

MUSEUM OF THE HOME

Replanting an urban oasis: The Gardens Through Time at the Museum of the Home

Report prepared for the Stanley Smith UK Horticultural Trust
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The Tudor Knot Garden is the first Garden Through Time and lies in front of our new Learning Pavilion, giving school groups direct and easy access to the gardens when they come for their visits and workshops. The ground between the Pavilion and the gardens is completely level for accessibility and there is a platform lift from the galleries to the gardens at this end of the Museum building. © Hufton & Crow

The Museum of the Home has completely replanted our Gardens Through Time as part of a major redevelopment spanning three years. The extent of the works to the Museum buildings meant that our original gardens had to be completely dug up at the outset of the project. Over the course of the last 10 months, our two gardeners have worked tirelessly to replant the Gardens to a new layout and planting scheme which benefits all our visitors, from local residents and families to school groups. We are very grateful for the support of the Stanley Smith UK Horticultural Trust to help make this project possible.

The Gardens Through Time show how city gardens have developed over the past 400 years. The Tudor Knot Garden includes interlocking arrangements of Santolina and wall germander in a formal symmetrical design. The Stuart Garden has a more practical feel, with raised beds mostly containing herbs. The clipped hedges in our Georgian Garden mirror the concern with neatness that applied indoors at this time. The Victorian Garden includes a greenhouse and brightly-coloured flowers which echo the decorative styles of the time. The Edwardian Garden has more relaxed planting, influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement. Finally, our modern green roof is inspired by the changing nature of dense urban environments, and has been planted with plants that need little irrigation, adapting to our warming climate.

The Gardens Through Time have also benefitted from a new irrigation system and extensive new landscaping to improve accessibility. We have altered the layout, relaying the central path to run alongside the Museum building, which makes the journey through time into each garden much clearer.

Since the Museum reopened on 12 June 2021, we have had 4808 visitors through the doors. This has included people in wheelchairs and families with buggies, for whom accessing the Gardens was very difficult before the redevelopment. Now there are built in, landscaped access ramps in the Gardens, as well as lifts in the Museum building making access much easier.

Many of our visitors have commented on how much they enjoyed seeing the gardens and have been amazed by their beauty. Comments on social media have included: “the gardens are radiant and buzzing with bees!”; and “The Gardens are absolutely spectacular.” We will continue to collect visitor feedback through online post-visit surveys, but the impact of the Gardens will also be evaluated via other activities such as our Learning Programme and our commercial business.

Naturally we experienced some challenges along the way. Delays to the overall build meant that our gardeners were not able to start work until much later than expected and the Gardens were officially handed over to them in August 2020. The extent of the build and the fact that the Museum is situated on an old rubbish tip meant that the ground was full of debris and had to be carefully and laboriously worked over before any planting could begin. In total the gardeners filled 10 skips full of rubble and in addition some was buried underneath the new pathways.

The pandemic has naturally been a major challenge for the Museum to grapple with. Work slowed significantly in 2020 as the number of construction workers on site had to reduce dramatically to allow for social distancing. The contractors also experienced supply shortages and delays for key building materials. This caused a delay to our overall reopening date.

Now that the Museum is open, we have had to put measures in place to ensure the safety of our visitors. This includes asking visitors to book their free ticket in advance so that we can carefully manage our capacity, which is far reduced from what we would normally allow in the building. It is a shame that visitor numbers are therefore much lower than what we had hoped upon reopening, but after such a long period of closure we are delighted to have finally opened our doors again.

The Gardens Through Time are one of the Museum's biggest assets, being the largest open green space in the vicinity. The redevelopment of the Museum has made the Gardens much more central to our site and easily accessed from our new reception space. In addition, they are now open all year round for the first time, and the planting has been chosen as such, making them an essential part of a visit to the Museum. Whilst we currently have a one-way system in place due to Covid, when restrictions ease, we will be much more flexible about the way visitors choose to enjoy our site and expect that many will come just for the gardens - which could be especially appealing for local families in an area with a high density of blocks of flats.

