

Bees, berries and beans

A self guided walk in the London Borough of Hackney



Discover the urban spaces people are using to grow food
See vegetables, fruit and herbs outside houses and in communal areas
Explore the potential for increasing urban food production
Find out how we can create a more sustainable way of living in cities

www.discoveringbritain.org

*the stories of our landscapes
discovered through walks*







Contents

Introduction	4
Route overview	5
Practical information	6
Detailed route maps	8
Commentary	10
Credits	33
Further information	34

© The Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers, London, 2012

Discovering Britain is a project of the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

The digital and print maps used for Discovering Britain are licensed to the RGS-IBG from Ordnance Survey

Bees, berries and beans

An edible walk through the London Borough of Hackney

Introduction

Picture a city. Are you thinking of skyscrapers, office blocks, housing estates, shopping malls and superstores? Or are you thinking of flower gardens, allotments, orchards, vineyards and bee hives? This walk explores a rather unexpected aspect of city life – growing food in urban spaces.

By meandering through the residential areas of the London Borough of Hackney, you will discover a surprising amount of vegetables, fruit and herbs being grown in marginal spaces. You'll also find out about some of the people who have taken the initiative to transform unused land where they live.

Looking at other urban spaces – grass embankments, car parks, rooftops and derelict sites – you will be able to think about the potential for increasing food production and creating a more sustainable way of living in cities. This walk is best in the late spring, summer and early autumn.

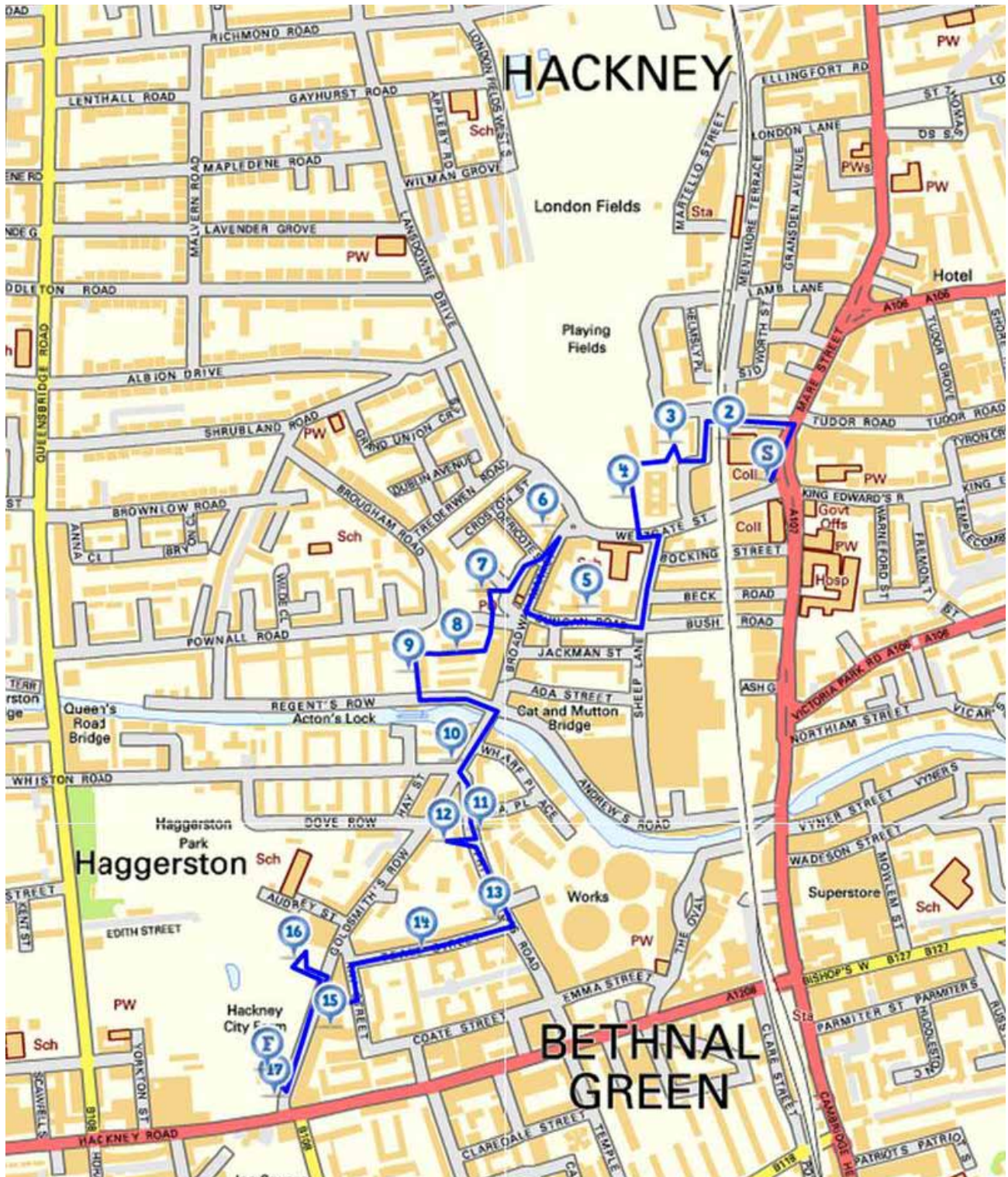


Warburton and Darcy Community Garden
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



Indian bean tree, London Fields
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Route overview

