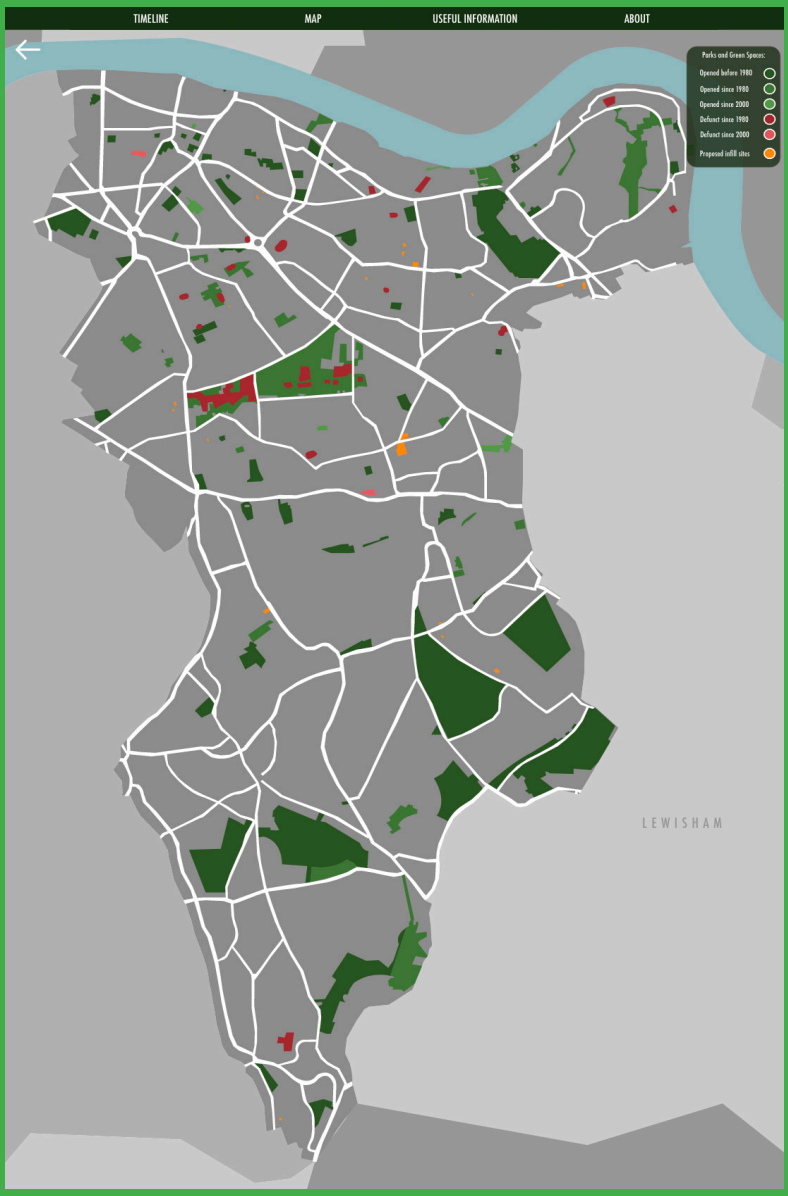
LONDON PARKIVE

CONTEXT REPORT

MAYA OSAKA

INDEX

Introduction 1
What 2
Why 8
Who 21
How 22
Conclusion 50
Bibliography 52



Screenshot of the original London Parkive map I created in my first year final project.

INTRODUCTION

The London Parkive (V2) is a project around archiving London's open spaces, past present and into the future and is a continuation from my first year final project by the same name. In this context report I will outline:

What the goals and the intentions of the project are.

Why I want to build the Parkive and what the key inspirations for the project are.

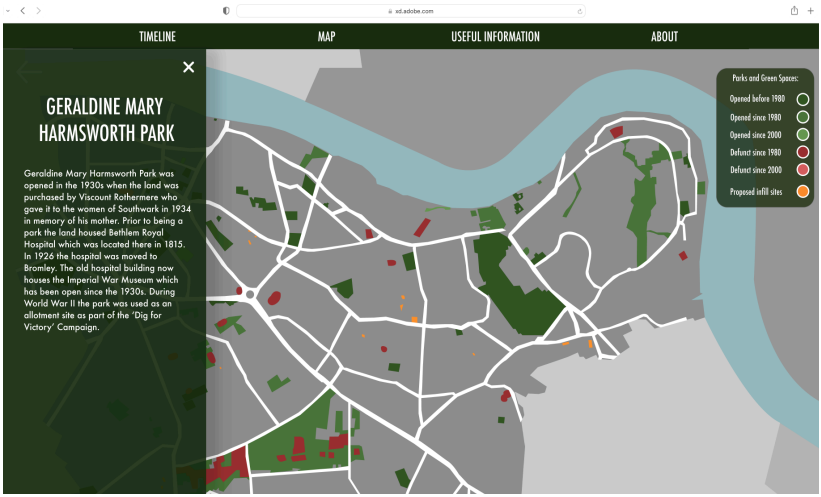
How I have been, and intend to continue, investigating, designing and building the Parkive.

WHAT

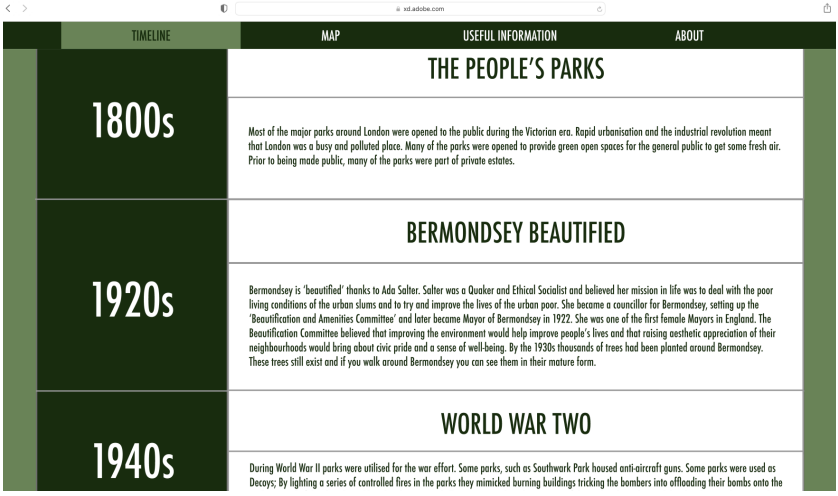
The London Parkive V2 is a project around archiving London's open spaces, past present and into the future. The project is a continuation from my first-year final project in which I built a prototype for a web-based interface. The interface consisted of a map of Southwark depicting parks and open spaces in the borough, including ones that don't exist anymore. Clicking on a park would bring up its name and a brief history.

I have chosen to continue developing this project because:

- **I was only able to cover one borough and would like to expand my search further.**
- **This was my first attempt at designing a web-based interface and I now see many major design improvements that could be made.**
- **I want to practice and develop my web development skills.**
- **I want to further develop my data collection and investigative skills.**



Screenshot of the original London Parkive prototype depicting information on a clicked park.



Screenshot of the original London Parkive depicting the timeline I created from information collected from newspaper clippings in Southwark Archive.

The catalyst for the original project was the fourth studio project in my first year (The Environment Keeps Happening to Me) in which my group was assigned a park called Charlotte Turner Gardens which was under threat from development. Talking to the locals about their beloved park and how it was under threat triggered a desire to find out how many parks and open spaces are under threat from development. This led me to CPRE's 'Forever Green?' report, released in March 2022 which highlights 50 parks and green spaces in London that are under threat from development. The report also talked about some of the key reasons why parks are undertreat today, including:

- A lack of robust legal protection for parks and open spaces in London

- A lack of adequate protection within the planning system, particularly since The National Reforms of 2012 – *"if you can argue that building on a green space is 'sustainable development' or needed for major infrastructure development then that seems to trump all protections."*

- A lack of funding and resources for parks and, in contrast, the lucrative value of land and development in London.

(CPRE London 2022, p.3)

Reading this report and looking at other articles and social media posts around open spaces under threat made me want to find out how many open spaces have actually been closed to the public or destroyed overtime. I looked on Google but didn't find any consolidated information on the topic and this lead to the idea of the London Parkive. I wanted to find this information out and make it more accessible to the public.

I chose to create a prototype for a website because, in our digital age, the easiest way to make information accessible is through the internet. But also, I had taken an interest in user interface (UI) design, so it seemed like the perfect opportunity to learn how to use prototyping software and learn about UI.

During the project I visited Southwark Archive to collect relevant datasets. I found several lists of parks between 1980 and 2000 which I compared to find out how many parks had been opened or closed during that time period. I was surprised to find that, not many parks had been closed to the public or destroyed during that time period. However, my research did not account for the reduction in size of open spaces or green spaces that are not recognized as open spaces by the councils or government.

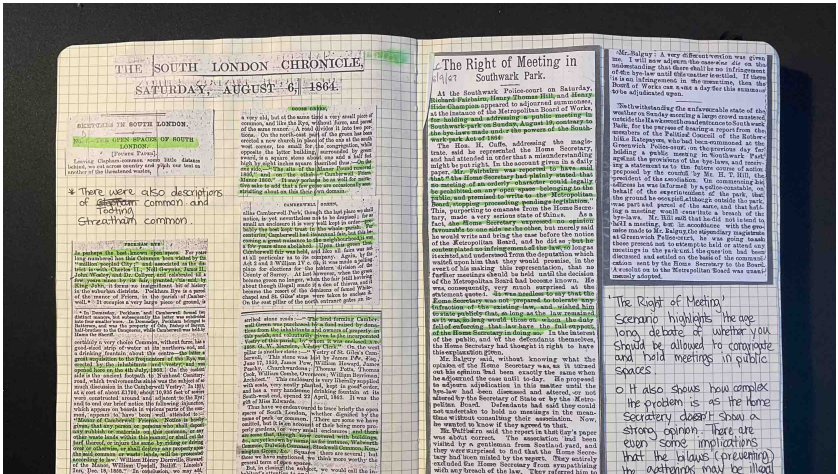
While looking through archival material I came across newspaper articles relating to open spaces within Southwark. Most prominent parks in the area were opened by the Victorians in the late 1800s, after WWII many bomb sites were converted to parks, In the 1980s parks were neglected due to funding cuts etc. It made me realise that open spaces reflect the socio-political landscape of any given time.

