

Front garden loss: Bad for Biodiversity

Paul de Zylva

London National Park City Front
Gardens

and

Quaggy Waterways Action Group
(QWAG)





Losing our nearest green space street by street

London National Park City
Front Gardens

www.frontgardens.nationalparkcity.org/



Join us!

Our Amazing Vanishing Front Gardens

Wednesday 17 May 2023, 7.45pm (ONLINE)

The costs of losing the most local of green spaces

Christine Eborall, Ealing Front Gardens Project

In November 2022 even the National Infrastructure Commission reported on rising flood risk from “The spread of impermeable surfaces – such as the paving over of gardens...”

Front gardens are the green spaces right on our doorsteps. As more of these little bits of Britain are paved over, often to park vehicles or to ‘reduce maintenance’, the side effects are becoming clear.

Not everyone has a front garden but when others who do make an effort with theirs everyone gains – in more ways than one.

Humble front gardens have a multi-purpose role by:

- helping reduce local flood risk by storing heavy rainfall. By contrast, too much water running off hard, non-porous surfaces like paved-over front gardens, adding to pressure on drains, sewers and local rivers
- moderating excess heat in warmer months because soil, planting, hedges and trees help with cooling in hot weather. Gardens converted to hard surfacing exacerbate the kinds of heat threatening high temperatures seen in in 2022 because they heat up and retain warmth more.
- Providing space for nature. The loss of soil, plants and spaces for wild species to shelter and feed adds to the UK’s shocking decline of wildlife and means we experience less wildlife in our lives on our doorsteps.

Christine Eborall has tracked the loss of front gardens to hard surfacing in Ealing, west London, since the 1990s. She’s also shown how front gardens can be restored and even used to park / charge vehicles without losing all of the multi-functional role front gardens play.



QWAG has been raising the loss of space to hard surfacing including on social media

3 4G

12:28

71%

Another front garden vanishes under hard surfacing.

This one is in [#Catford](#) [#Lewisham](#).

No space for nature. No obvious drainage.

And people wonder why the area is a flood risk zone.



Add another Tweet



1. Nature no more

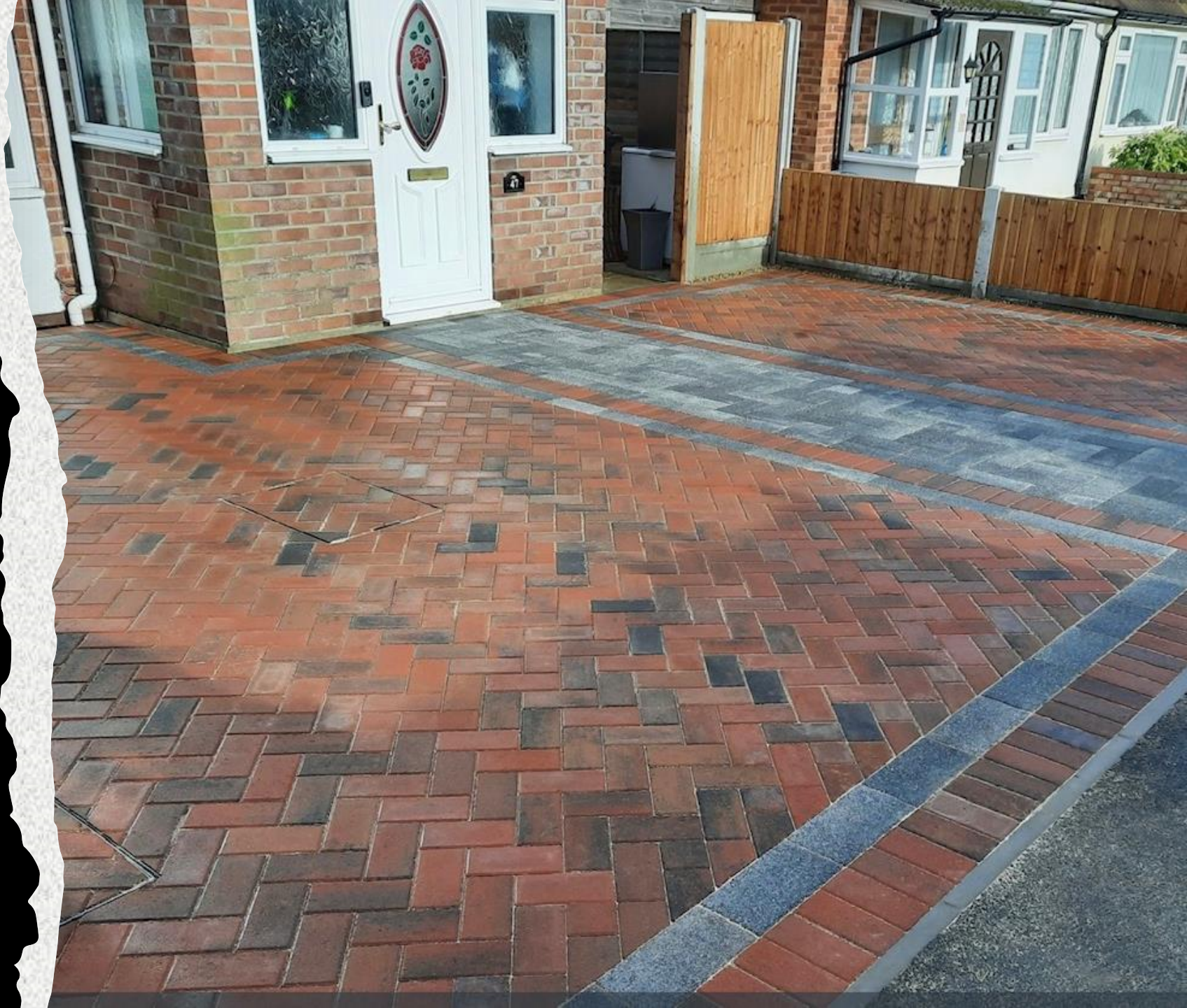
- Plants, hedges removed OR reduced and fragmented
- Soil scraped off and sent in a skip to landfill
- 'Garden' space capped with rubble, concrete (sometimes reinforced) and paving blocks.



