



Hedgerow Heroes Delivery Report – 2023/24



A group of volunteers laying a new section of hedgerow!

Summary

- The past year of Hedgerow Heroes has helped foster a newfound passion for hedgerows amongst community groups across London!
- Funding has enabled us to plant nearly 2,000 metres of entirely new hedgerow and surpass our target for the restoration of hedgerows.
- We have had strong community engagement with a diverse range of local people, enabling individuals of all ages to get involved with nature, learn more about hedgerows, and develop green skills- with demand exceeding our expectations.
- As a direct result of funding, Hedgerow Heroes has provided local community groups with the capacity to grow their membership and connect Londoners to nature, allowing the range of social and environmental benefits to be experienced by the wider community.

Major successes were achieved across environment and social goals:

Environmental:

- 29 locations now have new or restored hedgerows
- 2,754 metres of hedgerow has been newly planted or restored including:
 - 1,916m – totally new hedgerow
 - 454m – restoring and filling gaps in existing hedgerow
 - 360m – hedgerow laid and
 - 104m – new dead hedging
- 2,230 metres of hedges were surveyed

Social/Community:

- 85 trainers and leaders have been involved with the project
- Over 1000 volunteers engaged, who gave over 3,000 volunteer hours in total
- 29 friends groups involved in planting
- 76 children took part in activities
- 25 people attended a hedgerow information workshop
- Four hedgerow walks

All of this contributes to our wider goal of supporting the UK reach the target recommended by the Independent Climate Change Committee of planting or restoring 120,000 miles of hedgerow in Britain by 2050 at the latest.



A group of Good Gym volunteers who did their volunteering in the evening by torchlight

Community Involvement

Local community groups were crucial in the planting and maintenance of hedgerows over the past year and will continue to be a focal point for our hedgerow planting efforts.

Our strong relationship with London's Friends of Greenspace Network – which supports community groups aiming to enhance their local green-spaces – helped us to reach groups to offer our support with Hedgerow planting, with 29 groups directly involved in the laying and maintaining of hedgerows.

We were able to support groups less familiar with hedgerow through training and expert guidance. We worked with hedgelayer Rob Cole from *Septimus Works* who delivered 12 one day hedgelaying sessions on our behalf to two different groups, as well as hedgerow expert Megan Gimber, who gave an online seminar and Q&A session all about hedgerows. Similar educational support was provided by hedgerow experts from *The Conservation Volunteers (TCV)*, who we coordinated with throughout the year.

On the whole, this was enthusiastically received. Plenty of groups were interested – even those who were unable to work with us during the past planting season – and we hope that we will be able to build upon these relationships over the next year to deliver further hedgerow work.

Another key community group we worked with were local schools. In total, six schools were engaged with the project, including two special educational needs schools through the Heath Hands volunteer group.

In total, we collaborated with 20 partner organisations, worked with 29 groups on hedgerow activities, and connected with 57 groups over the course of the year.



A group of children who joined our hedgerows work in Clapton Common

Our Impact

Hedgerow Heroes has helped local communities across three different areas: enhancing the local environment, developing green skills, and facilitating community cohesion.

First and foremost, Hedgerow Heroes enhanced the green spaces of local communities, restoring or creating new hedgerows in 29 locations across London. These hedgerows will act as biodiversity hotspots within their local community and will also strengthen the health and wellbeing of local residents through improvements in air quality and a reduction in noise pollution.

As one local park user stated, “Hoblingwell Park and Woodland is looking the best I have seen it in 10 years” – a clear example of the impact Hedgerow Heroes can have – and has already had – on a local green space.

Furthermore, Hedgerow Heroes has provided individuals with personal development and educational opportunities.

Notably, a young hedgelaying apprentice was able to use these sessions to gain valuable training and experience, and further develop their skills. With enough experience they will potentially be able to lead other volunteer groups in hedgelaying, a great example of how the past year’s events are laying the foundations for the future of London’s hedgerows.