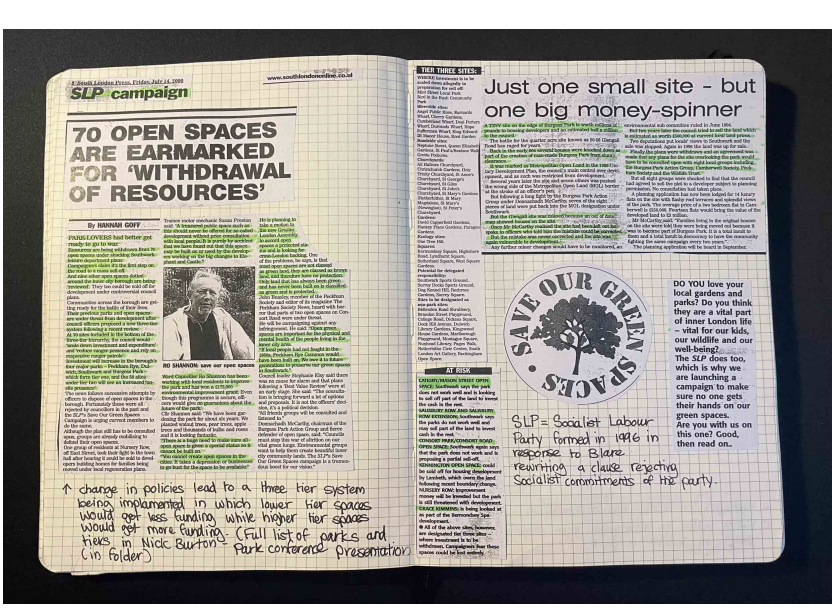
If we look at Southwark's socio-political landscape today, their plans to build 11,000 new council homes by 2043 stands out. These plans have led to 'infilling', a process by which new buildings are added to existing estates on 'disused' areas, some of which are green spaces. In an article by Architects' Journal on the topic, one of the residents they interviewed said,

'Not only is the surrounding area already very dense, but the space marked for infill on our estate is very small. Building there would strip our community of already rather modest green space we use for gardening and relaxation.' (Jessel 2021)

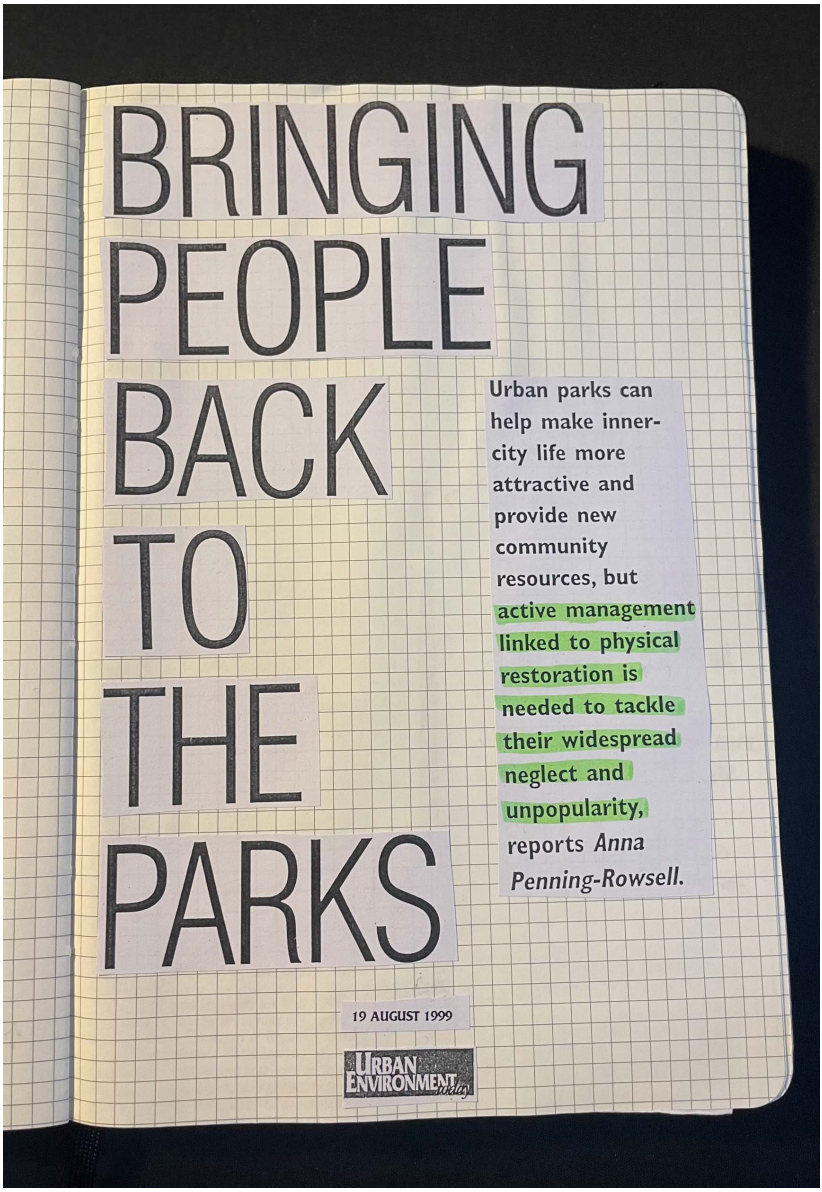
This suggests that a lack of protection leads to a gradual decline of green spaces and also highlights the complexities around infilling as on the one hand there is a dire need for more social housing in Southwark and on the other hand precious green space is being destroyed and is depriving its current residence which in turn is affecting their quality of life, often adversely.

On my original Parkive prototype I showed some examples of infill sites on the map so people could see some of the green spaces that were under threat from development at the time.





Photos of my first year final project sketchbook depicting newspaper clippings I collected from Southwark archive.



BRINGING PEOPLE BACK TO THE PARKS

Urban parks can help make inner-city life more attractive and provide new community resources, but active management linked to physical restoration is needed to tackle their widespread neglect and unpopularity, reports *Anna Penning-Rowsell.*

19 AUGUST 1999

URBAN ENVIRONMENT today

WHY

Some of the other reasons why I want to create the London Parkive.

Shifting Baseline Syndrome

Shifting Baseline Syndrome (SBS) describes *"a gradual change in the accepted norms for the condition of the natural environment due to a lack of human experience, memory and/or knowledge of its past condition and increases people's tolerance of environmental degradation." (Soga and Gaston 2018, p.2)*

According to Soga Masashi and Kevin J Gaston in their paper titled 'Shifting Baseline Syndrome: Causes, consequences and implications' one of the factors that could help prevent SBS is

"Monitoring and collecting data. Further progressive SBS may be limited by accumulating more data about the natural environment (Lister et al. 2011; Mihoub et al. 2017). One powerful tool to collect large-scale and long-term environmental data is citizen science - the practice of public participation and collaboration in scientific research (McKinley et al. 2017; Dennis et al. in press)." (Soga and Gaston 2018, p.8)

The London Parkive is a means of collecting and monitoring data and could help in keeping track of the situation on parks and open spaces. With council budgets having been cut by 47% since 2010, and therefore a cut in park funding (London Councils n.d.), and a decrease in the protection on parks since 2012 (CPRE London 2022), we might begin to see more parks being closed or shrunk

and therefore it is more important than ever to have a website like the Parkive that can monitor park closures, inform the public and hold governments and organizations accountable. By presenting past datasets alongside data from today people will be able to clearly see if open spaces are being closed at an alarming rate or not.

According to Soga and Gaston one of the most affective ways for countering SBS is

"Promoting people's positive interactions with natural environments would be beneficial to limiting SBS. Indeed, studies have shown that participating in first hand experiences with nature, such as visiting urban green spaces and observing local fauna and flora, increases people's levels of understanding of the condition of their surrounding natural environments." (Soga and Gaston 2018, p.9).

The London Parkive is a digital product and as such doesn't guarantee physical positive interactions with nature by its users. Furthermore, while a digital product that highlights our changing landscape could be educational, and useful in combatting SBS it likely isn't as effective as physically interacting with open spaces and nurturing a relationship with them.

In his book 'On the Internet' which critiques the internet's impact on education Hubert Dreyfus says,

"[Our bodies] sensitivity to mood opens up our shared social situation and makes people and things matter to us; and its tendency to respond positively to engagement with other bodies; underlies our sense of trust and so sustains our interpersonal world." (Dreyfus [2001] 2009, p.70)

This is relevant to SBS as learning about our natural environments is key in preventing it. If the London Parkive was built for mobile as well as desktop it could help to enhance people's interactions with open spaces as they can view information while visiting the space. I have personally experienced this when visiting or walking past a park in Southwark. I sometimes open the London Parkive prototype to find out information on the park and this makes the interaction more meaningful than just walking past or through the park.

Ultimately the purpose of the Parkive is for demonstrating the evolution of the London landscape at large rather than a tool for encouraging people to interact with open spaces so I hope it will help in countering SBS in this way.

