



# **SPACE TO GROW**

Early impacts of the Markfield Park  
community garden

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In partnership with Wild City Studio, Centre for Mental Health created The Balance Garden, which was exhibited at the 2023 Chelsea Flower Show. Using affordable and innovative techniques, the garden was designed to highlight the importance of nature experiences on people's mental health, and to demonstrate the difference that communal green spaces can have on urban neighbourhoods and communities. Supported by Project Giving Back, the garden has been relocated to Markfield Park in Tottenham, London, to offer a welcoming and safe urban green space for local people to enjoy.

Supported by Natural England, this report outlines the early impacts of the community garden, such as the opinions and levels of interest from local communities, as well as the anticipated impacts and uses of the space following full installation.

## **CURRENT USES AND PERCEPTIONS OF MARKFIELD PARK**

Our research found that visitors to Markfield Park most commonly use the space to engage in sport or exercise, such as running, walks in nature, and football. Other reported uses of the park include partaking in social or community activities and volunteering commitments.

Importantly, while Markfield Park is generally rated as a "very safe" park to visit in the daytime, many of our respondents told us that the park becomes an "intimidating" place to visit after dark, which causes people to avoid the area at night. Our research demonstrates a need for more safety measures to be introduced to the area in order to improve the park's safety levels, especially for its female visitors.

## **EARLY IMPRESSIONS OF THE GARDEN**

Overall, current users of Markfield Park showed a good level of interest in the new community garden, with several respondents expressing excitement, appreciation, and the hope that it will "bring [new] energy" and attract "more visitors" to the park. Most of our respondents felt that the garden will have a positive impact on their mental health and wellbeing, as having access to nearby green spaces was described as "very important" for mental health.

While the public feedback we received was largely positive, a small number of respondents voiced concerns over the potential risks and unintended consequences that the garden may bring to the area. For example, some were concerned about the long-term maintenance of this new space, and the possibility of continued antisocial behaviour which could deter people from visiting the garden. Finally, concerns over gentrification were mentioned by several respondents as they felt it was "unclear" which community the garden is being built for.

## **LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: EFFORTS TO FUTURE-PROOF THE GARDEN**

Our findings provided promising evidence of sustained community engagement post-installation, with half of survey respondents showing interest in volunteering in the future to help maintain and develop the garden. We also found strong engagement from the local school communities, with members of staff reporting a desire to continue their involvement through regular visits and by developing new projects with their pupils. Examples include forming litter-picking groups and designing a “talking bench” to encourage positive social interactions between future users of the garden.

## **KEY LEARNINGS AND NEXT STEPS**

While this research showed that many users of Markfield Park welcome the implementation of the new community garden, several concerns from local residents were also identified, including questions around the safety, cleanliness, and possible gentrification of the area. As such, we recommend that time and effort is invested in widening community engagement in terms of the maintenance of the garden to prevent disengagement and misuse of the new space. To do this, it would be beneficial to optimise relationships with current volunteers and beneficiaries who are keen to prolong their involvement (e.g. school gardening groups) to maximise chances of sustained engagement.

# INTRODUCTION

In May 2023, Centre for Mental Health partnered with Wild City Studio to create a show garden for the annual RHS Chelsea Flower Show. Supported by Project Giving Back, The Balance Garden was designed to highlight the importance of experiences in nature on people's mental health, and to demonstrate the difference that communal green spaces can have on urban neighbourhoods and communities. To achieve this outcome, Wild City Studio created The Balance Garden using affordable techniques and natural materials to show how innovative horticulture could be used and adapted to produce real change in areas that are often overlooked and disadvantaged.

There is strong evidence that disadvantaged communities face multiple inequalities in access to safe and well-maintained green spaces (Wolch *et al.*, 2014). Research has shown that racialised communities in the UK have less access to urban parks and green spaces compared to white communities (Natural England, 2019), perpetuating the health disparities faced by racialised communities (Rigolon *et al.*, 2021).

In Britain, one in eight households have no access to a private or shared garden, rising to one in five households in London (Office for National Statistics, 2020). Importantly, a recent report highlighted that mental ill health in Markfield Park's borough of Haringey is among the worst in the UK, with 22% of the population having lived experience of mental ill health (NowPatient, 2023).

The most recent Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) on mental health in Haringey revealed that in 2022/23, 48% of adults aged 18 and over reported feeling socially isolated or lonely, while 10% of adults were found to be living with depression (Haringey Council, 2024). The prevalence of severe mental illness was also found to be higher in Haringey (1.3%) compared to London (1%) and England (1%) (Haringey Council, 2024), indicating a greater need for initiatives to boost mental health in this area.

