

J & L Gibbons

504_Thornhill Bridge Community Gardens

Design Statement

12_07_10

The idea is to enhance the existing character of the space through establishing an ecology garden and educational resource with a woodland garden theme. The south facing garden will be preserved and improvements will be made for 24/7 access to the canal. The work will reinforce the space as a place to pause and observe local flora and fauna, especially invertebrates, birds and bats, in the garden and on the canal. An integrated art and ecology concept is proposed linking with various other local canal side initiatives. Some specifics are set out below.

Demolition and removals

Existing fences and edges are to be removed recycling all timber post edgings as infill for the invertebrate wall. Existing concrete stepped ramps and an area on the ramp landing will be broken up and left as screed for ruderal plant colonisation. The path will be widened to enable a 3m to increase accessibility. The removed interpretation board will be replaced with a new information that reflects the diversity of the garden.

Thresholds and routes

The entrance to Caledonian road will be raised to create a flush entrance, improving on the current situation and a new step added to take up the raised level difference. Both entrances will be re-paved in a visually contrasting block to highlight the thresholds to the garden. There will also be strips of these blocks along the step nose to highlight the change in level and a linking band running between the two entrances. These contrasting paving elements both emphasise the link through the space and also will aid partially sighted users.

The ramped path will be top dressed with Colas Heritage, or similar resin bound gravel with a timber edge. It will be re-aligned in places to open the corners out and make it more visibly permeable and accessible. The tightest corner radii will be increased to 3m. The central landing will also be slightly reshaped to increase the planting area.

Alongside both stepped and ramped routes will be new handrail and a low rail element. The handrail will occur on both sides of the steps and on the lower side of the ramp. In areas where there is no handrail there will be a low rail clad with hazel hurdles to prevent dogs from entering the planting.

Ecological and educational features.

To highlight the site's important location as an area for urban wildlife, a number of ecological features are proposed. These will create habitats for a number of species and will also act as an educational resource. Proposed are two timber framed invertebrate walls infilled with recycled material, one cladding the road buttress and the second a low, 600mm high structural next to path with a sedum roof. The structure of both walls is based on the natural geometries of a hornets' nest. There will also be an artificial bat roost either on a freestanding post or attached to existing tree. This will help enhance the canal's role as an important corridor for bats. Another element that will have both ecological and educational functions is a wireless weather monitoring station and console. This can be used to compile data on the micro climate of the garden and changing climate patterns and provide a very useful resource for local schools.

To help enhance the space as an outdoor classroom the landing area will have boulders of granitic formation for temporary seating. These will be able to be used for pausing in the sunshine overlooking the canal but are intended to be not too comfortable that might encourage lingering. A log for seating is also proposed opposite the invertebrate wall from where observation of bugs can be carried out. This dead wood will be an important habitat in itself for fungi with the seating element possibly procured as an artist commission.

It is also hoped this space will form part of a linked educational resource with Camley Street and other canal side spaces to build up a larger ecological network.

Planting

Infill woodland planting is proposed including three multistemmed specimen trees. The trees will contrast in form to the heavily pruned, lofty, existing ash trees. Along the east side of the canal gate a holly hedge is proposed to match that on the west side.

Interpretation

All mosaics will be retained and new interpretation integrated with the scheme.

Programme

The design process will run until end of July 2010, the contract tendered in August aiming to be on site in October 2010. The garden will be closed during construction until spring 2011, when a spring opening event will be planned.