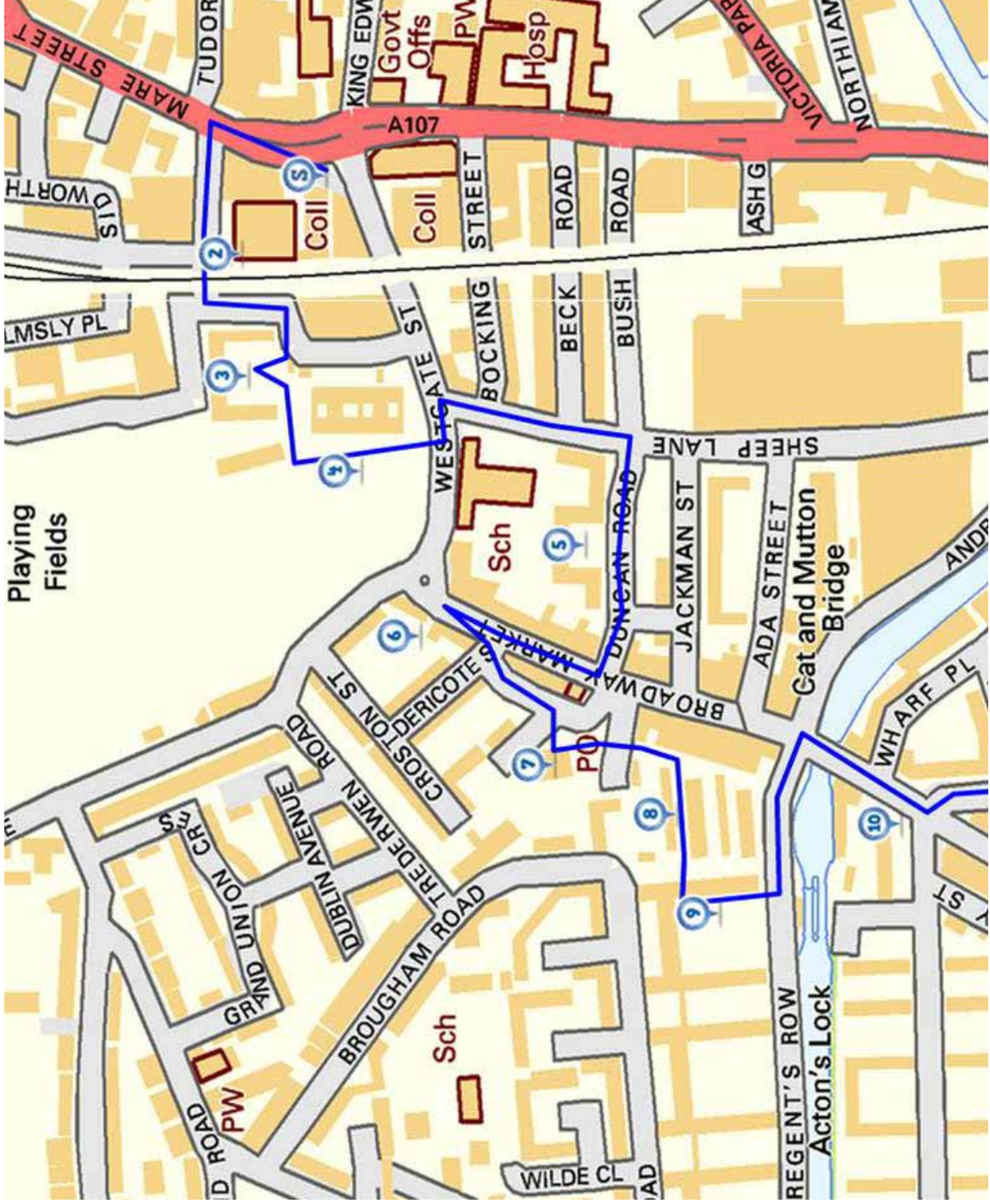


Practical information

Location	Hackney, East London
Getting there	<p>Train - the nearest mainline stations are London Fields and Cambridge Heath</p> <p>Underground - nearest station is Bethnal Green (a 20 minute walk to the start of the route)</p> <p>Bus - routes that pass the walk start include 48 (London Bridge to Walthamstow), 55 (Oxford Circus to Leyton), 106 (Finsbury Park to Whitechapel) and 254 (Aldgate to Holloway)</p>
Start point & postcode	The Triangle (junction of Mare Street and Westgate Street), E8 3RH
Directions from railway station to start	<p><i>From London Fields Overground station</i> - from the front exit turn right into Mentmore Terrace. Keep the railway line on your right. At the end turn left into Warburton Road, then right into Mare Street. The Triangle is on the right by the horse trough.</p> <p>The Triangle is 10 minutes walk from Cambridge Heath Overground station and 20 minutes walk from Bethnal Green Underground station. Please use local maps.</p>
Finish point	Hackney City Farm, E2 8QA
Onward journey	<p><i>To return to The Triangle</i> - turn left into Goldsmith's Row, continue into Broadway Market then turn right into Westgate Street</p> <p><i>For Overground train services from Cambridge Heath</i> - turn right and at the end of Goldsmith's Row then turn left into Hackney Road. Continue to the end; Cambridge Heath station is on the right after the railway bridge</p>

Distance	1½ miles
Level	Gentle – A flat urban route on pavements and in city parks
Conditions	Due to the seasonal subject, this walk is best tried between May and September while fruit and vegetables are growing from late spring to early autumn
Suitable for	Families – lots of plants for children to spot Wheelchairs / pushchairs – an entirely step-free route
Refreshments	There are plenty of cafes and restaurants along the route
Facilities	Public toilets in London Fields (Stop 4), Haggerston Park (near Stop 16) and Hackney City Farm (Stop 17)
Family friendly activities	<p>Hackney City Farm is home to many animals, plus the garden, cafe and shop. Open Tue-Sun, 10am-4.30pm. Closed Mondays. No onsite parking (Tel: 020 7729 6381)</p> <p>The Geffyre Museum features furniture, textiles and paintings from the 17th century onward plus a herb garden of period plants. Free entry, open Tue-Sat 10am-5pm and Sun midday-5pm (Tel: 020 7739 9893)</p> <p>St Mary's Secret Garden features food growing, herb and sensory gardens. At 50 Pearson Street behind the Geffyre Museum. Open Mon-Fri 9am-5pm (Tel: 020 7739 2965)</p> <p>V&A Museum of Childhood is nearby at Cambridge Heath Road. Open daily 10am-5.45pm. Free entry, cafe, toilets and baby changing facilities (Tel: 020 8983 5200)</p>