As part of the recommendations from the latest JSNA in Haringey, the importance of accessible green spaces and parks was highlighted as a way to improve mental and emotional wellbeing among local residents. Therefore, as part of The Balance Garden's legacy project, Wild City Studio is relocating the garden in Markfield Park, Tottenham, with the hope of providing a welcoming, safe sanctuary for the surrounding neighbourhoods to experience authentic natural spaces, as a way to improve social cohesion and the overall wellbeing of the community.

## **THE BALANCE GARDEN AND HISTORY OF MARKFIELD PARK**

In collaboration with Project Giving Back, Haringey Council, and Friends of Markfield Park, Wild City Studio is currently installing the main features of The Balance Garden in an open area adjacent to the Markfield Park Café. The area has been purposely chosen due to its rich history, including the vital work that the Markfield Pumping Station (now the Markfield Beam Engine Museum) provided to improve the water quality and sewage system in Tottenham, and its history of farming pigs to supplement food rations throughout World War II. However, the space has since become overgrown and neglected, and due to numerous reports of antisocial behaviour, this area was ultimately fenced off from public use and has been redundant for several years.



Thus, as an attempt to repurpose and celebrate this unique site, Wild City Studio is installing features from The Balance Garden, including a mushroom den, permaculture grow beds, a reflection pool, and a community allotment and orchard (see figure 2). Construction of the garden began in early 2024 and was completed in Summer 2024.



**The Balance Garden, designed by Wild City Studio, at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show in May 2023. The image shows the main features of the community garden, including a mushroom den, wild flowerbeds, seating areas made from natural materials, and a reflection pool.**

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**An artist's impression of the garden at Markfield Park, Tottenham.**



## **RESEARCH AIMS**

Funded by Natural England, the primary purpose of our research was to explore the early impacts of the community garden on Markfield Park and its users. In addition, we sought to understand the extent to which the garden will change people's perceptions and uses of the park, and to provide baseline findings of the anticipated outcomes of the garden. Finally, we aimed to document the experiences of local volunteers who have been assisting Wild City Studio with the installation of the garden as a way to explore community interest and the benefits of gardening on people's mental wellbeing.

# 1 RAPID LITERATURE REVIEW

## HOW DOES NATURE IMPACT OUR MENTAL HEALTH?

A growing body of literature suggests that regular exposure to nature brings both short- and long-term mental health benefits (Gascon *et al.*, 2015), with evidence that even brief visits to urban green spaces (e.g. urban parks and woodlands) are associated with improved wellbeing, including a boost in positive mood, reduced stress (Tyrväine *et al.*, 2014), and higher levels of life satisfaction (Houlden *et al.*, 2018; Bertram and Rehdanz, 2015). Several studies have further demonstrated a strong link between green neighbourhoods and positive health outcomes, with those living within walking distance of green spaces and parks reporting better mental health (Wood *et al.*, 2017; van der Berg *et al.*, 2015), and more regular physical activity (Kondo *et al.*, 2018).

The reported benefits of nature exposure are not limited to mental and physical health, with evidence showing a positive influence of green spaces on the social health of nearby neighbourhoods and communities. In a UK-based study, Cox *et al.* (2017a) found that greener neighbourhoods were positively associated with better mental and social health. Importantly, the study reported that just one visit to nearby nature per week is enough to enhance perceptions of social cohesion, as consistent outdoor activity increases the opportunity for positive social interactions and allows for the development of bonds within the neighbourhood.

While most of the literature is based on adult samples, research suggests that nature also has a range of positive impacts on children and young people's mental and physical health. For example, in a systematic review of research into the impact of green spaces on the wellbeing of children, McCormick (2017) concluded that access and regular exposure to green spaces was positively associated with improved mental wellbeing and cognitive and behavioural development in children. Benefits included greater attention and self-discipline, coupled with moderated stress levels and benefits to ADHD symptoms.

Although ample evidence supports the health and social benefits of spending time in green spaces, the specific features, characteristics, and types of activity that best promote positive wellbeing are less understood (Gascon *et al.*, 2015). More recent studies which have aimed to fill this gap in the literature reported that key components of neighbourhood nature, like bird abundance and vegetation cover, were related to lower levels of self-reported depression, anxiety, and stress (Cox *et al.*, 2017b). Furthermore, the duration of time spent in nature was found to be a strong predictor of reported health benefits, with those who spend at least two hours per week in nature being more likely to report higher levels of wellbeing (White *et al.*, 2019).