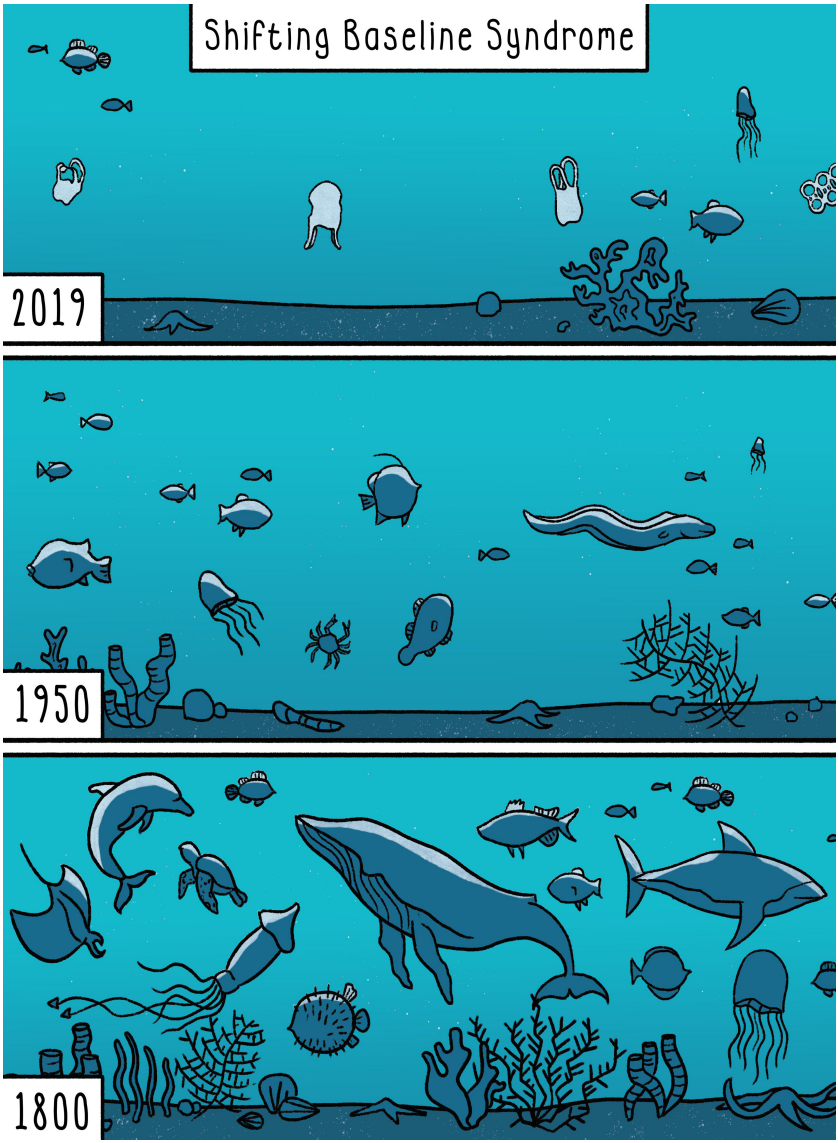


Image depicting Shifting Baseline Syndrome illustrated by Cameron Shepherd, taken from his X account at https://twitter.com/cameron_jms

Creating an Archive

An archive, according to the Cambridge Dictionary definition is *"a collection of historical records relating to a place, organisation, or family... a place where historical records are kept." (Cambridge Dictionary n.d.)* the purpose of an archive, according to Laura Millar in 'The Uses of Archives', is to *"prove rights, confirm obligations, verify events and substantiate claims. They help us remember the past, and they safeguard us against inaccurate recollections or intentional deceit." (Millar and Cambridge University Press 2017)*

One of the reasons for creating the London Parkive is to have a database of information that demonstrates the evolution of London's physical spaces which can be used to hold governments and other organizations accountable for the reduction in open spaces and to educate people on the changing London landscape and therefore its use is similar to a traditional archive.

However, the Parkive is arguably more like a community archive than a traditional archive. In her paper, 'Radical Record Keeping: How Community Archives Are Changing How We Think About Records' Jeannette Bastian says

"Community Archives are often seen as being in the vanguard of social concerns and social justice, as markers of community-based activism, as offering a participatory approach in a collaboration between archivists and non-archivists, as exemplifying the on-going development of 'professional' archival (and heritage) practice and as integral to the ability of people to articulate and assert their identity. (Bastian 2020)

In the early development stages of the London Parkive I will be doing all of the data collection myself. However, if the Parkive were to be rolled out as a functioning website, I would design it so the general public can get involved in the data collection process and stewardship, particularly when it comes to adding current data sets such as a park that has been closed or is currently under threat. The Parkive ultimately has activism in mind, as one of the reasons for preserving this data is to demonstrate the evolution of London's open spaces with its preservation in mind.

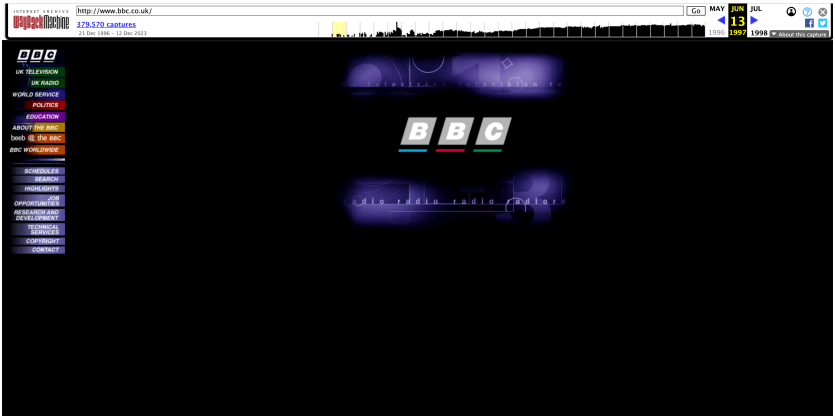
However, it is also important *'to remember that archives are ultimately kept in order to be used, by anyone for any reason. Researchers, scholars and average citizens refer to archives to find proof; to gather research data; to illustrate, illuminate or explain." (Millar and Cambridge University Press 2017)*

While my intentions for the project are to be used in the efforts of open space preservation or historical research the Parkive could be used by a wide range of people for a wide range of uses.

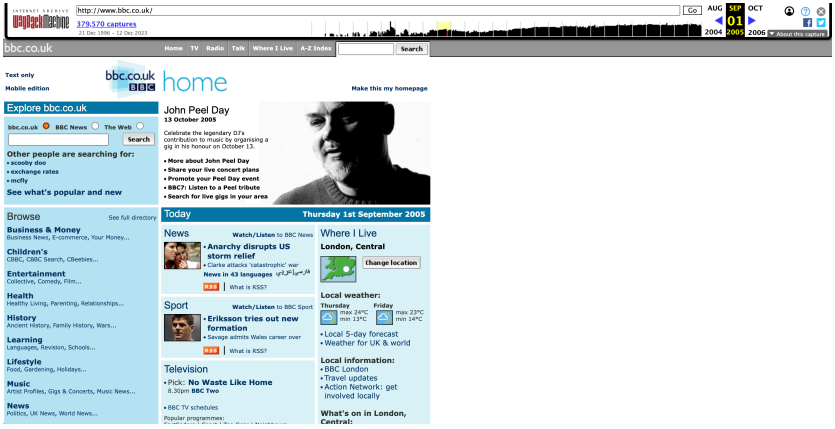
The Internet Archive's Way Back Machine is a community archive that I have taken inspiration from. The Way Back Machine lets a user look up a website and see what it looked like at different points in time. If we look at the BBC website on the Way Back Machine as an example (you can see screenshots on the following pages), you can see that there are images from1997, 2005, 2012 and 2023. We can see how the user interface has evolved over time and get an insight into the different time periods. The Parkive will aim to be something similar by using map overlays from different time periods, showing when open spaces were opened or closed and how the shapes and sizes of open spaces have evolved over time.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE BBC WEBSITE

1997

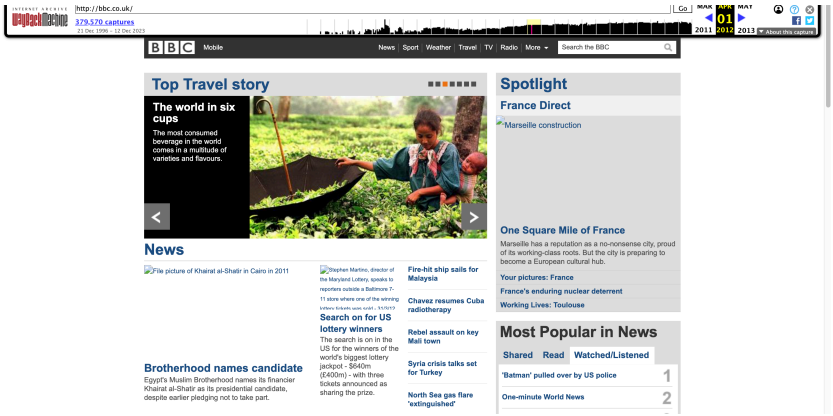


2005



Screenshots from the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine depicting the BBC website from different time periods (web.archive.org/web/20230101000000/bbc.com)*

2012


http://bbc.co.uk/
379,570 captures
21 Dec 1996 - 12 Dec 2023
Go
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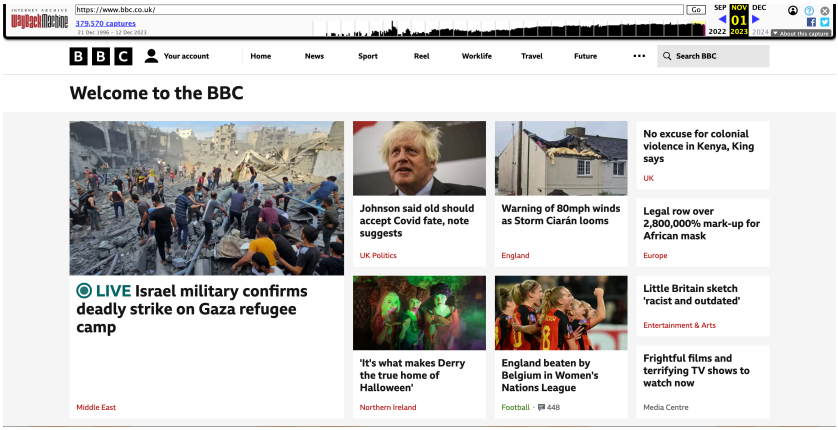
2011 2012 2013
About this capture
BBC
Mobile
News | Sport | Weather | Travel | TV | Radio | More
Search the BBC
Top Travel story
The world in six cups
The most consumed beverage in the world comes in a multitude of varieties and flavours.
Spotlight
France Direct
Marseille construction
One Square Mile of France
Marseille has a reputation as a no-nonsense city, proud of its working-class roots. But the city is preparing to become a European cultural hub.
Your pictures: France
France's enduring nuclear deterrent
Working Lives: Toulouse
News
File picture of Khairat al-Shatir in Cairo in 2011
Brotherhood names candidate
Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood names its financier Khairat al-Shatir as its presidential candidate, despite earlier pledging not to take part.
Stephen Martino, director of the Maryland Lottery, speaks to reporters outside a Baltimore 7-11 store where one of the winning lottery tickets was sold
Search on for US lottery winners
The search is on in the US for the winners of the world's biggest lottery jackpot - $640m (£400m) - with three tickets announced as sharing the prize.
Fire-hit ship sails for Malaysia
Chavez resumes Cuba radiotherapy
Rebel assault on key Mali town
Syria crisis talks set for Turkey
North Sea gas flare 'extinguished'
Most Popular in News
Shared Read Watched/Listened
'Batman' pulled over by US police
One-minute World News

2023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UK
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'It's what makes Derry the true home of Halloween'
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Creating Accessible Datasets

Another reason for pursuing such a project is around creating an accessible database of information. Today, thanks to the internet, we are able to share more information with each other than ever before and as a result it is easier to create accessible datasets.

