

The background is a stylized map of a canal network. It features a prominent, thick, dark blue wavy line representing a canal, with several smaller, thinner lines branching off. The map is set against a light blue background with various geometric shapes representing buildings and other structures.

Community-led governance for sustainable canalside spaces

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Executive Summary

This report examines several key canal sites in London, including Sainsbury's Stumpery in Ladbrooke Grove, Canalside Gardens at the Westminster Adult Education Service, the Westway Flyover, Mary Seacole Memorial Park, Meanwhile Gardens, and Gerry's Pompeii. Each site offers unique insights into urban space utilization, highlighting the importance of community engagement, collaborative management, and adaptable policy frameworks. Active community-led governance emerges as a pivotal factor in the vibrancy and functionality of these spaces.

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Introduction

CONTEXT

The history of the British canals dates to the mid-18th Century when at the onset of the Industrial Revolution they played important economic and commercial functions. Since then, perceptions of and use functions of canals have varied. Today, London's canals, no longer a workhorse of the economy, have been transformed into important waterfront developments, offering public amenities, for pleasure, health and wellbeing, to canalside communities, cruisers, and passersby alike.

London's canalside communities represent a unique social and cultural phenomenon. Nevertheless, due to various constraints, including restrictions on mooring, what activities are permitted, economic pressures and regulatory limitations, the canalside communities have faced considerable distress. This hints at wider social, cultural, economic, and political issues and thus the canals represent sites of confluence of several medium- to long-term pressures and risks. Such issues pertain to land and water usage, control and access to public space, infrastructural and planning issues, as well as the potential for enactment of differential ecological frameworks, as canals have substantial ecological effects and are vulnerable to future climate change and ecological risks. At the same time, canals have been largely overlooked in academic research due, in part, to their 'artificial nature', as an almost entirely anthropogenically created ecosystem built to connect inland river catchments as part of efficient transportation infrastructures.

Yet the canals also boast significant potential for future public benefits. Ecologically, the canals offer possibilities to fulfill various important functions, being home to several protected species including kingfishers, bats, water vole and otter. The London canal system has been designated a single "metropolitan" level Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) and adjoins other sites of significant ecological importance, such as the Walthamstow Marshes and the Lea Valley. Additionally, research conducted by the University of Manchester and the Canal & River Trust (2019) demonstrated the potential cooling effect of canal waters on urban areas during heat waves. This research, combined with the insights from the report "Water Works: Making the Most of London's Waterways" by Future of London (2019), reinforces the potential of canals and waterways to address the climate emergency and promote sustainable practices.

Putting in place an ambitious policy agenda for a cohesive integrated canalside strategy provides benefits on multiple fronts, including urban regeneration, environmental sustainability, and community engagement. By better integrating canals into the broader urban planning framework, London authorities can harness their full potential for recreational spaces, natural

cooling systems, and green transport corridors. Furthermore, promoting access and engagement with these waterways can strengthen the cultural identity and heritage of the area, ultimately contributing to the creation of more livable, resilient, and inclusive cities.

With the coalescence of multiple stakeholders (e.g., multispecies, itinerant communities, casual users of canals, authorities), each with their distinct set of priorities, the canals and canal spaces often represent sites of complex and often ambiguous governance issues. The governance of the canal waterbodies and the towpaths and adjacent land to them is often ambiguous, with overlapping domains of ecological, socio-economic and political jurisdictions. They are commons encompassing self-governance practices of the boating communities alongside formalized regulatory structures by the Canal and River Trust (water, canal infrastructure and pathways) and the local authorities (for the adjacent areas), with the Environment Agency, considering how the canals interact with other waterbodies (e.g., rivers and ponds).

Importantly, the ecological crises we face are rooted in problems of custodianship, individual ownership and conceptions of rights that are exemplified in the context of resource governance, pertaining to both land and water as two of our most fundamental natural resources. Changing land use is a crucial and contingent issue in addressing the climate and ecological crisis. These discussions are also pivotal for canalside spaces which are increasingly being utilized and appreciated by a broader range of stakeholders with often conflicting demands on these spaces. From peatland restoration, tree planting, rewilding, mitigating biodiversity loss, recalibrating our food production, and implementing adaptation initiatives, competing and pressurized demands on land are at the heart of climate debates in the UK in recent years. The UK Government pledged to release a Land Use Framework (LUF) which aims to integrate decision-making, transparently address all land uses, engage communities, and support sustainability (Reynolds, 2024). The framework is seen as essential for achieving multiple benefits from land use, given the UK's dense population, high land pressures, and the absence of an integrated mechanism to meet government targets related to land.



Source: Tom Walker

WHY LAND GOVERNANCE INNOVATION MATTERS

Firstly, the canals serve as a vivid demonstration of the interplay between urban development and anthropogenic water ecosystems and illustrate the need for balanced approaches in urban planning and regeneration. Secondly, adequately conceiving solutions to the complex set of interconnected issues around canals requires an interdisciplinary research approach that takes into account socio-economic, spatial, and ecological factors. This approach is essential in addressing the diverse needs and impacts associated with canalside communities and related stakeholders, such as local authorities, residents, cruisers, urban architects and developers. Furthermore, the aspect of public access to nature, which is crucial for physical and mental health, is currently limited. In England, just 8% of land is designated with the “right to roam” status, and this does not extend to waterbodies such as canals, pointing towards a gap in public policy and land governance.



Source: Tom Walker

Changing land use is a crucial and contingent issue in addressing the climate and ecological crisis. From peatland restoration, rewilding, mitigating biodiversity loss, recalibrating our food production, and implementing adaptation initiatives, competing and pressurized demands on land are at the heart of climate debates in the UK in recent years. There is an urgency of recognising land's importance in the face of increasing demands for food, recreation, infrastructure, and climate resilience. With England's growing population and limited land resources, a comprehensive strategy to manage land use effectively could not have been timelier (Spiers, 2017). Whilst there are noteworthy examples of community-led initiatives (e.g., neighbourhood groups, such as residents' associations or friends' groups) taking over and successfully managing open public spaces (CABE, 2010) communities still face considerable challenges in realising these outcomes. Further, UK land assets are increasingly being bought up by business and private interests. There are some instances of asset transfer from public bodies to community groups, particularly for underused or neglected spaces. This transfer enables communities to take ownership and actively involve themselves in managing

these spaces. This process is becoming more common in England (CABE, 2010). There is potential for community organizations to develop new sources of income to maintain the shared canalside spaces, addressing challenges related to funding and maintenance. Challenges faced by local communities in the use of land include financial constraints for maintenance, information asymmetries, bureaucratic challenges, lack of capabilities and knowledge resources to support innovation outcomes, and long-term sustainability of the land (CABE, 2010; Green Alliance, 2022). These examples illustrate the growing involvement of community groups in managing and revitalizing public open spaces, emphasizing the importance of community engagement in urban planning and public space management. Our report provides a thorough analysis of the untapped potential of London's canalside spaces, identifies common trends and challenges, provides a canalside strategy and a common governance tool, and concludes with recommendations to policymakers to be integrated into future local plans for regeneration of the area and citizen wellbeing.

Methodology

The report is informed by activities which are part of a broader initiative aimed at fostering dialogue, understanding community needs, and influencing policy decisions regarding the use of canal spaces.

STAKEHOLDER EVENT 0: BUILDING DIALOGUES INITIATIVE

On 7-9 July 2023, a significant community engagement event Building Dialogues was held beneath the Westway Flyover, along the canalside. Facilitated by Your Canal Boat CIC, this event was a pivotal part of the proposal, aimed at encouraging community participation in the decision-making process regarding the usage of these canal spaces. The event successfully brought together local residents, boating communities, and other stakeholders to discuss, debate, and provide input on the future of these urban spaces. The insights gathered from this event were documented to be synthesized and presented in a comprehensive format, ensuring that the voices and opinions of the community are central to any future developments.

STAKEHOLDER EVENT 1: HARNESSING THE POTENTIAL OF LONDON'S CANALSIDE SPACES

This event, Canalside Strategy Boat Tour from Kensal Green to Paddington, held aboard the 'Elsdale II' on 29 November 2023, focused on exploring alternative uses for canal spaces in consultation with the local councils, communities, architects, and design organizations. Starting at Ladbroke Grove, the boat tour showcased positive examples of community-led regeneration and improvement, such as through the community efforts at Meanwhile Gardens, to offer inspiration. Other sites, such as the Westway flyover, are identified as spaces that pose long-standing, complex design and governance challenges. The objective was to propose creative and sustainable solutions for the utilization of these spaces, aligning with the needs and aspirations of the local community. The event was attended by members of Westminster Council's place-shaping team, the Greater London Authority's Nature Recovery Programme, Paddington Development Trust, Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation, Your Canal Boat CIC, Imperial College and Loughborough University, amongst others and many community groups with stakes in the sites. The involvement of architects and design experts ensured that the proposed ideas were not only innovative but also feasible, considering the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the canal-side environment.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS AND VOX POPS

A series of semi-structured interviews and vox pops were conducted between October 2020 and February 2024 to document and communicate the

narratives of various stakeholders, particularly those from the boating and canalside communities. These activities were designed to gather diverse opinions and facilitate dialogues between different groups of stakeholders, thereby ensuring a holistic understanding of the key issues and challenges faced by these communities.

STAKEHOLDER EVENT 2: REPORT AND DOCUMENTARY SHOWCASE, POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND DEBATE

The key findings and policy recommendations from this report and a documentary showcasing the narratives from the earlier phases of the project were to be presented to key stakeholders on 7th February 2024. This event is to feature a mix of keynote presentations, two panel discussions addressing challenges in shared governance and sustainable development along the canals, and networking sessions. Additionally, this report is to be utilised to create a social movement and media outreach, aiming to lobby for the protection of canalside spaces and the rights established through governance mechanisms.

SCOPE AND CONTEXT OF STUDY

The study encompassed a wide scope, focusing on the sustainable and community-centric development of canalside spaces using novel research methods such as participatory observation and action, ethnographic field work through spending time with the boating community, observing their daily routines, and understanding their interactions with the waterways, digital storytelling, stakeholder mapping and spatial analysis and deep interviews with key informants. By engaging a diverse range of stakeholders, including local communities, policymakers, architects, and social scientists, the study aimed to create a multifaceted understanding of the issues at hand. The context of the study was grounded in the need to preserve and enhance common urban spaces while respecting the rights and voices of the local communities.

Stakeholder Analysis

Conducting a stakeholder analysis is imperative for the efficacy of canal regeneration initiatives, as it facilitates a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted interests and exertions of divergent entities, thereby enabling effective planning and implementation that aligns with the needs, expectations, and contributions of all stakeholders involved.

The table below categorizes various stakeholder groups involved with the canals, outlining their thematic areas and modes of engagement. Policymakers like the Greater London Authority, Canal and River Trust and Westminster Council were engaged through interviews and events, as well as providing their insights into the report. Nonprofits and community groups such as One Westminster and Paddington Development Trust participated through events and interviews. The boating community, including individuals living on canalboats and groups like The Sharks, contributed through numerous interviews and participation in cultural and educational events. A full list of stakeholders can be found in the Appendix.