Given the well-documented health benefits of spending time in nature, many studies highlight the potential of nature-based interventions as cost-effective and accessible strategies to promote health and wellbeing (Cox *et al.*, 2017a; Capaldi *et al.*, 2015). In line with this, as part of the NHS Long Term Plan, the NHS launched the Green Social Prescribing Programme in 2021 (NHS England, n.d.) to integrate nature-based interventions and activities into mental health pathways and services. The aim of the programme was to reduce health inequalities, build resilience, and find sustainable ways to maintain overall health and wellbeing. Initial evaluation of the programme revealed promising results, with high levels of engagement and improvements in mental health found in communities where the programme was piloted. As such, researchers are calling for increased use of green social prescribing, especially for communities where access to green spaces is limited (Seers *et al.*, 2022).

# 2 MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS ON SPECIFIC GROUPS

A mixed-methods approach was used for this research, gathering a combination of numerical and textual data through survey responses and semi-structured interviews. We have summarised our research methods in more detail in the following sections.

## **SURVEY**

The survey was designed to understand the extent to which the community garden would affect how regular users of Markfield Park perceive and use the space. Our survey consisted of 22 items, including demographic questions, such as age and gender identity. A series of statements and Likert scales were used to measure key areas of interest. These were:

- ⦿ How people use and perceive Markfield Park in its original state (before the garden is implemented), including safety perceptions and the importance of nature on one's mental health and wellbeing
- ⦿ Thoughts, concerns, and aspirations for the new community garden, including likelihood of visiting, and potential impacts on personal wellbeing as well as the surrounding area.

Open textboxes were also available for respondents to provide further details in relation to their closed responses.

It is important to note that the community garden had not been completed at the time of data collection. Thus, our findings related to the garden are either based on the very early stages of implementation or on people's expectations of the garden. However, efforts were made to ensure that our respondents could provide well-informed feedback and responses for the survey. For example, images of The Balance Garden from the 2023 RHS Chelsea Flower Show, as well as a brief description of its main features, were incorporated into the survey. This helped the respondents to visualise what the new space might look like upon completion.

Our survey sample was recruited using a combination of in-person and online methods. The initial approach involved in-person data collection through opportunity sampling, with researchers from Centre for Mental Health visiting Markfield Park to engage with park users and distribute paper surveys. An online version of the survey was also disseminated online to a number of local communities and groups around Markfield Park via email.



## SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

A total of 16 users of Markfield Park took part in our survey. Over half of our respondents (10) identified as male, five identified as female, and one identified as 'other' gender. Respondents were aged between 24-69 years old. The majority (13) identified as white British, and the remaining three respondents identified as either Asian British, Black British, or Mixed.

Due to the small sample size, we cannot be confident that our findings are representative of all users of Markfield Park. However, it is worth noting that efforts were made to recruit and engage with more of the local community. For example, the survey was distributed to local schools, community support services, volunteering groups and sporting clubs as an attempt to reach a wider and more diverse sample. However, given the lack of pre-existing community engagement, and time constraints with data collection, it was difficult to reach a wider audience. Future research would benefit from having more time dedicated to community engagement to ensure as many voices are heard as possible.

## INTERVIEWS

We conducted semi-structured interviews with two volunteers who had been helping with the construction of the community garden. The volunteers were affiliated with the local primary and secondary schools, which are a short walking distance from Markfield Park. Both volunteers had been leading a small student gardening group to volunteer with Wild City Studios on a weekly basis. As such, we sought to achieve the following from our interviews:

- ⦿ To explore the early impacts of the community garden (e.g. to Markfield Park, the local community, and the volunteers)
- ⦿ To understand the impact of nature exposure and gardening on young people's mental health and wellbeing
- ⦿ To facilitate conversations around future-proofing the new garden (e.g. understanding intentions and plans for sustained engagement, especially from the local school community).

The interview transcripts were analysed thematically and reported to supplement the quantitative findings.





# 3 FINDINGS

## VIEWS ON MARKFIELD PARK

We sought to understand how people use Markfield Park and their views and perceptions of the space before the community garden was implemented. In addition, we asked respondents to share their aspirations for the park, such as changes and features that would better serve current and future visitors.

### **CURRENT USES OF MARKFIELD PARK**

Over half of survey respondents (10) were regular users of Markfield Park and visited the space at least once per week, while the remaining 6 respondents visited the park once a month or less.