Colouring London is a project being managed by the Alan Turing Institute that is taking advantage of this fact.

Colouring London is similar to the Parkive in that it is a map-based interface. Instead of highlighting parks and open spaces it collects and showcases different datasets on buildings in London. Data such as when a building was built, land use and energy performance. These datasets are presented on a colour coded map.

Colouring London is part of the Colouring Cities Research Program which supports institutions globally in creating similar projects. The website can be accessed by anyone, and all of their code is available for anyone to view at GitHub. The aim of the project, as well as making this sort of data accessible to all is to

"improve the quality, sustainability and resilience of building stocks, and to help reduce emissions from them... In many countries relevant data are extremely difficult to obtain, often highly fragmented, restricted, missing or only available in aggregated form." (The Alan Turing Institute n.d.)

By visiting archives and manually collecting relevant datasets on parks and compiling this onto a website the London Parkive could help create similarly accessible information.

Screenshots of Colouring London's website at colouringlondon.org. The top map is colour coded according to the age of the buildings and the bottom map is colour coded according to land use.

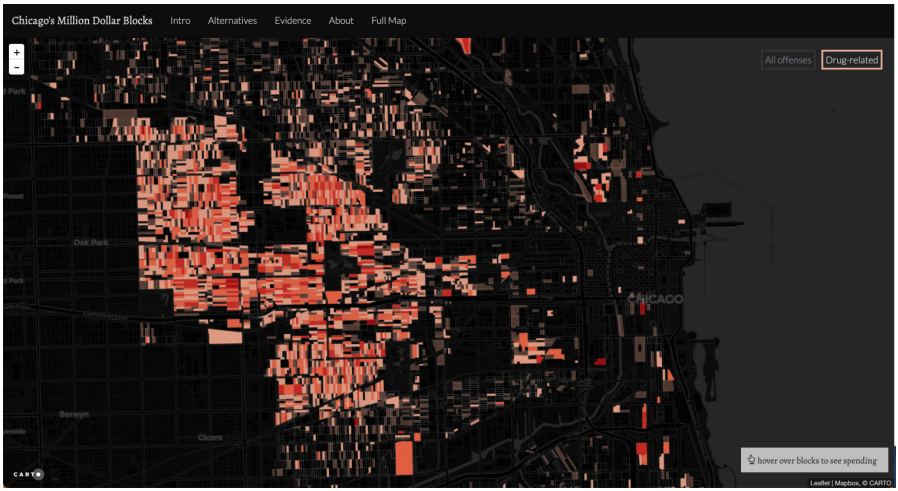
Investigative Design

Investigative Design is the act of investigating something through the means of design. Nicolas Nova summarises investigative designers as

"shar[ing] an array of distinctive characteristics, inherited from the way designers go about things, combined with approaches drawn from the social sciences and other disciplines: namely, the importance of a continually reinvented procedural dimension, an inclusive approach that embraces a wide range of references and methods, and an emphasis on creating investigative devices out of physical material, and on unusual forms of presentation. These four characteristics testify to the originality of the designer's investigative approach." (Nova n.d.)

The Parkive probably follows quite a traditional form of investigation (though I am no historian so it is hard to say for sure) involving collecting datasets from archives and the internet and creating spreadsheets. However, it is the presentation of this information that makes it a form of investigative design. If I was a historian and I did this investigation the final outcome of my project would most likely be in the form of a written paper. In written form, my project would be very dry and difficult to understand. By instead creating an interactive map that showcases the research it makes it much easier for the reader/user to understand what my findings show.

A project that follows a similar investigative design approach is Million Dollar Blocks. The screenshot on the opposite page shows Chicago's Million Dollar Blocks website which shows a colour coded map depicting how much money was spent between 2005 and 2009 incarcerating people from different blocks. The red blocks on the map depict areas where over $1000,000 dollars were spent incarcerating people. The map effectively highlights the neighbourhoods that are most affected by incarceration. This excerpt from the Washington Post shows the impact of this project:



Screenshot of Chicago's Million Dollar Blocks at chicagosmilliondollarblocks.com

"When the spatial concentration of all this money is mapped so starkly, the picture poses a critical question: What would happen if we poured the same resources into these same struggling parts of any city in very different ways? What if we spent $2.2 million dollars not removing residents from the corner of West Madison and Cicero but investing in the people who live there? What if we spent that money on preschool and summer jobs programs and addiction treatment? Evidence suggests that such investments could do more to deter crime than locking people away." (Badger and Washington Post 2015)

The project was effective in highlighting a problem and questioning the way in which the problem is addressed. It is hard to know at this point in my investigation whether any profound findings will come out of my project. Even if it doesn't at this stage if the project were continued into the future we might begin to see interesting patterns emerge.

WHO

The London Parkive will be a website accessible to anyone with an internet connection so the target audience is the general public. However, the subject matter is niche so the main users I anticipate are:

- **People living in London who regularly use parks**
- **People interested in London's history**
- **People interested in open space preservation within London**
- **People visiting London interested in visiting parks and open spaces (particularly those with an interest in history)**
- **People with a general interest in history**
- **People with a general interest in open spaces**
- **Historians**
- **Environmental Activists**
- **Politicians/ Councils/ Government**
- **People/ organisations wanting to demonstrate data around open spaces.**

HOW

As I already have an established idea around what I want to create for my final project, I have started researching how to actualise a project like this. In this section I talk about how I have been, and how I intent to continue, investigating, designing and building the London Parkive.

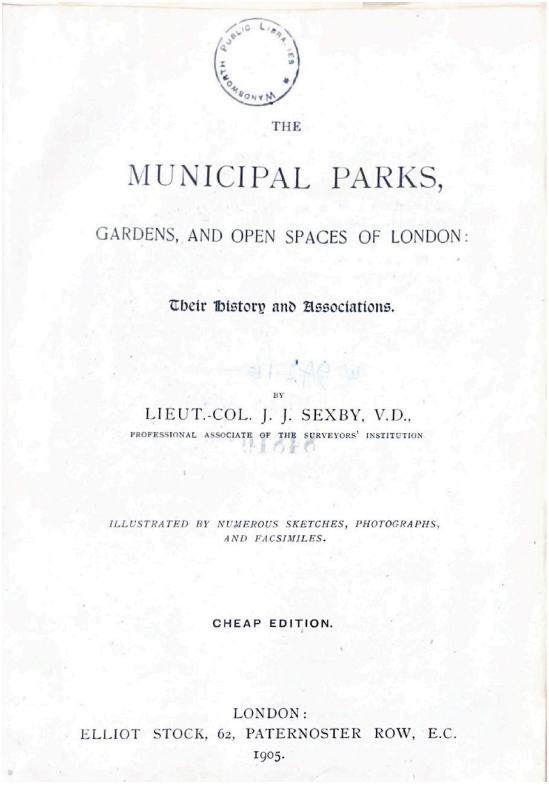
Investigation

Definition and History of Open Spaces

For the purposes of this project, the definition of an open space as described by the Open Spaces Society works well:

"There is no universal definition of open/green space, in respect of size, quality or description. However open space is defined in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as land laid out as a public garden, or used for the purposes of public recreation, or land which is a disused burial ground. Open space may be managed under public or local acts of parliament (such as parks and open spaces held by local authorities under the Open Spaces Act 1906), or under schemes of management (made by local authorities for common land and town/village greens)." (Open Spaces Society n.d.)

Given that the London Parkive's roots are in preservation of green spaces, I initially considered looking beyond parks and open spaces that the Government or local councils recognise. There are plenty of green spaces that are privately owned, not publicly accessible or are so small they aren't listed as an open space by councils or Government. However, given the retrospective nature of the Parkive, at this stage, it would be impossible to track down spaces that don't appear in official records so I have chosen, at this stage, to stick to exploring parks and open spaces that have been recognised by the government or councils.



THE

MUNICIPAL PARKS,

GARDENS, AND OPEN SPACES OF LONDON:

Their History and Associations.

BY

LIEUT.-COL. J. J. SEXBY, V.D.,

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATE OF THE SURVEYORS' INSTITUTION

ILLUSTRATED BY NUMEROUS SKETCHES, PHOTOGRAPHS, AND FACSIMILES.

CHEAP EDITION.

LONDON:
ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.
1905.

Photo of the front page of 'Municipal Parks, Gardens and Open Spaces of London: Their history and Associations' by J.J. Sexby, a book I found in Wandsworth archive which I have been using to compile data on open spaces opened before 1905.

Researching the history behind parks and open spaces has been helpful in establishing my project. For example, in 1855 the Metropolitan Board of Works (MBW) was set up to manage London's utilities. MBW was given the power to acquire land to create parks and the responsibility to maintain them. *(The National Archives n.d.)*

From this point onwards open spaces were opened to the public on a large scale. Several other acts were passed including the Metropolitan Open Spaces Act 1877 which gave MBW the power to acquire remaining common land to be preserved forever and the Disused Burial Grounds Act 1884 which prevents disused burial grounds from being developed on. This encouraged MBW and societies such as the Kyrle Society to convert disused burial grounds into public gardens. *(Fraser 2018)*

As most open spaces were opened to the public from the 1850s onwards it makes sense for the projects timeline to begin from around 1850. Any spaces opened before then can simply be tagged as "opened before 1850".

In the 1970s the Greater London Council (GLC) (successor of the London County Council (LCC) which in turn is the successor of the MBW) was disbanded and all its responsibilities were taken up by either parliament or local councils. *(Fraser 2018)* Most parks and open spaces became their respective councils' responsibilities. This has been useful when looking for historical documents. When looking for information on open spaces prior to the 1970s the information is usually consolidated across the whole of London whereas when looking for information on parks post 1970s one must visit each respective council to find out the information.

An example of a useful document is 'Open Spaces in Wandsworth', a policy paper published in 1972 that has a complete list of the open spaces in Wandsworth and a detailed history and analysis of the situation of open spaces in the area of that time.