SUMMARY OF ALL STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGED THROUGH THE RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Stakeholder	Thematic Area	Engaged Through
Policymakers		
Canal and River Trust	Charity responsible for maintenance of canals and rivers in England and Wales, generally owns and maintains the towpaths	Interview, event
Westminster Council	Regeneration, Economy & Planning Community engagement	Interviews, multiple events, an active collaboration on the project and other research-related activities
Greater London Authority	London Nature Recovery Unit looking at the strategy related to preserving London's nature and biodiversity	Interviews, multiple events, an active collaboration on the project and other research-related activities, joint funding bid

Stakeholder	Thematic Area	Engaged Through
Policymakers		
Environment Agency	Protection and enhancement of the environment in England	Collaboration on related research projects
Nonprofit & Community		
One Westminster	A charity running Westminster City's programs, such as the Westminster Volunteer Centre linking volunteers to local organisations, and providing funding, governance, partnership and other relevant information and advice.	Event
Paddington Development Trust	A charity supporting Westbourne Champions and Grand Junction projects in the Paddington area	Interviews, Event
Gerry's Pompeii	A cultural project to preserve the art heritage of Gerry Dalton	Interviews, multiple events, an active collaboration on the project and other research-related activities
Thames 21	Thames21 is a charity working on water improvement projects across London and developed from a partnership programme supported by Keep Britain Tidy, the Port of London Authority, the Environment Agency, Thames Water, CRT, The Corporation of London and 19 local authorities. The charity is now funded by charitable trusts, companies and public funding	Interviews, multiple events, and funding bid

Stakeholder	Thematic Area	Engaged Through
Nonprofit & Community		
Westbourne Forum	A neighborhood forum which is a community partnership between local residents, businesses, places of education, and voluntary organisations. The Forum is open to everyone who shares an active interest in the life of Westbourne.	Event, indirect referrals
Meanwhile Gardens Community Association	A community organization managing the estate of Meanwhile Gardens, which also includes the skate park, childcare facilities (the Playhut) and a factory building house the Metronomes Steel Orchestra	Event, interviews
National Bargee Travellers Association	The NBTA aims to advocate for the lifestyle and rights of itinerant boat dwellers by engaging in lobbying efforts at central and local government levels, defending legal rights, and promoting minority demographic rights while fostering community engagement.	Event, interviews
London Lea Catchment Partnership	The London Lea represents the lower reaches of the River Lea extending from the M25 to its confluence with the River Thames in the heart of London's docklands. Catchment partnerships seek to improve the health and natural functioning of a wide variety of interconnected water environments and river systems, to meet the national goal of: 'improving the environment within a generation and leaving it in a better state than we found it' (DEFRA 25 Year Plan)	Interviews, multiple events, joint grants

Stakeholder	Thematic Area	Engaged Through
Urban Architects and Designers		
Smallwood Architects	Urban planning, public realm, experience with canal sites design (e.g., Westway flyover)	Interview, Events
Group 19 Architects	Architecture and urban design	Interview, Events
Dark Matter Labs	A not-for-profit organization exploring new approaches to ownership, legal systems, governance, accountancy and insurance	Online meeting
Steven Crisp	Horticulturalist, involved in earlier regeneration plans of the WAES site	Site visit
Property Development		
Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation	Established by the Mayor of London in 2015, to secure the regeneration of the Old Oak Opportunity area, spanning land in three London boroughs of Ealing, Brent and Hammersmith & Fulham.	Event
Education, Research and Art		
Westminster Adult Education Service (WAES)	Westminster's adult college offering various qualification (one building located by the canal in Lisson Grove and is part of this report)	Online meeting
Loughborough University	Various academics, research associates and professional services staff	Collaboration, funding and research activities
Royal College of Art and Open Data Institute	WaterWays, a cultural collaboration to re-imagine the ecology of Regent's Canal, Royal College of Art in partnership with the Open Data Institute (ODI)'s Data as Culture	Online engagement

Stakeholder	Thematic Area	Engaged Through
Education, Research and Art		
Sonia Levy	Creator of a film 'Creatures of the lines' on the species living in the London's canals in collaboration with anthropologist Heather Anne Swanson.	Collaboration, funding and research activities
Boating Community		
The Sharks	A community-based kayaking at different locations along the canals, sessions in Harefield (NW10, London) and Southall	Event, interview
Your Canal Boat CIC	An organization set up to working with the boating community on cultural and educational events, campaigning for the better and more equitable use of the canals	Interviews, multiple events, an active collaboration on the project and other research-related activities
Individuals who live on canalboats	Boating community members who often sustain themselves through micro ventures and other entrepreneurial activities	40 interviews were conducted for the purpose of PhD research, and multiple cultural and educational events in support of the boating community on other related projects

Case Studies Of Sites

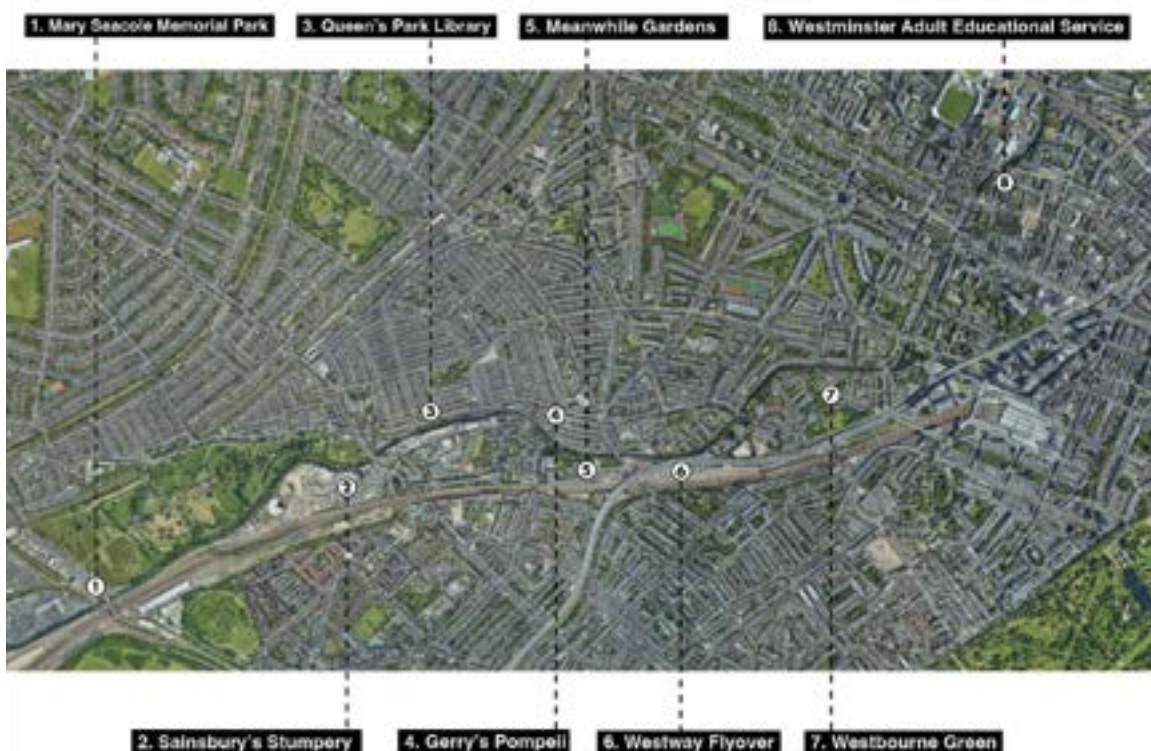
The canal sites, studied in this report, including Sainsbury's Stumpery, Canalside Gardens (WAES), the Westway Flyover, Mary Seacole Memorial Park, Meanwhile Gardens, and Gerry's Pompeii, each offer unique contributions to the city's cultural and communal fabric. Sainsbury's Stumpery and Canalside Gardens are notable for their integration of ecological features and community spaces, while the Westway Flyover and Mary Seacole Park stand out for their potential for urban regeneration. Meanwhile Gardens and Gerry's Pompeii represent the power of community-driven projects, showcasing inclusive volunteering and the preservation of non-traditional cultural heritage. Each site reflects a blend of historical, artistic, and ecological values, emphasizing the importance of these spaces in urban community life.

All sites face development challenges, whether due to ongoing urban regeneration projects like in Sainsbury's Stumpery or Mary Seacole Park or the need to integrate ecological considerations as in Canalside Gardens. These developments often involve navigating legal complexities and addressing community concerns, especially when transforming spaces for public use or preserving cultural heritage, as seen in Gerry's Pompeii.

Ownership complexities are a recurrent theme, affecting the sites' use and development. For example, the complicated ownership at the Westway Flyover requires consensus among various stakeholders for any modifications. Similarly, Gerry's Pompeii faced challenges after the artist's death due to changes in ownership, highlighting the need for clear property rights and permissions for preservation efforts. This is however not always commensurate with the solutions observed in practice. For instance, despite specific ownership complexities remaining at Westway Flyover site, a consortium continues to manage the site, highlighting the necessity of ongoing consultation between owners amidst development characterized by ambiguity, rendering property rights irrelevant in this commons model.

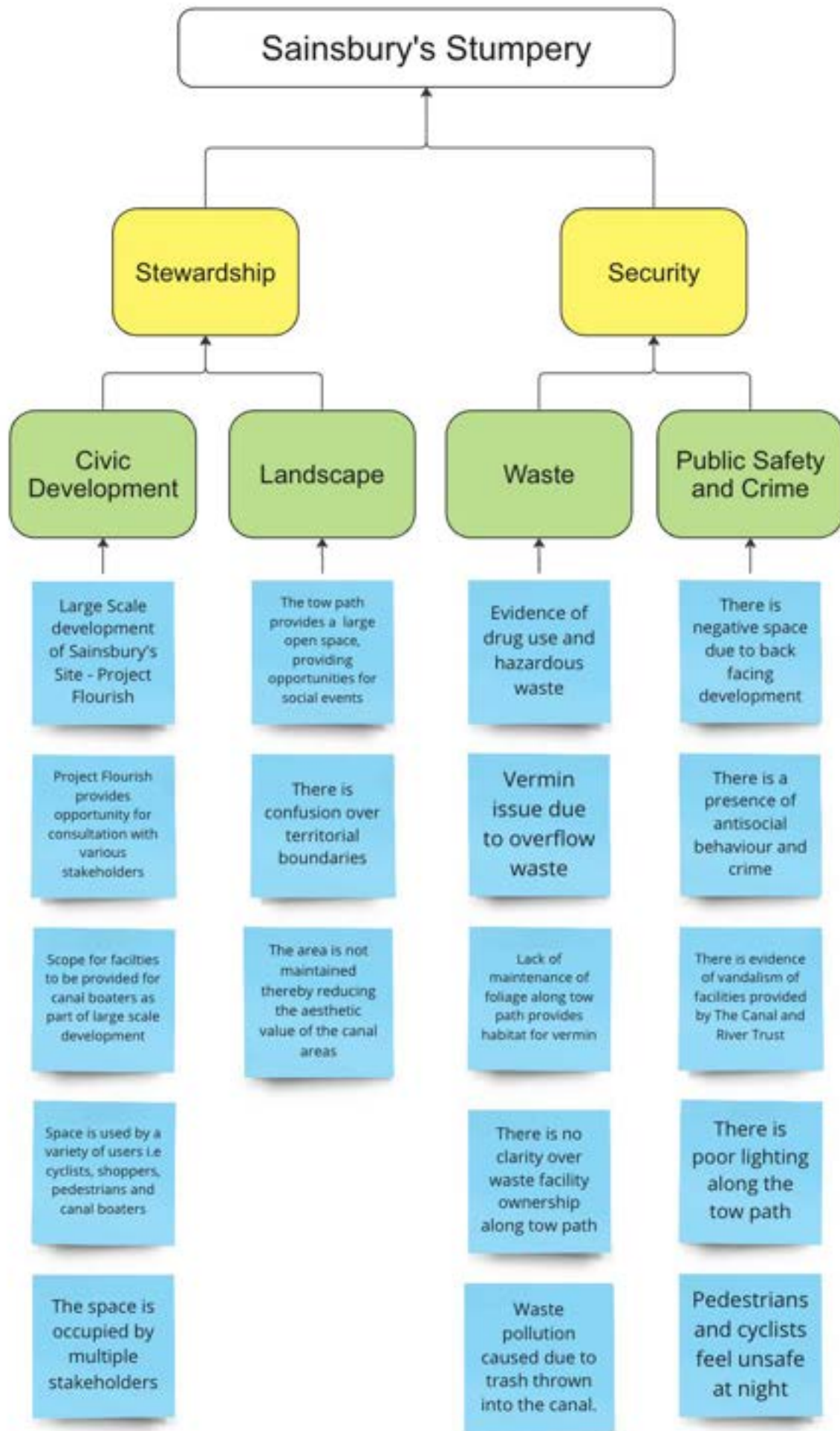
These themes underscore the importance of community engagement, collaborative management, and adaptable local policies to navigate the challenges of urban development, preserve cultural heritage, and maintain vibrant, inclusive public spaces along London's canals.

	Location	Features
1	Mary Seacole Memorial Park	London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham 's smallest park
2	Sainsbury's Stumpery	Project initiated; more input needed to the space
3	Queen's Park Library	Public consultations Stage 1 already held. Plans are ongoing to improve access to the canal.
4	Gerry's Pompeii	A personal project which has become valuable to the community.
5	Meanwhile Gardens	Portrait of a well-maintained council park along with a successful community project adjacent to the canal
6	Westway Flyover	Issues with rough sleepers and fly-tipping.
7	Westbourne Green	Example of a well-maintained canalside park with involvement of local community centre.
8	Canalside Gardens	Accessed through WAES



SAINSBURY'S STUMPERY





Factors Affecting Canal Site	
Borough	Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Amenity use	Noise due to antisocial behavior Lack of security (poor lighting) Lack of maintenance of foliage provides habitat for vermin Activities like the organization of events with local musicians, contributing to noise and disturbance but also enhancing public engagement.
Development	Uncertain degree of ecological and habitat integration in future development plans, such as Project Flourish planning to build 2,519 homes. Maintenance or provision of new habitats, such as the creation of the “Stumpery” by Your Canal Boat CIC.
Management	Control of the site by Sainsbury’s and Ballymore Construction, including clearing overgrown hedges and initiating construction projects.
Ownership	Arrangements and boundaries of land ownership, with Sainsbury’s leasing land from CRT and Ballymore’s involvement in Project Flourish real estate development. Medium-term changes in the usage of the land, from being a rundown site to a space for public events and potential commercial development. Confusion over territorial boundaries

Source: Factors adapted from London Biodiversity Programme Habitats Action Plan – Canals, https://www.lbp.org.uk/03action_pdfs/ac09_canals.pdf

One of the larger strips of undeveloped land in our study is behind the Sainsbury’s located where Ladbrooke Grove Road crosses the canal. Approximately 100m of the towpath is reserved behind the store for boaters to “stop and shop”, with a 4-hour time limit to assure access for everyone. Historically the site has been an eyesore, where people gather to drink and where boaters often contribute waste to small, typically full, bins. For years, the hedges were badly overgrown, collected rubbish and uneaten food, and became a haven for vermin. At its own expense, Sainsbury’s cleared the strip (leased from CRT) in 2020, opening up the space and creating fresh opportunities.

