



Whitfield Gardens

Secure By Design: Responding to Concerns of
Personal Safety and Anti-Social Behaviour

August 2019

LD&DESIGN

1.0

Personal safety from the start

Right from the start of the design process the brief for Whitfield Gardens aimed to respond to the issues raised by local residents, users and surrounding businesses in terms of their concerns for personal safety. Part of the way they did this, was to use Secure by Design principles. Secure by Design is a police initiative which aims to reduce crime by incorporating crime prevention techniques into the layout and landscape of an area to provide safe places to live, work, shop and visit.

LDA Design included the following points relating to Secure by Design principles in the original brief which was presented to and agreed by the design team at Camden Council in January 2018:

- * Create a safe and attractive public space that celebrates the different characteristics of Whitfield Gardens, as 'urban square' and 'urban garden'.
- * Adhere to Secure by Design principles to create a space that people feel safe and discourages anti-social behaviour.
- * Ensure the seating doesn't cause rubbish to build up behind it or create places for people to hide.
- * Reduce/remove the presence of hiding places within planting areas which also compounds existing 'toilet' issues.
- * Improving the accessibility of the spaces through change from steps to ramps

It was clear from the outset that ultimate importance be placed on making the space feel and perform safer for the local community. The following sections outline some of the ways that the design of Whitfield Gardens has looked to address these issues.

It should be noted however, that the design of the space is only one part of responding to these problems. Alongside the redevelopment of the space are additional anti-social behaviour undertaken in partnership with the local community and stakeholders to address the wider social and local concerns including working with the local community safety teams.

2.0 Natural Surveillance

2.1 Clear lines of sight

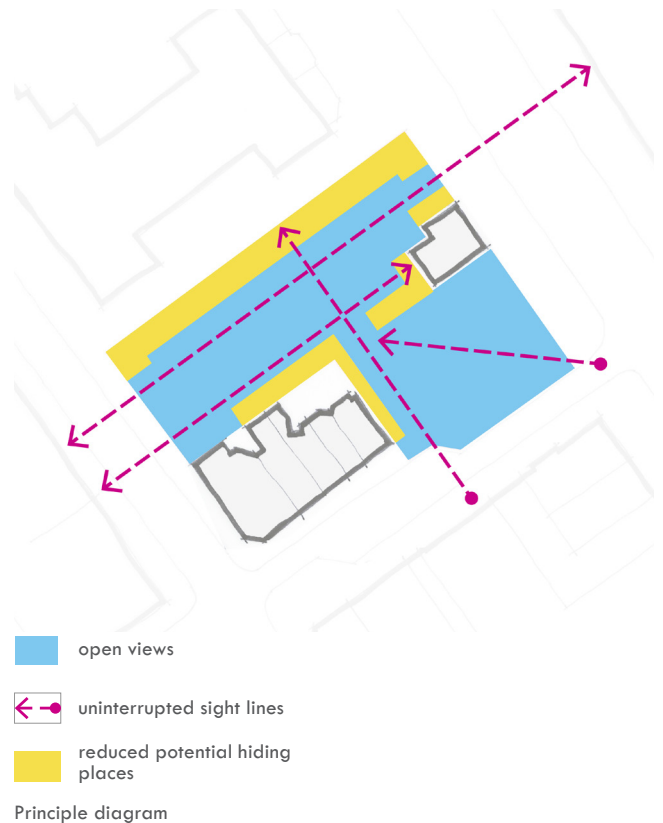
The Problem

The existing space is arranged in such a way that deep areas of planting step in and out creating shady corners and places where people could tuck themselves away to hide from view. This makes would-be-users feel vulnerable and unlikely to feel safe within the space even when there is no threat.



The Solution

Planting areas have been reduced in depth and reconfigured to provide direct views through the spaces. When you enter the garden you will always be able to see a way out and the potential for individuals to hide along that route is dramatically reduced. This also means a visitor can to quickly work out their escape point if they feel uncertain.



