



Case study: Gaia's Garden

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What is Gaia's Garden?

Gaia's Garden was a community-built public garden that offered free workshops and events to Londoners looking to learn more about sustainability.

Award-winning creative studio Play Nice spearheaded the project in partnership with London-based property developer Dominvs Group, to platform the ideas of the young people who took part in *The Pattern*, a cultural incubator programme launched after Play Nice won the £50,000 Fusion Prize – a Culture Mile initiative, in partnership with Foundation for Future London – earlier this year.

 **For more information**
www.playnice.london

Why is it needed?

Located at 61 Holborn Viaduct, the site of Dominvs Group's future *Citicape House*, Gaia's Garden is a prime illustration of both the cultural and community provision that is at the heart of Dominvs Group's developments. In addition, Gaia's Garden is further evidence that Dominvs Group is keen to reanimate the City, attract new audiences into the area and establish new experiences for those residents and workers who are already based within the City of London.

Gaia's Garden served the needs of Londoners short of green space, connections and most of all community. Facilitating the ideas of young people into moments and programming that has been great for their portfolios and the wellbeing of socially minded individuals all over London.

Play Nice's community work focused to engaging the city on all levels, giving the community the space built a chance to engage with developing, hosting and enjoying an urban oasis that's been unheard of in the city.

How did you do it?

Play Nice aimed to develop a space that democratised sustainable practises in response to a brief from Noga Levy-Rapoport, an ambassador for the UK Student Climate Network and mentor on their cultural incubator.

Culture Mile having seen the potential of the project initially acted as a broker for the project, bringing Fusion Prize winners Play Nice to the table with Dominvs Group and a consulting producer who could help bring logistical knowledge to the development of the space.

Once a deal had been struck, the Play Nice team embarked upon a partnership with Urban Growth, a social enterprise that improves Londoners' well-being by collaborating with them to create & maintain beautiful, biodiverse spaces, who developed the garden landscaping. In addition, Adapt, a climate club and creative studio, originated a brand identity for the space.

Since, Dominvs have launched a brand-new Social Value Unit, headed up by Wesley Ankrah, as part of its continued commitment to putting community value at the very heart of future growth plans and development schemes, both throughout the development lifecycle and over the long term. Gaia's Garden is part of that strategy.

Volunteers were coordinated through Play Nice's networks to bring the space to life, under the supervision of Urban Growth in late May and the garden opened officially at the end of July, including planters, seating areas and a stage.

The young creatives who conceptualised Gaia's Garden then worked with Play Nice on programming and activating the space, including everything from fermentation workshops and meditation sessions through to live DJ sets and shared vegan meals. In addition, hoardings were printed that featured photography, poetry and artwork by a selection of The Pattern cohort.

What progress has been made?

The change is substantial: a unused site has an entirely new lease of life and significance within the City of London's ecosystem: it can now legitimately be referred to as a destination.

Dominvs Group also significantly increased its investment in the project as a result of Play Nice's creative and ambitious vision



For more information

www.cityam.com/holborn-dominvs-group-opens-community-garden/

Gaia's Garden was a positive contribution to the City after a year of restrictions and lockdowns, bringing in over 1,300 people into the City of London, predominantly from under-represented communities, to access some of the programming hosted within the garden. The project has created over 20 paid opportunities and a community of progressive young people who want to continue their careers as creative and cultural practitioners.

Gaia's Garden developed a true sense of community and ownership amongst the space (evidenced in part by Gaia's Garden collecting over 3,000 followers on Instagram).

"Developing this project from concept through to delivery has shown the true potential of developing spaces for fringe communities to create responses to the world's most pressing issues. A lot of the time this work has been seen as CSR but its in fact R&D – we've hit public policies, created new and interesting opportunities and educated people on sustainable practices. All while creating spaces to dance, learn and engage with one another. It's a project that lives to level up Londoners and supports Culture Mile's plan for a more inclusive, innovative and sustainable future for the Square Mile."

NATE AGBETU
CO-FOUNDER, PLAY NICE

Culture & Commerce Taskforce



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"Gaia's Garden is a wonderful example of how commerce and culture can work hand in hand to rejuvenate the City's public green spaces, while empowering young Londoners to gain new skills in producing, placemaking, and programming. The Foundation for Future London is pleased to see Play Nice's innovative Fusion Prize-winning project flourish and grow from strength to strength through this valuable collaboration with Dominvs, and its invite to young Londoners"

MARIA ADEBOWALE-SCHWARTE
CEO, FOUNDATION FOR FUTURE LONDON

Press coverage about Gaia's Garden featured in BBC London News (800,000 viewing figures), City AM (399,000 readership), Time Out online (approx. 136,766 unique impressions), City Matters (45,000 readership), EC1 Echo (10,000 readership), Dazed & Confused Digital (8,500,000 monthly readership).

What's the learning so far?

Collectively we learnt that there is appetite for closer collaboration between property developers and emerging, community-focused artistic organisations but that the relationship between the two entities requires brokering, patience, time and deep consideration.

While Gaia's Garden was absolutely a success, to go from initial idea presented to Dominvs in March through to opening in July is an incredibly fast turnaround and more flexibility and breathing space should be accommodated for partnerships between these types of organisations in future.

Next steps

Since this partnership, Dominvs Group and Play Nice are looking for ways to continue their relationship, with the aim to keep representation and community outreach as a cornerstone of future cultural plans in the City and throughout London.

