

Publica

Hanover Square Gardens: one of the West End's most significant civic spaces reimagined



The gardens on Hanover Square have reopened to the public following an extensive redesign, which sees its original 300-year-old vista recovered to create a green oasis in the heart of London's West End.

Opening today, 15th September 2021, the gardens are part of a wider transformation of Hanover Square, which heralds a new approach to the district's historic townscape, its integration with new transport infrastructure and the restoration of a beautiful amenity space.

The project has been delivered by Westminster City Council to concept designs for the public realm by urban design consultant Publica and for the garden, by landscape architect Todd Longstaffe-Gowan. The designs were developed by engineers and landscape architects WSP and delivered by FM Conway. Westminster City Council is the main funder for the project.

Commissioned by the council in 2016, the garden redesign is the first of a series of public realm improvements for the Square. Together, these improvements will transform the area and bring a revitalised setting for buildings, businesses, monuments and new public art, supporting the promotion of the wider West End as a retail environment, place to do business and area to visit. The remainder of the project will be unveiled once the new Elizabeth Line has been completed.



Concept drawing for Hanover Square by Todd Longstaffe-Gowan

Landscaping and planting

The garden within Hanover Square has been redesigned in collaboration with Todd Longstaffe-Gowan and engineers WSP. Hanover Square was not originally laid out with a planted central garden, however the relationship between the trees and the townscape of the area has become very important. Trees were first planted along the east and west sides of the garden in the nineteenth century respecting the grand vista extending through the square north to Cavendish Square and south to St. George Street.

The principal aim of the landscaping scheme has been to recover this original 300-year-old vista which until recently had been occluded by trees, structures and other obstacles, and to reinvigorate and reimagine the gardens within the Square to create an oasis for the public amidst the bustle of the West End. There were several additional aims: the need to reflect the square's new role as the first landscape destination for visitors to central London who will alight at the nearby Elizabeth Line station; the need to revitalise the central garden and precincts to reflect its heyday in the 1830s; and the need to make the statue of William Pitt the Younger, at the south end of the square, once again a conspicuous public monument.

The revitalisation of the square's planting has been an important part of the refurbishment of the garden and its precinct. The boundary of the square's garden has been replanted with a mixture of deciduous and broadleaf evergreen flowering shrubs, and large, long beds of herbaceous plants and shrubs have been formed along the outside edge of the perimeter path. Most of square's mature trees have been retained, and new smaller flowering trees have been introduced to fill gaps in the boundary planting to supply seasonal interest and to enhance the feeling of enclosure within the gardens.

Garden paths

An important element of the redesign is the orbital path, which is designed to create a 'place' in the middle of the garden. Previously, there were two diagonal paths intersecting in the middle, which, when the Elizabeth Line arrived, would have become a cut-through for pedestrians walking to or from the station changing the nature of the gardens significantly.

This design enables the protection of the gardens as an important green space in the West End and mirrors the redesign of the pedestrian space and footway areas throughout Hanover Square outside the railings.

Railings

The historic characteristics of the square have been enhanced, with modern interpretations of the early nineteenth century railings reinstated around the garden. A special section of 'musical' railings is to be incorporated at the east side of the gardens, extending children's ability to play in the gardens and giving them an opportunity to engage directly with the history and townscape of the garden square. The railings have also been designed to support heritage lanterns and programmable festive lighting.

Water Feature

The water feature for Hanover Square Gardens provides a beautiful incident on the journey, rather than a central feature. Enhancing the experience of a green oasis, the sound of water adds to the sensory perception of the square, with the sound and sight of water being visible from both the main lawn and the orbital pathway. Crafted from Tarvos stone sections, to match the surrounding stone benches, the design sees a stone fountain that pours water into a pool beneath, creating an ambient sound while also reflecting light from the sun.

History of Hanover Square

Begun in 1713, Hanover Square was one of the first open spaces laid out in London's West End during the Georgian period. It was closely followed, and in design terms, imitated, by Cavendish Square in 1717, lying north of Oxford Street on an axis with Hanover Square. The development of these two grand residential squares in such proximity reflects London's property market at the time. The square was developed shortly after the accession of the Elector of Hanover as King George I in 1714, which gave the square its name. Its early ties were largely to the Whig political party and the military, with residents including Generals Earl Cadogan, Sir Charles Wills and Lord Carpenter.

A key historical point on its map that remains is the parish church of St George's, built between 1721-1724 to the designs of John James, a former assistant of Sir Christopher Wren, as one of the twelve completed churches of the Fifty Churches planned by Queen Anne's Act of 1711 as a result of London's rising population. Its best-known parishioner was composer George Frideric Handel, who came to live in Brook Street in 1724, just as the church was nearing completion.