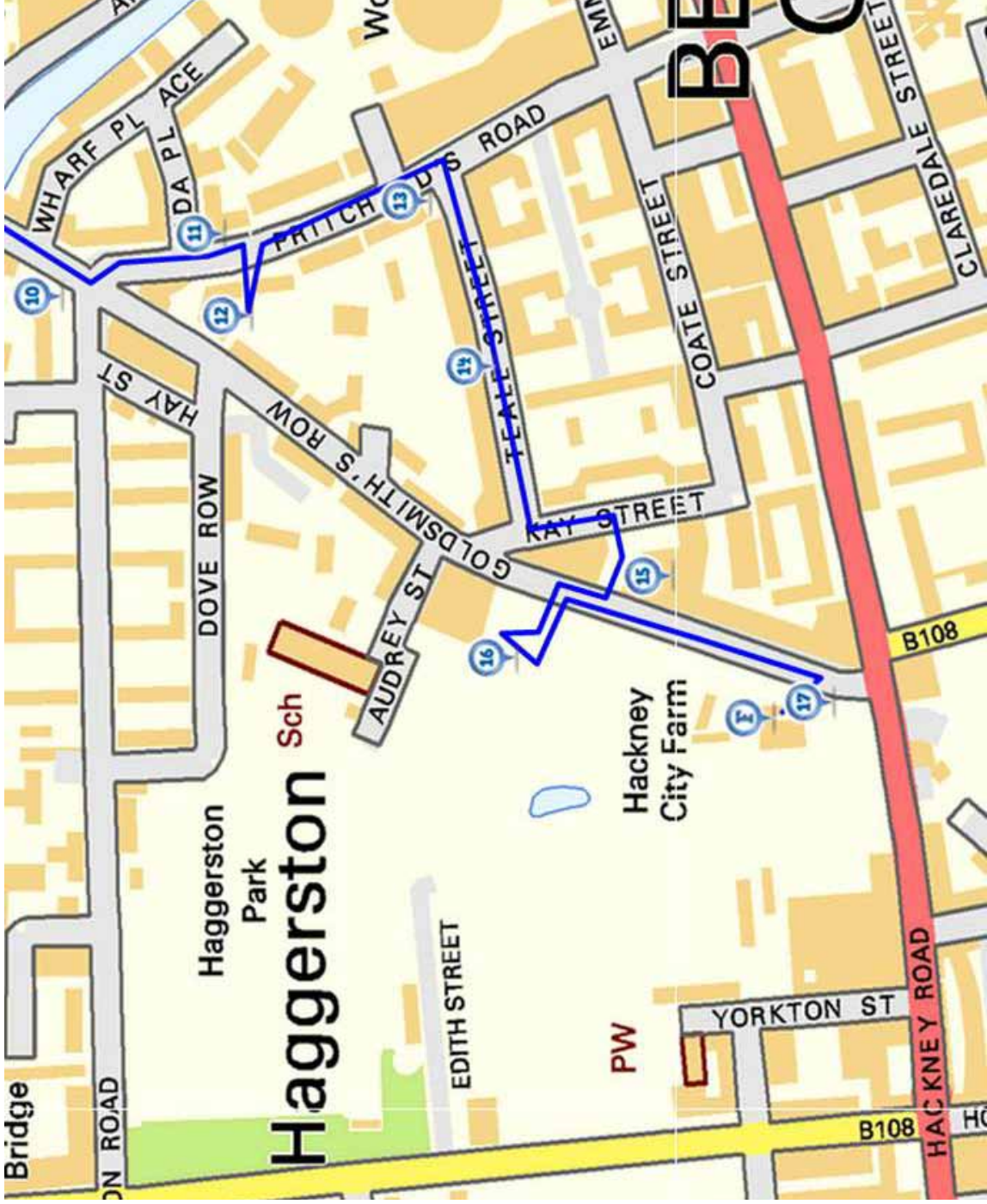
Detail of the first part of the route



Stopping points

1. The Triangle, junction of Mare Street and Westgate Street
2. The Triangle Studios, Warburton Road
3. Warburton & Darcy Community Garden
4. London Fields
5. Alden House, Duncan Road
6. Cat and Mutton pub, Broadway Market
7. Welshpool House
8. Suffolk Estate Garages
9. Orwell Court
10. Debdale House, corner of Whiston Road

Detail of the second part of the route



Stopping points

10. Debdale House, corner of Whiston Road
11. Ada House and Pritchard House
12. Goldsmith's Triangle
13. Pritchard's Road
14. Teale Street
15. Former Queen's Hospital for Children
16. Haggerston Community Orchard
17. Hackney City Farm
18. Hackney City Farm

1. Welcome to Hackney

The Triangle, junction of Mare St and Westgate St

Hello, my name is Mikey Tomkins and I am a local beekeeper. I am also a PhD student and have been researching the subject of food growing in cities since 2005. This walk forms part of my research.

Have you looked at the packaging and labels on your food at where it has come from? Some of our food is shipped or flown thousands of miles from distant places. Globalisation and technological advances have made this possible. Currently it is economically viable for multinational companies but that might change as oil prices continue to rise.



Where does your food come from?
© Dino Quinzani, Flickr (Creative Commons License)

And it's certainly not environmentally friendly. I believe it's time to change the way we think about food.

Since the majority of people live in cities, perhaps we should think about growing more of the food that we need right here on our doorsteps. In some ways we have always done this with allotments and grow-your own and especially in times of crisis, such as "Dig for Victory" in the Second World War. But how would it look as a permanent part of our modern urban landscape?



