



West London Tree Hub

INTERIM REPORT – JULY 2024

HESTON ACTION GROUP



Introduction

This Interim Report provides key stakeholders with information about the key achievements, opportunities, headwinds and future ambitions of the Heston Action Group (“HAG”) with the creation and running of the West London Tree Hub. If any more information is required, please get in touch, or better still come and visit the Tree Hub.

What is the West London Tree Hub?

The Tree Hub is located in Heston Community Garden, an open space for the community to connect with nature.

The Tree Hub is just one part of HAG’s overall strategy to support environmental awareness and education, in this case using trees as a medium to clean air, capture carbon, provide shade, accelerate biodiversity gain, address urban flooding and support wellbeing. The way that we do that is set out in this report.

Heston Community Garden has a dedicated space for the Tree Hub, which currently houses over 200 trees of various varieties. HAG volunteers who support the Community Garden regularly engage in activities to support the Tree Hub, welcoming new sapling and whip arrivals, watering and repotting them and planning for where they are going to end up, whether in the Garden itself, local parks or streets or residents’ front and back gardens. The activities to support the Tree Hub are not limited to the Community Garden.



The Tree Hub isn’t just a tree nursery – it’s a place to learn and get first-hand experience of the importance of trees for urban landscapes. It a place for inspiring communities to rewild their neighbourhoods and to provide access to residents and local community groups to practical information, tools and resources (including the trees) to do this. The Tree Hub also draws in people to the Community Garden to learn and engage in wider environmental issues, including biodiversity net gain, edibles, water management and clean air and to part of a growing community group.

West London, and the areas around Heathrow Airport suffer from a significant dearth of canopy cover and we hope that our continued work with the Tree Hub and its ongoing legacy will help counter that, supporting London’s Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Key achievements

We have had high levels of community engagement with the creation and running of the Tree Hub and its associated activities, including the creation of the Tree Hub itself, the Food Forest within Heston Community Garden, two Miyawaki forests and numerous community events.

We have engaged with local schools and have had over 300 children attend our tree workshops. We have forged links with a further three schools in anticipation of similar events this year and have started creating mini orchards in school grounds. Our engagement with children has been supported with regular attendance and support from our local Scouts, Cubs and Beavers.

We have run regular “Heston in the Loop” workshops in the garden, using volunteer support to “heel in” saplings”, care for the Tree Hub trees and tend to the Food Forest.

We have worked closely with Hounslow Highways to support depaving and tree planting in local streets, with almost 50 new trees planted, supported by our work to enlist tree champions. We have identified two areas for more extensive depaving and planting and will shortly be following up on this alongside the street tree planting plan for 2024/2025.



We have rolled out our “Make Space for Nature” front garden project to over 150 households, with a further 500 to be included in the next two months.

We have had local political support and been invited to present our tree hub work at a local area forum and to the Environment Committee of LB Hounslow. We have had strong advocacy and encouragement from both our local and national representatives.



We have engaged with local businesses who have attended the Tree Hub to support our activities and are match funding some of our work.

With the long-awaited agreement for the Tree Hub construction, our existing stock of native, non-native and fruit trees and our new water supply we are confident that the

programme of events and workshops we can run this year will be better than last and that we can deliver the project as we had intended to last year.

The Tree Hub is a valuable learning space for local schools and residents and other community groups as well as a tree nursery.

Headwinds

As you will be aware there has been significant delay to the project given a specific issue that arose with LB Hounslow in 2023. The reasons for that delay and the solution, which has only just been implemented, is set out in the letter from Wayne Stephenson, Director

of Environment & Climate dated 2 October 2023, sent to you again by email on 28 March 2024 from Gaye Galvin, Heads of Park.

The issue was whether the initial approval given for the project by LB Hounslow negated the requirement for separate planning permission. As at the date of the application for Grow Back Greener funding the infrastructure of the community garden had been created by the LB Hounslow, including fencing, two water butts and an accessible pathway. The request to create a learning space and eco-toilet facilities for Tree Hub activities was agreed upon at the time of our funding bid, but then subsequently met with some resistance and an indication that the entire community garden was outside of any planning rules. We were advised that we potentially faced a fine and enforcement action which was very troubling for HAG.



It took several months to resolve this issue. The position that was agreed was that as the Community Garden is located in local park, LB Hounslow would grant permission provided that they were able to directly organize and undertake this work. We had to agree to this arrangement and as a result a survey was carried out and LB Hounslow started the work in mid July 2024, almost a year later than planned. It is fair to say that this issue and the work towards a solution has expended a significant amount of volunteer time and energy and has strained relationships within the HAG Committee itself and with our key stakeholders at LB Hounslow.