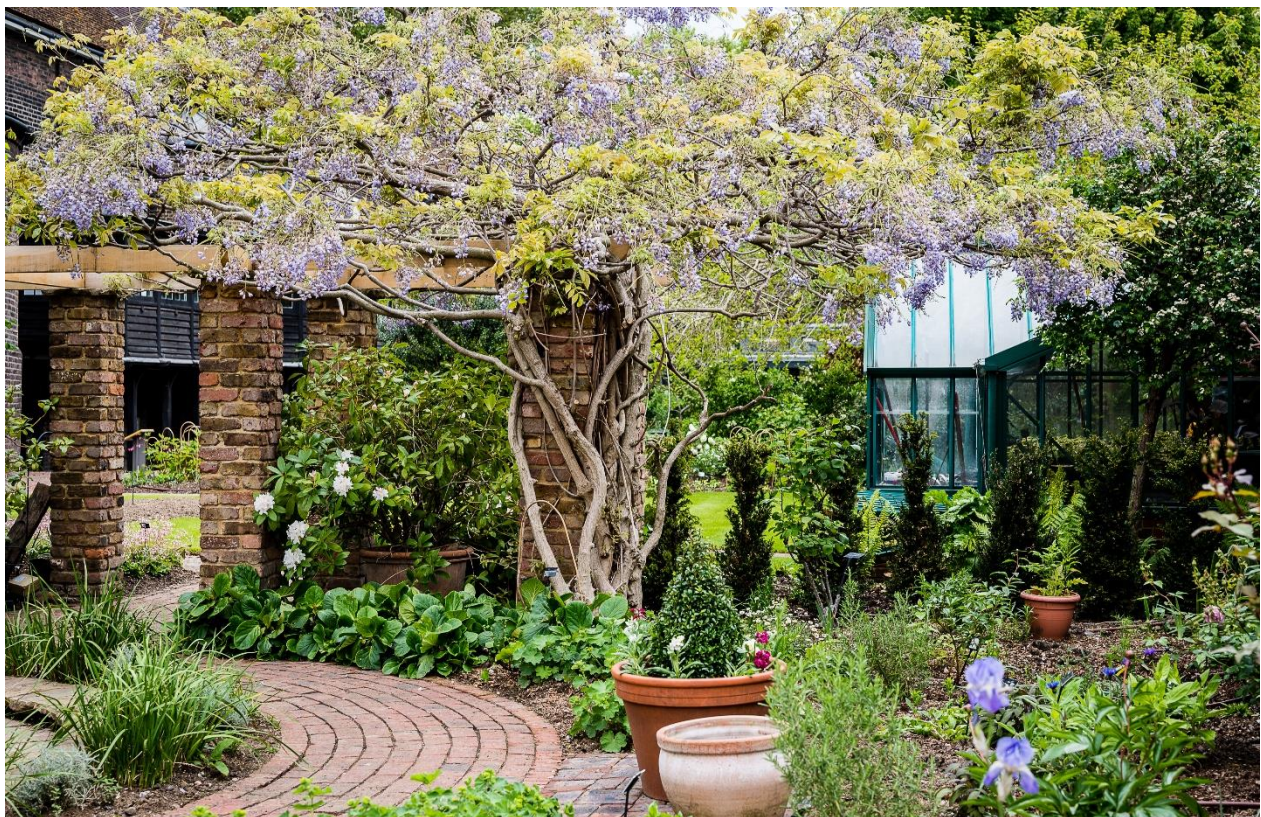
The new design of the Gardens and of the wider site makes our Learning programme intrinsically connected to the outdoors. Previously our education rooms were tucked away in a corner of the site with access to only a few raised beds. Now, our new Learning Pavilion sits between our walled Herb Garden and the Tudor Knot Garden, with direct and level access to both. Gardening, wildlife and sustainability will be a key strand of our schools and family programmes and we have already produced a new 'Mini Gardeners' family trail. Being located in such a built up area, the Gardens are such a valuable resource for local schools and families who can enjoy the boost in wellbeing that is provided by being in a beautiful green setting.