Open textboxes were provided to enable respondents to describe what they typically do at the park. Most responses (58%) described using the park to engage in some form of sport or exercise, including cycling, running, walking, or football. A further 26% shared that they use the park as a space to “meet friends”, attend “local events”, and visit nearby facilities such as the coffee shop and community centre. The remaining 16% visited the park for volunteering purposes.

### **SAFETY PERCEPTIONS**

In our survey, we asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they felt safe during their visit to Markfield Park. To gain a more nuanced understanding, we explored whether time of visit would influence safety perceptions. While almost all respondents (15) reported feeling ‘safe’ or ‘very safe’ visiting Markfield Park in the daytime, over half of the respondents (10) shared that they would not feel safe if they visited Markfield Park at night-time.

A total of 12 respondents provided further insight into why they would or would not feel safe visiting the park at night. During the volunteer interviews, we also explored the topic of perceived psychological and physical safety, and how this affects park usage. We summarise the key findings below:

- ⦿ **Crime and antisocial behaviour:** Over half of respondents shared that they would avoid walking through the park after nightfall due to concerns over frequent reports of antisocial behaviour. Several respondents highlighted that many locals are aware of numerous “mugging” incidents, “big fights” and “weird” activity happening in the area during night-time, which makes it a “no-go zone” for many people once it gets dark
- ⦿ **Lack of lighting:** Some respondents felt that the park would be unsafe to visit at night as there are “very little lights” and too many “isolated”, “dark”, and “hidden” areas around the park. One respondent reported feeling that the park is “quite an intimidating place” to visit because of the lack of sense of safety, and that increased lighting would make it “safer, more friendly, and hospitable” for those who are concerned about safety levels at night

- ◎ **Gender:** From our survey responses, there was a clear gender difference in the safety perceptions of Markfield Park. Out of the five respondents who reported feeling safe to visit the park after dark, only one identified as female. Additionally, the female respondent highlighted that they only felt safe “because [they] cycle through” the park at night, which suggests that they would feel unsafe if they were to visit the park by foot. Another male respondent noted that although they would personally feel comfortable to use the park at night, their female partner would feel unsafe and thus avoid the space.



## ASPIRATIONS FOR MARKFIELD PARK

In the survey, we asked our respondents to share their aspirations for Markfield Park, and the changes that they would like to see in the area. We found that many people felt a personal attachment to the space and were “proud” to be part of the local community. Several respondents also expressed appreciation at having access to a large, open green space to spend time in nature despite living in an urban neighbourhood. However, many of the respondents also expressed disappointment and concerns about the long-term neglect that they have seen in certain areas of the park. As such, suggestions for improvement were largely related to ways in which the space could be made safer and more welcoming to attract “more visitors” and better serve the residents, to ensure that there is a greater “appreciation” and usage of the green space.

For example, some respondents highlighted the need for more basic facilities, such as seating areas, car park spaces, and clean public toilets. One respondent suggested that a “litter picking” group should be set up to help maintain park cleanliness. Others noted that the park would benefit from having a wider range of wildlife, such as “flowering trees” and “wild spaces” for visitors to enjoy.

Finally, several respondents expressed the need to enhance the safety of Markfield Park, especially after nightfall. Suggestions included increased street lighting, police presence, and barriers to “stop mopeds going through the park as a shortcut”. One respondent highlighted that even small, simple additions in the area can improve psychological safety for its users, such as the recent addition of “signs in the park about harassment and [the importance of] giving women and girls [their personal] space”. In addition, seeing more posters “go up about community events” was described by one respondent as “quite nice” as it creates a sense of community, “as opposed to [Markfield Park being] a space where some people might go sometimes but otherwise generally avoid”.

# 4 FINDINGS

## VIEWS ON THE NEW COMMUNITY GARDEN

To explore the initial views and anticipated impacts of the community garden, we asked our respondents to describe the change or effect they think the garden will have on Markfield Park and its users. In addition, the links between nature exposure and mental health were briefly explored through discussions on the anticipated effects of the new garden on people's overall health and wellbeing.

### INITIAL IMPRESSIONS OF THE GARDEN

#### IMPORTANCE OF GREEN SPACES FOR URBAN NEIGHBOURHOODS

From our survey, we found that all respondents rated nearby green spaces as either "a little" or "very" important for their mental and physical wellbeing. One respondent shared that they feel "very thankful to live near a park" as time spent in nature can offer peaceful moments away from "stress or whatever that might be happening in your life", which "could be totally game-changing" for one's mental health. As such, our findings provide further support for the well-documented benefits of nature on people's mental health, and demonstrate the importance of accessible, safe green spaces for those living in urban environments.

