



BEGBROKE SCIENCE PARK
- PUBLIC ART PROPOSAL -

ASSEMBLE

Submission to accompany Reserved Matters Application
25th August 2021.

“What is a weed? A plant whose virtues
have never been discovered.”

Gertrude Jekyll

‘I markd the varied colors in flat spreading fields chekerd with closes
of different tinted grain like colors in a map the copper tinted colors of
clover in blossom... the sunny glare of the yellow charlock and the sunset
imitation of the scarlet head aches with the blue corn bottles crowding
their splendid colors in large sheets over the lands and “troubling the
cornfields” with destroying beauty.’

John Clare, ‘Leisure’

‘THE WEED GARDEN’ BY ASSEMBLE

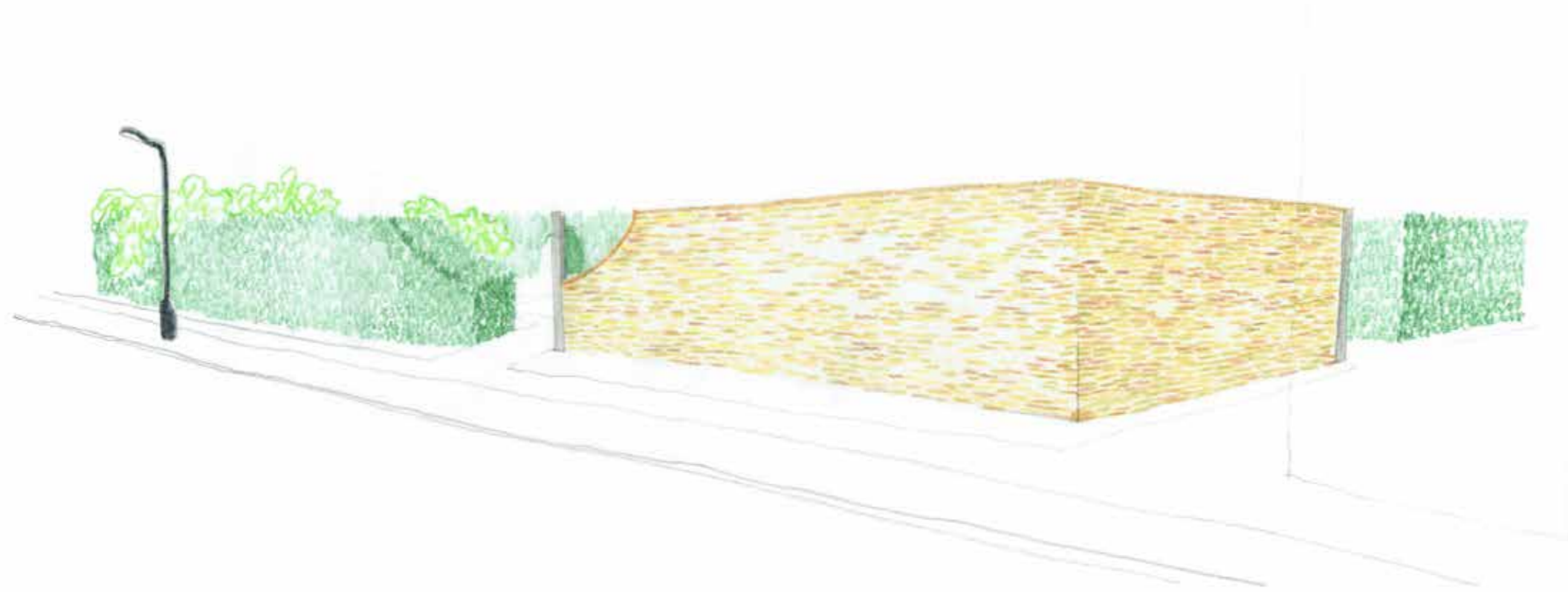
‘THE WEED GARDEN’ BY TURNER PRIZE-WINNERS ASSEMBLE IS AN ARTWORK AND A GARDEN THAT COMBINES ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS WITH PLANTING TO CREATE A SINGLE, COHESIVE WHOLE – A ‘TOTAL ARTWORK’ IN WHICH ALL ASPECTS EXIST TO COMPLEMENT ONE ANOTHER.