2. Altered habitat

- Less diverse plants for different foods across seasons
- No soil = no worms = no food
- Less nesting material and fewer shelters for species to hide from predators

Wildlife doesn't do uniformity.



3. Turning up the heat

- A formerly friendly space becomes an inhospitable uniform surface
- Less / no shade
- Absorbs heat
- Adds to higher localised health-harming heat
- Species can't cope.



4. Nature No-Go Zone

Nature not allowed

Space is now reserved for:

- Vehicles
- Litter
- 'Weeds'



5. Knock on effects

- Harder, faster rainfall piles pressure on drains
- Carries more litter and microplastics from crisp packets, sweet wrappers, take-away waste
- Pollutants - tyre particles, engine oil, brake dusts and fluids etc...



6. Weed killer cycle

- Paving does not allow useful planting, but it still attracts 'weeds'
- Contrary to 'easy to maintain' myth
- Herbicides washed off-site reach local watercourses
- Adds to poor state of freshwaters away from the site itself.



7. 'Blandcape' spreads

"I want one" and the
"easy to maintain" and
other myths starts a
cycle of decline

Cumulative effects of
heat, water run-off,
herbicides, and lack of
diverse planting for
food and shelter
across whole streets

Nature is not about
'easy maintenance'.





***Cars 2
Trees 0***

8. Impacts can extend beyond the property to the public realm:

Street trees removed to allow vehicles to cross over public pavement.



The best of both worlds?

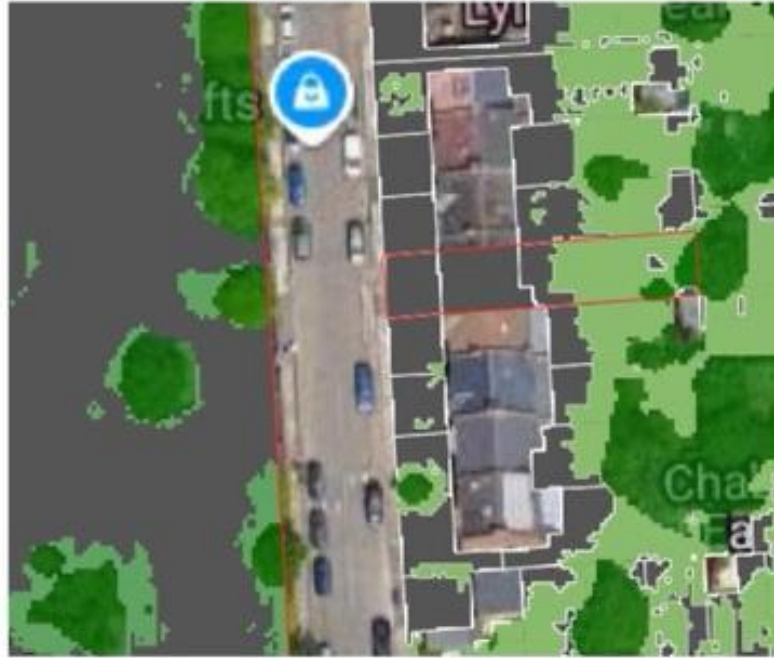
**Parking space *without*
losing all of the benefits
of having a front garden**



Matrix paving takes vehicles but without the ‘need’ to remove soil, is truly permeable, rather than the kinds of “permeable paving” being marketed (which is precast concrete, made to look like stone or brick), and can be planted up with different species to keep ‘weeds’ from dominating.