Vegetables and herbs growing at Ada House
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Walking through main roads and back streets over a 25 hectare site in Hackney, you will start to imagine a productive food growing landscape. We'll look at the many fragmented piecemeal spaces that could be used – open spaces and grass verges, car parks and garages, private gardens and public squares, derelict buildings and waste land.

You'll need to use your imagination to transform what you see into a landscape of vegetable plots, herb gardens, orchards and beehives. Hackney could spring to life with local, seasonal food.

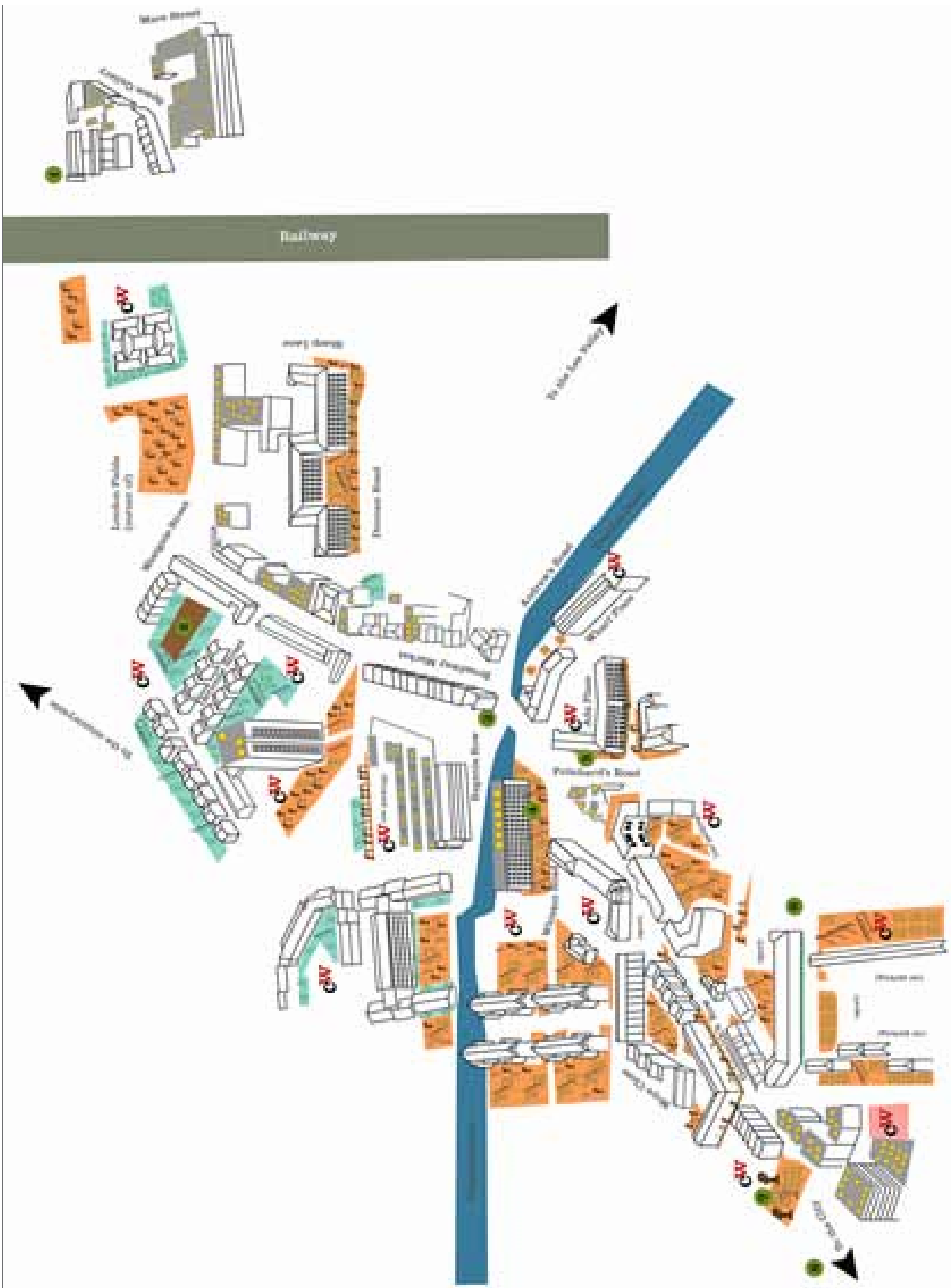
This is a relatively safe place to walk. You'll never be too far from main roads but some of the streets can be quiet. Please exercise the usual care and attention when walking in big cities and watch out for bikes! Also, take time to meander. I discovered many of these spaces by detouring around, wandering and wondering what was around the corner.



Community space at Orwell Court
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 1

From The Triangle, walk along Mare Street towards London Fields Station and take the first left, which is Warburton Road. Before the railway bridge, stop by the metal fence of The Triangle Studios on the left.



An edible map of Hackney © Mikey Tomkins

2. City of Nectar

The Triangle Studios, Warburton Road

Every week during the spring and summer, I walk from my home nearby to the Space Gallery to check the bees on the roof.

As you stand facing the car park at the rear of the Space Gallery, look up at the flat roof on the right beside the railway. This flat roof is currently home to three bee hives.

If it is mid-summer to August, up to 80,000 bees are currently flying above your head, each one loaded with nectar.



The roof of the Space Gallery is home to three bee hives
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



Honeybee on lavender, Hackney
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

These bees have been here for two years. Before that, they lived on a rooftop near Liverpool Street and before that at the Elephant and Castle. They are Londoners – born here and happily working hard to make honey.