In 2021, Ballymore Construction funded Your Canal Boat to make “meanwhile” use of the site, allowing temporary improvements and hence not impeding plans for Project Flourish, which will build 2,519 homes, breaking ground in 2024. Your Canal Boat proposed building a “Stumpery”, a creative arrangement of tree stumps to improve the aesthetics of the site and offering seats for events.

In 2022, Your Canal Boat recruited local musicians to retrieve Stumpery’s first

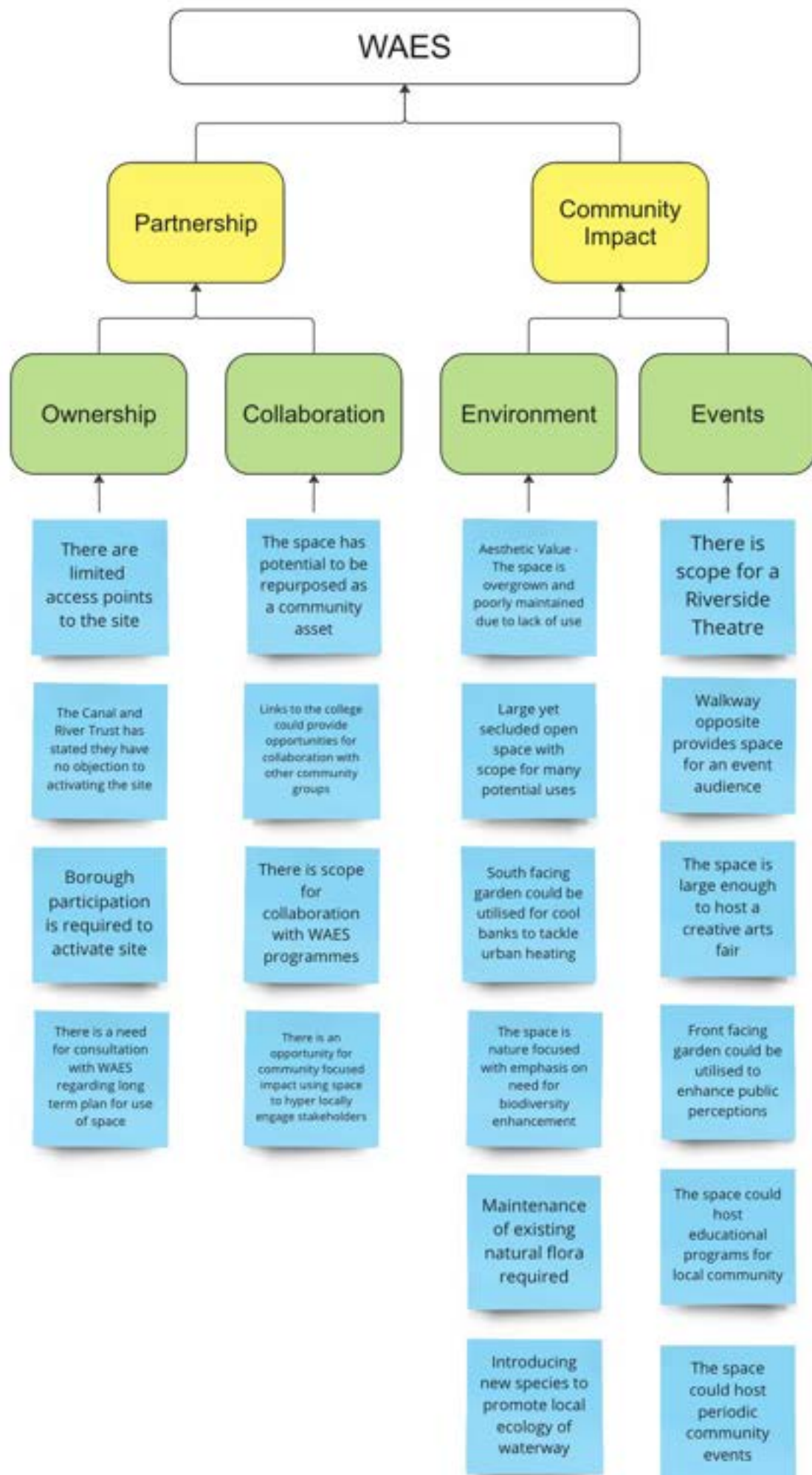
stump, and launched a series of free weekend events to demonstrate the site's utility for hosting performance. Despite particularly harsh March weather, several hundred people attended with 42 musicians playing for free, with architecture professor Gregory Cowans describing the history and relevance of the project.

The Project Flourish website makes little reference to the canal other than that access to the towpath will be provided. There is no indication of engagement with Canal and River Trust, or the boating community. Presumably the "stop and shop" moorings will be preserved at the new Sainsbury's Superstore. An artist's depiction suggests a historic canal basin behind the current store will be rehabilitated. In response to residents' concerns, Ballymore agreed to limit new construction to 30 stories. The site will be transformed with uncertain impacts on the canal experience. It is mentioned that the project will contribute to restoring the canal basin, creating a wharf, inspired by the one that once served the gas works on site as well as the nearby Portobello Dock and provide better links to the canalside path.

CANALSIDE GARDENS (WAES)



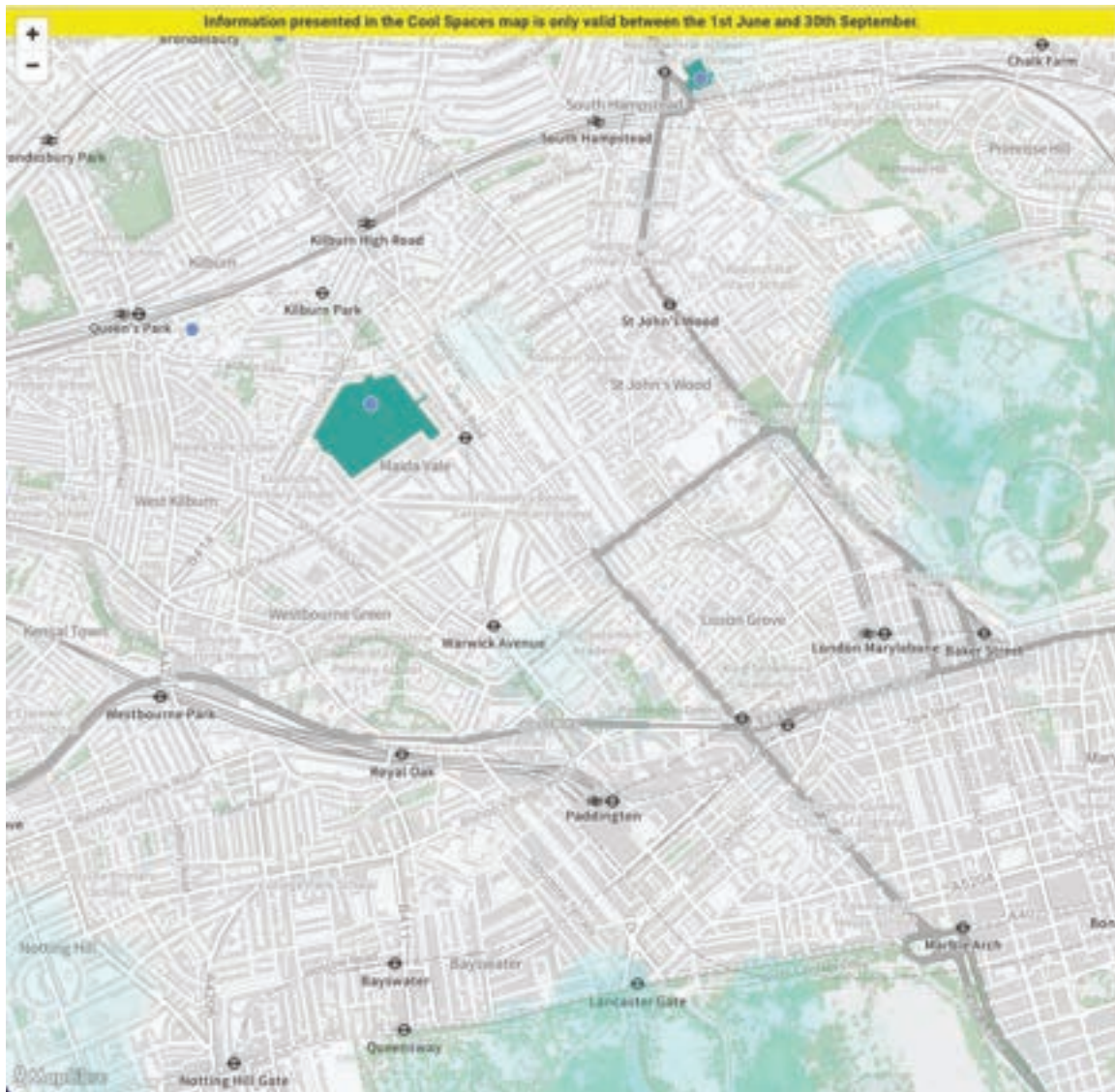
RECENT PHOTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE (SEPT 2023)



Factors Affecting Canal Site

Borough	Westminster City Council
Amenity use	<p>The site could serve as a cool retreat, beneficial during heat waves, especially for low-income residents without air conditioning.</p> <p>Potential to be included in the London Mayor's Office Cool Spaces initiative.</p> <p>Potential for raising tree canopies and modifying planters to increase capacity and visual allure.</p> <p>Provision for wildlife with nests and feeders, enhancing outdoor learning opportunities.</p> <p>Infrastructure for periodic events, like pavilions or boats, to support educational and health objectives.</p>
Development	<p>Challenges in accessibility and maintenance for public use.</p> <p>Possible uses include educational, entertainment, and recreational activities.</p> <p>Partnership options with WAES for educational initiatives and community engagement.</p> <p>Independent events like festivals, theater, or music performances, and art fairs.</p> <p>Visual improvements to establish the site as a recreational space and a 'Cool bank' for climate adaptation</p>
Management	<p>Managed by WAES under the governance of Westminster City Council.</p> <p>Accessibility and maintenance as principal challenges; need for DDA compliant access and potential restoration of a spiral staircase.</p> <p>Requirement of dedicated service for garden maintenance, with an estimated cost and the need for a groundskeeper.</p>
Ownership	<p>Under the jurisdiction of Westminster City Council.</p> <p>Canal and River Trust has no objection to activating the site.</p> <p>Borough participation needed for further development and activation of the site.</p>

The canal site of WAES — refurbished at great expense and dedicated to public use in 2005 — has been closed to the public for 17 years. WAES falls under the governance of Westminster City Council. Northern exposure limits horticultural opportunities, but — along with the waterside location — creates a cool retreat that will be a critical community amenity during heat waves anticipated to be increasingly common in the future (and of particular benefit to low-income residents unable to afford air conditioning). London Mayor's Office has developed a Cool Spaces initiative that this site could be added to. There is a notable absence of Cool Spaces in this stretch of London as the image below illustrates.



Source: London assembly 'cool sites'

Canopies of all of the trees could be raised to improve visual allure. At least one of the planters could be eliminated, maintaining the shaded cover, but increasing the capacity of the area. Seven "catacombs" could be put to use for teaching or workshops as originally intended in the creation of Canalside Gardens 20 years ago. Bats (or other wildlife) resident to the site are unlikely to be negatively impacted by landscaping improvements. An addition of nests and feeders for birds and other wildlife would allow the space to become a more accessible destination for outdoor learning opportunities by local school children. An installation of a pavilion, or mooring of a boat, would provide infrastructure for periodic events by invitation that garner support and demonstrate meanwhile uses of the spaces for funding educational and health and well-being objectives such as social prescription, science and history learning.