The loss of front gardens

Mapping losses street-by-street across Lewisham borough



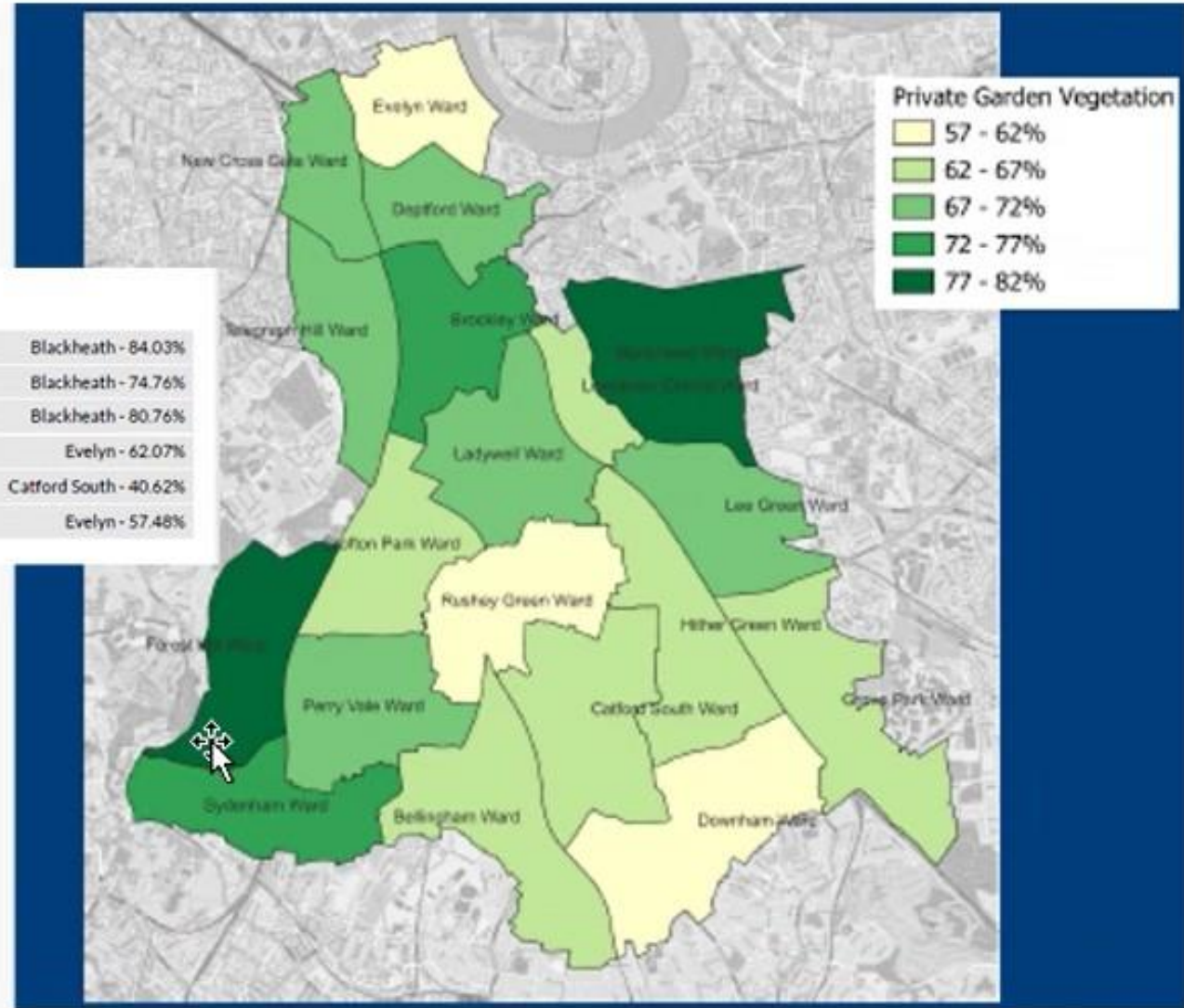
Pinpoint losses and target restoration

Statistics

Highest vegetated %	Back gardens	Blackheath - 84.03%
	Front gardens	Blackheath - 74.76%
	All gardens	Blackheath - 80.76%
Lowest vegetated %	Back gardens	Evelyn - 62.07%
	Front gardens	Catford South - 40.62%
	All gardens	Evelyn - 57.48%

Dark = more green cover
Light = least cover

40% of front gardens lost in Catford South ward





What if restoring
a front garden is as
easy as covering one
over?



this front
garden is
being
managed
for
biodiversity

**A Blue Heart tells passers-by that
Christine Eborall's garden is
meant to be "wild and untidy"**