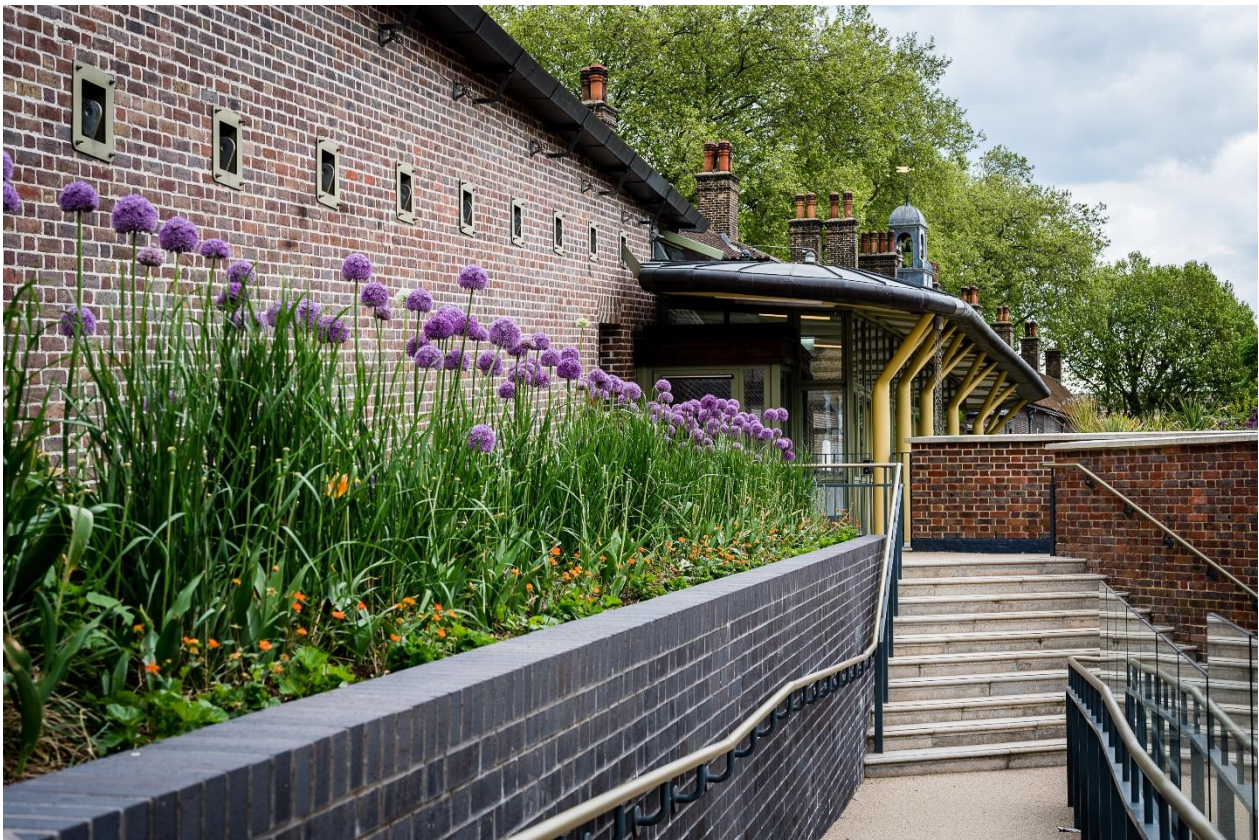
Finally, the redesigned Gardens include a large, central paved area of York stone which is perfect for commercial events, from corporate parties to weddings. The Museum has recently secured a wedding licence and we are looking to grow our commercial business, which will bring in vital income for our core operating budget. All our corporate hires in 2020 had to be cancelled due to the pandemic, resulting in losses of £174,000. Therefore, commercial activity is more important than ever to bolster our finances.

Thank you again for your support and we hope you are able to see the Gardens for yourselves in due course.



Pictured left is the Stuart Garden with its raised beds full of herbs. Beyond is the clipped hedges of the Georgian Garden. With our new entrance and reception space (pictured right), visitors are afforded wonderful views of the gardens as soon as they arrive. Below is our magnificent wisteria which dominates the Edwardian Garden, and just seen behind is the greenhouse in the Victorian Garden. All photos © Em Fitzgerald





The new entrance to the Museum has an accessibility ramp with a new raised bed in the middle, providing an opportunity for seasonal colour. Seen below is a new paved area of York stone in the middle of the Gardens Through Time - a fantastic resource for commercial hires. Both photos © Em Fitzgerald





*The green roof is a modern addition to the Gardens Through Time and can be admired both from the new reception space and from adjacent Hoxton Station, seen on the right.
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