An apprentice hedgelaying sharpening a stick for the hedgerows

School children – including those with special educational needs – were also given the opportunity to take part in the events. By working with six schools, we enabled students to engage with their local green space, gain valuable green skills, and hopefully inspired them to take an interest in their local environment and, above all, enjoy being outside connecting with nature.

Finally, the educational sessions provided by Rob Cole, Megan Gimber, and hedge planting experts from TCV, have given local groups the capacity to better maintain hedgerows going forward, instilling a renewed sense of stewardship over their hedgerows and the wider green space: One person who attended Megan’s seminar found it “utterly inspirational!”.

From a community perspective, local residents who took part were able to connect and meet with like-minded individuals who share a similar passion for the environment. The community-led approach of this project, where volunteers from different pockets of the local community united through green activities, helped connect Londoners to nature and encouraged new community relationships. Friends of greenspace groups were also able to use these planting sessions as an opportunity to highlight what they do and how they benefit the local community to help grow their membership.

A quote from one of our participants who helped lay the Dog Kennel Hill Hedgerow perfectly encapsulates how Hedgerow Heroes benefits volunteers, volunteer groups, and the wider local community through enhancing green spaces and connecting Londoners with the countryside on their doorstep.

“The workshops for building the Dog Kennel Hill Hedgerow were an excellent and rewarding experience. Robert is such a generous and skilled teacher who took great care to effectively transfer a wealth of important skills and knowledge. His explanations and demonstrations were clear and insightful, making the learning process engaging. One of the most precious aspects was the opportunity to gain hands-on experience while creating something beneficial for the local community. The recognition and appreciation from residents of the neighbourhood made the experience even more joyful and inspiring. Getting to know the dedicated members of the Friends of Dog Kennel Hill was another highlight. Their passion for the community initiative was palpable and motivating. Overall, being part of such a meaningful project that tangibly improved the area was an immense privilege. The workshops left me with a deep sense of gratitude for the chance to learn, create, and connect in such an impactful way.” Participant, Dog Kennel Hill

Lessons Learned

A number of lessons can be taken from our first hedgerow planting season.

Educational Resources:

- The Friends groups we worked with had differing levels of hedgerow experience. Some only needed help with the funding; others required expert knowledge on how to approach the planting.
- Knowledge was provided to Friends groups through a variety of means, from lessons to Q&A sessions to seminars.
- Going forward, we want to collect all this information into a single source which we can share with Friends groups, so that it is easily accessible and ensures no information is lost.
- We will also develop an information sheet for sending out to landowners outlining best practice in terms of managing their new hedgerow.



Coordinating with Groups:

- Arranging hedgerow sessions with groups took longer than anticipated, in part due to the range of items that had to be organised for a session to run. This meant that several groups from our Autumn 2023 planting season had to be delayed to Spring 2024.
- Going forward, we want to get in contact with Friends groups earlier in order to organise planting with as much notice as possible.
- This is especially true for groups in targeted areas for hedgerow planting such as the Green Belt. We found it took more time to coordinate with these groups as there were fewer groups in more sparsely populated areas.

Project Organisation:

- We used a spreadsheet to track the project, but it was very detailed and hard to keep up to date.
- We think other ways of tracking the project could be clearer and are currently investigating Monday.com as an alternative.

Hitting Goals More Effectively:

- We predominantly worked with Friends groups as we believe this helps the long-term sustainability of the groups. However, many of these groups only needed smaller hedgerows (c. 10-20m in length).
- To better hit future targets, we are considering working directly with landlords who have larger areas of land and/or in partnership with *The Conservation Volunteers* to fund groups they've already found.
- We believe both avenues will help us hit our planting goals more effectively.