BECAUSE OF THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS, AN INCREASING NUMBER OF ARTISTS ARE MAKING AND NURTURING GARDENS AS ARTWORKS, GIVING BACK TO THE WORLD AS OPPOSED TO PRODUCING OFTEN RESOURCE-HEAVY FORMS LIKE SCULPTURES. RECENT UK EXAMPLES INCLUDE GABRIEL OROZCO’S GARDEN FOR SOUTH LONDON GALLERY AND ANTHEA HAMILTON’S FORTHCOMING ‘THE GARDEN’ FOR STUDIO VOLTAIRE.

THESE GARDENS ARE A CONTINUATION OF A LONG TRADITION OF ARTISTS MAKING GARDENS, FOR EXAMPLE CLAUDE MONET’S GIVERNY AND VANESSA BELL AND DUNCAN GRANT’S CHARLESTON, AS WELL AS DEREK JARMAN’S PROSPECT COTTAGE.

A CELEBRATION OF BIODIVERSITY IN ITS TRUEST SENSE, ‘THE WEED GARDEN’ IS A GIFT FOR THOSE WHO CURRENTLY WORK AT BEGBROKE SCIENCE PARK AS WELL AS THOSE WHO WILL COME TO SPEND TIME HERE OVER THE COMING YEARS. DESIGNED TO BE BEAUTIFUL ALL YEAR ROUND AND SECLUDED FROM THE REST OF THE SITE, THE SPACE CREATED WILL BE TRANSPORTIVE, OFFERING AN OTHER-WORLDLY AND RESTFUL SPACE IN WHICH TO THINK, MEET OTHERS, OR JUST BE.

REBECCA HEALD & VICKIE HAYWARD



RESPONSE TO THE BRIEF

This document accompanies the Reserved Matters Submission following the grant of outline planning permission ref. 18/00803/OUT on 17 September 2018. The Reserved Matters Submission relates to the development of two new research facilities on the Begbroke Science Park campus. Condition 21 of the outline planning permission states:

'The reserved matters submission(s) required by Condition 1 of this permission, shall include details of the creation and/or enhancement of the public art in the vicinity of the new development as identified within Policy Kidlington 1, to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter, the proposed public art shall be in situ prior to the development hereby permitted, being operational.'

We are delighted to have been commissioned for this new Public Art opportunity for Begbroke Science Park. In response to a peri-urban site with a rich landscape character and a history of agriculture and research interwoven with the land, our proposal is for a weed garden for Begbroke.

All gardens are sites of active engagement with the land, and this site will be no different, enabling visitors, gardeners and members of the Begbroke community to understand the landscape of the site and in its valuing of 'weeds' challenge our perceptions of what belongs and what can contribute to a sense of place.

The weed garden will be an amenity for the current community at Begbroke, and will continue to grow and develop and be enjoyed as the community enlarges, but most importantly it will provide an amenity and a landscape feature that can continue to benefit the wider area as it develops into a neighbourhood.

Over the following pages we explain how this idea has developed in relation to the site and its history for facilitating the 'Weed Research Organisation' and set out the ambition for the Weed Garden as a public amenity.