Keeping bees in cities is nothing new – humans have always done it. In fact, there are over 2,500 registered bee hives in London with many more unrecorded – that’s about 1 for every 24 hectares. There is no obligation to register a hive and most beekeepers make private arrangements with landowners to keep bees.



One of the hives on the roof of the Space Gallery –
A very convenient location for harvesting nectar and pollen
from the trees of London Fields behind
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

There are about 40,000 honey bees in each hive. The bees collect nectar and pollen from the lime trees in nearby London Fields, as well as buddleia that grow along the nearby railways. Each hive makes around 30 kilograms of honey by the end of the summer season.

You can start to see the neighbourhood from the viewpoint of the bee when you open the hive and watch the bees dance across the comb. The dance tells the beekeeper the rough direction the bees are flying, and how far the bees will travel. Bees have polarised vision and can 'see' the sun even on cloudy days. They tell other bees which way to fly for forage – nectar and pollen – potentially up to 3 miles.



Mikey smoking the bees in order to examine the hives
on the roof of the Space Gallery
© Mikey Tomkins

Directions 2

Continue along Warburton Road under the railway bridge. At the end, turn left with the railway on your left and Warburton House on your right. Follow Warburton Road round to the right and go through the railings on the right. Enter the archway in front of you into Warburton and Darcy Community Garden.

3. A natural harbour

Warburton & Darcy Community Garden

Secluded at the back of this estate is a small community garden. I first found this garden by following a fox across the car park. The entrance is crowned by a sign that arches above your head. Push the gate open and walk in. I have never known it to be locked.

The design of the blocks along three sides gives this space the feeling of a natural harbour amongst the right angles of the buildings. Please feel free to wander around. Look for the many different herbs, vegetables, fruit trees and a grape vine, as well as the composting bins.



Plum trees around the community garden entrance
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

If you are here in August the entrance should be surrounded by ripe plum trees. Also, if you are lucky you will find residents' tending the vegetable plots in the right hand south facing corner of the garden.



A range of vegetables and herbs under cultivation
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

These beds are intensively 'farmed' for salad crops, beans and tomatoes. While the productive fruit trees around the garden require little attention, the annual vegetables need constant care. If you see gardeners talk to them. What are they growing, what will they grow next, how much do they eat? Growing more food in cities means more conversations, more time outside, in all weather not just good weather. The composting bins are essential. People argue against compost bins because of the worry about rats. But if you are really worried about rats, petition against a fried chicken outlet.

As you leave the garden, you will see a nursery school opposite. Look through the railings and you may be surprised to find raised beds where vegetables are growing. It's a nursery within a nursery!

Directions 3

When you are ready, leave the garden through the gate. Remember to look at the vegetable beds in the nursery school opposite. With the nursery on your left and Darcy House on your right, go through the gateway into London Fields.

4. Urban orchard

London Fields

This is London Fields. The park itself was first recorded in 1540. At this time it was common ground and was used by drovers to pasture their livestock before taking them to market in London. Evidence of this historical usage can be seen in the street names around – Sheep Lane, Mutton Lane and Lamb Lane.

London Fields is now much smaller than it was 500 hundred years ago – about one-third of its original size. It's now mostly used for leisure and sport – there's a lido, concrete ping-pong table, cricket pitch, tennis courts and BMX track.

But it is also a productive space. The bees come here to feed on the cherry trees, lime trees and Indian bean trees*.



A sculpture recalls the historical use of London Fields
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

But imagine if this area was also planted with 20 dwarf apples trees. Each tree could produce approximately 40 kilogrammes of fruit, with an overall harvest of 10,000 apples.

The trees would add to the leisure space rather than crowd it out. In September, the park could become a festival space and the various market gardeners and local food growers take over the park to celebrate. They would sell red cabbages, onions, broad, French and runner beans, as well as local honey.



The Indian bean tree is a favourite of the honey bees
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

*** Indian bean trees are very tasty to bees but not recommended for people - please don't eat any of their fruit or leaves as they can be poisonous!**

As you leave the park at the corner, stop for a moment to look at London Fields Primary School opposite. From the ground it's all tarmac and brick. But it actually has a 400 square metres of rooftop area which is suitable for an edible forest garden and six beehives.

A forest garden models itself on natural woodland, with a canopy, a shrub layer and low growing plants. It could contain over 120 varieties of trees, shrubs and herbs. At the moment, the only edible forest garden in the UK is in Reading. Why can't we have more?



London Fields Primary School –
potential for a rooftop garden?
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 4

With the nursery on your left, leave London Fields at the corner of the park. Remember to look up at the roof of London Fields School and the potential for growing food there. Cross the road using the pedestrian crossing and head straight along Sheep Lane. Take the first right into Duncan Road with Alden House on your right. Stop by the railings where there is a grassed area surrounded on three sides by Alden House.

5. To grow or not to grow?

Alden House, Duncan Road

Does this landscape look familiar? The three sides of Alden House here create exactly the same space as we saw earlier at Warburton House. But where is the welcoming arch? Where are the fruit trees and vegetable plots? All I can see are two benches and a few plant pots.

Alden House was built in the inter-war period. Look at the raised grassed area. That is the remains of the terraced houses that were previously on this street before this estate was built. Dig down and you get bricks and rubble. There's no fertile soil here. The thin veneer isn't good enough for growing food. If we are going to increase local food production in cities, we need to make soil. And that means dealing with waste – vegetable and human.



The communal garden at Alden House – fenced, locked and unused
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

The lack of soil might be one reason why the residents of Alden House have not copied Warburton House with a communal garden. But another is access. Where is the entrance? At the end of the road is a gate – locked. And people would have to come out of the main entrance on the other side of the building, along the street and into this space at the back, carrying all their gardening equipment. It hardly encourages people.