Accessibility and maintenance were and remain the principal challenges to

restoring the site to the public realm. Accessibility is currently restricted by a locked gate at street level which enters onto a narrow walk with steps that are not DDA compliant. Current access is through the building onto a ramp which is compliant, but only available by request to building management. Restoration of a previously existing spiral staircase would require approval of the residents who live there. Accessibility is more than a physical issue, but a visual and aesthetic one for residents and passers-by who benefit emotionally with measurable impacts to their well-being from seeing a well-cared-for landscaped, ornamental space. Maintenance to maintain the gardens would require one and a half days per week of dedicated service at an estimated cost of 300 pounds per week (estimated by Steven Crisp, Chief horticulturalist of the US embassy involved in prior restoration of the site). The presence of a groundskeeper on the site would have a huge and beneficial impact in support of all of those activities. The Canal and River Trust has stated they have no objection to activating the site. Borough participation is needed to move forward.

Looking towards the future, the site could be used for a number of purposes, from educational, entertainment to recreational usage. There are different benefits but also additional considerations of planning and budgeting attached to each option. We detail these options below:

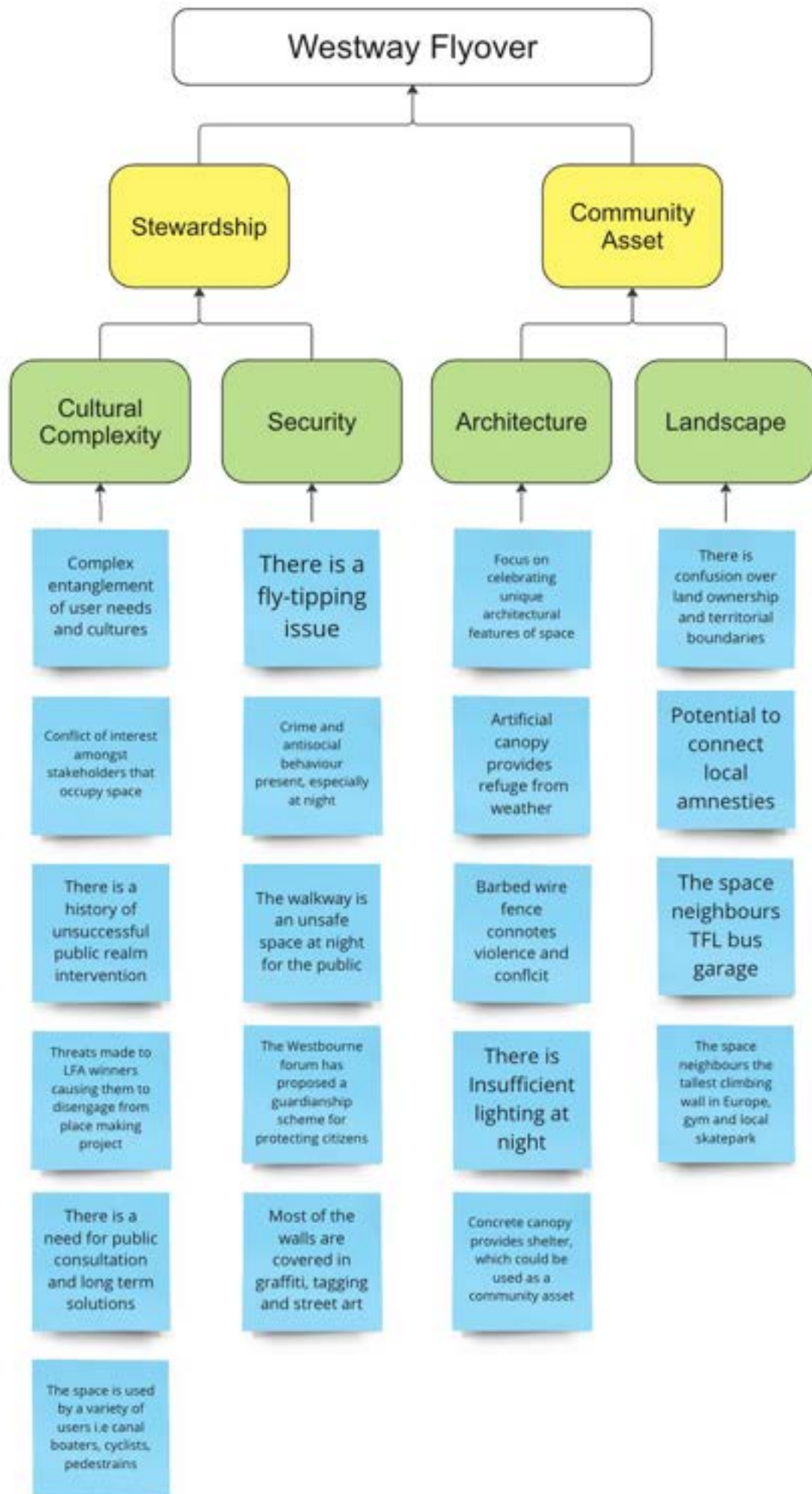
- In partnership with WAES
 - This could involve educational initiatives, potentially in fields like cooking, food, or plant growing, perhaps utilizing the culinary department at WAES.
 - It could also include floristry programs.
 - The space could be used to engage with the local community more visibly and actively, focusing on community-driven impact

- Independent, periodic events
 - The site could host a festival, ideally in the summer.
 - It could be used for theatre or music performances, with audiences positioned either on the site or opposite it.
 - Organizing an art fair could be another use.
 - The site could host thematic or ethnic events.

- Visual improvement
 - The site could be enhanced for recreational usage.
 - Establishing it as a 'Cool bank' would show leadership in climate adaptation and proactive action, aligning with the latest research on urban heat phenomena.
 - Such improvements would enhance public perceptions and create a nature-focused environment.

WESTWAY FLYOVER





Factors Affecting Canal Site

Borough	Westminster City Council
Amenity use	The underbelly of the Westway Flyover, despite its lack of sunlight and vegetation, is architecturally significant. Efforts to transform the space for public-facing activities, such as the installation by Architect Sophie Nguyen and the design contest hosted by the City of Westminster. Discussions about transforming the space into a community asset, accommodating activities for vendors, boaters, cyclists, and pedestrians.
Development	The site's development is challenged by its complicated ownership and the need for consensus among various stakeholders. Consideration of elements like public artwork, lighting, storage facilities for pop-up events, and improvements to the physical space to promote its utility. Potential modifications such as lowering retaining walls, removing barbed wire, and creating uniform ground treatment to reduce user conflict and increase flexibility of use.
Management	The site's management involves multiple stakeholders: the Highway Department, the Canal and River Trust, Great Western Studios, and the City of Westminster. The need for the Borough to convene these stakeholders to determine allowable modifications. Management considerations include public artwork approval, storage facility provisions, and creating bookable moorings for traders.
Ownership	Complicated ownership involving the Highway Department (overpass), Canal and River Trust (towpath), Great Western Studios (a portion of land), and the City of Westminster (remaining areas). The necessity for collaboration among these entities to facilitate the site's development and utility maximization.

The Westway Flyover — more specifically, the section of canal and towpath beneath it which is the longest stretch of covered towpath in London — represents a historical trouble spot for Westminster City planners. Absent sunlight and vegetation, it is forlorn. The concrete underbelly of the highway overhead is architecturally magnificent, however. A series of interventions have attempted to rouse interest in leveraging the unique aspects of this covered space for public facing activities.

In 2017, Architect Sophie Nguyen hosted a month-long installation at Great Western Studios called This Place Needs Love. Her efforts inspired the City of Westminster to host a design contest for the 2019 London Festival of

Architecture. Thirty thousand pounds was offered to build the winning entry. In July 2023, Your Canal Boat CIC hosted four of the design teams who had been shortlisted in the competition to return and discuss their entries. *What would they do differently now to transform the space? What mix of ingredients would turn urban blight into community gold? Fifty years later, what changes will transform this space? So that vendors can sell goods, boaters can responsibly dispose of rubbish, cyclists can fix their bikes, and no one gets run over?*



Boaters, residents and representatives from the City of Westminster share their visions at the July 2023 Building Dialogues event hosted by Your Canal Boat CIC

The chief impediment — the architects concluded at the event — is the site's complicated ownership. Each team had had to speculate on what various entities would approve: the Highway Department which owns the overpass, the Canal and River Trust which owns the towpath, Great Western Studios which owns a sliver of land and the City of Westminster which owns the rest.

“The Borough,” architect Matt Hopkins said on behalf of everyone, “is the only entity that will be here in 300 years. They need to convene the other stakeholders and see what modifications are allowable.” Questions raised included the following:

- Would the highway department allow public artwork and lighting on the underside of the Westway?

- Would property owners allow a storage facility for items needed for pop-up events to encourage further use of the site? tables and chairs? bins and bin bags? work benches for boaters and cyclists to do repairs?
- Would the bus facility allow lowering of the retaining wall and removal of barbed wire as elsewhere along the retaining wall? Opening up views and allowing light to penetrate?
- Would CRT create a bookable mooring(s) for roving traders to sell items and act as caretakers? Could a uniform ground treatment be installed, to reduce conflict between users and allow for greater flexibility of use?

The Royal Parks were cited for demonstrating how a uniform surface and appropriate signage can induce cyclists to give way to crowds and during events.

This initiative could potentially establish a novel framework for collaboration between local government authorities, the Canal and River Trust, and private stakeholders. Such a framework would be instrumental in maximizing the utility and enhancing the value of various canalside locations throughout London.

BUILDING DIALOGUES

After decades of proposed interventions, what is the future of this space?

WORKSHOPS, TALKS, MUSIC.
JULY 7-9. 2023

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/628543710157>

Photo by: @stockmarkets & Alan Gault

The flyer for the July 2023 event

MARY SEACOLE MEMORIAL PARK IN HARLESDEN



Factors Affecting Canal Site

Borough	Hammersmith and Fulham
Amenity use	<p>Mary Seacole Park is a small but unique park, serving as the only water point on the Paddington Arm between Alperton and Little Venice.</p> <p>It functions as a point of ingress and egress for the Kensal Rise Association of Boaters.</p> <p>The park's bounding walls display the work of top London graffiti artists.</p> <p>Features an undercroft beneath Scrubs Lane with potential for public repurposing.</p> <p>The park's construction on multiple levels creates a natural amphitheater.</p>
Development	<p>Mary Seacole Park is in a neighborhood undergoing extensive change, with the construction of new flats by City & Docklands.</p> <p>It is located at the easternmost boundary of the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation (OPDC), the UK's largest regeneration project, projected to result in 30,000 new units.</p> <p>The park has been subject to developmental interests and financial support from OPDC and City & Docklands, especially for events hosted by Your Canal Boat.</p>
Management	<p>Managed under the jurisdiction of the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham.</p> <p>Financial support and program activation by OPDC and City & Docklands.</p>
Ownership	<p>Owned by the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham.</p> <p>Influenced by the developmental interests of City & Docklands and the OPDC, which have invested in the area and the park's projects.</p>

Mary Seacole Park ("Mary Seacole Gardens" on some maps) is a flyspeck of a park — the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham's smallest. It occupies a uniquely situated triangular parcel, bounded by Scrubs Lane, a branch of the Great Western Railroad and the Paddington Arm of the Grand Union Canal, vestiges of three ages of transportation. It has several notable features as follows:



- It is the only water point on the Paddington Arm between Alperton and Little Venice.
- It is a point of ingress and egress for a small enclave of boaters called KRAB (Kensal Rise Association of Boaters)
- bounding walls showcase the work of top London graffiti artists
- an undercroft beneath Scrubs Lane could potentially be re-purposed for public use.