#### ANTICIPATED IMPACTS OF THE COMMUNITY GARDEN

The majority of our respondents (13) felt that the community garden will have a "positive impact" on Markfield Park, with the remaining 3 stating that they were unsure about the type of impact that the new garden will have on the park. Many felt that the garden is a welcome change to the park, believing that it will "bring [new] energy" and attract "more visitors". One respondent shared that they looked forward to being able to visit an "underused and neglected" area again, and to the public having the opportunity to "appreciate the history and beauty of the site". Others noted the educational value of the garden as "people can learn about nature and wildlife [and] develop new interests".

Additionally, our findings strongly suggest that the new community garden will offer a number of social benefits for park users. For example, over half of survey respondents (10) stated that having this new space would encourage them to visit the park more regularly. Importantly, several respondents believed that the community garden would bring more people together and help nearby residents to feel more engaged as "members of the [Markfield Park] community".



In addition, we asked respondents to consider the extent to which the garden will impact their mental health and wellbeing. 13 respondents stated that the garden will have a 'positive impact' on their mental wellbeing, and the remaining 3 felt that it would produce 'no impact'. When prompted to explain their answers, two respondents believed that the garden would positively influence their mental wellbeing because it will provide more opportunities for them to "enjoy natural spaces", and "do a little bit of weeding and tending the plants" to help them "take [their] mind off everyday worries". Among those who felt the garden would have no impact on their personal wellbeing, two acknowledged the potential benefits and said they "can see why [the garden] would have a positive impact for others".

## RISKS AND CONCERNS

Although the feedback we received from our survey was largely positive, it is important to note that several respondents voiced concerns about the potential risks and negative consequences of community garden, including:

- ⦿ **Maintenance:** Some respondents highlighted the need to future-proof the garden after it has been implemented. Some were concerned that the garden "won't be cleaned" and would gradually become neglected and overgrown if the initial boost in community engagement and interest declines
- ⦿ **Antisocial behaviour:** Many respondents were concerned about the continued presence of antisocial behaviour around Markfield Park, and how this may affect the cleanliness and upkeep of the community garden. Several respondents noted that such behaviour is unlikely to "just disappear", expressing concern that the garden may become "vandalised". This leaves some people feeling reluctant to use the new space
- ⦿ **Gentrification:** A small number of respondents voiced concerns over the possibility of gentrification with the new garden being built in a neglected space. One respondent felt that it is "unclear" which community the garden is being built for, and another acknowledged that although the new garden will undoubtedly "attract new people" to visit the space, they are "worried it might become overcrowded" and be "taken over by new communities" if the area becomes "too nice".





# 5 FUTURE-PROOFING THE GARDEN

## **LOCAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

While Wild City Studio have been able to recruit a number of volunteers to help with building the foundations of the new garden, they hope to see more involvement from local communities to ensure that the space can continue to thrive and serve those who live in the neighbourhoods around Markfield Park.

Although community engagement has not been as strong as desired, our survey data demonstrates clear interest from the local community, with half of survey respondents (8) expressing interest in volunteering to help maintain the garden. Furthermore, several respondents emphasised the importance of engaging the local community to ensure long-term interest and engagement. As such, it would be beneficial for Wild City Studio to organise and advertise more volunteering events to recruit a larger group of local volunteers as a way of future-proofing the space sustainably.

## **STUDENT INVOLVEMENT: EXPERIENCES THUS FAR AND FUTURE ASPIRATIONS**

An example of successful community engagement comes from the group of student volunteers Wild City Studio have been working with since the beginning of 2023. Two staff members from Crowland Primary School and Gladesmoor Community School have been leading a small student gardening group to help Wild City Studio build the foundation of the new community garden. To gain a better understanding of the development of the garden, as well as the volunteer's experiences, thoughts, and aspirations for this new space, we interviewed both staff members. We have summarised the main thematic findings below.

### **“SENSE OF OWNERSHIP”**

During both interviews, the staff members reported that their students had developed a “sense of ownership” and personal connection to the garden. Having the students “see how [the space] has changed” through their weekly contributions and efforts helps to keep them “engaged” and “interested in what is growing in the park”. Many students have expressed a sense of pride over their involvement with this project, as they are “really keen to bring their parents to show them what they’ve been doing”. As one member of staff noted, their students look forward to documenting how the space changes and evolves over the next few academic years as they “very much see it as their space now...they kind of accept that they’re like guardians to this land.”