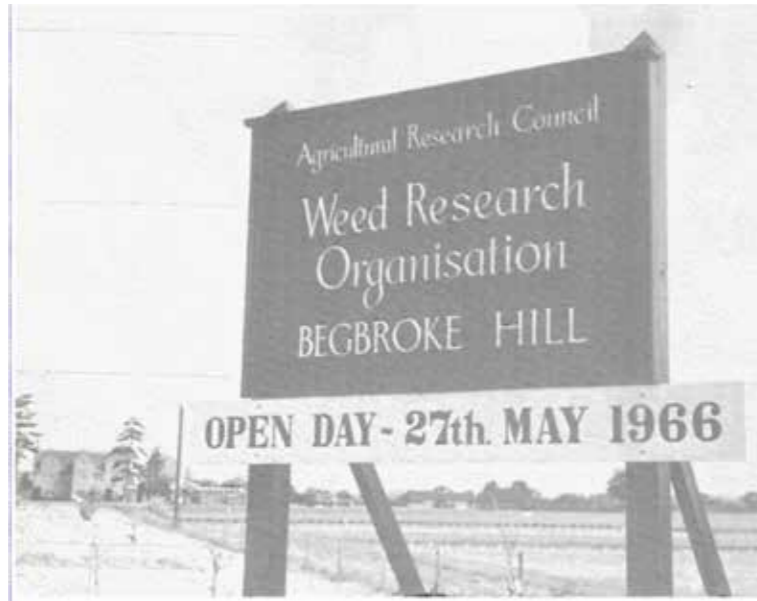


RESPONSE TO SITE

On visiting the site, we were fortunate to be given a guided tour by the Director Alistair Cory across the grounds and inside some of the buildings. We were pleasantly surprised to find how peaceful Begbroke Science Park is, in part because of its somewhat rural context away from the city centre. Despite the fact that there were approximately 300+ people on site at the time, Begbroke Science Park has a tranquil feel to it and you find yourself aware of the rustling leaves of the mature trees, the gentle swaying of the areas of wild grassland and the birdsong. The Grade II listed former farm buildings and walled gardens are a reminder of Begbroke's history as an operating farm.

We understand that the planned expansion of Begbroke Science Park will increase the capacity of laboratories twofold through the addition of two new buildings and the rearrangement of the car parking. We understand that Begbroke Science Park is part of a much larger development by Oxford University Development Ltd and that the adjacent farmland may potentially be developed in the future to provide a new district of housing, schools, landscape and potentially a new train station.

Our response to the brief is site specific and in reaction to our immediate findings.



Weed Research Organisation, Begbroke Hill



Weed Research Organisation, Begbroke Hill



Weed Research Organisation, Begbroke Hill



Site Map, 1880



Site Map, 1970

HISTORY OF THE SITE

The site of the Oxford University Begbroke Science Park has been used for farming for generations with the 17th century Jacobean farmhouse and its walled garden at the heart of the site. The stone farm buildings were sensitively restored in the 1960's and now house offices and conference facilities. Academic research began on the site in the 1960's when Begbroke Hill Farm became the headquarters of the Weed Research Organisation. This brought in a new approach to connecting to the land at Begbroke, still engaging with the organic make-up of the soil on site and its produce yet this time through academic study. In the 1980s, the Cookson group bought the site for its Technology Centre and in 1998 it was taken over by Oxford University.

Today Begbroke Science Park continues the site's tradition of exchange between science and industry, hosting 20 research groups and 30 companies on site. Many of the organisations have a strong focus on the Physical and Life Sciences, as well as Environmental Engineering, such as the Centre for Sustainable Water Engineering and Oxford Sustainable Fuels.



THE SITE TODAY

Begbroke Science Park is contained by a large enclosure of mature trees and shrubland that appears to have been cultivated from the 1970's onwards when the site was purchased by Oxford University as a Science Facility. The Science Park is like a large, walled garden in itself, the parkland interspersed with buildings, walls and areas of hardstanding.

Approximately 300 people are working on the site during the day and enjoy the landscape and fresh air during their lunch breaks. Outdoor events are sometimes held in marquees for networking and fundraising opportunities. Local walkers from Begbroke, Yarnton and Kidlington are known to pass around the perimeter of the site, when walking across the neighbouring landscape. Within the Park one can stumble across a number of beautiful walled gardens, a pond or through cultivated areas of wild grassland. Most striking and curious however, is a large and mature beech hedge that defines an area of untended landscape and creates an imposing, natural landmark.



PROPOSAL - A CULTIVATED WEED GARDEN

In response to the existing hedge, we propose to enclose this area of the site off to make it a haven for plants, animals and people. In part inspired by the site's history, and part by the rich abundance of plant-life already living in the space we've designated it a 'weed garden'. As Richard Mabey writes in his book 'Weeds: the Story of Outlaw Plants', 'plants become weeds because people label them as such'. So as a result the idea of the weed, and our relationship with these plants that have often evolved to cohabit with humans strike to the heart of the false distinction between nature and culture.