Over the same period we were also affected by staff changes, such that our normal escalation points had changed, which in turn delayed resolution.

We have mitigated this issue as best as we can by limiting school activity to short events with only local schools and on good weather days, using our polytunnel as an alternative venue where necessary.

We also continue to face challenges over agreed areas for depaving, after our key stakeholder at Hounslow Highways, the contractor for LB Hounslow moved on. We are still discussing which sites would be suitable for depaving, how large the areas will be and what will be planted there. Pending resolution on these issues we have built and placed flower troughs on the streets of Heston to flag our intention to green the grey.

The headwinds are very similar to those faced by many grassroots movements staffed by volunteers that positive engagement and continuity with the local authority is an important as that with the communities that are being served. They also highlight how many local authorities adopt a very conservative approach to community activism, often using an over defensive interpretation of the law and planning rules to justify the status quo.

Advocacy

We have presented our plans regarding the West London Tree Hub to our local Council Forum including our local councillors and the community, the LB Hounslow's Flood and Biodiversity Resilience Panel and to the local community via meetings at the Community Garden, the Tree Hub Festival and at our recent AGM. Our Member of Parliament has also attended sessions at the Tree Hub.

We have held some higher profile events and activities around the Tree Hub including the Spring 2024 Festival in the Community Garden, which was very well attended. We have proactively communicated the work of the Tree Hub to local schools and other Community Groups and the local authority.

We have worked with a local charity called Greentalk to map some of the new trees that are being planted and to engage the local communities.



- https://hounslow.greentalk.io/story/west-london-tree-hub-is-now-mapped?utm_source=btn&utm_campaign=shr
- https://hounslow.greentalk.io/story/tree-festival-day-at-heston-community-garden?utm_source=btn&utm_campaign=shr
- https://hounslow.greentalk.io/collection/hags-hounslow-highways-trees-2022-2023?utm_source=btn&utm_campaign=shr

We have a dedicated page on our website for the Project and have also shared our West London Tree Hub events widely on Social Media and also communicated that the Project is supported by the London Mayor.

We have also used the Tree Hub to forge connections with local schools and other community groups and to reinforce our relationship with LB Hounslow's street tree contractor (Hounslow Highways).





We hope that in the future the Tree Hub will be seen as a reliable place to home and supply trees. We enter 2024 with a programme of events and activities enhanced by the construction of a covered learning/activity space and a new mains water supply to support our

existing rainwater tanks. We continue to organize regular litter picks in the area to remove plastic pollution and support local nature.

We have about 20 volunteers to the Community Garden each week, alongside additional attendees to growing classes we facilitate every fortnight. All have interacted with the tree nursery at some point with planting, watering, mulching, labelling, cutting back weeds and creating and running the children's' workshops.



We have also prepared a short video to capture the aspirations and achievements of the Tree Hub.

Collaboration with other groups

As a starting point, we sourced over 160 whips through TCV's "I Dig Trees" programme and via the Woodland Trust. This was the starting point for the Tree Hub. We also collaborated with LB Hounslow to source fruit trees to supplement our stocks, including the recently grafted Hounslow Wonder. Through further engagement with these groups, alongside collaboration with the National Trust at Osterley Park, our own purchases and contributions from our volunteer base we intend to keep a diverse stock of trees available at the Tree Hub.





We are well connected with other groups, including Cultivate London & Groundwork who have run workshops at our Community Garden including events connected to the Tree Hub. We work closely with C-Change West London, Heston West Big Local, Cranford Action Group, Crane Valley Partnership, Lets Go Outside & Learn and Friends of River Crane.

We are supporting new groups with the creation of community gardens at Harlech Gardens and Western Road Urban Garden in Southall and have attended a multi-group event to plant a new Orchard (Henley's Orchard). All these groups and

others have free access to the tree stock at the Tree Hub for their own events.

At the Spring Festival in March 2024 at the Community Garden we had several other groups speak about the importance of trees, including a representative from Greentalk, who map street and park trees and Mind Food who focus on tackling stress, depression or anxiety through nature.



One of the supporters of the Project is London National Park City, a grassroots movement to make London greener, healthier and wilder. We have promoted events on their platform and involved some of their Ranger Community. We will shortly produce a blog for their website to highlight the key elements and achievements of the project.