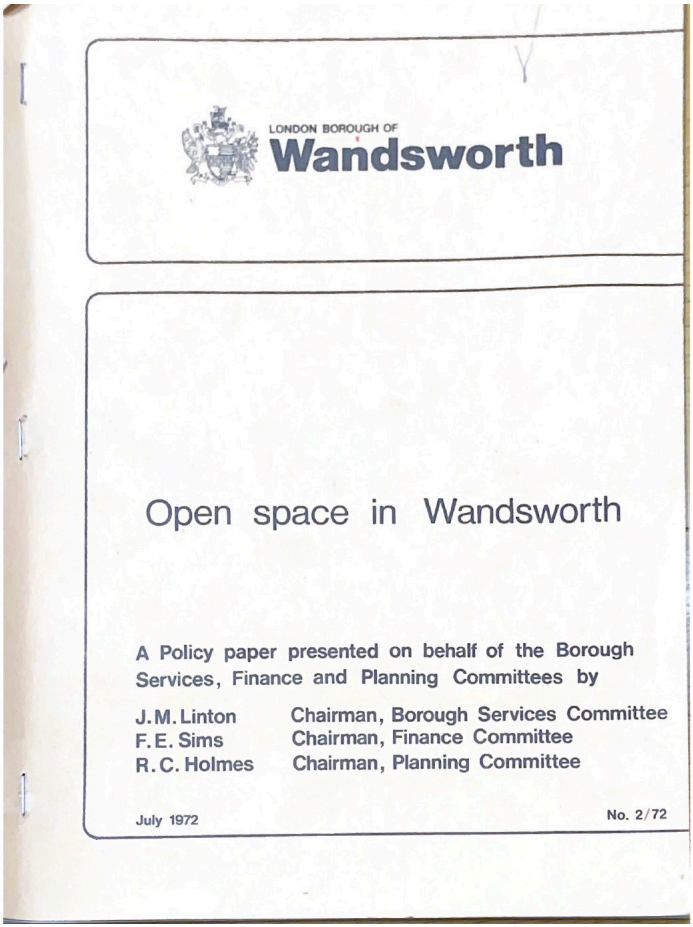


Photo of the front cover of 'Open space in Wandsworth' a policy paper written in 1972 which I found in Wandsworth Archive.

Utilising Archives

Archives have been a crucial resource for my investigation. So far I have visited two council archives (Southwark and Wandsworth) and the London Metropolitan Archives. Useful resources I have found include books on parks and open spaces, official council documents that contain lists or maps of parks, newspaper clippings and photographs. The lists of open spaces are especially useful for this project because they allow me to spot parks that don't exist anymore.

Using archives has made me appreciate their importance. Without these materials I would not be able to create the London Parkive. The process has also highlighted issues around accessibility and gatekeeping in archives. For example, the British Library would be a valuable resource but due to a cyber-attack their resources are currently unavailable. Another example, Lewisham and Lambeth's archives are both currently closed to the public which means I can't access their resources until they reopen (if they reopen before my project is due). These examples of inaccessibility are temporary and in the British Library's case unplanned. However, some archives, such as Greenwich's archive 'gatekeep' their information. When I reached out to them about visiting their archives, I was told that their archival material is not open to the public and I would have to pay one of their researchers to collect information for me (though I would get the first 30 minutes free). Gatekeeping information in this way feels exclusionary as many people probably can't afford to pay the fee. I have also found that sometimes I go into an archive not knowing exactly what I am looking for and by perusing the materials I find useful information. Preventing people from interacting with the material prevents that organic interaction.

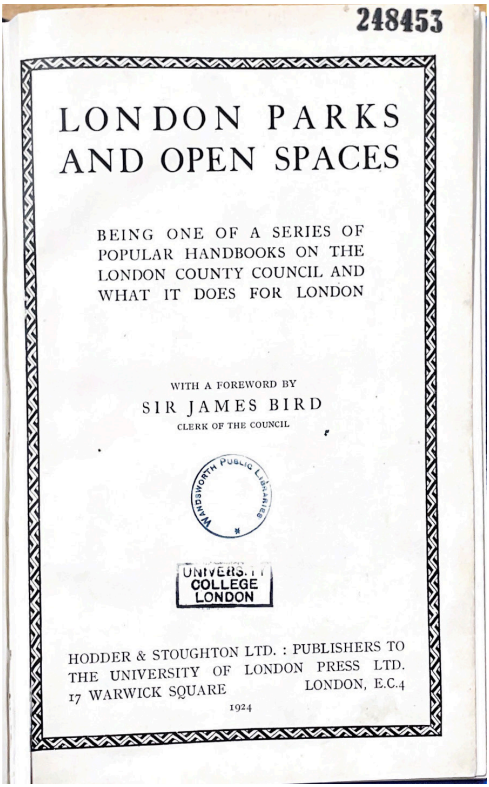


Photo of the front cover of 'London Parks and Open Spaces' by Sir James Bird, another book with an extensive list of parks in London dated 1924.

My interactions with archives has highlighted how valuable they are as a resource and how fortunate we are, in London, to have access to such a wealth of information but equally how frustrating it is when you can't access the information. This ties into the fact that I would like the Parkive to be open source and easily accessible with anyone who has an internet connection.

APPENDIX.

LIST OF ALL THE PLACES IN THE COUNTY OF LONDON AVAILABLE FOR PUBLIC RECREATION, TOGETHER WITH THOSE OUTSIDE THE COUNTY MAINTAINED BY THE LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL.

NAME OF PLACE.	ACREAGE.	BY WHOM MAINTAINED.
Albert Embankment Gardens	1½ acres	London County Council.
All Saints' Church Ground, Mile End	450 sq. yds.	The Vicar of All Saints.
All Saints' Church Ground, Poplar	4 acres	The Rector of All Saints.*
Avondale Park	4¼ ,,	Vestry of Kensington.
Baker's Row Recreation-ground	1⅛ ,,	Whitechapel District Board.
Barnsbury Square Garden	1 acre	Vestry of Islington.
Bartholomew Square	⅕ ,,	Vestry of St. Luke.
Battersea Park	198 acres	London County Council.
Beaumont Square, Stepney	1 acre	,, ,, ,,
Benjamin Street, Clerkenwell, Burial-ground (disused)	¼ ,,	Vestry of Clerkenwell and Holborn District Board of Works.
Bethnal Green Gardens	9 acres	London County Council.
Bishop's Park	14 ,,	Vestry of Fulham.
Blackfriars Bridge Garden	1/20 acre	City Corporation.
Blackheath	267 acres	London County Council.
Bostall Heath	71¼ ,,	,, ,, ,,
Bostall Woods	62¼ ,,	,, ,, ,,
Boundary Street Central Garden	½ acre	,, ,, ,,

* Only a portion of this Church ground is open to the public.

40

Photos of pages of 'Municipal Parks, Gardens and Open Spaces of London: Their history and Associations' by J.J. Sexby, a book I found in Wandsworth archive which I have been using to compile data on parks created up to 1905. You can see an example of the sorts of lists I am using to compile my datasets from.

NAME OF PLACE.	ACREAGE.	BY WHOM MAINTAINED.
Finsbury Park	115 acres	London County Council.
Fortune Green	2¼ ,,	Vestry of Hampstead.
Fulham Parish Churchyard	2 ,,	Vicar of Fulham.
Garratt Green	9¼ ,,	Lord of the Manor.
Goldsmith Square	¾ acre	Vestry of Shoreditch.*
Goose Green	6¼ acres	London County Council.
Green Park	54 ,,	H.M. Office of Works.
Greenwich Park	185 ,,	,, ,, ,,
Grosvenor Gardens (Lower)	¼ acre	Metropolitan Public Gardens Association.†
Hackney Downs	41¾ acres	London County Council.
Hackney Downs (Enclosure)	¼ acre	Hackney District Board.
Hackney Independent Chapel Ground	⅔ ,,	,, ,, ,,
Hackney Marsh	337 acres	London County Council.
Hackney (West) Churchyard	1⅓ ,,	Hackney District Board.
Hackney Town Hall Garden	½ acre	,, ,, ,,
Hackney Triangle Shrubbery, Mare Street	190 sq. yds.	,, ,, ,,
Hammersmith Recreation-ground, Church Lane	1½ acres	Vestry of Hammersmith.
Hampstead Heath	240 ,,	London County Council.
Haverstock Hill Playground	½ acre	Vestry of Hampstead.
Highbury Fields	27¾ acres	London County Council.
Highgate Road Open Spaces	3 ,,	Owner.
Hilly Fields, Brockley	45½ ,,	London County Council.
Holy Trinity Churchyard, Brompton	1 acre	The Vicar.
Holy Trinity Churchyard, Rotherhithe	⅜ ,,	London County Council.
Holy Trinity Garden, Bow	1¼ acres	,, ,, ,,
Horseferry Road Burial-ground (disused)	1 acre	Vestry of St. Margaret and St. John, Westminster.
Hyde Park	361 acres	H.M. Office of Works.
Ion Square	⅛ acre	Vestry of Bethnal Green.
Island Gardens, Poplar	3 acres	London County Council.

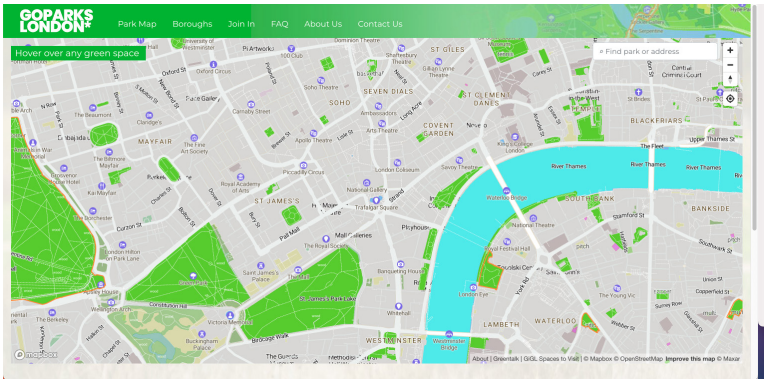
* Freehold of the London County Council.
† Open to the public for six weeks in the autumn.