Our additions to the site will enclose it, creating a piece of public art in the tradition of the *hortus conclusus*, with the existing hedge extended and augmented by a limestone wall. We hope that the weed garden will be a space of reflection for the users of the Park providing them with a space to socialise and to think, but that it will also be a space for the flora and fauna of the site to dwell and to flourish.



PROPOSED PUBLIC ART DESIGN

This Public Art Proposal will complete the garden that is already defined by the existing mature hedge on site, by adding two new walls to create an enclosed weed garden. The new enclosure would combine an extension to the existing beech hedge, providing further ecological habitats, and a new wall built out of the oolitic limestone on which and of which Oxford is made.

Within this new enclosure the garden would provide a rich ecological environment with the existing weeds of the site added to and enriched by a complimentary planting scheme of related plants. Visitors will be able to enjoy the garden by walking through or around it on stone dust paths, or seated on a stone slab bench.

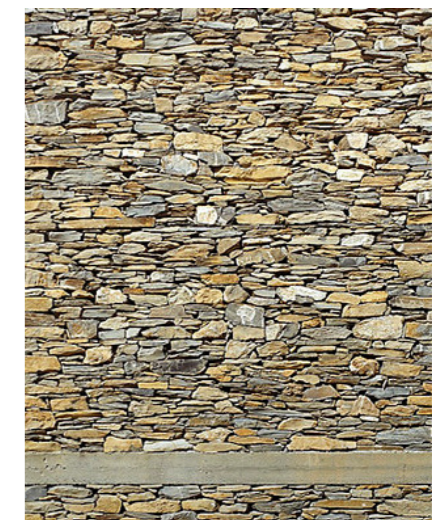
The garden will provide a practical amenity, a stone sink and counter as well as benches will help it be used for events, and a visual amenity with the rich mix of 'weeds' providing a year-round multi-sensory experience.



Existing weeded area within the hedge



Existing limestone wall on the site



Contemporary dry stone wall



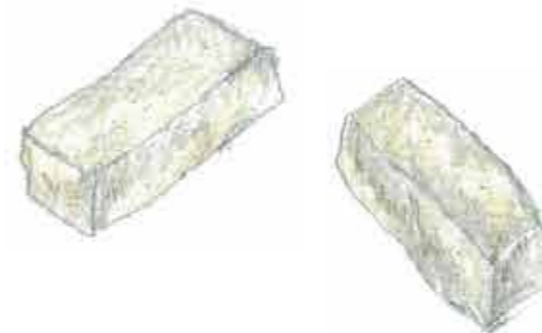
PROPOSED PUBLIC ART DESIGN

Within the perimeter of the hedge the enclosed garden will offer a different character to the wider landscaping, working with the existing weeds, hedge and three trees that already exist.

Carefully observing the weeds that already occur across Begbroke Science Park, but in particular within the area of the garden, our proposal is to selectively plant more of them. The soft landscaping will include raised areas of spoil with informal areas of existing weeds, offset against more formal areas of planted weeds, wildflowers and some new trees and shrubs. Our intention is to preserve and enhance the biodiversity and wildness of the existing landscape that will soon be lost to the new science buildings and car park.



Sink & counter



Pair of benches



Stone furniture by Assemble at Valerie Traan Gallery

VISUAL AMENITY

The garden will provide a rich and atmospheric alternative to the surrounding of the site. Within the enclosure of the hedge, the plants will be abundant and wild with a landscape character both of the location and the site and yet in contrast to the mannered world beyond.

The garden will be distinctive from across the site as a beautiful block of beech with apertures cut into it to reveal the wildness inside.

Much in the manner of a garden like Ian Hamilton Findlay's Little Sparta, stone objects will be scattered through and on the periphery of the garden alluding to unknown histories and local geologies. We imagine these to be mixed of newly formed objects and of found objects from salvage yards.

All of this will combine to make a place of other beauty.