## **“THEIR HAPPY PLACE”**

Both members of staff reported a number of social and behavioural benefits to students as a result of gardening. Volunteering with Wild City Studio has provided regular opportunities for the students to relieve academic stress and pressures by “get[ting] out of the classroom and perhaps not think[ing] about traditional schoolwork” for the duration of the gardening session. This “complete change of scene [and] pace” has been “brilliant” for the students’ overall wellbeing.

One staff member shared that their gardening group includes young people who may be “struggling at school” or require “special educational needs support”. Having the opportunity to take a break away from the school environment and instead engage in gardening activities helps to “take the pressure away from communication” and enables their students to develop a positive association with the space. As such, the garden has naturally become “their happy place [where] they don’t have to talk to [other people] because they’re busy looking after the plants”.

## **INTRODUCTION TO “THE WORLD OF HORTICULTURE”**

From our interviews, it was clear that both members of staff felt that volunteering for the community garden has been a valuable opportunity for their students to experience new activities and explore new interests. As one staff member recalled, their students originally showed a lack of interest in the project but were soon “up to their elbows in mud” and are now “really involved” and “enthusiastic about gardening”.

In addition, one staff member shared that some of their students “don’t have gardens at home”, which makes the new community garden an important and valuable space for young people to learn about “the world of horticulture” and be in touch with a diverse range of wildlife. Having these new experiences and frequent exposures to nature is enabling the students to “think about different things...to [notice] the new birds and life that are coming into [the garden]”.

## **“A PROJECT WITH LONGEVITY”**

Both members of staff expressed their intentions to continue visiting the community garden with current and future students to help maintain and develop the space. As reported by the staff members, the students are enthusiastic about their sustained involvement with the garden and have proposed several side projects to work on following implementation. For example, there are discussions to set up a regular “litter picking group” for the students to “do a little clearing up” around the garden in order to maintain its cleanliness.

Additionally, the older students are currently designing a “talking bench” where members of the public can sit “to show that they would like to talk to someone” as a way to encourage positive social interactions and increase a sense of community and cohesion. As the staff member expressed, having these creative discussions with their students is “really nice” and shows that this is “a project with longevity...it’s something that we can really invest in and be part of for [a long time]”.

# 6

## KEY LEARNINGS AND NEXT STEPS

From our engagement with the community and volunteers, we are confident that the new community garden at Markfield Park will generate a number of social and mental health benefits for its current and future users. However, our research also presented several concerns from the community regarding the safety, cleanliness, and target audience of the garden, which must be considered and addressed to ensure that the space serves its intended purpose. Based on our findings, we suggest the next steps for the project below.

- 1. Increase community engagement:** Our research demonstrated a strong need for more community involvement, especially with the future upkeep of the garden. As several respondents noted, there is an understandable concern that the garden may gradually become neglected as the initial surge of interest declines. It is therefore imperative to maximise local interest and engagement early on in the implementation stage to increase the likelihood of sustained involvement. Involving more locals would also emphasise that the new garden is designed for the local communities, which would address concerns of gentrification to a certain extent.

To achieve this, it would be beneficial for Wild City Studio to collaborate with local support groups and sporting clubs to organise community events and volunteering days at the garden. Our research also showed a clear interest in future involvement from current users of Markfield Park, but as one respondent expressed, they were unsure how they could help. Thus, it is worth putting up posters around the park as a way of communicating with the public about how they could become regular volunteers for the new space, and to advertise upcoming events.

- 2. Optimise existing contacts:** While it is desirable to expand community involvement through recruiting new groups of volunteers, it is worthwhile to note that community engagement has been challenging in terms of both the research project and implementation of the garden. Therefore, it would be beneficial for Wild City Studio to optimise their relationships with current active volunteers, such as the school gardening groups and local gardeners. This will ensure a certain degree of sustained engagement, which would help to prevent the space from becoming neglected and overgrown. As one of the volunteers shared, they hoped that their continued involvement would gradually reduce the prevalence of antisocial behaviour in the area once the garden “looks [more] tended to” which will show that “people care” about the space.
- 3. Increase resources for data collection:** As previously discussed, a limitation of our research relates to the small sample size and limited community engagement. This means that while our findings offer valuable insights into the uses and perceptions of Markfield Park and the new garden, they are not generalisable to the wider community. It is therefore crucial for future research to consider these challenges, especially during the planning and design phase, to ensure that sufficient time, materials, and resources are allocated to maximise the chances of successful sample recruitment.

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