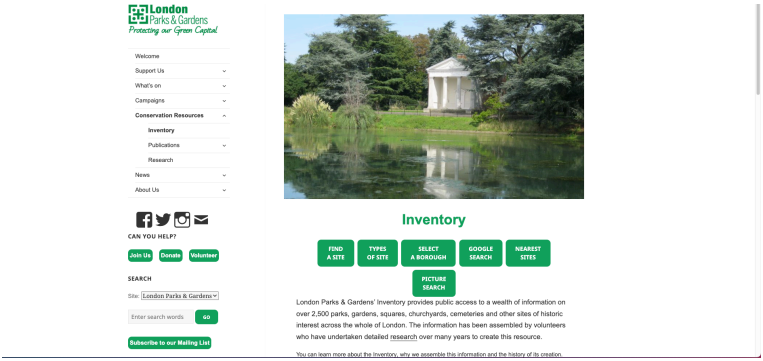
Existing Websites on Parks

There are existing websites that share information on parks and open spaces. GoParks.london showcases most of London's open spaces on a map and has information on them including useful links to Gigl which shows information on ecology, and London Garden Trust which has information on the history of parks. From these websites I can collect useful information and cross reference information collected from the archives.

It is important to note that while these websites share information on parks and open spaces, the Parkive will have its own unique USP. While GoParks has information on open spaces that exist today, and the London Garden Trust has extensive history on parks but no map interface, the Parkive's main purpose is to show the geographical evolution of the open spaces and should complement the information found on these other websites.

On the opposite page you can see screenshots of park websites (from top to bottom): goparks.london, londongardentrust.org , gigl.org.uk


GOPARKS LONDON
Park Map
Boroughs
Join In
FAQ
About Us
Contact Us
Hover over any green space
Find park or address

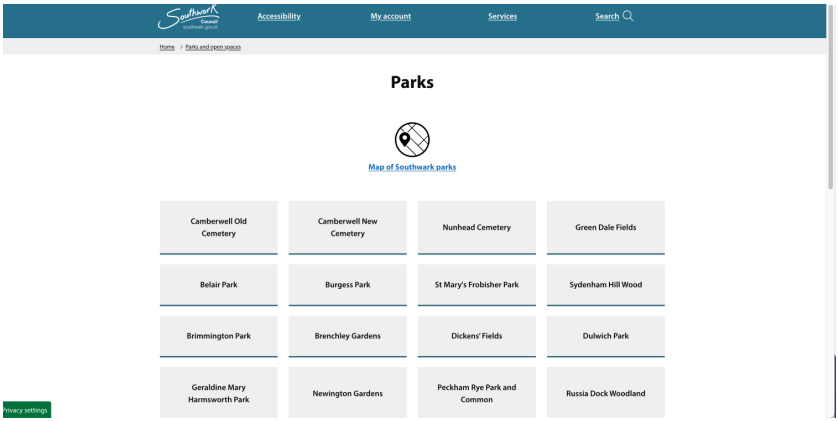

London Parks & Gardens
Protecting our Green Capital
Welcome
Support Us
What's on
Campaigns
Conservation Resources
Inventory
Publications
Research
News
About Us
CAN YOU HELP?
Join Us
Donate
Volunteer
SEARCH
Site: London Parks & Gardens
Enter search words
GO
Subscribe to our Mailing List
Inventory
FIND A SITE
TYPES OF SITE
SELECT A BOROUGH
GOOGLE SEARCH
NEAREST SITES
PICTURE SEARCH
London Parks & Gardens' Inventory provides public access to a wealth of information on over 2,500 parks, gardens, squares, churchyards, cemeteries and other sites of historic interest across the whole of London. The information has been assembled by volunteers who have undertaken detailed research over many years to create this resource.
You can learn more about the Inventory, why we assemble this information and the history of its creation.

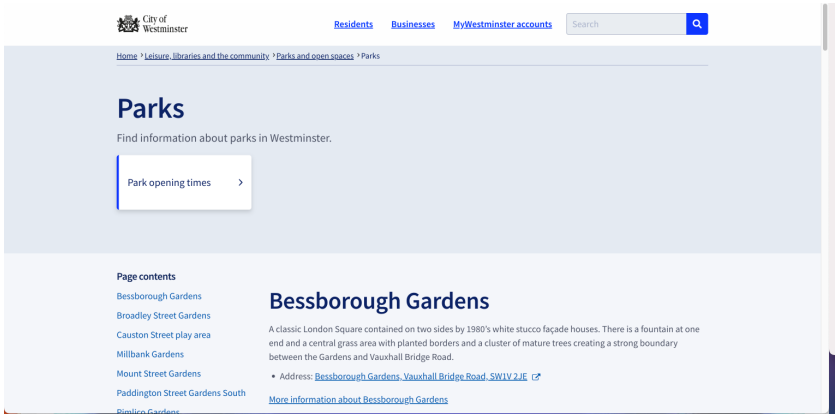
Request Report
Submit Records
Online Mapping
Newsletter
GiGL
Greenspace Information for Greater London CIC
the capital's environmental records centre
ABOUT GIGL
OUR DATA HOLDINGS
SERVICES
SUBMIT RECORDS
ACCESS OUR DATA
RECORDING & SURVEYING
CONTACT
Greenspace Information for Greater London CIC
GiGL mobilises, curates and shares data that underpin our knowledge of London's natural environment. We enable our stakeholders to make informed decisions in policy and practice.
About GiGL

Council Websites

Today, parks and open spaces in London are managed by their respective councils, so information regarding them can be found on council websites. Finding information on parks between the late 90s and now might be difficult as the council websites are updated on a regular basis so if any parks were created and destroyed during this time period they might not appear on the printed documents from the pre-internet age and won't be on the councils parks and open spaces pages of today.

To solve this problem the internet archive could be useful. I could look up a council website and view it at different points in time and view lists of parks this way.



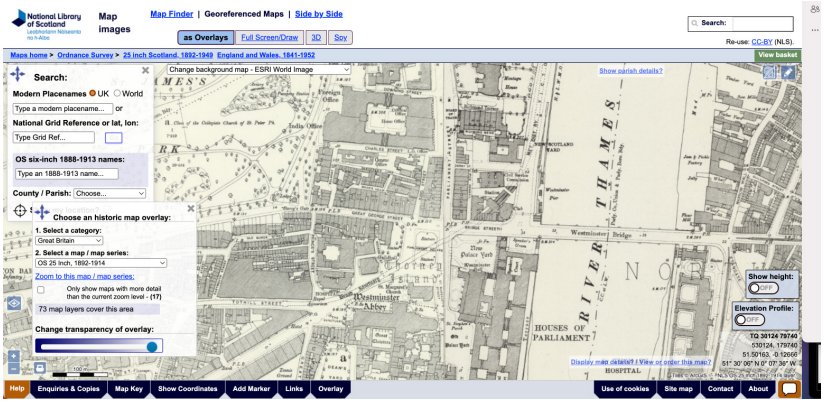


Screenshots of Southwark Council's Parks page (www.southwark.gov.uk/parks-and-open-spaces) and City of Westminster's Parks page (https://www.westminster.gov.uk/leisure-libraries-and-community/parks-and-open-spaces/parks)

Using Old Maps

The National Library of Scotland (NLOS) has a digital map with old Ordnance Survey maps as overlays. I am currently working through a list of parks found in the book 'The Municipal Parks, Gardens and Open Spaces in London' by J.J Sexby, published in 1905. One of the available map overlays is an OS map dated 1892-1914 which is 25 inches to a mile. This map is very detailed and I have used it to locate parks that were opened before this date. By comparing the open spaces on this map with Google maps, I have been able to determine if a space has been shrunk, expanded, or has remained unchanged. For the original London Parkive, I was not able to account for alterations to the shape or size of an open space. Making these comparisons means that Version 2 will show more accurate and in-depth datasets.

One issue is NLOS's digital map overlays only go up to the 1960s due to copyright so to draw comparisons of parks after that point, I have purchased some old atlases of London. I am hoping to either digitise these maps and create a similar overlay feature or use them to make physical comparisons. Digitising them on the Parkive could lead to copyright infringement so I will have to investigate this further.



Screenshot of the National Library of Scotland's Georeferenced Map page (maps.nls.uk/geo/explore)

Another issue with NLOS's map overlays is that, while the 1892-1914 OS map is very detailed, many of the later maps are not as detailed and might not be as useful for drawing comparisons. If this is the case, I will look for old atlases that are more detailed.

NLOS's digital map overlays have an API feature which means I should be able to integrate their map overlays into the Parkive's interface.

Piecing It All Together

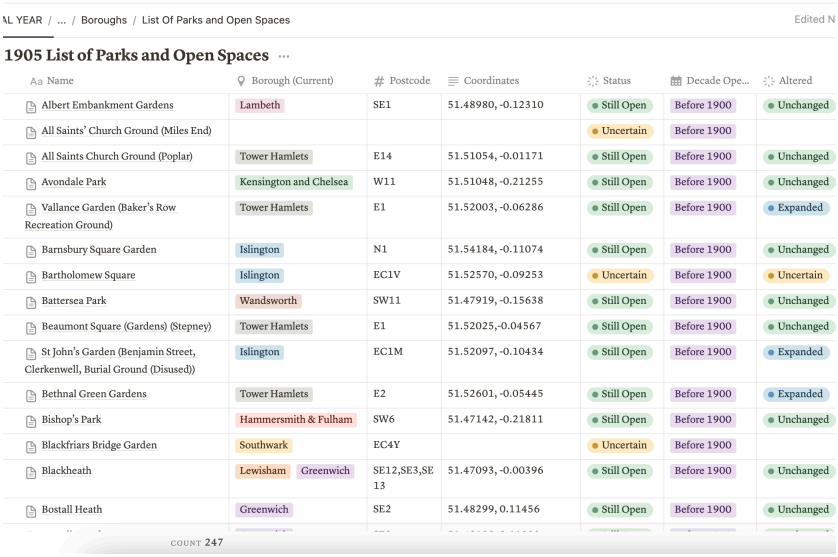
When compiling all of the data together I have been using a productivity and note taking app called Notion. I am currently producing a master list of open spaces that depicts the following information:

- **Which modern day borough the park resides in**
- **Postcode**
- **Its geographical coordinates**
- **If it is still open -**
  I have been working this out by googling the open space. If nothing comes up, I look for any indication that the space has been destroyed or if the parks name might have changed. Websites like The Metropolitan Archives, National Archives and London Remembers have been useful for determining whether an open space has been closed or not. Often, there is information that will help me to locate where the closed space used to be and from this information, I locate the open space on the National Library of Scotland's historic maps.
- **Whether the park's boundaries have been changed -**
  I do this by comparing google maps and National Library of Scotland's old maps.
- **Historic Information on the open space -**
  London Garden Trust's website has been useful for finding out the history of an open space. Occasionally I will utilise other websites if the London Garden Trust lacks information.