But the potential is here. There are 76 flats and 1,100 square metres of gardens – that's 14 square metres per person for growing food. In fact, these older blocks have much more generous allocation of gardens. Look at the area of land that the building and the gardens take up – that's what we call the 'footprint'. Here the footprint of the building and the gardens is about the same and that makes them ideal for converting to food production.

Directions 5

Continue to the end of Duncan Road where it meets Broadway Market. Turn right and walk up to The Cat and Mutton pub.

6. Local produce

Cat and Mutton pub, Broadway Market

The Cat and Mutton pub has stood on this site for centuries. Look on the opposite side of the street. Between number 73 and number 75 is a black gate.

Previously this was the entrance to a stable and paddock, enclosed by the surrounding terraced housing. But now it is a forest garden planted by Hackney City Farm. You can just see the top of the tree canopy over the gate.

The idea of forest gardens is to create bio-diverse habitats while also providing food. Some argue they are the future of food production because they are more productive than mass agriculture.



The forest garden off Broadway Market
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

They are also perennial and not annual like most agricultural systems. However, this would mean we would need a radically different diet with less of the annual grasses such as wheat or rice.

Let's look up and think about some of the other productive space here in Broadway Market. Despite its fragmented look, the north end of Broadway offers a consolidated rooftop space of 733 square metres. Rooftops are difficult spaces to view on foot in the city because they are hidden out of view. There is actually enough space for 10 beehives and a short session vegetable garden providing salads and annuals. But if we had honey bees here residents would need to grow more flowers to sustain them as well as the other insect pollinators. We should feed bees in the same way that some people feed birds. And if you want organic honey stop using pesticides.

On a Saturday, Broadway Market is full of market stalls selling local seasonal produce. It is popular but expensive. The price will drop as more people learn how to grow food and yields increase. And the shop at the corner – L'eau a la bouche – sells honey from my apiary at the Space Gallery after it has been harvested in August.

Directions 6

Turn back along Broadway Market the way you came. After a short distance, turn right into Dericote Street and immediately left into Welshpool Street. Continue to stop near the tower block – Welshpool House.

7. Wasted potential

Welshpool House

This 17 storey tower block is Welshpool House, built in the 1960s. Look at the open space around the block – fragmented grassy and paved areas enclosed by low railings. Unused. Wasted potential. Think of what could be here – raised beds and fruit trees. And the roof of the tower is perfect for another apiary.



Unused space at Welshpool House with potential for food growing
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 7

Leave Welshpool House and cross Benjamin Close cul-de-sac. Go through the bollards and into the area of garages.

8. From stables to garages

Suffolk Estate Garages

Back at the Cat and Mutton, we saw what were old stables and a paddock belonging to Victorian housing. The horses have gone and the paddock is now a forest garden. Here we are in the modern replacement – garages for cars.

But look at how much space these garages take up – their ‘footprint’. Couldn’t this area be put to better use? In fact, many people don’t use these garages for cars. I know two men who store deck chairs in them. They come down here, sit outside and drink tea!



Potential food growing space at Suffolk Estate garages
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

So what could this area be used for in the post-motorcar age? It could be a farm for mushrooms, white asparagus or rhubarb. We could have beehives. This is a fifth of hectare – which could grow over 12,000 kilogrammes of organic spinach a year.

Directions 8

Go down the row of garages starting with numbers 11 and 48. At the end, go up the steps to Orwell Court. Pass through the archway and into the grassy square.

9. Pioneer gardeners

Orwell Court

Walk around the square and look at the small spaces in front of people's houses. Some have small gardens; others have paving stones with no signs of any plant life other than weeds. A few pioneer gardeners are growing herbs, cabbages, basil, sweet corn and tomatoes.

I often wonder what these spaces were intended for when these estates were designed. Just to look at? For residents to have picnics on? In my mind, they look like giant geometric raised beds – perfect for food production. In fact, one resident has started growing herbs and vegetables in one section. This is Council property but there seems to be no objection to a resident using this communal space.



A pioneer gardener in Orwell Court is using part of a communal area to grow cabbage and lettuce
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

If you think about it, we give names to housing blocks and streets but often these open spaces have no name although they occupy more space than the housing. Why do we give such little value to these fragmented yet multiple spaces in cities?

These anonymous spaces get covered with a desert of close cut grass. They are sterile and unchanging. Add them together and you get a patchwork of potentially productive spaces. But instead of that, there are enormous waiting lists for allotments.

Directions 9

Leave Orwell Court at the corner by the canal and turn left along Regent's Row with the canal on your right. Note the Solche Cilician cafe on the left hand side which has vines growing in the patio area outside and the plum trees opposite. Turn right onto the bridge over the canal. Stop at the corner of Whiston Road outside Debdale House.

10. Footprints

Debdale House, corner of Whiston Rd

As we cross the canal, we enter a more residential space. Here the housing blocks have gardens that are fenced and walled off from the street. This is the main agricultural area of this part of central Hackney. At Debdale House note the small food garden perched out on the close cut grass. If you are lucky you might see the gardener sitting there.

As we saw earlier on our walk, buildings such as Debdale House have a fairly equal balance between the land taken up by the building and the open space. In the 1960s when this was built, designers and architects placed an importance on open spaces.



Growing flowers and vegetables outside Debdale House
Mikey Tomkins © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

But look across the junction at the housing block built in the 1980s. There is absolutely no open space: behind the railings is the building itself. The footprint of the building is the footprint of almost the entire site. There's no space for a communal outside life, no space for growing food. As more people live in cities the density of housing increases, which is less sustainable as land is pressed into use for housing rather than food production.

Directions 10

Cross over the road at the pedestrian crossing towards the Perseverance pub. Turn right down Pritchard's Road. Pass Ada House and Pritchard House on the left hand side and read Stop 11.