By the 19th century it had evolved alongside the rest of the West End into a thriving commercial district. Later years saw the prominence of Hanover Square fade as it became congested with traffic and overshadowed by the West End's major retail thoroughfares. Much of the original character and quality of the square and its strong visual and spatial connections to the wider neighbourhood had gradually been obscured or forgotten. Fast forward to the 21st century, and the arrival of the Elizabeth Line catalysed the need for change, with the eastern ticket hall of the Bond Street Station planned to open onto Hanover Square dramatically increasing the number of people moving through the space and its surrounding streets each day.

Over the past 10 years, Hanover Square has undergone a complete transformation. Building on aspirations identified by the Great Portland Estate and Crossrail and with the support of the GHS Limited Partnership, one of Great Portland Estate's joint ventures, Publica produced a vision and concept design for Hanover Square as

an exciting new entrance into the West End and a revived garden oasis for residents, workers and visitors.

The gardens, featuring a landscape design by Todd Longstaffe-Gowan with executive landscape architects WSP, are the first phase of the project to be completed. Further phases will finish over the course of the next 12 months.

QUOTES

Cllr Matthew Green, Cabinet Member for Business, Licensing and Planning said: “I’m pleased to see the redesigned and improved Hanover Square Gardens reopening to the public. We hope that residents, workers and visitors will enjoy this green gem in the heart of the West End, just metres away from the traditional hustle and bustle of Oxford Street. This is a great example of partnership working that is delivering a needed boost to London’s recovery, ahead of the opening of the Elizabeth Line, while simultaneously benefitting all who use and cherish this much loved and historic space with a beautiful and sustainable restoration.”

Lucy Musgrave, Founding Director at Publica said: “We are thrilled to have been able to work on such an incredibly important project for London’s West End. The transformation of Hanover Square demonstrates how private and public sector bodies can come together to provide a step change in the quality of public realm provisions in the area, and forms part of a greater effort to ensure the city’s historic places remain relevant, attractive and useful.”

Todd Longstaffe-Gowan said: “As a great admirer of London squares I was delighted to play a part in the refurbishment of Hanover Square and its immediate environs. The square is the centrepiece of a remarkable and theatrical early eighteenth-century enfilade that connects Cavendish Square to Conduit Street. As such it is more than a mere communal garden: it is an important constituent of an early and very distinguished piece of baroque town planning. Until recently this celebrated ‘vista’ – as it was known in the early eighteenth century - had been disfigured by centuries of accumulated clutter. We have, as a team, now reinvigorated this historic enfilade by restoring the vista and reconfiguring the interior and surroundings of the square with a view to making it a more welcoming and attractive public oasis at the very heart of Westminster.”

Cynthia Grant, Project Director at New West End Company said: “The result of partnership working and collaboration at its best, the opening of the Hanover Square Gardens marks a great milestone in the transformation of one of London’s most historic garden squares. With new pedestrian access linking the gardens with prime office, retail, new galleries, cafés and restaurants, soon visitors and workers alike will be able to enjoy the tranquillity of the gardens amid the bustle of London’s West End. With direct access to the new Elizabeth Line Bond Street station, the square will act as a gateway to the district, offering seamless accessibility to the neighbouring Bond, Oxford & Regent Streets, and to the galleries of Mayfair, benefitting those who visit, live and work here.”

Project credits

Client: Westminster City Council (WCC) and GHS-GPE

Design team: WSP, Norman Rourke Pryme, Publica, Todd Longstaffe-Gowan, Withernay Projects, and KLH Sustainability

Contractor: FM Conway

Year: 2015-ongoing

NOTES TO EDITORS

About Publica:

Publica is a London-based public realm and urban design consultancy providing intelligence, advice and design services to Local Authorities, Great Estates, major landowners, Business Improvement Districts and communities. Publica operates at the heart of the debate about urbanism and cities. Its work is part of an international conversation about how to make cities more efficient, integrated, vibrant, humane and safe, and how to preserve the vitality of urban neighbourhoods amid rapid growth and development. Publica's work is value-driven and underpinned by thorough research.

About Todd Longstaffe-Gowan:

Todd Longstaffe-Gowan is a London-based landscape architect. He has advised on a number of public and private historic landscapes, and has developed and implemented long-term landscape management plans for the National Trust, English Heritage and a wide range of private owners in the UK and abroad. He has similarly had extensive input in the conservation and redevelopment of a variety of historic landscapes including The Tower of London, Hampton Court Palace, Kensington Palace Gardens and The Crown Estate (Central London).

CONTACT

For further information and image requests:

Alice Morby
alicemorby@publica.co.uk

communications@publica.co.uk
+44 (0)20 7490 3986