Once I have finished working through J.J. Sexby's 1905 list of parks, I will go through the other lists of parks. I will do this in chronological order and once I get to the 1970s, I will start collecting information one borough at a time. Once I have comprehensive information on one or two boroughs, I will use those completed boroughs to make up the first prototypes of the London Parkive.

There are a few issues that need to be considered. First of all, I have struggled to locate or find information on some of the listed open spaces. This would imply that those spaces no longer exist but what do I do if I can't locate where they used to be? I am hoping that further investigation into the spaces using local archives and old maps will eventually lead to them being located on a map but the Parkive may end up with a few gaps like this. To me, this justifies the creation of the Parkive even more to prevent future closed open spaces from falling through the cracks.

The second issue is that I have found that despite claiming to be a complete list of municipal parks and open spaces, J.J. Saxby's list of open spaces has some gaps. I am therefore assuming that all other lists may also have inconsistencies. When I start to narrow my search down to specific boroughs, I am thinking of dividing each borough up into squares and combing through each square to check for any parks that may not have been accounted for. At the end of the day the Parkive will never be 100% accurate when it comes to the retrospective datasets, but I will still try to compile as much accurate information as possible.



Screenshots from the list of parks I have created on Notion.

Albert Embankment Gardens

Borough (Current)	Lambeth
Postcode	SE1
Coordinates	51.48980, -0.12310
Decade Opened	Before 1900
Year Opened	Empty
Status	Still Open
Altered	Unchanged
Destroyed	Empty

Add a property

Add a comment...

Information:

The Albert Embankment forms part of the riverside opposite the Victoria Embankment, constructed in the 1860s to alleviate London's sewage problems. The Albert Embankment promenade opened in 1868, a paved walkway with stone balustrade, benches giving views over the river and lamp standards that were replicas of those on the opposite Embankment. There are three areas of public gardens south of Lambeth Bridge, to the north of which is a raised area of planting with grass and trees, including a Holm oak planted for the Millennium. A memorial for members of the Special Operations Executive was unveiled on 4 October 2009. The National Covid Memorial Wall is located at the north end of Albert Embankment near St Thomas's Hospital, a public mural of painted hearts instigated by Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice in March 2021 and now over 500m long.

https://londongardenstrust.org/conservation/inventory/site-record/?ID=LAM002

Design

When it comes to the design of the Parkive I will be taking some inspiration from the book "The Functional Art" by Alberto Cairo. In this book Cairo gives an introduction into information graphics and visualisation. Below are some of the concepts that he introduces and how I intend to apply them to my project:

"The first and main goal of any graphic and visualisation is to be a tool for your eyes and brain to perceive what lies beyond their natural reach." (Cairo 2013, p.10)

This ties in with what I mentioned earlier in the investigative design section. The research I am conducting could be presented in written form, without any visual aids, but by presenting my findings on a map it makes the data more accessible and easier to understand.

"In most cases there is not just one way of encoding a particular set of data properly. You may have more than one option, but your goal must be always to think first about what kinds of questions readers are more likely to want answered from your infographic." (Cairo 2013, p.31)

My project might not be classed as an infographic, but I recognise the importance in thinking about what a user is looking to answer when using the London Parkive. Some of the questions that I anticipate a user will want answered include:

- **Are there any parks and open spaces that have been destroyed in my neighbourhood? (Map)**
- **When were the parks and open spaces in my neighbourhood opened and have their shapes and sizes evolved over time? (Map)**

- **When was 'x' park/ open space opened and has it evolved over time? (Map)**
- **What time periods were most open spaces opened in? (Other)**
- **What time periods had the most open spaces closures? (Other)**
- **Which areas have gained the most open spaces over time? (Other)**
- **Which areas have lost the most open spaces over time? (Other)**
- **What is the cause for most park closures? (Other)**
- **What is the distribution of open spaces across London and how has this evolved over time? (By number of open spaces and by total area) (Other)**
- **Are there any parks that are under threat in my area? (Map)**

These are questions that I have anticipated some users might have. I intend to ask potential users to think of some questions they might want answered too.

Alongside the questions I have also added (Map) or (Other) on the end of each question. This is to signify questions that I think can be best answered by using a map visualisation (Map) and questions that I think other forms of visualisation such as a graph or chart could be better for (Other). For example, while a user could work out which time periods had the most open spaces openings and closures by looking at the map, it would be quicker for them to work this out if there was a bar chart where each bar represents a different time period.

Meanwhile, a question like “Are there any parks and open spaces that have been destroyed in my neighbourhood?” Is a more exploratory question in which having a map where you can look up different locations would be more useful.

At this stage of the project, many of these questions cannot be answered yet because I am still manually collecting datasets. It might be that I won’t have data on the whole of London by the deadline so my final project may not include charts and graphs of the whole of London. But it would be worth having some graphs and charts that look at specific boroughs within London.

“I find that in pencil I can just do a rough version, arrange the elements as i wish, and throw away whatever I feel is not related to the points I want to get across.... If you try to do the same thing like that in a computer, you will somehow feel committed to your first ideas.” **- Excerpt of John Grimwade’s responses to one of Cairo’s questions in an interview with him in the profile section of the book *(Cairo 2013, p.219)***

Before reading this book, I started thinking about what the website could look like on Figma. I found myself thinking a lot about the aesthetic of the website even though I am in the preliminary stages of the design process. Just as Grimwade said, I found myself feeling committed to the designs that I drew up on the computer. I find that, getting too committed to a design without exploring alternative options is a weakness of mine. From this point onwards I will spend more time in the ideating and sketching process so I don’t get too committed to any ideas too soon and spend more time thinking about the functionality of the website before designing the aesthetics. Having said that, it has been good to design the website digitally to familiarise myself with Figma as I am more accustomed to using Adobe XD.

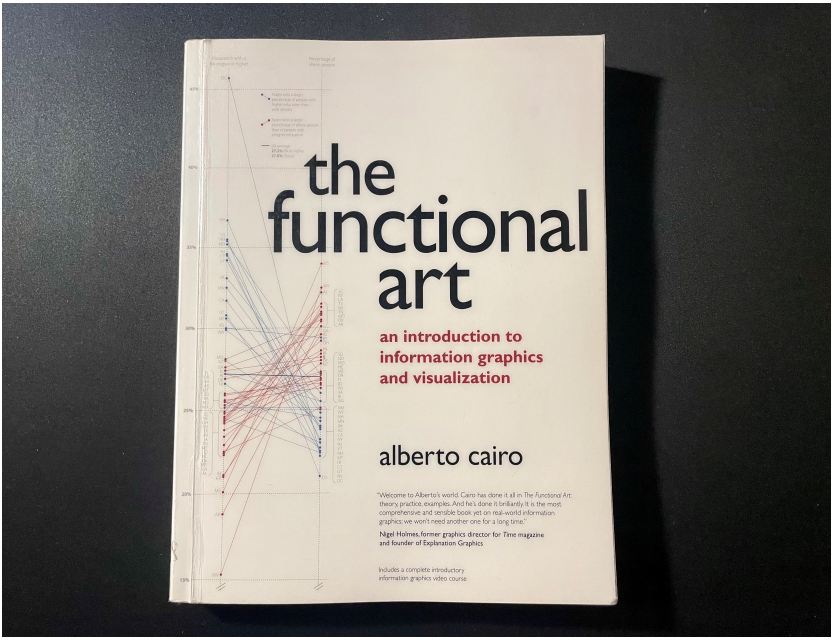


Photo of the copy of 'The Functional Art' by Alberto Cairo that I have been reading.

Designs

Here are some screenshots from Figma of some of the preliminary designs I have been drawing up.