We have collaborated with the Sharifa Ibrahim Foundation to plant up the mini forests

We have an ongoing partnership with Heston in the Loop, a London Borough of Hounslow programme to

encourage residents to reduce waste. In this capacity some of the Heston in the Loop activities in the Community Garden focused on maintaining and understanding the Food Forest.



Community engagement



The Tree Hub is based at Heston Community Garden, a space accessible to the whole community via regular events. The arrival of our first batch of trees, donated by the Conservation Volunteers (TCV), was met with a school programme involving 152 children from two Primary Schools attending five separate events to transplant the saplings and whips to pots, with labels and to assist with the heeling of saplings within the hub. This activity was supported and continued with our regular community garden volunteers.



We continue our engagement with local schools by offering further events and also mini orchard projects within school grounds. We also have an active programme involving the local Scouts and have also involved other community groups and local businesses to support the Tree Hub.

The tree nursery has become an integral part of the garden and is used to receive & care for any new/surplus stock that we receive and from which trees can be distributed for HAG activities or to other groups or to local residents/volunteers.

Outside of the specific events for schools we have organized events to use the tree hub to create mini forests in local parkland, which have been very well attended. We have also given volunteers to opportunity to plant and care for trees within the



food forest within Heston

Community Garden and

offered tree hub stock to other local community groups to run their own events/activities.



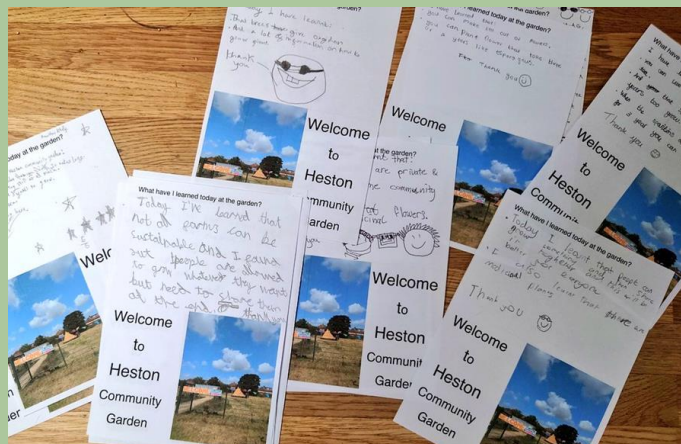
We have held "street tree" events to engage locals with depaving and creating space for nature in their own front gardens and to recruit tree champions. We have two further events planned in coming months.

The Tree Hub has also been very much the focus of the Spring and Summer 2024 festivals and at the centre of our efforts to engage the local community with our ambitions to have more street and park trees and to encourage dialogue and debate about

canopy cover across Hounslow.

We meet in the Community Garden every week on Saturday and Sunday and each time and this has included Tree Hub activities, including transplanting to pots/ground, watering, weed control and planting. In addition, in 2024 we have held the "Heston in the Loop" Gardening Club every two weeks and used some of this time to focus on the tree hub, tree care and identification.

There were 5 school visits in 2023 and a further 3 in 2024 (to date) and one corporate event.



Street Tree planting

We had agreed as part of this project for two streets to be repopulated with trees, Springwell Avenue and Summerhouse Avenue. Both streets had previously had trees, but these had been removed over the years and both had very little canopy cover.



Both streets are main arteries to local primary schools, including Springwell School, Edison School and Berkeley Primary. They were selected on the basis that increased canopy cover would significantly improve journeys for those who walk or cycle to work and encourage and support more sustainable travel habits.

Both streets have also faced a significant loss of front gardens, created by excessive paving and the creation of illegal crossovers. The failure to tackle illegal driveways and crossovers and in some cases the endorsement of such behaviour through dropping curves and the loss of parking bays has presented particular challenges in identifying suitable planting sites for depaving and street trees.