- Mary Seacole is buried in the cemetery of St. Mary's Church, less than a quarter mile away.
- construction on multiple levels creates a natural amphitheatre
- There is a corporate partner, City & Docklands, invested in the project

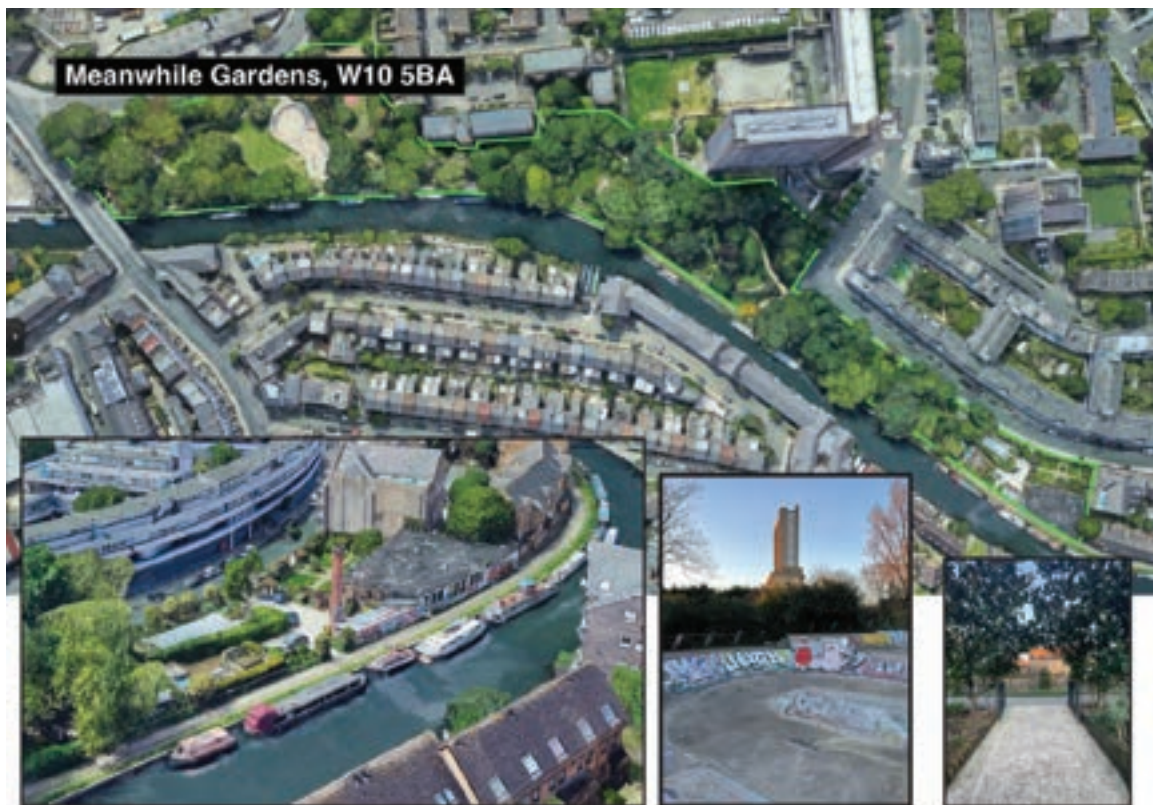
These factors create beguiling possibilities for a neighborhood in the process of wholesale change. Mary Seacole Park is quickly being engulfed by hundreds of new flats being erected by City & Docklands. It is effectively the easternmost boundary of the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation (OPDC), the largest regeneration project in the UK, projected to result in 30,000 new units.

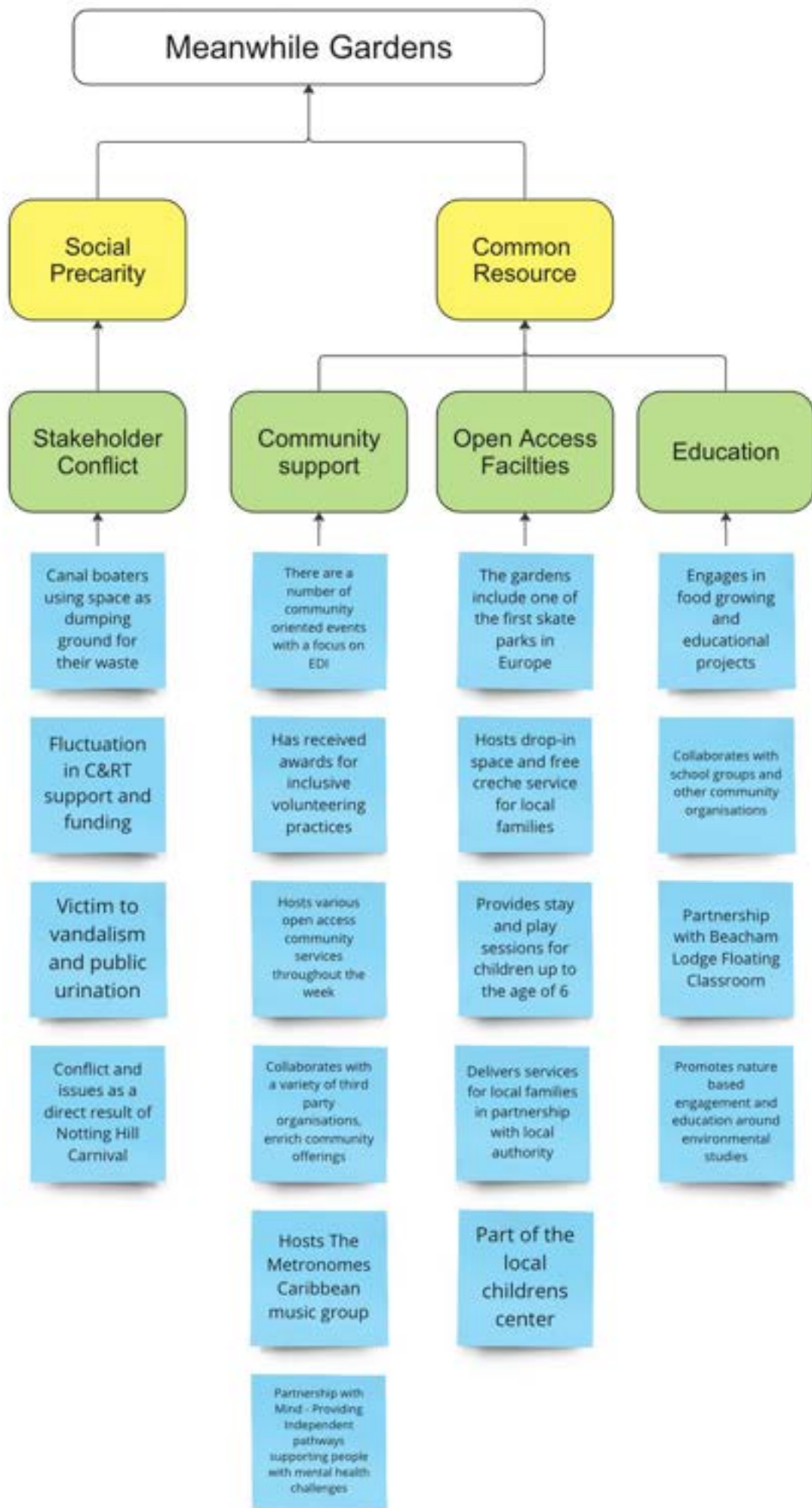
The OPDC and City & Docklands provided financial support for two Your Canal Boat programs that activated the site under strict audience limitations in the spring and summer of 2021.



The events and the park's history are more fully documented online <https://yourcanalboat.com/locations/mary-seacole-park> and in a project video [boat.com/locations/mary-seacole-park](https://yourcanalboat.com/locations/mary-seacole-park)

MEANWHILE GARDENS





Factors Affecting Canal Site	
Borough	Kensington and Chelsea
Amenity use	<p>Meanwhile Gardens offers various community amenities including a skate park, a drop-in facility for families, and stay-and-play sessions for children.</p> <p>The gardens serve as a hub for food growing, educational projects, and school group activities. It is a recognized space for inclusive volunteering and community bonding, receiving awards such as the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service.</p> <p>Hosts cultural and educational activities, such as those by the Metronomes steel band and the Beacham Lodge Floating Classroom.</p>
Development	<p>The Gardens have adapted to changing needs and funding availability, offering a range of play activities and emphasizing the importance of green spaces.</p> <p>The project is affected by local urban development, with the need to balance the community project with the surrounding infrastructure and housing developments</p>
Management	<p>Managed by a community project team with a focus on inclusivity and engagement of volunteers from diverse backgrounds.</p> <p>Partnership with various organizations enriches the community offerings, with a focus on sports, education, and ecology.</p> <p>The project addresses safety concerns along the towpath and waste management challenges, seeking collaborative solutions</p>
Ownership	<p>The primary funder is the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, providing grants for garden maintenance and community programs.</p> <p>The Canal and River Trust plays a crucial role in governance, supporting various initiatives and the adoption scheme for canal upkeep.</p> <p>Ownership challenges include negotiations for lease renewals and managing complex ownership aspects of the canal site, especially regarding maintenance responsibilities and the prolapsing wall issue.</p>

Meanwhile Gardens is a community project which focuses on maintaining a 4-acre community garden alongside the canal, offering various activities and facilities. The community project includes a skate park, recognized as one of the first in Europe, providing an open-access and free facility for local people. Additionally, Meanwhile Gardens runs a drop-in facility for local families, offering stay-and-play sessions for children up to the age of 6. Over the years, this facility has grown in popularity and has become a part of the local children's centre, delivering services for local families through a contract with the local authority.

The project also engages in food growing, educational projects, and welcomes school groups and other community organizations. Meanwhile Gardens has received awards for inclusive volunteering, including the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in 2018. Volunteers, including those with learning disabilities, mental health issues, and substance misuse backgrounds, play a crucial role in maintaining and developing the landscape. The project emphasizes inclusivity and community bonding among volunteers, who work together as a committed team across various sessions throughout the week.

The community project has adapted to the changing needs and funding availability over the years, offering a full-time timetable of different play activities for children. The importance of green spaces and nature for health and well-being has been highlighted, particularly during Covid-19 lockdowns, bringing more recognition to the work of Meanwhile Gardens. The project continues to collaborate with various organizations and has established itself as a hub for diverse community activities, including sports, education, and ecology.

Meanwhile Gardens collaborates with several organizations, enriching its community offerings. One such partnership is with Kensington and Chelsea Mind, running a therapeutic project for individuals with long-term mental health difficulties within a dedicated section of the gardens. This enduring collaboration has spanned approximately 40 years.

The Metronomes, a prominent steel band in the UK, has been based at Meanwhile Gardens for around 35 years, boasting about 50 members. They conduct practice sessions and contribute to the cultural landscape by showcasing traditional Caribbean music, particularly from Trinidad, through the unique sounds of steel pans.

Another noteworthy collaboration involves the Beacham Lodge Floating Classroom, led by the Chief Executive Simon Ryder. This initiative, running since 2012, focuses on delivering environmental and history projects around the canal for school children. The floating classroom engages in environmental studies within Meanwhile Gardens as part of its sessions, further enhancing the educational and ecological aspects of the community project. The Wildlife Garden project at Meanwhile Gardens commenced in 1994, providing an enriching and educational experience for the community. Additionally, Meanwhile Gardens collaborated with the Natural History Museum on outdoor learning initiatives since 2020, fostering nature-based activities during challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Funding for Meanwhile Gardens comes from various sources. The principal funder is the local authority, The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC), providing a core grant that supports garden maintenance, and community involvement through volunteering programs, health and well-being sessions, and community events. Additionally, there is a separate pot of funding from the local authority for the Play Hut, which is part of the

Family and Children Services department at the RBKC.

In terms of governance and key actors, the Canal and River Trust plays a crucial role. Collaborations with them have led to impactful projects that celebrate the local environment and engage the community in artistic and educational endeavors. The trust's involvement ensures coordination and support for Meanwhile Gardens' initiatives along the canal side.

A noteworthy project in 2018, funded by a local donor with support from Canal and River Trust, involved renowned artists creating artwork to celebrate the canal and towpath. The collaborative effort resulted in the creation of a boat, showcasing the community's involvement and artistic expression.

The Canal and River Trust's adoption scheme allows organizations like Pursuing Independent Pathways (PIP) to actively contribute to specific areas along the canal, such as Meanwhile Gardens. This scheme fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among community partners, creating a more sustainable and vibrant environment. Under this scheme, organizations like PIP actively engage in specific areas along the canal. Adopters collaborate with the Trust to tailor activities, contribute to towpath upkeep, and enhance the biodiversity of their adopted stretch. PIP embraced the opportunity to adopt a substantial stretch from Sainsbury's to the bridge on Great Western Rd, a testament to their commitment. This partnership exemplifies the potential of collaborations between community projects and larger organizations, facilitating positive change and community engagement. PIP, with 80 volunteers from a corporate body, joined forces with Meanwhile Gardens to clean up after Notting Hill Carnival. Approximately 25 volunteers assisted in the gardens, while the remaining team contributed to enhancing the towpath's aesthetics and overall appeal. Over the years, the relationship between Meanwhile Gardens and the Canal and River Trust has experienced communication fluctuations. Budgetary constraints and unfilled positions are among the challenges faced, affecting the overall communication dynamics.

Meanwhile Gardens grapples with challenges such as boaters using the gardens for dumping and maintenance, causing inconveniences. Despite these challenges, the project remains resilient, actively seeking solutions and fostering a sense of community.

Meanwhile Gardens faces challenges resulting from unclear ownership of the prolapsing wall close to the towpath. When faced with such concerns, Meanwhile Gardens management has to navigate the complexities by reaching out to the Canal and River Trust through their inquiries line. Simultaneously, the management collaborates with the local authority responsible for canal towpath upkeep, showcasing a proactive approach to problem-solving.