A formed beech hedge at Marnas by Sven-Ingvar Andersson



A stone bench at Rainham Marshes by Peter Beard



Wildflower planting at La Vallee by Gilles Clement



The walled garden at Lindisfarne by Gertrude Jekyll

PROPOSED SITE PLAN

1. All dimensions and levels to be checked on site before commencing work.
2. This drawing to be read in conjunction with all relevant contract documents.
3. Do not scale from this drawing, use figured dimensions only.
4. Report any errors, contradictions or omissions to the designer as soon as possible

RevID	Change Name	Date



KEY

- Colas Fibredec Heritage Surfacing for Accessible Path
- Dust Gravel Path

Drawing
Proposed Ground Floor Plan

Project
Begbroke Weed Garden

Client
OUD

Date
24/08/2021

Drawing No
1259_120.1

Drawn by
GS

Scale
1:200 @ A3

ASSEMBLE

Sugarhouse Studios, 19 Collett Road, SE16 4DJ
+44 (0)2072370000
info@assemblestudio.co.uk

SOFT LANDSCAPING

Upon visiting the garden, we observed a wide variety of ‘weeds’ already growing in the area. The idea is to take this as inspiration. Why bring in new ‘weeds’ when the weed garden has already been made? These ‘weeds’ have found their way into the garden already and are adapted to the space, offering up a ready made colour palette and a variety of shapes and forms, that already give us the elements of what makes ‘good’ garden design.

We’re interested in the definition of a weed, which is quite simply ‘a plant in the wrong place’. Ragwort, for example, is famed for being poisonous to horses, an idea that is completely unsubstantiated but has become a commonly held belief, so much so that countryside ladies who ride will fall out with neighbours for their refusal to remove it. A more cultivated version just a few cultivars away, Dusty Miller, is prized by florists and gardeners. Our planting in this garden will look to explore the line between the two.

The idea is to create a journey around the space. Beginning on the north side of the garden, the existing plants would simply be left to be, as a kind of mini re-wilding experiment. We would then take the elements of what is already there and start to transform the planting in the other areas into something more formal, as the garden loops around to where the existing trees are.

The scheme here would take from the palette of what is already present in the ‘weed’ area; yellows, whites and browns, and begin to add in the cultivated versions of these ‘weeds’, arranging them in more recognised planting shapes and patterns. This creates a formal, more visible design from the language of the existing site. On the south edge of the garden we are proposing a bank of about 2m, which would be made from spoil (either from the other side of the garden, or from elsewhere on the site - e.g. the car park). This is the best way to grow wild flowers and would add some height. It would also mirror the spoil that is already there.

The last two spaces in the journey, on the east side of the garden, would become more formalistic, with a clipped hawthorn hedge and symmetrically planted trees. Rowans and elders are both culturally significant and are found near the space, and so would be an interesting fit.

The area around the kitchen would be planted with climbing dog rose and Clematis Old Man’s Beard. Both beautiful climbers that often grace railway tracks and scrubland.

The hedge, which we will extend will play between being clipped and unclipped. There are many species living in and on the hedge that it could be interesting to leave in some places.

The images on this page show a selection of Sarah’s photographs of the weeds already living on the site.



Achillea Millefolium



Artemisia



Ragwort



Verbascum

WEED SPECIFICATION

PLANTING LIST

FOUND IN THE WEED GARDEN

These plants already exist within the weed garden site

Grasses

Achillea Millefolium, wild

Linaria purpurea, wild form

Convolvulus

Teasel

Rosa Canina

Dock

Verbascum (yellow)

Ragwort

Clover

Ribwort plantain

Crataegus Monogyna

Thistle

Artemisia, wormwood

PROPOSED FOR THE CULTIVATED GARDEN

These would be plants, related to those already existing within the weed garden site that we would seek to introduce alongside those already there

Grasses / stipa tenuissima, stipa gigantea etc

Achillea millefolium 'Terracotta'

Linaria purpurea, 'Canon went'

Convolvulus Cneorum

Teasel/ Eryngium

Cultivated rose / shrub rose

Sorrel/ Dock

Verbascum bombyciferum, Verbascum blattaria

Jacobaea maritima (dusty miller)