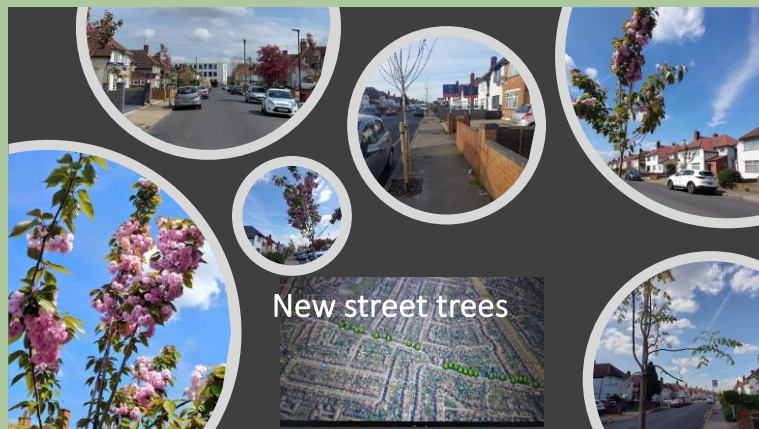


Our HAG volunteers carried out preliminary walkabouts on these streets to identify and agree suitable planting sites.

Since planting we have also faced challenges in relation to the vandalism of trees and damage caused by irresponsible parking. Our volunteers have worked hard to speak to local residents and protect trees that are at risk of damage.



One of the key volunteer activities is to water new street trees. We have identified street tree champions who will take responsibility for watering trees and encourage their neighbours to do the same. We have offered water butts to these volunteers and currently have six requests, which we intend to fulfill.



In total 48 additional street trees have now been planted on Summerhouse Avenue & Springwell Road, by de-paving and creating new tree pits, with a further 10 expected in early 2024. We are also mapping all newly planted street trees on GreenTalk and via that platform individual tree champions can be signed up.



We are identifying future sites/streets for tree planting in 2024 and beyond. We are working closely with LB Hounslow to depave two prominent sites for planting pocket gardens and hope to have this progressed by Summer 2024.

The Food Forest

We are planting up a "food" forest and orchard within the Community Garden to maximize the food production (fruits, nuts, berries and other edible perennials) in "mini woodland" settings.

In 2022 Heston Action Group focused mainly in planting most trees and bushes with the herbaceous plants over the course of next few years which starting in Spring 23. We followed the guidelines of food forestry, and each tree will form the central part of a



Permaculture fruit tree guild by adding plants around the tree what would fulfil multiple purposes – nitrogen fixers, mineral accumulators, pollinator attractors and of course edible plants, roots, fruits and will be open to requests by the users of the community garden in years to come.

The West London Tree Hub enables us to buy fruit trees and other forest gardening trees in order to help maintain resilience and biodiversity. It will also help explain to schools, residents and visitors, as well as other newer local community groups the principles behind forest gardening and permanent edible gardening and the permaculture principles by which Heston Action Group is functioning.

As we want to use the forest garden to educate about biodiversity, ecology, food security and climate change we want to showcase how densely planted plants make for a better improved soil, help with pest control and feed the animals including humans. Following the principles of Permaculture where plants need to benefit different systems, forest gardening teaches the community about practical growing, foraging, natural nutrition, soil ecology, food resilience and interconnectivity. Making a choice of frost resistant and

drought resistant plants would enable us to try understand how climatic eventualities affect the natural world and how to adapt to a new climate.

As the community garden is surrounded by residential gardens our choice of tall trees is restricted to small fruiting ones no larger than 6 metres to prevent shading them. The community garden is a long term project therefore the Forest Garden is an ideal setting for it, bearing in mind that there is also a designated area for conventional vegetable kitchen garden and ornamental gardening.

The Mini Forests



We have planted trees in Sutton Playing Fields in several mini forests in collaboration with other community groups, schools and local volunteers. These trees, originally donated by the Woodland Trust, are planted using the Miyawaki method to accelerate growth. One of the mini forests was planted as part of the Queen's Canopy Project.

In dryer periods our volunteers are assigned to a watering rota from the Community Garden (now assisted by water mains installation). They will water trees within HCG and the local miniforests.



We have been advised that one site (Rectory Farm) is no longer available for planting.



These mini forests are progressing very well and introducing new ecosystems for local nature. They are also transformative in that they show how quickly nature can recover if given the chance.

Depaving

We are still in advanced discussions with LB Hounslow to depave two areas of pavement in Heston village and to support with the proposed SUDS work in Heston (Shelly Crescent & Brabazon Road). These are broadly in the same neighbourhood where the original depaving was planned. We have paused depaving ambitions on the TFL network given challenges with getting permissions.

We are optimistic that these sites will be agreed, but in the meantime we have created planting troughs from recycled wood and placed them in sites that we are aiming to depave.