Collecting Feedback:

- Our feedback forms sent to group leaders were detailed, but some questions were not clear enough regarding the information we wanted to collect. Therefore, we had to estimate some of the targets.
- We have since edited the questions to make it obvious to the attendee the type of feedback we require from them.
- We also didn't have a clear way to collect feedback directly from attendees. One option was to send a follow up form to Eventbrite sign ups, but these were rarely filled out.
- In the future, we believe it will be best to work with the group leaders to gather this information.



Future Aims for 2024/25

Our specific aims are to:

- Support community-led planting of 2,000 metres of new hedgerow and restore a further 100-200 metres of hedgerow in the 2024/25 planting season with a view to stepping up this contribution further in future years based on lessons learned.
- Deliver three skill building sessions related to hedgerow surveying, hedgerow planting, laying and maintenance
- Offer two hedgerow walks to help more people understand the importance and value of hedgerows, where they will learn to identify native hedgerow species and engage in a very hands-on way with hedgerows through foraging.

The experience gained from the past year has allowed us to establish a system for putting out a call for potential sites.

We have already flagged the potential for hedgerow funding to Friends groups and have received early interest from a number of groups for planting in 2024/25.

Of the groups that have expressed interest in planting hedgerows, a good number have already secured the necessary permissions from their local council.

Communities we would particularly like to work with for this upcoming planting season are those currently in green deprived areas in order to benefit local mental health and mitigate poor air quality. In this regard, we already have expressions of interest from groups seeking to improve green space near social housing, and to reduce air pollution from roads near children's play areas, which is encouraging.

As part of our commitment to make quality green space more accessible to a wider range of people, we wish to prioritise working with groups whose planting plans also consider the social benefit of improving greenspaces near to poor communities

We would also like to collaborate with more like-minded partners over the course of the next planting season.

We will collaborate with the *Woodland Trust* – pointing interested groups in the direction of subsidised hedgerow mix packages – which provide excellent value for money combined with high quality plants that support native wildlife. The *Woodland Trust* will also help us to link Friends groups and volunteers to excellent support and advice on hedgerow planting and relevant experts. The *Woodland Trust* are also sector leaders in identifying the most environmentally friendly forms of tree guards. We will primarily choose sites with little to no need to tree guard use – but are committed to using the most sustainable options available where necessary.

We also plan to collaborate with the *People's Trust for Endangered Species* – working with their Hedgerow Officer on Hedgerow surveying workshops.



Budget

2023/24 Budget

Description	Unit cost	Total
<i>Hedge whips including guards where needed</i>	Aiming to plant 2,000 metres of hedgerows and gap up or restore 100-200m more	£18,900
<i>Hedgerow surveying, planting, hedge maintenance training, hedge laying (50m in two-day workshop) costs. Includes materials and travel</i>	One hedge laying workshop @ £1,500. Two hedgerow surveying workshops @ £250 each. £1,000 for planting workshops and maintenance training.	£3,000
<i>Two hedgerow walks – learning about hedgerow plants including foraging activity</i>	£250 per walk	£500
<i>Project Management and coordination</i>		£4,000
<i>Publicity and public engagement</i>		£750
<i>Monitoring, evaluation and reporting</i>		£1,000
Total Project Cost		£28,150

2024/25 Estimated Budget

The total anticipated budget is £33,780 comprised:

Item	Unit cost	Total
<i>Hedge whips including guards where needed</i>	Plant c. 2,000 metres of hedgerows @ 5 whips/m and gap up or restore c. 100-200m more	£22,680
<i>Hedgerow surveying, planting, hedge maintenance training, hedge laying (50m in two-day workshop) costs. Includes materials and travel</i>	One hedge laying workshop @ £1,800. Two hedgerow surveying workshops @ £300 each. £1,200 for planting workshops and maintenance training.	£3,600
<i>Two hedgerow walks – learning about hedgerow plants including foraging activity</i>	£300 per walk	£600
<i>Project Management and coordination</i>		£4,800
<i>Publicity and public engagement</i>		£900
<i>Monitoring, evaluation and reporting</i>		£1,200
Total Funding Required		£33,780