The prolapsing wall incident underscores the need for a comprehensive tool or platform that clearly defines site boundaries and responsibilities. While such a

resource is currently unavailable, collaborative efforts with local authorities and larger organizations, such as the Canal and River Trust, remain pivotal in addressing and resolving site-related challenges. Energy and activity around improvement projects can wane for various reasons, such as changes in personnel or government priorities. Communication and a sustained strategy were identified as critical elements for the success of environmental improvement projects. Policymakers should explore ways to maintain momentum over the long term, potentially by establishing frameworks that ensure continued community engagement and commitment.

In revisiting the challenges faced by Meanwhile Gardens and considering potential policy recommendations, it is worth mentioning "Share the Space" initiative, undertaken by the Canal and River Trust approximately six to eight years ago, aimed to address safety concerns along the towpath. The findings from this initiative remain relevant today, particularly in light of safety issues arising from fast cycling during specific times of the day. Safety along the towpath emerges as a significant concern for Meanwhile Gardens, with incidents reported, including those involving staff members. The need for a collaborative effort to enhance safety and reduce risks to users and staff is paramount. Revisiting and potentially revitalizing the "Share the Space" initiative could serve as a foundation for improving safety measures and ensuring a secure environment for all.

Furthermore, the Meanwhile Gardens face the ongoing challenge of waste management, with instances of abandoned items affecting the aesthetic and environmental quality of Meanwhile Gardens. While the responsibility for maintaining the canal towpath does not fall within the community project's remit, the issue remains, necessitating attention and potential collaboration with relevant authorities. Meanwhile Gardens is a living image of a delicate balance between public usage of the space and the flourishing natural environment. The importance of community-led initiatives for canal cleanups and biodiversity enhancement was underscored throughout the conversations with Meanwhile Gardens. Policymakers should consider supporting and incentivizing such initiatives through funding, awareness campaigns, and collaborations with local groups. There is potential for exploring partnerships with universities and student bodies to propose and implement innovative waste management solutions, addressing issues of abandoned items along the canal towpath.

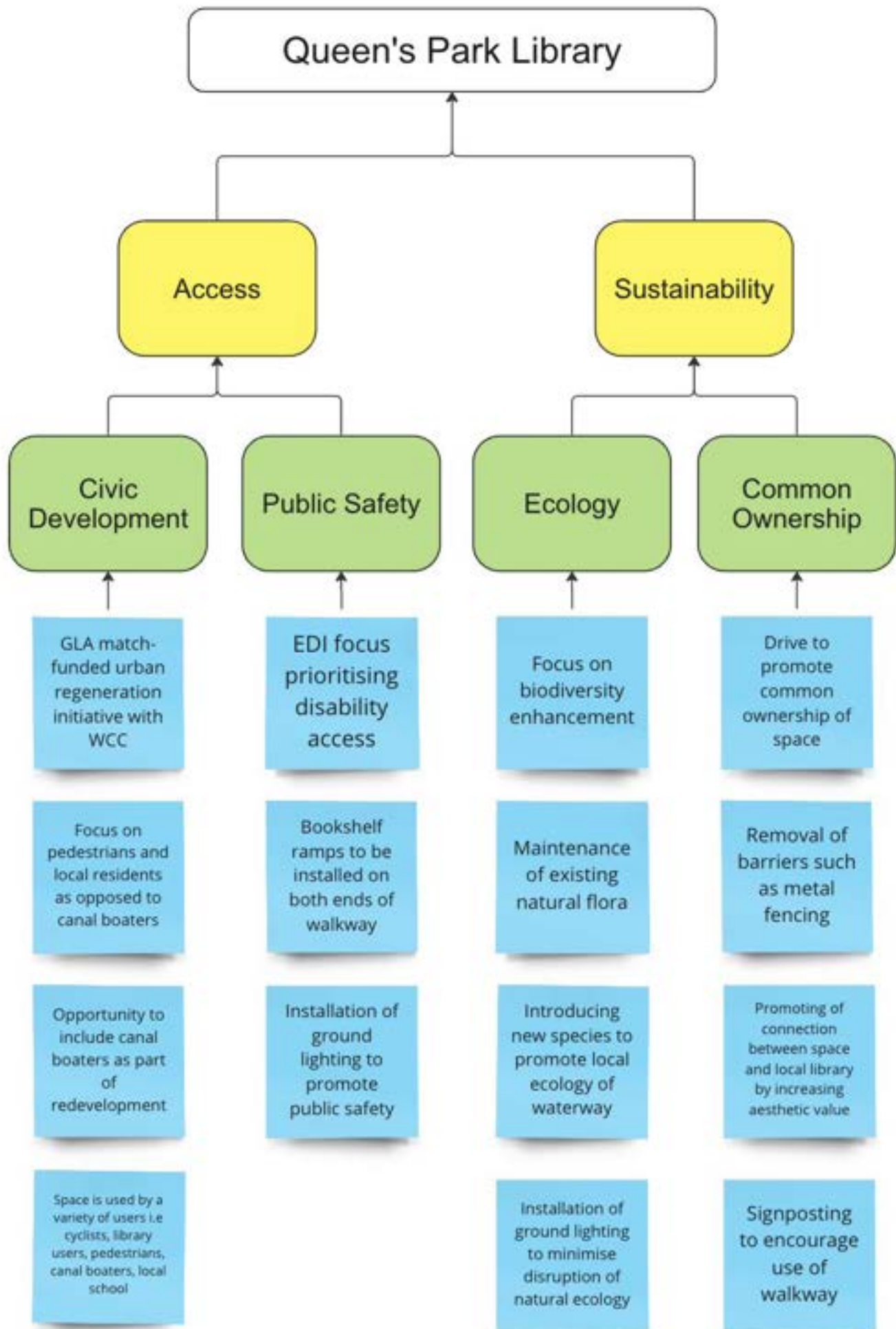
There are ongoing negotiations of the renewal of leases for Meanwhile Gardens, particularly for the factory building that serves as their office and rehearsal space. The complexity of managing tenancy at will and long-term leases highlighted the multifaceted challenges faced by community projects. Meanwhile Gardens highlighted the ongoing efforts to maintain the garden and continue fundraising. The organization aims to work towards being a lasting presence in the community. There is an opportunity for a big fund-raising effort as Meanwhile Gardens is coming up to its 50th Anniversary. Meanwhile Gardens Community Project continues to evolve, driven by the

spirit of collaboration, resilience, and community engagement. Despite challenges, the project stands as a beacon of creativity, inclusivity, and positive change along the canal.

QUEEN'S PARK LIBRARY

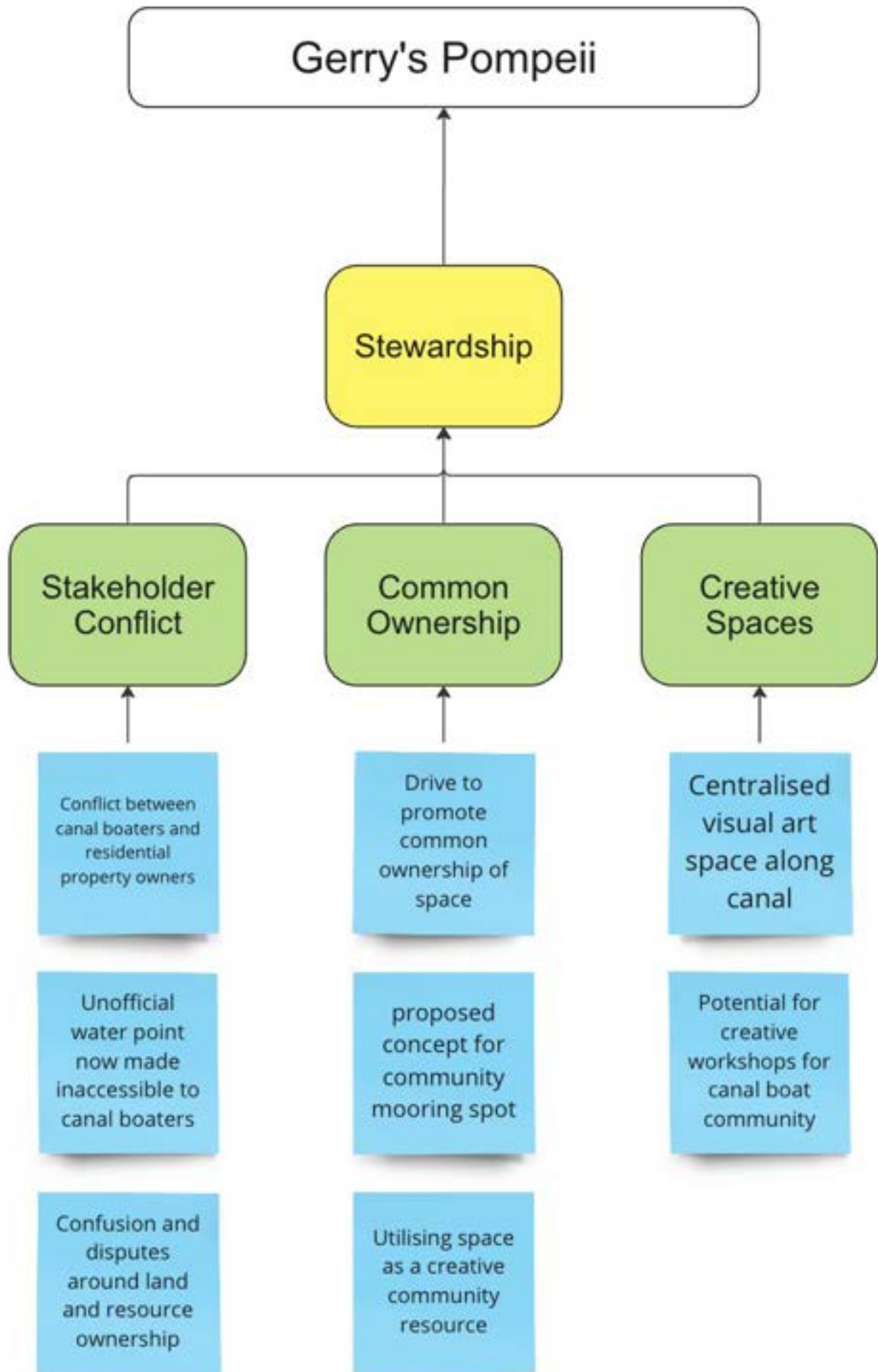


The regeneration of this site is underway by the Westminster City Council and therefore information provided in this report is of summative and visual nature.



GERRY'S POMPEII





Factors Affecting Canal Site	
Borough	Westminster City Council
Amenity use	Gerry's Pompeii was a deeply personal and artistic creation by Gerry Dalton, offering a rich tapestry of characters and stories. The site serves as an engaging history lesson and a model for preserving marginalized cultural heritage. The project evolved into a charity hosting an arts program, emphasizing community involvement in the cultural landscape.
Development	The site's development as a public heritage site was complicated by legal challenges, including property leases and stakeholder involvement. Efforts to gain official heritage listing for the site faced challenges due to its non-traditional nature and lack of recognition in the mainstream art world. The project represents a model for saving marginalized cultural heritage sites, requiring adaptable policies and community consensus building.
Management	Managed by Sasha Galitzine, an arts curator
Ownership	Initially, the artworks and space were under the ownership of Gerry Dalton and later transferred to his family. Permissions from the housing association were required for any preservation efforts or changes to the site.

This site was created by Gerald 'Gerry' Dalton (1935-2019), an Irish immigrant, who transformed his social housing environment into an extraordinary work of art along a 50-meter canal bank. Despite limited financial resources and no connections to the art world, he created an extensive and personal museum-like space, mostly in secret and at night.

The site was a deeply personal project for Gerry, reflecting his interests rather than political allegiances. His creation offers a rich tapestry of characters and stories, potentially serving as an engaging history lesson for both children and adults. Following Gerry's death, the initial aim was to preserve the site as it was. Despite significant media attention and a broad campaign involving stakeholders like the Mayor of London's office and various arts councils, Gerry's family eventually removed the artworks, complicating preservation efforts. The preservation faced legal challenges, including property leases and the involvement of multiple stakeholders. These complexities required careful navigation and the involvement of lawyers and housing associations.



Sasha Galitzine, the curator of Gerry's Pompeii, presenting the site on the stakeholder engagement event from the boat

Gerry's creation was within a social housing unit. After his death, this presented legal challenges regarding property rights. Social housing properties are subject to specific regulations and policies, which can complicate efforts to transform such spaces into public heritage sites. The artworks and the space itself were under the ownership of Gerry's family after his passing. Their decision to remove the artworks and the need to negotiate with them for preservation rights added complexity. Additionally, permissions from the housing association were required for any changes or preservation efforts.