Trifolium Ochroleucum

Ornamental plantain

Crataegus Monogyna

Scabious

Artemisia 'Silver Mound', Tarragon

Sorbus subg. sorbus (Rowan)

Sambucus Nigra



Achillea Millefolium 'Terracotta'



Linaria Purpurea



Trifolium Ochroleucum



Artemisia 'Silver Mound'



Convolvulus Cneorum



Verbascum Bombyciferum

The difficulty lies in the very expression “relation to the world,” which presupposes two sorts of domains, that of nature and that of culture, domains that are at once distinct and impossible to separate completely.

Bruno Latour, Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime



SUMMARY

In response to the Public Art Brief for Begbroke Science Park our proposal is site specific and in reaction to finding a large, striking mature beech hedge that defines an area of untended landscape to create an imposing, natural landmark.

Inspired by the site's history for facilitating the Weed Research Organisation in the 1960's our proposal will complete the garden that is already defined by the existing mature hedge on site, by adding two new walls to create an enclosed 'weed garden'. The new enclosure would combine an extension to the existing beech hedge, providing further ecological habitats, and a new wall built out of the oolithic limestone on which and of which Oxford is made.

Within this new enclosure the garden would provide a rich ecological environment with the existing weeds of the site added to and enriched by a complimentary planting scheme of related plants. Visitors will be able to enjoy the garden by walking through or around it on stone dust paths, or seated on a stone slab bench.

As Richard Mabey writes in his book 'Weeds: the Story of Outlaw Plants', 'plants become weeds because people label them as such'. So as a result the idea of the weed, and our relationship with these plants that have often evolved to cohabit with humans strike to the heart of the false distinction between nature and culture.

All gardens are sites of active engagement with the land, and this site will be no different, enabling visitors, gardeners and members of the Begbroke community to understand the landscape of the site and in its valuing of 'weeds' challenge our perceptions of what belongs and what can contribute to a sense of place.

The weed garden will be an amenity for the current community at Begbroke, and will continue to grow and develop and be enjoyed as the community enlarges, but most importantly it will provide an amenity and a landscape feature that can continue to benefit the wider area as it develops into a neighbourhood.



Totteridge Academy Quad, Assemble



Laguna Viva, Assemble



Granby Winter Garden, Assemble



OTO Projects, Assemble

ASSEMBLE

Assemble is a multi-disciplinary collective working across architecture, design and art.

Founded in 2010 to undertake a single self-built project, Assemble has since delivered a diverse and award-winning body of work, whilst retaining a democratic and co-operative working method that enables built, social and research-based work at a variety of scales, both making things and making things happen.

The social focus and impact of our work was recognised in the receipt of the Turner Prize in 2015 for the network of neighbourhood projects created in collaboration with the residents of Granby, Liverpool.

SARAH ALUN-JONES

Assemble's Project Team has been extended to include Sarah Alun-Jones, a Farmer and Outdoor Education Manager; as a Critical Partner in developing the concept proposal for the soft landscaping.

CURATORS

About Rebecca Heald: Specialising in art, architecture and urban planning I shape city spaces that transform the everyday. My work with leading organisations including Tate, Southbank Centre, British Council, Art on the Underground, Aga Khan Development Network, Argent, Arup, Science Gallery London, and the Royal College of Art demonstrate my ability to communicate and connect with the most wide-ranging audiences. Drawing on two decades of experience, I work at scale with ambition to match. From liaising with structural engineers to untangling legal intricacies, I embrace any situation and agenda to make art happen.

About Company, Place: Company, Place was founded in 2018 by Vickie Hayward. We provide curation, programming, partnerships and all-round enlivenment for brands and spaces. Our work builds a foundation for places to continuously engage with their audiences in a meaningful way. We use local knowledge and history to inform our core creative ideas. Through championing communities and collaboration we devise programmes that connect people with place. Currently we are working on ongoing commissions for Argent, Argent Related and Peabody. Company, Place is actively working on projects that focus on reducing consumption and waste.



ASSEMBLE