



Access to green space

Giving city dwellers access to nature is key aim, says National Trust

Charity to bring its gardens to urban areas to allow nature-deprived communities access to green spaces

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Bringing glorious gardens and green space to [nature-deprived people in cities](#) is one of the National Trust's most important roles, its head has said.

Maintaining some of the most famous country houses in England, Wales and Northern Ireland has long been thought of as the trust's central purpose, but the charity is aiming to bring its gardens to urban areas to increase access to nature, with an urban garden planned for Chelsea flower show that will model a pocket park that can be copied and rolled out across towns and cities.

The National Trust director general, Hilary McGrady, said: "We know, just as our founders did, that access to nature and green space matters to people. It's good for our wellbeing, our pride of place, for climate resilience and of course for nature's recovery. Yet far too many people are deprived of its benefits. That's why the trust is working with partners to invest in urban green space, and calling on others, including the government, to do the same."



📍 The London Blossom Garden at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, Stratford, east London. Photograph: James Dobson/National Trust Images

In Manchester last year, the trust transformed **Castlefield Viaduct** into a “sky park” where people can connect with nature in the heart of the city. The trust also acquired Crook Hall Gardens in Durham, which according to the plans will be “the gateway to a green corridor connecting the urban heart of Durham with the countryside on its fringes”.

The charity is planting blossom trees in urban locations including London, Plymouth, Nottingham, Birmingham and Newcastle, and is part of a coalition forming 18 community organisations across the UK to create people-powered plans for nature in their neighbourhoods, which are mostly in urban areas.

The pocket-park garden, which will be shown at the Royal Hospital Garden in west London next spring, has been created in honour of the National Trust’s founder, Octavia Hill, who tried to improve access to nature for the people of the UK. Founding the charity in 1895, she said she believed that “the healthy gift of air and the joy of plants and flowers” were vital in everyone’s life.

Ann-Marie Powell, the garden’s designer, said: “In honour of Octavia Hill, we’ve created a place to sit in, a place to play in, a place to stroll in and a place to spend the day in. It is a place of refuge, a place to withdraw from personal challenges and the everyday. In this space, surrounded by wildlife, your spirit can be nurtured and revived.

“The garden also shows that the parks, verges and gardens of our cities and towns present a huge opportunity to increase plant diversity and provide habitats and food for wildlife, including pollinators. Many people think of biodiversity as a luxury - a nice-to-have - but it’s the engine that produces everything that we consume. When it is diminished, everything loses out.”

The garden is laid out as a series of “outdoor sitting rooms” - a core idea from Hill - where each individual garden compartment has its own atmosphere. It will feature reclaimed brick, timber, stone and thatch, sourced from National Trust places. All plants are peat-free and are climate-change resilient, including the trees. It is an urban community wildlife garden set in a brownfield site, which Powell hopes can be emulated by garden designers across the country for the public realm.



📍 The National Trust 'sky park' at Castlefield Viaduct in Manchester. Photograph: Annapurna Mellor/National Trust Images

Andy Jasper, the National Trust's director of gardens and parklands, said: "What we wanted to do was ask: if Octavia Hill was alive today, what would concern her? Without a doubt, she'd want to provide access to nature for urban communities, because we believe gardens and green space have the power to transform lives in so many ways.

"We hope everyone will come away from this garden with an appreciation of Octavia Hill, what she stood for and how important she has been to the formation of the National Trust. We remain inspired by the role she played and we believe that gardens can continue to address the biodiversity crisis."

The trust said Hill's mission remained relevant today, as its research showed one in three people in Britain still did not have access to nearby nature-rich spaces. While celebrating Hill's legacy, the garden also aims to inspire people to create innovative gardens that connect people with the beauty and complexity of the natural world.

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