The project required collaboration with various stakeholders, including local authorities, housing associations, arts councils, and the community. Coordinating these groups and aligning their interests and requirements often involves navigating complex bureaucratic processes. Arranging legal documentation for property use, changing the status of the space, and ensuring compliance with local regulations required legal expertise and time.

Gaining official heritage listing for a site like Gerry's Pompeii is a complex process. This would involve proving the site's cultural and historical significance, which is challenging for non-traditional artworks created by individuals outside the mainstream art world. The site was not officially listed as a heritage site, which meant it was at constant risk of being altered or destroyed. Securing such a listing would provide legal protection but involves a detailed and often lengthy bureaucratic process. Engaging the community and building a consensus among local residents, especially those directly affected by the project, is vital. Gerry's Pompeii serves as a model for saving marginalized cultural heritage sites. It highlights the importance of community involvement and grassroots initiatives in preserving local history and art. The project emphasizes inclusivity, offering the community a shared space for creative expression. It has evolved into a charity focusing on preserving the canal side wall and garden, hosting an arts program that inspires community participation. The project shows the potential of local involvement in enriching

the cultural landscape and in the decision-making process.

Policymakers are encouraged to recognize and support projects that preserve marginalized cultural heritage. This includes facilitating processes and providing resources, especially for projects in unconventional spaces or created by individuals outside the mainstream art world.

There is also a need for policies that are adaptable to the unique challenges of preserving non-traditional artworks and heritage sites. This includes considerations for property rights, community needs, and the artistic value of such creations.

Gerry's Pompeii exemplifies the significant impact an individual's creativity can have on the cultural and communal fabric. The preservation efforts highlight the importance of collaborative approaches, involving authorities, cultural institutions, and local communities. This site project underscores the necessity for flexible, supportive policies and a strong focus on community engagement to preserve and promote unique cultural heritage sites. It serves as a reminder of the value that individual creativity and grassroots initiatives bring to the cultural heritage sector.

WESTBOURNE GREEN PARK



The regeneration of this site is underway by the Westminster City Council and therefore information provided in this report is of summative and visual nature.



WCC's North Paddington Canalside Strategy

A BRIEF OVERVIEW

In 2023, Westminster City Council and Canal and River Trust launched a regeneration project focusing on the North Paddington Canalside between Little Venice and Queens Park, funded by the Greater London Authority (GLA) Green and Resilient Spaces Fund. This project is within the scope of the North Paddington Programme which aims at raising social and economic standards of the three poorest wards within WCC (and amongst the top 10% most deprived wards in England). The eight sites to be redeveloped will be linked together by an overarching strategy to ensure coherence and continuity. WCC envisions to bring about a variety of positive changes in London's environment and community, including enhancing natural spaces, improving air and water quality, addressing climate and ecological concerns, increasing connectivity between open areas, reducing flood risk, promoting walking and cycling, engaging local participation, providing better play facilities, addressing socio-economic issues, and creating appealing outdoor spaces for activities and events throughout the seasons at multiple scales.

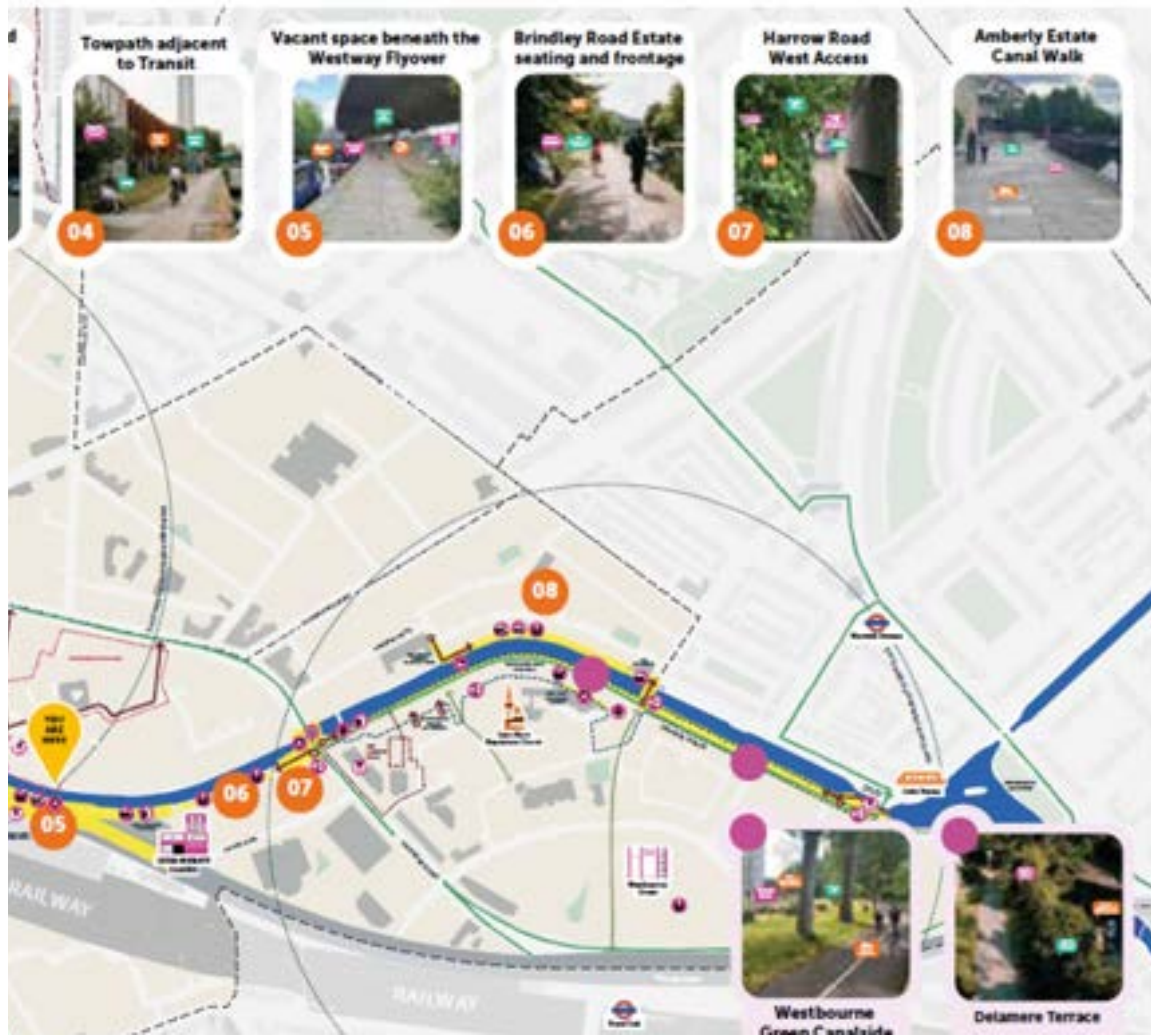
The WCC's Canalside Strategy for North Paddington aims to leverage the GLA's Green and Resilient Spaces Fund to revitalize the area. This diverse community within the Northwest Economic Development Area requires regeneration to enhance employment and social opportunities. The success of the strategy relies on achieving three key objectives: improving public open spaces, fostering future development by enhancing the public realm, and ensuring long-term management with imaginative programming. The regeneration project encompasses eight sites with varying complexities and urgencies for improvement. The sites, with diverse land ownerships, include Westminster City Council Highway, private land, and Canal & River Trust properties.

THE EIGHT ENVISIONED SITES ARE (CF. MAPS)

1. Half Penny Steps
2. Great Western Road Slip Road
3. Great Western Road Rail Bridge
4. Towpath adjacent to Tower Transit
5. Vacant space beneath the Westway Flyover [see earlier section for this site]
6. Bridley Road Estate seating and frontage
7. Harrow Road West Access
8. Amberly Estate Canal Walk



Source: North Paddington Canalside Strategy, Westminster City Council



Source: North Paddington Canalside Strategy, Westminster City Council

The proposals to regenerate sites aim to enhance the usability, aesthetic appeal, and biodiversity of these spaces while respecting their unique characteristics and community significance.

CLIMATE AND ECOLOGY

Ecological impact assessment: we recommend conducting a comprehensive ecological impact assessment before implementing the proposed changes. Such an assessment is essential to evaluate the potential consequences on local ecosystems, wildlife habitats, and biodiversity of these sites.

Invasive or alien species: We recommend taking into consideration when redesigning the green aspects of these sites, to prevent or manage invasive species that could potentially disrupt local ecosystems. Monitoring the impact of these changes on local biodiversity and ecosystems should be an essential part of such a project.

Cooling banks: Shaded spaces will become increasingly important with the rising temperatures in London. Planting trees along the canal to provide additional cooling banks should be integral part of the redesign of these sites.

Planting supporting a range of invertebrates: Recent research by Wood and colleagues at Loughborough University found that aquatic insects represent a relatively small proportion of the entire community in the canal, due to the lack of natural habitat. The research also found the importance of floating ecosystems for the aquatic invertebrates, and we recommend, where possible on the canal (to avoid obstruction to the public) to provide these natural floating habitats.

GOVERNANCE AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The ownership across the regeneration sites along the Grand Union Canal is diverse, encompassing properties owned by Westminster City Council, private land, and land under the stewardship of the Canal & River Trust. This variety in ownership implies a need for coordinated efforts among multiple stakeholders, each potentially having different priorities and regulations. Such a mix of ownership can add complexity to the planning and implementation processes of the regeneration project, requiring careful negotiation, collaboration, and adherence to a range of policies and guidelines. Loughborough University has been working on new models of citizen-led ecological land stewardship, with the aim of developing a community mapping digital tool.

Key Themes Identified Through Stakeholder Engagement And Field Work

SHARED OWNERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

In shared land ownership scenarios, challenges often arise from the diversity of stakeholders, each with distinct needs and ways of engaging with the land. These include residents, local businesses, and community groups, all of whom play a role in shaping the canal environment. Balancing these diverse interests while maintaining infrastructure and addressing environmental concerns is critical. Financial limitations, especially with reduced governmental support, further complicate this balance. Engaging local communities is crucial for fostering a sense of ownership and reducing issues like vandalism. However, there are limitations to current community engagement and research efforts. Despite a commitment to widening participation and deepening collaboration with communities, it is acknowledged through the interviews that this is a work in progress. Recent initiatives have included recruiting an engagement team in the local council to foster community development, build partnerships, and work with local neighbourhood forums, thus aligning with local neighbourhood plans.

The advantages of an integrated canal strategy are multifaceted and significant, as highlighted variously in the interviews conducted by Loughborough University. This approach would underscore the importance of a cohesive and comprehensive management plan for shared waterway spaces.

Boundary disputes have emerged as a pervasive issue, significantly affecting the direct users of canalside locations. Interviews reveal the challenge in pinpointing a single source responsible for land asset ownership, particularly for sites straddling the boundaries of multiple jurisdictions, such as the Westway Flyover site. Furthermore, accessing this information is not straightforward. Entities like the land registry impose fees to access asset information, and even when ownership arrangements are clear, it can be a time-consuming process to identify and contact the responsible parties within councils or the Canal & River Trust. There is a pressing need for new developments to not only include improved facilities but also ensure strict implementation of continued maintenance post-development, addressing questions of ownership, financial responsibility and oversight.

Innovative governance models, particularly those that are community-led, are vital for sites lacking formal governance yet deeply impacted by community stakes. Prior successful examples of public-private partnerships can be used as models for potential future development, such as that realised at Hanover Square redevelopment linked to Crossrail.

Based on the interviews, for planning, redevelopment and ongoing use of the sites in the context of shared land ownership, a key recommendation is the

development of a community land governance tool that assists people active in a particular site to navigate the complexities of ownership and access to the land. This initiative, aiming to address the multifaceted layers of land ownership and usage rights, is essential for effective management and utilization of shared spaces. The formation of stakeholder groups with representatives from core user groups is essential to ensure the continuity and success of such community-led governance initiatives

ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS AND SUSTAINABILITY MANAGEMENT

Our research points to the need for a mindset shift to foster long-term and creative thinking that also acts responsibly in relation to opportunities associated with canals and the role they may play in future urban sustainability. Freshwater ecosystems are under threat from habitat loss, partly due to urban expansion (Walker and Hassall, 2020). More ambitious frameworks, such as a reconciliation ecology, need to be understood and interpreted in relation to canal ecosystems and in support of more holistic ecological outcomes.