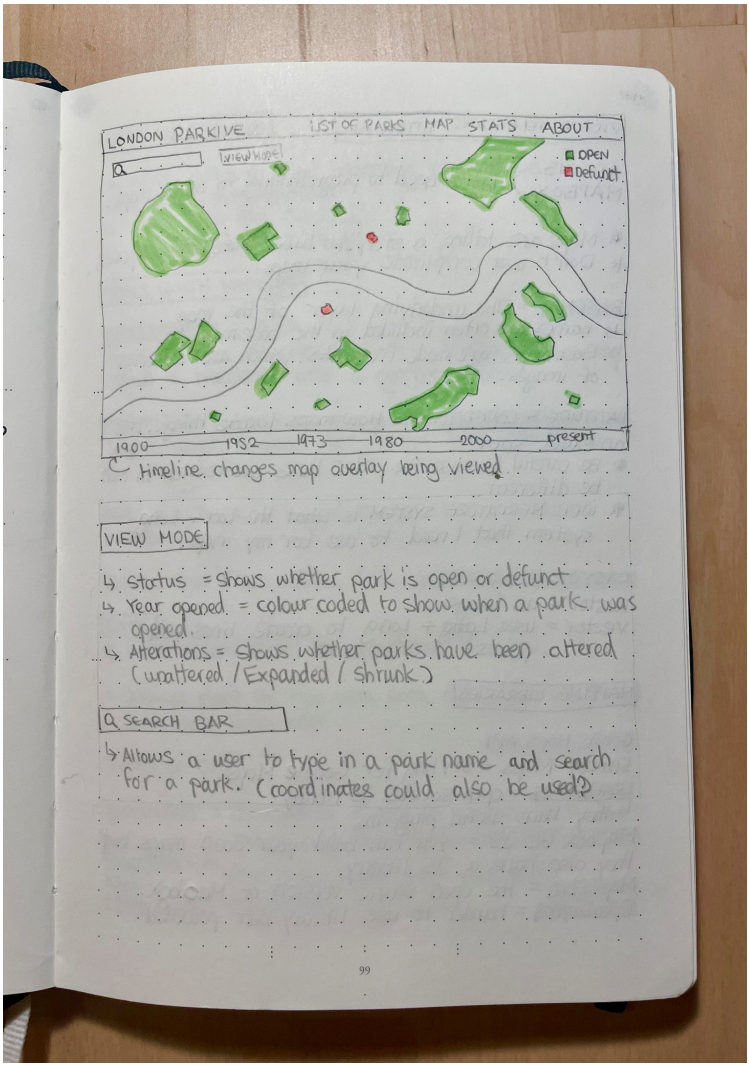
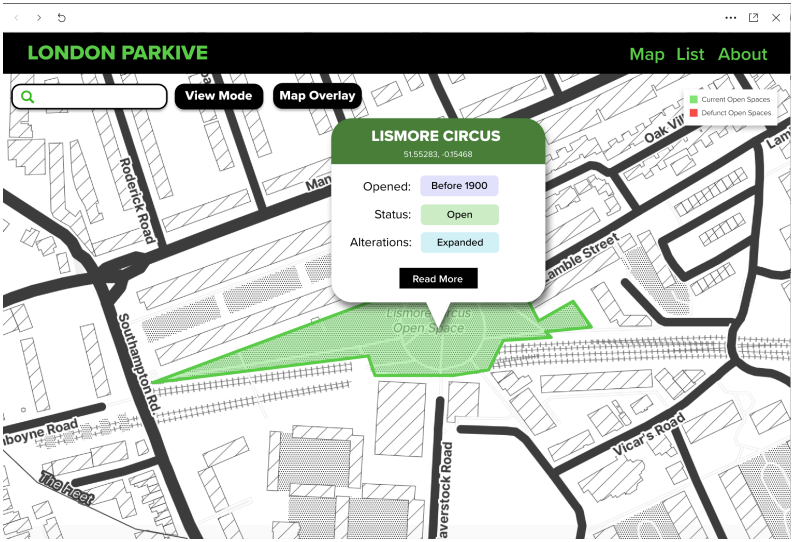
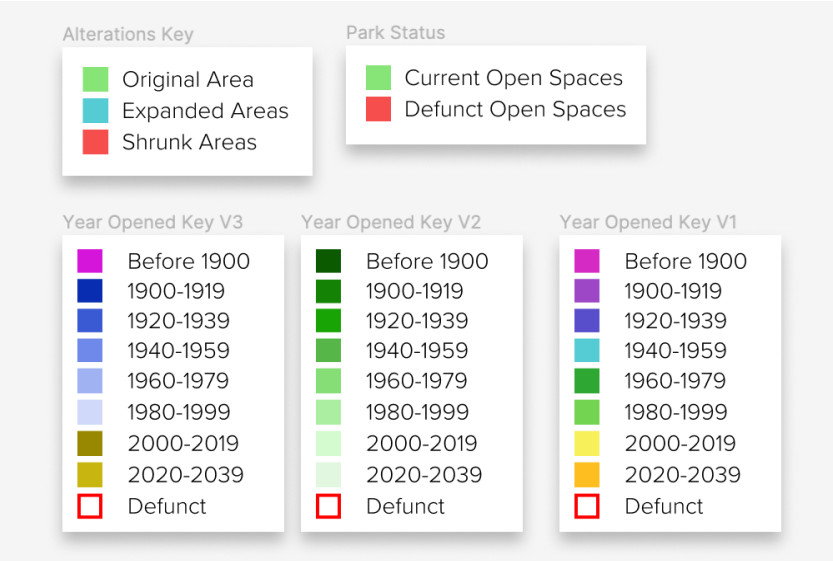


Photo of initial ideas for what the Parkive could look like.



Screenshot of initial user interface design of the Parkive on Figma.



Screenshot of different keys and their colour palettes on Figma.

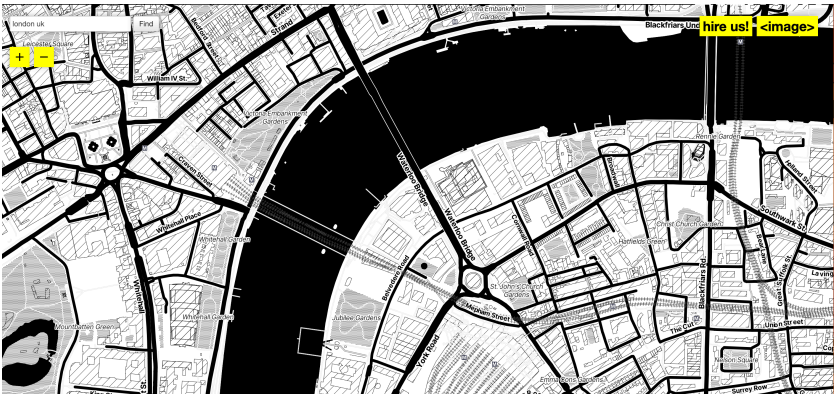
Building

When building the website, I will be using HTML (Hyper Text Mark up Language), CSS (Cascading Style Sheets) and JavaScript. I have some experience using these languages but I have never built a map-based interface before. To learn more about how to program GIS (Geographical Information System) I have been doing an Udemy Tutorial called “Intro to Web Development for GIS and Mapping” by Victor Temprano. In this tutorial I have first been recounting the basics of HTML, CSS and JavaScript, and then learning more GIS specific information such as JavaScript libraries that are useful for programming map-based interfaces. Below are some concepts that I have learned about since embarking on this project:

APIs

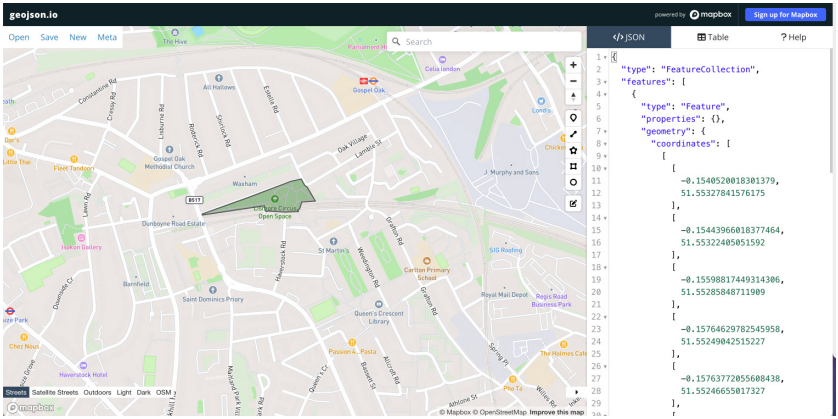
This project is my first time using APIs (Application Programming Interface), which is a way for different computer programs to communicate with each other over the web. So far, I have tested using the Ordnance Survey base map API, which allows you to use OS maps’ interface in your own application, and a similar API by a mapping company called Stamens. I also plan on using one of the NLOS’ APIs for using their overlays on my website.

Using APIs is great for the convenience. In terms of base-maps without an API I would have to source maps as MBTiles (which is a file format for storing large maps) and upload them onto my website. An advantage of using API maps is that they get regularly updated. However, for my project the fact that the API maps get updated could be a downside to using them.



Screenshot of Stamen's Toner Map taken from stamen.com. This is one of the API base maps I am considering using.

One of the aims of my project is to show the evolution of London's geography so having maps that depict what London looked like at a specific point in time is key. At present it doesn't matter if I use an API because the APIs map reflects what London looks like today in 2024. However, 10 years down the line the API map will have been updated and there will no longer be a record of what London looked like in 2024. Therefore I may opt for manually uploading MBTiles rather than using an API so that I can depict what London looked like in 2024 and if the project is continued into the future, I would upload more MBTile files in 5 - 10 year intervals.



Screenshot of GeoJason.io. On the map you can see a polygon I have drawn over one of the parks in London. On the right hand side you can see how the polygon has been translated into GeoJSONw format.

JavaScript Libraries

To assist me with building my website, I will be using several JavaScript libraries. *"JavaScript libraries include pre-written JavaScript code that simplifies the completion of common and complicated tasks." (O'Grady n.d.)* I still don't know the full extent of what JavaScript libraries I will be using, but one key library could be Leaflet which is used specifically for GIS. The library allows you to upload and manipulate MBTiles and APIs that you upload to a website as well as adding features such as showing map coordinates and shapes with ease. Utilising JavaScript libraries in my project will be key in saving time and effort because it will mean I can implement code from the library rather than manually writing all of the code which will take time and experience which I don't have.

GeoJSON and GeoJSON.io

"GeoJSON is a format for encoding a variety of geographic data structures" such as points, polygons, lines and other geographical data. (GeoJSON.org n.d.) Finding out about GeoJSON has been key to actualising my project. When I come to adding open spaces to my map, I will be utilising GeoJSON to create the polygons that represent the parks on the map as well as the geographical coordinates (points) that will represent where the park is.

GeoJSON.io is a website with a map-based interface which allows you to add points and draw polygons onto the map and translate the points and shapes you have created into GeoJSON. This will be a useful tool if I decide to manually draw up the shapes for the parks. Alternatively, Ordnance Survey offers a package of green spaces as GeoJSON files so I may use this.

For parks that no longer exist anymore, I will locate the open spaces on the National Library of Scotland's digitised historical maps. This interface shows the coordinates of wherever your mouse is hovering over so from this I should be able to record the coordinates of each corner of the park and translate this into GeoJSON to create polygons and points on my map.

CONCLUSION

Given the current socio-political climate and the decrease in protection and funding for parks and an ever-increasing demand from development, London parks and open spaces are in a precarious position. It therefore seems more important than ever to have something like the London Parkive which can educate people on the evolving London landscape as well as holding the government, councils and organizations accountable for the reduction in parks going forwards and hopefully help in the efforts of countering Shifting Baseline Syndrome.

Given the ease of sharing information over the internet today it is exciting to create what could eventually become a community archive and to make information on parks and open spaces that previously only existed in physical archives, or were scattered across the internet, more readily available in a format that is easy to use and understand.

In terms of the development of the project, I have a good idea of how the London Parkive will be actualised. I will continue compiling the datasets and start to design the functionality and the user interface of the website and start building the website.

Given the timeframe, I am a little nervous about how much of the project I will get done. Manually collecting datasets is a time-consuming task and the design of the website will be partly determined by the datasets I collect. My inexperience with coding will mean that building the website will take a lot of time. However, even if it isn't a finished product by the end of the project, I hope to have enough done to demonstrate how the Parkive could be a useful tool.

By the end of the project, I aim to have a working prototype of the London Parkive as a website, both for desktop and mobile with complete information (as complete as information like this can be) on at least one of London's boroughs (hopefully a couple more). I would also like to reach out to potential users (as listed in the 'Who' section) to find out if they would find the London Parkive to be a useful/ interesting tool and to receive feedback on the usability of the Parkive as well as functions that they would find useful to have on such a website.

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