11. Second use

Ada House & Pritchard House, Pritchard's Road

On our left is Ada House. Ada House enjoys 806 square meters of public space and has already embarked on a successful food growing project. I have been walking past here for the last few years and have seen the expansion in food growing – from one small pot to a bigger pot the next year. Then extended into a small bed, a bigger bed...



Pioneer vegetable growing outside Ada House
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

If you are here in the growing season look out for grapes, coriander, runner beans, pumpkins, spinach, and rhubarb amongst others. As we continue our walk we will see many other fruits and vegetables growing. Why not start to make a list? Surprise yourself.

As well as looking out for different fruits, vegetables and herbs, also look at how residents have innovated and experimented with growing techniques. A bricolage of unwanted objects have been recycled – a drying rack used as a trellis, a glass shower door used as a greenhouse, food containers, bed parts... City waste being put to good use.

Directions 11

At Pritchard's House, cross the road and enter Goldsmith's Estate directly opposite between Atkinson House and Courtauld House. Stop in the central garden.

12. Production and pleasure

Goldsmith's Triangle

Goldsmith's Estate was built in the 1950s. It has that festival hall garden feeling – roses, lavender and small fences.

Although I am passionate about bringing marginal urban spaces into productive use, I also recognise that urban dwellers need open spaces for leisure and for pleasure. So I have no objection to the ornamental rose bushes here in Goldsmith's Triangle, but perhaps here we could have a balance between using these open spaces for production and pleasure.



Ornamental gardens for pleasure (left)
but opportunities to use grassed areas for food production (right)
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

There is an incredible 2,703 square meters of courtyard garden space here. It could be a mixed fruit and vegetable garden, bringing the community together and producing around 10 per cent of their short season vegetable needs.

Moreover, the pathways through the gardens provide ample opportunity for residents to talk to each other. You could find people here gardening in all weathers. Food growing changes people's ideas about what is good and bad weather. We need all weathers to grow food. Showers, sunshine and frost.

Directions 12

Leave Goldsmith's Estate the way you came. Look out for bees on the lavender outside Atkinson House. Turn right onto Pritchard's Road and stay on the right hand side.

13. Strawberry corner

Pritchard's Road

Back out on to Pritchard's Road, we start to see food gardens at the front of the houses. Sometimes neat rows of coriander, greens, or a collection of pots. Runner beans grow out into the street, unprotected. They don't get vandalised. Why would they? At the corner of Teale Street is a pear tree and there used to be a grape vine.



A range of fruit, vegetables and herbs growing on Pritchard's Row and Teale Street
Clockwise from top left: broad beans and squash; spinach; pears; lettuce; grapes; coriander
Mikey Tomkins & Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

If it is May, we pass vast expanse of strawberries as we enter Teale Street. Perhaps we should change the name of the street. We had Sheep Lane earlier, so why not Strawberry Corner, Coriander Road, Spinach Row? It may serve as a reminder that we need to grow food close to where we live.

One thing that we've not thought about yet is who is growing the food. If you have seen any of the gardeners, you may have noticed that many are Bangladeshi or Chinese. A lot of the food growing is being done by the immigrant communities that live in this area. In their cultures, it is very common to have kitchen gardens, so in many ways they are replicating that here in London. Some are also growing specialist foods particular to their culture that they cannot buy in the UK; for example, look out for the gourds grown by the Bangladeshis.

Directions 13

Turn right into Teale Street. Stay on the right side of the road.

14. What a contrast!

Teale Street

Teale Street is one of the most successful food gardens in the area. Almost every front garden has some food being grown – lime trees, walnuts, blackberries and blackcurrants. Pumpkins, spinach, potatoes and beans. Aubergine, runner beans and coriander.

Sometimes these are grown in micro-rows divided by small fences as if modelled by a child as a toy farm. The food runs from one end of the street to the other. You might see a gardener. Say hello if you do.



A trellis for growing gourds or pumpkins on Teale Street
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Again, look for innovative constructions and materials that are supporting the crops. This is seasonal architecture. For example, the supporting framework for the pumpkins gets erected in spring and is gradually covered by the end of summer.

In contrast to the productive gardens on the right hand side of Teale Street, look at the estate on the left hand side. Ample grassed areas behind railings. The estate has plenty of space for growing, poly-tunnels and composting. It could produce most of its soil and harvest rain water from its sloping rooftops. And look at the five blue garages all labelled “No parking”. How about a sign “Grow food here”?



As you turn left into Kay Street, you might see a woman sitting on the large grassed area in front of Sebright House. She climbs out of the window of her ground floor flat, with a deck chair, a cup of tea and a newspaper. She is the only person I have ever seen use this grass. What stops more people from using these communal spaces?

The two sides of Teale Street are quite different
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 14

At the end of Teale Street, turn left into Kay Street. Stop at the derelict site on the right hand side.

15. Derelict but not useless

Former Queen's Hospital for Children

This derelict building is the former Queen Elizabeth Hospital for Children. The hospital was founded in 1866 after a cholera epidemic in the East End and moved to this site in 1870. After various NHS mergers, the hospital here closed in 1996. Since then, the 0.64 hectare site has been awaiting redevelopment into housing. The derelict building has been gradually decaying – although it is occasionally used as a film set.



Rooftop potential for beehives at the derelict hospital
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

So far on this walk, we've been thinking about how to use open spaces for food production, but we should not forget the potential of derelict buildings like these.

The roof of the six-storey concrete tower could be home to ten beehives. In summer there would be tens of thousands of honey bees flying around looking for nectar and pollen. On Teale Street that we have just walked down, the south side is a desert of grass for them – not even a dandelion has survived the grass cutters – but the gardens on the north side are full of potential forage.

The abandoned car park at the back of the hospital is thick with weeds that are already feeding the local bees but this space is also ideal for raised beds. This area could produce 100 salad bags per week during the growing session. These could be taken to the nearby City Farm to be sold. As more and more food gets grown in cities the need for farms increases.

