

# Roots & Branches

Seeds for Action Case Study 2022–23

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## Interactive Garden Trail

Elizabeth Gaskell's House

# Elizabeth Gaskell's House

Elizabeth Gaskell's House [EGH] is the restored Grade II\* home of the Victorian Manchester writer. The house is open to the public three days a week and on other days for private tours, school groups, weddings, hires and events. We aim to bring the Gaskell home to life as a part of Manchester's community.





# The project: Interactive Garden Trail

Our project was to create and promote an **Interactive Garden Trail** using QR codes to provide fun facts and information on the plants, ways to reduce carbon emissions and wildlife in the garden at Elizabeth Gaskell's House.

Aimed at families during school holidays, we are able to adapt it in the future for different audiences and seasons. The trail was to be devised by the EGH under 25s volunteer group and included 'Welcome Family' training for all volunteers and a paper version of the trail.





# Impacts and Outcomes



## New permanent outdoor interpretation

We now have a **permanent garden trail / means of interpreting our outdoor space** that didn't exist before. The signage is small and minimal, so as not to detract from the planting, and is located at 10 points around the garden.

The web content linked via QR codes is completely new and the **research process** has been a way for all involved to **learn more about the space and wider climate issues**, both historically and in the present day.

We were able to make **links with specific plants in the garden and climate actions**. For example, ferns are one of the oldest types of plants and one of the hardest working in terms of reducing pollution in the atmosphere.



## Better understanding and new themes

We have a **better understanding and knowledge of the wildlife** in the garden and the **plants** we have, and why they are planted.

We have developed themes within the trail that link directly to climate actions.

- The **pergola** is linked to Elizabeth's travels in Italy – and we talk about ways to reduce carbon emissions by walking or travelling by **bike** on shorter journeys.
- On the site of the **old greenhouse**, we talk about the power of the **sun** and how the sun's energy can be harnessed as a **source of power**, that is better for the climate than fossil fuels.

# Impacts and Outcomes



## Better links between house and garden

The project has encouraged **better linkages between the interpretation of the house and garden.**

Volunteers and staff have all tried the garden trail and have commented that they now have a better understanding of the **garden historically and in the present day.** As a result, volunteers feel more confident in encouraging visitors to visit the garden as they know they will **find helpful environmental information.** Before it was very much hit and miss as to whether visitors would go into the garden. The advertising for the new trail has also put the **garden very much at the forefront of the visit** over the summer so straight away it is presented as part of the whole visitor experience at EGH.



## Garden trail printed on seed-paper

Prior to this project we hadn't considered **seed-paper as a viable material for visitor information** but as a consequence of this project we had the scope to look and to try seed-paper.

The paper version of the trail has been printed onto seed-paper (containing British wildflower seeds) and visitors are encouraged to **plant it at home** after doing the trail. It's also a **great talking point** between volunteers and visitors, and we got some extra samples of the paper to give to volunteers to try it themselves.

# Impacts and Outcomes



## Beryl bike hire station

Working on this project also made us consider other areas of the organisation in terms of climate actions. For example, we currently **ask visitors how they travel to EGH** and we identified that we could encourage more people to cycle to EGH if we had a **Beryl bike hire station** outside the house (the nearest is down the road at the Manchester Royal Infirmary). As a result, we have applied to have one installed and await consultation/planning approval.



## Participation for local community

**Local community visitors to the garden**, who will often come to just sit and eat their lunch and enjoy the garden, can now participate in the Interactive Garden Trail via their mobile phone and be **involved at a deeper level** in this activity.

Although the current content is aimed primarily at families, the content can easily be varied and supplemented in the future to appeal to different audiences.

# Challenges and Barriers



## Busy volunteers

The main challenge was **working around the other commitments** of the EGH under 25 volunteer group (paid jobs, exams etc.) to ensure they could meet deadlines for ideas and content for the trail.

Despite best intentions we went from having eight volunteers interested to only four doing the actual work, and we rarely had a meeting when everyone could attend (even having them on Zoom was tricky.)

We had to make sure **action notes** following and before meetings were very clear and gave those not able to attend the chance to respond and input.



As Chair of Trustees at Elizabeth Gaskell's House  
(and a keen participant in Carbon Literacy Training)  
I have been greatly encouraged by the increased interest  
in the garden and environmental topics shown by our volunteers  
and visitors to the house as a result of this project.

The Interactive Garden Trail has provided a focus for constructive  
discussions around climate change and the positive actions that  
each of us can take to reduce carbon emissions and encourage a  
wider understanding of the problems and solutions.

Frank Galvin, Chair of Trustees





# Next steps and future climate actions

If successful with the new site at EGH we'd like to **look at partnership opportunities with Beryl bikes** (offering users a discount) and look at promoting this to visitors. I personally would also be more inclined to cycle from the station than take the bus, as I'm sure other members of the staff team would be. Continuing with the bike theme would be great to explore other **opportunities to work with partners on cultural bike trails around the city.**

We have pledged as an organisation to try and use **more sustainable materials for temporary exhibition boards.** Our next temporary exhibition is planned for 2023 and we plan to use display boards that are easier to recycle and/or that production methods have lower carbon emissions.

The Gardening Team, this year, participated in **'No Mow May'** by not mowing the lawns during May – thus encouraging the growth of wildflowers and pollinating insects. Volunteers and visitors have noticed and commented upon a larger number of bees and butterflies visiting the garden plants. No Mow May will become a permanent feature of how the garden is managed in the future.



# Find out more



[Gaskell House Blog.post - Going Green with the Gaskells](#)



[Elizabeth Gaskell's House Sustainability Policy Statement](#)



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# Roots & Branches

## Seeds for Action – case studies



The **Seeds for Action Programme** is part of the Roots & Branches project. It aims to connect Carbon Literate Certified museum people across England to develop and build on their carbon reduction strategies and approaches to taking climate action.



By pooling our **collective expertise and resources**, we can save ourselves time and money, and tackle the climate emergency more effectively together. Feel free to **share this case study** with others.



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