2.2 Removing/reducing the hiding potential

The Problem

Currently, large woody shrubs occupy much of the wide planting areas, these plants restrict other plants growing underneath them and as such create 'dead' ground below and behind them. These shrubs often provide excellent potential for someone to be hidden from view and are so thick that they create 'den' like spaces underneath and behind.

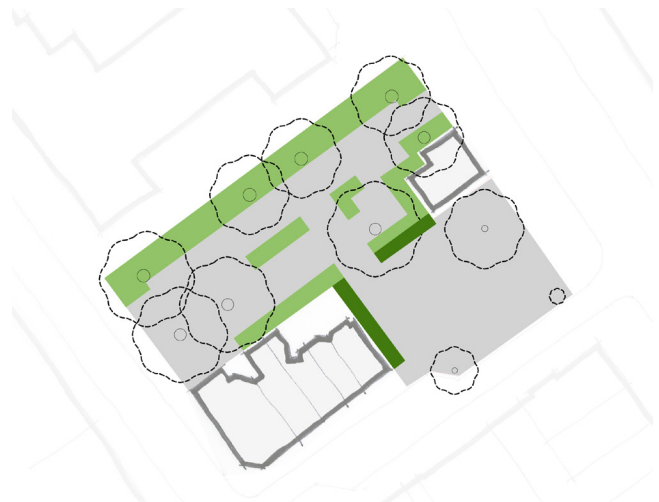
These accessible spaces are then used for a variety of anti-social behaviour and rough sleeping.



The Solution

We have responded in the following ways:

- * Planting depth has been reduced and reconfigured throughout the space.
- * The planting palette has been changed to provide dense but shorter planting: 500-750mm tall, (occasional flower spikes may be taller).
- * Where possible planting beds have been raised (approx. 400mm). So, if access is attempted, the individual will be in a very visually prominent position, in a much narrower planting bed, making anti-social behaviour and rough sleeping in these locations much less attractive.
- * 'Spiky' hardy plants have been introduced into the mix to further discourage unwanted access.



Principle diagram

2.3 Lighting

The Problem

At present the lighting is extremely poor. Lighting is supplied by two columns in the 'Urban Garden' space while the 'Urban Square' is lit by residual light from Tottenham Court Road and Tottenham Street which is inadequate. This has very obvious links to safety and security within the space and to the sense of feeling safe and comfortable.

It is the most likely reason for current levels of anti-social behaviour, rough sleeping and the feeling of the space being a no-go area after dark.



Recent photographs taken by MGS as part of existing condition survey

The Solution

The scheme will deliver a significantly improved lighting design which will:

- * Increase the number of light sources throughout the space to ensure an even lighting distribution.
- * Focus on functional lighting but also include feature lighting to improve comfort and make the space attractive to all after daylight hours, not just those wanting to abuse the space.
- * Successfully light the edges (identified previously as high risk areas of anti-social behaviour).
- * Provide lighting that means people can be seen clearly.
- * Improve the ability for a visitor to see and understand the space and clearly identifies routes through the space.

NOTE: Final lighting proposal by Lighting Designer (MGS) to be issued

3.0 Access and Movement

3.1 Direct and Accessible Routes

The Problem

Currently, routes throughout the space are convoluted and often involve the visitor making a number of turns, this reduces the ease and convenience of the space.

The routes often require the use of steps to move through the space, further reducing accessibility and attractiveness to a potential visitor or someone who might pass through.

Street furniture, planting and steps create obstacles.

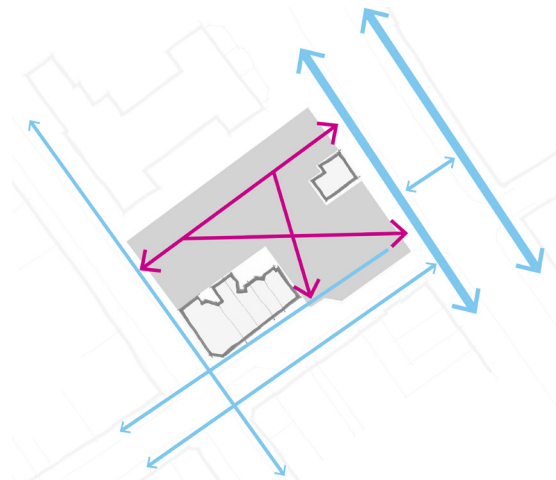
The result is that some may choose to avoid the space altogether simply because sticking to surrounding streets appears more straight forward, easier and safer resulting in a less populated space.