Directions 15

Walk along the footpath between the derelict hospital and the block of housing. When you reach Goldsmith's Row, cross over, go through the gate into Haggerston Park and immediately right into an open space with picnic tables.

16. A community space

Haggerston Community Orchard

Hopefully by now, you are getting more attuned to spotting food growing in the urban landscape. You are now in a forest garden. This corner of Haggerston Park is the Haggerston Park Community Orchard and Food Growing Garden.

In 2010 it was derelict waste land. Then hundreds of local volunteers came along and helped to prepare the ground, dig holes, fill holes, mulch, turn compost, put up fencing and plant edible plants.

When this garden was first built here, a great deal of compost and manure was added. As we sat in the space in August 2010 there were complaints from a walker about the smell of the soil. How familiar we are with the smell of vehicle fumes, but rotting soil and animal waste is a bit of a shock! But this is nothing new: not so long ago during the nineteenth century horse manure was collected from the many stables of the city and used to fertilise London's many market gardens.



Entrance to Haggerston Community Orchard
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

This has become a popular community space. It is not a hangout for bored youths; it has not been vandalised as you might expect. It has become a natural part of the local community where people come for pleasure and picnics. Do you remember that we talked before about creating a balance between using land for leisure and production? Well, this space achieves that balance – people are sitting in the shade of fruit trees, while food happily grows around them. It is the multiple use of open space in cities that make them exciting and interesting.

There are plans for expanding the garden, so come back again soon and see what has changed. The avenue of fruit trees leads to a wildlife garden and you might like to go there after you have finished the walk.

Directions 16

Go back out of the park gates onto Goldsmith's Row. Turn right with the railings and BMX track on your right. Just before the end of the road, Hackney City Farm is on the right hand side. The farm is open every day except Monday. Go inside the farmyard.

17. A farm in the city

Hackney City Farm

Hackney City Farm is an appropriate place to end our walk. This is one of more than a dozen farms in London and has been here for over 20 years. Take some time to explore the farm.

Wander round the garden and look for fruit trees, the bog garden with wetland plants, the arid garden with dry plants, and the herb beds. There are also raised beds growing fruit and vegetables. The produce is used in the cafe.



The herb garden
By kind permission of Hackney City Farm



Clover and Charlock, Golden Guernsey goats
By kind permission of Hackney City Farm

In the farmyard you can visit a variety of characters – there are sheep, goats, pigs, a donkey and calves, guinea pigs, rabbits, ducks, chickens, geese and turkey. From the back gate you can go out into the wildlife garden.

City Farms are a great way for urban-dwelling children to learn about where their food comes from. For adults – why not go on a course about vegetable growing, sponsor one of the animals or become a volunteer.

Directions 17

Remain at the farm for Stop 18.

18. Over to you

Hackney City Farm

On this walk we've seen the early stages of a food revolution and been able to envisage a potential future. We've seen how local residents have started to use communal spaces on their doorsteps for food production – front patios, grassy areas outside housing blocks, a nursery playground. We've seen how they have become bolder year after year, extending their plots and beds, building makeshift trellises, and diversifying their crops. We've seen how local volunteers run a thriving city farm and have created a popular forest garden.

But this is just the beginning. There's so much more potential. We've also looked at forgotten and in-between spaces – grassy areas, public parks, concrete paved squares, car parks, derelict buildings and rooftops. We've imagined what could be there instead – vegetable beds, herb gardens, orchards, apiaries. The city has the potential to produce most of the food that we need. We need to re-think our urban spaces.

And this walk is relevant to any town and city in the UK. Think about the streets around your home and how your own neighbourhood could be transformed into a more productive landscape. This is part of a bigger picture of making our twenty-first century lives more sustainable and thinking about the future of our planet.



This walk has explored pioneer gardening in the city (top)
and identified other potential spaces that could be used for food production (bottom)
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Credits

The RGS-IBG would like to thank the following people and organisations for their assistance in producing this Discovering Britain walk:

- **Mikey Tomkins** for creating the walk and providing photographs
- **Jenny Lunn** for editing the walk materials
- **Rory Walsh** for taking photographs and compiling walk resources
- **Caroline Millar** for editing the audio commentary
- **Nick Stanworth, Alex Ricketts, Sam Carlsson and Florence Lee** for additional assistance compiling walk resources
- **Hackney City Farm** for kind permission to use images of the farm
- **Stephanie Irvine** from **Growing Communities** for advice on Indian Bean trees
- **Laura Shawyer** and **friends** for testing the walk on a very wet Bank Holiday!

Further information

Find out more about the walk story and places of interest along the route:

Capital Bee

www.capitalbee.co.uk

Capital Growth

www.capitalgrowth.org

Edible Urban

edibleurban.co.uk

The Geffrye Museum

www.geffrye-museum.org.uk

Growing Communities

www.growingcommunities.org

Hackney City Farm

www.hackneycityfarm.co.uk

Hackney Museum

www.hackney.gov.uk/cm-museum.htm

The London Orchard Project

thelondonorchardproject.org

Sustainable Hackney

sustainablehackney.org.uk

St Mary's Secret Garden

stmaryssecretgarden.org.uk

V&A Museum of Childhood

www.vam.ac.uk/moc





Britain's landscapes are wonderful.

There is a tremendous variety within our shores - whether in the countryside, in towns and cities or at the seaside. And every landscape has a story to tell about our past and present.

Discovering Britain is an exciting series of geographically-themed walks that aim to bring these stories alive and inspire everyone to explore and learn more about Britain. Each walk looks at a particular landscape, finding out about how forces of nature, people, events and the economy have created what you see today.

The self-guided walks are fun, informative and inspiring. Prepare to discover something new, to be surprised and to find the unexpected.

Visit www.discoveringbritain.org to

Send your review of this walk

Search for other walks

Suggest a new walk