Reconciliation ecology is a relevant framework in this context for two reasons. It proposes ways to encourage biodiversity development from within human-dominated ecosystems. Firstly, as anthropogenically created habitat within largely concrete and urban ecosystems, baseline understandings of the ecology (plants, algae, invertebrates, fish species composition, biodiversity of both terrestrial and aquatic habitats) are currently not available. Therefore, before we can conserve the ecology, we need a baseline understanding from which stakeholders can begin to consider how they might manage the habitat and resources. Secondly, the canals are still 'working' waterbodies and stakeholders also need to agree on what should be done and what activities can and cannot take place. Yet, ecology takes advantage of the urban habitats and does not differentiate between natural or artificial/anthropogenic habitats and will simply take advantage of what is available. As such the canals provide blue / green wildlife corridors that potentially function in a similar way to hedgerows around fields, ditches and drains on floodplains. Thus, reconciliation ecology provides a potentially valuable framework for considering the ecology and habitats in this context. It provides a way of recognising and valuing the ecology that colonises anthropogenic habitats whilst also recognising societies' need to utilise spaces / habitats, especially in highly anthropogenic agricultural and urban ecosystems.

Alternatively, a rights of nature approach whereby nature is understood to have intrinsic value and actions are developed accordingly has some precedence in the context of UK waterbodies. Recent work on rights of nature frameworks in the context of waterbodies has been developed by legal scholars, as well as specific application cases such as the River Don, in South Yorkshire (Kings College London Legal Clinic, 2024; the River River Dôn Project, 2024). This might ask, what form of development would legal personhood for canal ecologies lead to?

The management role of stakeholders is therefore also a crucial aspect, especially in built-up areas of London like Westminster borough. For instance, the emissions from boats in winter can affect residents and compound existing negative perceptions of boaters, reducing the potential to engage boaters in sustainable canal maintenance, when these stakeholders are interested and willing to engage in such programmes. The implementation of eco-mooring trials in collaboration with local authorities exemplifies the need for innovative solutions and close cooperation with stakeholders to address their priorities.

The increasing demands to live on the canal lead to increased pressures on facilities and ultimately environmental plights. Addressing the competing demands of increasing user numbers, both for living on the canals and for recreational use, is a key challenge for maintaining and growing habitat, requiring sustainable infrastructure development and innovative management strategies. Much canalside development could better support land-based canalside habitats by focusing on extending and connecting towpath verges, woodlands, scrubs, cuttings and embankments. Various stakeholders identified the need to map out habitat opportunities along significant stretches of canal and how these may be integrated to support habitat development e.g., untapped cuttings that could be linked to create habitat corridors or prioritising grasslands and non-hard surfaces in developments.

Ecological impact assessments are essential activities to inform sympathetic development, responsible amenity development and use, and appropriate ecology and land management strategies. For instance, problem species such as Japanese knotweed and crayfish are known issues along the stretch of canal surveyed that are disrupting local ecosystems. Equally, such assessments can inform appropriate multi-use functions of canalside sites, such as appropriate planting strategies for site resilience, how sites should or can be developed in support of habitat development, for alternative wellbeing uses such as cool banks as temperatures rise over time, or food production.

Furthermore, at present eco-policy frameworks pertaining to the canal appears to need broader dissemination and understanding amongst stakeholder groups, especially so as these are understood to be numerous and somewhat complex. Limited discussion on eco-policy frameworks arose during our research. Nevertheless, stakeholders displayed appetite for and interest in more ecologically responsible developments and uses. Education is seen as important here, with key actors active in running either grassroots initiatives or conveying a desire to become involved in canal stewardship activities.

SECURITY, FACILITIES, AND MAINTENANCE

There is an expressed concern about the perception of canal spaces as unsafe. To counter this, efforts are being made by local authorities and stakeholders to engage with younger generations through educational programs in schools. This includes focusing on the canal's infrastructure and engineering aspects,

with the aim of increasing awareness and fostering a sense of connection and responsibility towards these spaces among young people.

The canal network, with its diverse landscapes, presents a unique challenge in balancing ecological richness and user safety. While certain areas are open and secure, others, particularly those under bridges or along narrower towpaths, can be perceived as unsafe. Interviews suggest a delicate equilibrium must be maintained between fostering biodiversity, which often leads to more secluded spaces, and ensuring the safety and visibility for canal users.

The lack of a fixed postal address for canal spaces is identified as a challenge, both for residents and for managing security. The idea of a tool to track the transit community can be a potential solution to enhance security and manage the transient nature of canal dwellers.

One significant issue is the financial strain on CRT due to government funding cuts, impacting the organization's ability to sustain maintenance and engage in development projects. Another challenge is managing the increase in boats, which places added pressure on existing infrastructure and facilities. This has implications for water management and conflicts in shared spaces. The canal's significant heritage importance adds another layer of complexity, as there are limited resources for the region, in charge with safeguarding the canal's historical value. Relatedly, there is an expressed concern about the perception of canal spaces as unsafe, which is directly linked to lack of investment in some areas. To counter this, efforts are being made by local authorities and stakeholders to engage with younger generations through educational

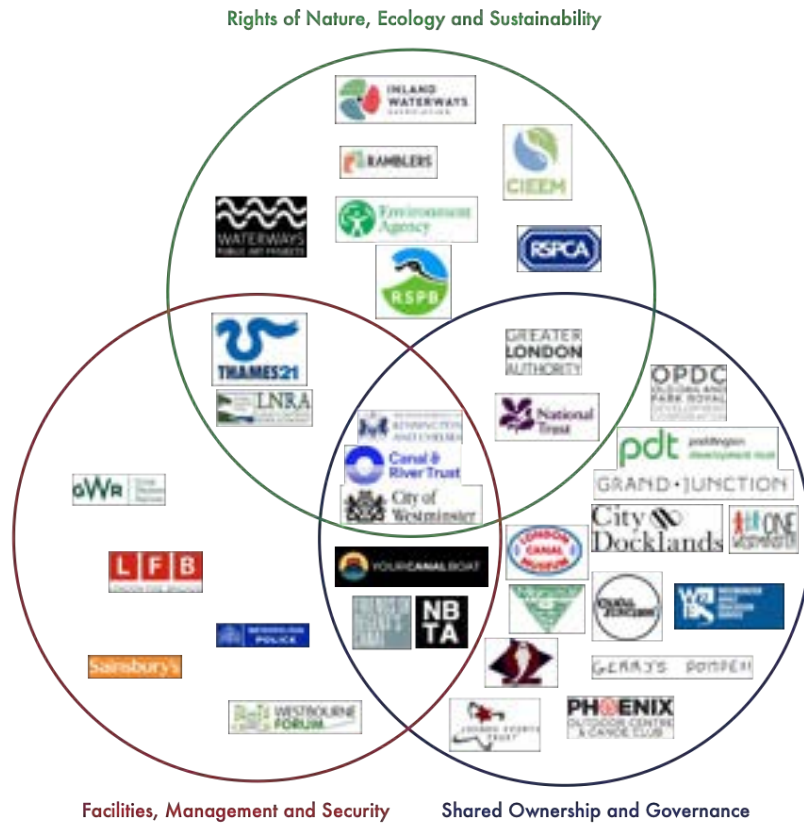


To read more- <https://cargocollective.com/finnlivingstone/4-1-Delivery-High-fidelity-solution>

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The following project involved the development of a location tool that provides London's nomadic canal boat community, living under the Canal & River Trust's continuous cruiser license, a means to access information on available mooring locations along London's canals and waterways. The integration of What3Words' API geocode system, enables canal-based transit communities to effectively plan their journeys, accurately record their mooring location and generate a flexible home address, facilitating access to civic services that are available to conventional residential homeowners.

The perception of the community somehow diverges from the perspective of authorities. There is an understanding that an increase in income due to price

hikes and rising demand should have been translated into improvements in facilities, maintenance, and security but has not. This situation points to a flawed logic where under-investing in facilities is seen as a way to discourage further growth in canal usage. Additionally, there is a lack of clear ownership and responsibility for facilities among stakeholders. For example, during planning phases, agreements for the installation of waste facilities like elsan points involve CRT, developers, and councils, but there are grey areas regarding the costs and responsibilities of ongoing maintenance. Moreover, new developments necessitate corresponding investments in facilities for boaters. There should also be enforceable penalties for failing to implement these facilities and for not maintaining them continuously.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations span the three thematic areas discussion in the prior section namely, a) sufficiency of community engagement, b) rights of nature, climate and sustainability, and c) security, facilities and maintenance.

A) SUFFICIENCY OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Enhanced stakeholder engagement (local residents, businesses, and community groups, professional bodies, local councils) could greatly improve outcomes planned in local plans (such as North Paddington programme) by ensuring inclusive decision-making, fostering potential for community-led governance, optimizing resource allocation, and resolving conflicts effectively leading to more equitable, potentially innovative, and context-specific solutions.
- Authenticity and long-term sustainability of public space projects requires comprehensive engagement to ensure that various perspectives and needs are considered, leading to more community-centric outcomes. For instance, stakeholder engagement in The North Paddington program is exemplified by the successful collaboration with the Westbourne Forum. The Forum, being a neighbourhood-focused group, plays a crucial role in channelling community inputs and priorities into the local plans.
- Stakeholder engagement would benefit from a staged development processes according to a) immediate (e.g., waste, security), b) meanwhile (e.g., community asset takeovers), and c) long-term goals and visions (e.g., re-development plans). This approach not only has potential to addresses immediate project and community issues and needs but also strengthens long-term sustainability and community relations by exploring opportunities for community-led meanwhile use of spaces that lay idle due to longer-term planning and development projects.
- Within this staged process its essential to establish a common stakeholder vision through stakeholder engagement to ensure the long-term viability and acceptability of potential outcomes, which should precede the implementation of design guides and neighbourhood plans to support implementation of the vision over time

B) RIGHTS OF NATURE, CLIMATE, SUSTAINABILITY

- Build resources, capacity, and knowledge to enable exploration and development of more ambitious ecological frameworks, in particular reconciliation ecology is an important approach in this context
- This relates directly to the need to take broader and more holistic approaches to understanding the close interrelations between more-than-human ecologies and human health outcomes, which can support reducing health outcome disparities
- Relatedly, build educational programmes on ecology of canals aiming to integrate broader communities of ecological stewards who support long-term nature-based canal uses, harnessing existing energies in support of such activities
- Ensure environmental impact assessments are conducted routinely as part of future developments is essential for better alignment of planning and development with eco-policy frameworks and articles and to ensure appropriate multi-functional site usage and potential for habitat creation and connection along stretches of canals
- The need to map out habitat opportunities along stretches of canals and how these may be integrated is identified by several ecological experts e.g., untapped cuttings that could be linked to create habitat corridors or prioritising grasslands and non-hard surfaces in developments
- Relatedly, mapping specific eco-policy frameworks and articles concerning planning in blue space and adjacent areas is required to inform a future knowledge resource. This can provide a structured way to implement ideas and enable community involvement in the development and maintenance of public spaces ecologically e.g., through community land trusts which focus on creating community assets
- Invest in developing community tool designed to facilitate access to information about land asset ownership for the stakeholders such as community organizations and activists utilizing these spaces would significantly aid in addressing the challenges highlighted in the context of canalside areas and boundary disputes, particularly for sites within complex jurisdictional boundaries.

C) SECURITY, FACILITIES AND MAINTENANCE

- Forming partnerships with local communities and educational institutions to promote heritage, environmental awareness and safety, for instance, engaging more with community associations such as Meanwhile Gardens or Gerry's Pompeii.
- Additionally, exploring innovative funding sources, such as public-private partnerships, can provide financial support for maintenance and development projects.
- Engaging diverse stakeholder groups in decision-making can also help address the complex challenges of maintaining canal sites.

Conclusion

The exploration of canal sites in London reveals that community engagement is paramount. These spaces thrive when local residents, volunteers, and diverse groups actively participate in their development and upkeep, as seen in projects like Meanwhile Gardens and Gerry's Pompeii. Collaborative management emerges as another critical factor; effective coordination among multiple stakeholders, including local authorities, housing associations, and private entities, ensures that these sites meet a wide array of community needs while preserving their unique character. Adaptable policies are essential in addressing the specific challenges faced by each site, whether its legal complexities in heritage preservation or integrating ecological considerations in urban development projects.

Moreover, these sites highlight the potential of public spaces to enhance urban living, offering residents places for recreation, education, and cultural enrichment. They also serve as crucial green spaces in the city, contributing to the environmental health and aesthetic appeal of the urban landscape. The successful development and management of these sites can serve as a model for other urban areas, demonstrating how to balance historical preservation, community needs, and urban development.

In essence, the careful stewardship of canal sites in London underscores a broader theme: the need for cities to invest in and cherish their public spaces. Such investments not only enrich the lives of current residents but also preserve the cultural and historical legacy for future generations. As London continues to evolve, these canal sites stand as beacons of community resilience, adaptability, and the enduring value of public spaces in urban life.



Source: Tom Walker

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