Front gardens

Our front garden activity is called "Make space for nature" encouraging residents to retain/enhance greenspace in their gardens with different ideas, We have visited residents door to door on streets where new trees have been planted and offer advice, along with a flyer that links to further information on why front gardens should be protected and how to balance parking needs with nature. We focus on the streets that have recently planted new street trees and have completed one street with two further planned in coming months.

Make space for nature on Summerhouse Avenue by:

De-paving, i.e. creating a small space in your front garden to plant an ornamental tree, a hedge, low maintenance shrubs, or some potted plants.
Heston Action Group volunteers can assist in design and implementation.

Watering your nearest street tree regularly.
Bring back birdsong and improve your sense of wellbeing.

Allowing Heston Action Group to install a free water butt on your drive.
Capture rainwater reducing surface water flooding, save on your water bill and help water trees!

Contact www.hestonactiongroup.co.uk or e-mail hestonactiongroup@gmail.com to proceed with these initiatives.

We aim to support residents to better understand the role and importance of nature in our urban landscape and to provide tools & knowledge to support and access to free trees.

Schools & youth learning

The school workshops have centred around the importance of trees for shade, clean air, carbon capture, biodiversity and support for wildlife, water management and water table issues and wellbeing, along with species identification with hands on experience of repotting, planting, watering and mulching our tree stocks.

The learning hub is a place to connect people to nature. We have used our open hub space, which houses our whips and saplings and our existing polytunnel to run all of our workshop whilst we



await the covered area that has been agreed with LBH. We expect this will be completed in 8 weeks and from that site we are planning to run regular workshops in 2024 and beyond, sheltered from rain and sun alike.

The Tree Hub presents a unique opportunity for local children and schools to get involved in a local project and to join forces with other schools and groups to create canopy cover and make space for nature in their parks, school



grounds, streets and gardens. It offers an invaluable local resource to local schools year-round.

The focus on rainwater harvesting attracts a huge amount of interest from school children who discover an easy and practical way of supporting local trees. The pupils will be encouraged to visit over the summer to continue watering "their" saplings over dryer months.

Year 3 Group 20 minute activities: summer

A	1	2	3
B	3	1	2
C	2	3	1

A = Decorate your crown
 B = Re-pot a sapling, label it and ID other trees
 C = Mini-beast hunt



We use the Tree Hub events to support other nature-based activities, which vary depending on the age of students.

We also take the Tree Hub to schools via our outreach programme to support local teachers. This has involved planting fruit trees in school grounds with education about the importance of trees and support with tree care and involving the schools and children in orchard design and management.

We have also engaged older children via the local Scout Groups and intend to extend activities to local secondary schools for 2024/2025.



Governance

The HAG Committee meets on a regular basis. The plan for the implementation was produced and approved at a meeting in early 2023.

At the outset we also held stakeholder review meetings, which included representatives from Kew, Cultivate London, London Borough of Hounslow, Hounslow Highways. other local community groups and volunteers. These meetings were eventually replaced with a standing item at our Committee meetings (every two months) as we were stalled by the decision of LB Hounslow to ask for planning permission (which is now resolved).

From a project governance perspective we set up a steering committee that has met twice and includes the local Council, Hounslow Highways and other community organisations and groups. We have sent updates to this Committee which have also been copied to you. We still need to appoint a project leader/manager but we have struggled to find someone to do this, so we have split tasks amongst our volunteers and existing committee members. We have however worked with other community groups such as the Salopian Gardens to source teaching materials for schools.

We continue to include West London Tree Hub as a separate item at our Committee meetings and we have a separate sub-committee to focus on Tree Hub activities and to account for specific expenditure on Tree Hub activity.

We agreed that two members of the Committee would develop and lead the schools programme, with others focused on events and depaving work. The WLTH delivery group is now made up of 7 members, including 5 committee members and 2 volunteers.

The Future

The delay in getting started with the Project has been frustrating but our intention has always been for the project to leave a legacy that will continue well beyond the end of the current cycle of funding. This is illustrated by the following:

- We intend to continue and expand our primary school programme offering regular workshops and events for different age groups, involving opportunities for local planting and creation of mini orchards in local school grounds. The improved facilities with the sheltered learning hub and the eco-toilet will enable these activities and we intend to seek funding via LB Hounslow's Thriving Community fund so that we can organize and facilitate these school sessions. In the medium to long term we look to work with LB Hounslow and to run their Green Skills boot camp programme for older secondary school children (including those who are undertaking their Duke of Edinburgh programme) and the Tree Hub will be central to that.