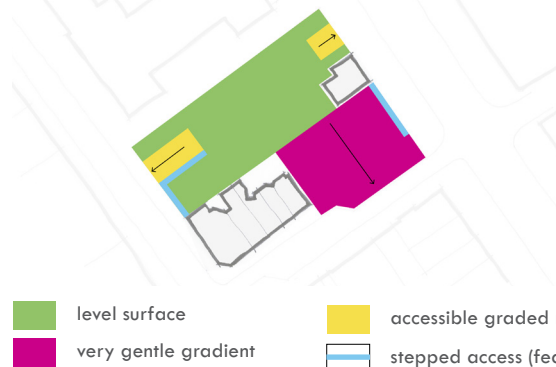
Existing Plan: Movement

The Solution

The proposal creates clear and direct access through the space making it attractive, easy to move through and convenient. Where possible, the design removes stepped access, replacing with gentle slopes to encourage greater use. The increase of people using and moving through the space will help to make the area feel safer.



Principle diagram: Movement



Principle diagram: Access

3.2 Choice of routes

The Problem

In public places people are more wary after dark. This is because there tend to be less people around, especially in winter. It is important therefore that a choice of routes exist. People will want to use a different route if their first choice appears threatening. The current design only allows for one route which includes frequent hiding places and dark, shady corners.



The Solution

By changing the location of the planting areas (but with a similar amount of planting) and increasing the number of seating edges we have created two alternative routes providing visitors with an option which is not significantly further than the first-choice route.



Illustrative plan overlay

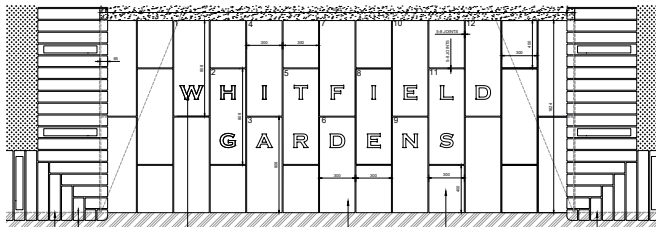
4.0 Sense of Ownership

4.1 Perception of Space

The approach

Within the space there is a noticeable change in surface material and lettered paving.

This will give the perception that the space beyond the threshold is different, and care/respect should be taken when entering.



Extract from detail

4.2 Sociable Spaces

The approach

The design provides meeting spaces which will strengthen community relationships and provides a comfortable space to meet and spend time in the company of others. The expectation is that this will encourage people to spend more time and therefore enhance natural surveillance. Here the design of the furniture looks to discourage rough sleeping.

4.3 Activity

The approach

Places which are only used in one way can feel deserted, making them attractive to criminals who perceive they are less likely to be detected.

The space has been designed to allow for maximum flexibility of the 'Urban Square' to provide space for events, markets, performance and exhibitions. The events space will be equipped with power to better facilitate events and the dynamic use of the space. The increase in seating edges builds on an already bustling lunch time economy that could extend into the evening. The general approach to comfort will increase the amount of time people want to spend in the space.

4.4 Respecting the Space

The approach

The presence of loose bin bags is a familiar sight, this gives the impression that the space is uncared for and encourages further littering. It can also go further, suggesting that the space can be freely used for other forms of anti-social behaviour. The wider scheme will restore the Fitzrovia Mural and remove all graffiti to improve respect for the area. The design includes a timber enclosure which will hold two 1100L wheeled bins to contain rubbish bags and clear them out of sight.



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