga, vegetable growing, outreach too hard to reach groups, and children's activities.

There is a strong interest in somewhere to grow things among green fingered residents, while learning new skills and there are many offers of help in getting the garden established.

Many people are interested in enjoying the Nature Garden with their children, however there are also those who express a wish for peaceful enjoyment.

With the first meeting the Sunnyhill Nature Garden Umbrella Group (SNUG), there is a viable group of people ready to develop a transparent, resident-lead, constituted group to lead decision-making and volunteering locally. This group will be able to tackle and discuss ensuing questions arising from this report.

With all the above in mind, Lambeth and their partners in this project will proceed with fundraising for Sunnyhill Nature Garden. While the projects can only really be defined after brambles are cleared, we will look at these:

- Coppice woodland
- Remove seedling sycamores
- Bird boxes
- 'Minibeast City'
- Low fertility wildflower meadow

- Vegetable beds
- Manage the hedgerow through traditional laying
- Nectar-rich climbers to front fence.
- Edible hedge and pollinator plants to rear
- Small wildlife pond
- Looping path
- Log seat circle
- Mud Kitchen
- Stepping stones
- Forest school activities
- Sunnyhill School access
- Community gardening
- Conservation workshops and course
- Community Open Days

'What is there not to like about this project. These types of spaces a vital in London. I have 3 young children who would love this as would I to enjoy moments of quiet and calm'

'I live in a flat without a balcony and have really missed being able to be outside, care for outdoor spaces and watch things grow (other than on my windowsill)'

5. Next steps

All partners are very grateful to everyone who has offered their knowledge, experience, and ideas through this survey. In an ideal world we would have a much larger site, and a large amount of funds to make everyone's ideas happen. We are now moving forwards slowly with the limited land available, seeking external and internal funding to realise this small, special, community garden.

Sunnyhill Nature Garden Umbrella Group is now working towards constituting and acting as a channel for neighbour participation, setting guidelines, and considering ongoing programme. All those who voiced interest in joining the group were given the contact for SNUG and asked to get in touch.

A grant application has been submitted and other sources of funding will be considered to begin clearing brambles and creating habitat. If successful this grant application will enable us to begin gardening and voluntary activities over winter, and

Streatham Common Co-operative have kindly agreed, pending grant agreements, to facilitate the core programme of organised volunteer workdays at Sunnyhill, providing experienced staff, tools, insurance, and protocols to support local people. It is likely that a volunteer-led series of events will sit alongside this. We will email the kind people who offered to help with the programme, once we know if we have funding for tools, materials, and facilitation.

If grants are successful, education, forest school and events will begin in spring 2021, with Sunnyhill School having exclusive use on two days a week, Covid 19 permitting.

For further information on Sunnyhill Nature Garden, or to be put in touch with Sunnyhill Nature Garden Umbrella Group, please email parks@lambeth.gov.uk