- We will continue to arrange a series of regular events for our volunteers to engage with the subject of local canopy cover including activities within the Tree Hub and local parks, supporting the planting of street trees and organized walks and talks to cover basic topics and deep dive into more detail on issues such as pruning orchard trees, mycorrhizal network fungus, Miyawaki planting methods, trees and art, biodiversity etc. We will work with the London National Park City Rangers to organize these events.



- We will continue to collaborate with LB Hounslow to identify and support with de-paving & use the Tree Hub stock for the introduction of new street and park trees and the signing up and continued support of new tree champions, using the Tree Hub as a base of operations. This will include the continued planting and enhancement of mini forests in local parks and greenspaces, with monitoring of progress and impact on local biodiversity.

• Our partnership with local community groups and Community Gardens to support events and activities and supply saplings and whips will continue. We are collaborating with three community gardens at present and look forward to supporting tree planting projects in Winter 2024 with Tree Hub stock. Any new donations from the Woodland Trust, TCV London and Osterley Park will be homed at the Tree Hub.

- We are aiming on organising future corporate planting events to encourage local businesses to create and sponsor mini forests and street trees around their offices, and to invest in the maintenance and care of new trees by supporting tree champions and local groups.
- The promotion of the West London Tree Hub and its Food Forest as a focal point for the betterment of local canopy cover, tree education and local engagement on the importance and impact of trees within the urban environment.
- We intend to do some work to extend the Tree Hub itself with a broader base and a detachable shade constructed to allow us to shelter the trees from the height of the summer sun and maintain moisture in the ground. We now have a water connection to the Community Garden but continue to use harvested rainwater from adjacent roofs to water the trees in the Tree Hub and Food Forest, the irrigation system being funded by this project.
- We have proposed new water butts in our local park to water recently planted mini forests and the same in local schools. We now have six residents and two businesses interested in the installation of water butts to water local street trees. We are campaigning for all new developments to have water butts installed as a matter of course.



APPENDIX 1

Food Forest

Fruit Trees

Apple trees x 2 (*Malus spp*) MM106 (4m height by 3m width)
Fig tree (*Ficus carica*), 4m (H) by 3m (W) and
Plum tree (*Prunus domestica*) Marjorie's seedling Wavit 3.5 m and 3m.
Apricot x 2 (*Prunus americana*) Rootstock Goldcot and Aprisalis 4m by 4m
Quince (*Cydonia oblonga*) 4m by 4m
Cherrie Stella 4m x 4m
Italian Alder (*Alnus cordata*) 25 m (H) and 6m (W) as a nitrogen fixer+
Bladdernut (*Staphylea pinnata*) 5 mx 5m
Ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*) or Maidenhead tree (18m by 5m for its scent and medicinal value
Autumn Olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*) Deciduous Tall 5m (H) by 5m (W)
Ebbing's Silverberry (*Elaeagnus ebbingei*) Evergreen tall tree 4m (H) by 4m (W)
Seabuckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides*) 6m x 6m
Pomegranate (*Punica granatum*)
Toona (*Toona sinensis*)

Fruiting Shrubs

Siberian Pea tree (*Caragana arborescens* as a leguminoase it would help enriching the soil.
Deciduous 2.5m by 2m
Blackcurrant (*Ribes nigrum*) 1.8m
Whitecurrant (*Ribes sativa*)
Redcurrant (*Ribes rubrum*) 1.2m
Gooseberry hybrid like varieties (*Rubus uva-crispa*) Hinnomaki 1.2m
Raspberry (*Rubus idaeus*)
Loganberry (*Rubus loganobaccus*) 2m by 2m
Saskatoon (*Amelanchier alnifolia*) 4m by 3m
Gogi berries (*Lycium barbarum*) 2.5m by 4m
Shallom (*Gaultheria Shallon*) 1.2m by 1m
Chilean Guava (*Ugni molinae*) 2m by 1m
Mahonia or oregon grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*) 2m by 1.5 m
Szechuan pepper x 2 (*Zanthoxylum simulants* and *Z. piperitum*)

<u>Climbers</u>	<u>Ground cover</u>
Grapevine	Bird's foot Trefoil
True Kiwi	Wild garlic
Passiflora	Garlic Mustard
Peas	Sweet violet)
Mashua	Fodder radish
Herbaceous perennials	Sweet Woodruff
Asparagus	Wild strawberry
Babbington Leak	
Red Valerian	
Wild Cabbage	
Good King Henry	
Welsh onion	
Jerusalem Artichoke	