

THE LONDON TREE AND WOODLAND AWARDS 2018

CASE STUDY – THE COMMUNITY TREE AWARD

WINNER – FRIENDS OF MEATH GARDENS



The London Tree and Woodland Awards celebrate the work of individuals, communities and professionals to protect, improve and expand the capital's tree and woodland cover.

The Community Tree Award is sponsored by Bartlett Tree Experts and is for a tree project that has been inspired, driven and delivered by local community groups. Winners of the 2018 Award were Friends of Meath Gardens.

Friends of Meath Gardens:

The Friends of Meath Gardens formed in 2015 to restore a neglected greenspace in Bethnal Green and have planted nearly 100 new trees, a wildflower meadow, erected nestboxes and new signs. The local community are committed to looking after the trees, including watering them using local canal water. Their work has not only transformed a community space but created new friendships and sense of belonging through making Meath Gardens more wildlife and community friendly.



Activities:

The community-led initiative, which has gained the backing of Tower Hamlets Council, is evidence of the power of nature to bring people together; to create a sense of optimism, ownership and belonging.

Formerly a privately-owned cemetery, the Meath Gardens opened as a public space in 1894. The area is now densely populated: in fact many of the park's trees were felled to make way for homes. It is surrounded by busy roads, a railway line runs nearby and air quality is poor. Neglected for many years, the park is the only green space for many families and dog walkers and is also used by two nearby primary schools and several youth groups.

In 2015, local residents formed The Friends of Meath Gardens (FoMG) to reinvigorate the space through a landscape strategy which includes:

- Wildlife-friendly woodland areas, with new trees screening off the railway to the south, creating a barrier to noise and pollution.
- New signs to inform users about the Gardens' history and ecology.
- Enhanced biodiversity, with bat and bird boxes, an 'edible' playground and a wildflower meadow.
- A 'green corridor' linking the Gardens to neighbouring streets.
- The Friends invested time to persuade Tower Hamlets Council that this was a serious endeavour and rallied support for the 'green corridor' through meetings with five residential associations managing surrounding estates.



There is no water point in Meath Gardens and to secure Council consent, the Friends had to demonstrate they could maintain the young trees themselves. Armed with buckets and trolleys, the volunteers will take water from the nearby canal, once every two weeks for the next two years throughout spring and summer, to keep the trees well watered.

Outcomes:

The judges were looking for demonstrable community gains, active management and/or planting of woodland and evidence of long term management and co-operation that will ensure the sustainability of the project.

In 2017, the Friends hosted the first of two tree-planting events, planting 70 native trees donated by tech firm, PaveGen. Two councillors attended, as did the local press. It was an exciting milestone for the community.

The Friends of Meath Gardens were also awarded a Greener City Fund grant to deliver the landscape strategy and plant new trees in Smart and Usk Streets, adjacent to Meath Gardens. In Spring 2018, a further 18 trees were planted, including copper beech, lime trees and flowering cherry.

The transformation continues. New wildflower meadows are being created and signage added. Bat boxes and bug hotels will be installed with the help of local primary schools. In 2016, Meath Gardens was awarded a Green Flag, a national benchmark for quality.

As a result of their success, the Friends have been invited to work on other local initiatives, including a consultation exercise to redesign the nearby Globe Town Market and plans to regenerate Bethnal Green.

The project has not only brought new trees to Bethnal Green, it has created excitement within the community and a shared enjoyment of nature, leading to new friendships and a sense of belonging. It is a triumph of community will and vision.



For more information about Friends of Meath Gardens go to:

www.friendsofmeathgardens.com

<https://www.facebook.com/friendsofmeathgardens/>

<http://romanroadlondon.com/friends>

2018 Awards ceremony:

The London Tree and Woodland Awards were presented at a ceremony hosted at City Hall on 10 July 2018 by Shirley Rodrigues, Deputy Mayor for Environment and Energy and Sir Harry Studholme, Chair of the Forestry Commission.



The photo shows representatives of the Friends of Meath Gardens (founders Joanna Milewska and Tunde Morakinyo are holding the awards in the middle) with Sir Harry Studholme (third from left); Shirley Rodrigues (fourth from left) and Richard Trippett of Bartlett Tree Experts (fifth from left). The award was sponsored by Bartlett Tree Experts.



Further photos from the event are available on the Forestry Commission's [Flickr page](#)

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