

# Dalston Eastern Curve Garden 2010-2020

A place built on relationships, persistence and responsiveness to community needs:  
A review of a ten year journey

The Dalston Eastern Curve Garden opened its doors in Spring 2010. It was designed with the local community as a temporary space, to offer access to green public space in a built up densely populated area of East London, where few people have their own gardens. Over the last 10 years it has become a much loved and successful community garden, providing many social, economic, environmental and health benefits to residents and volunteers from the area and to visitors from beyond. Since 2012 it has been independently managed by a social enterprise.

**Journey**  
• Spring 2008: A disused former rail line is highlighted as ‘opportunity land’ for a publicly accessible green space, as part of the ‘Dalston Mapping’ research project by muf architecture/art and J&L Gibbons.

• Summer 2009: Barbican’s ‘Radical Nature’ exhibition is on site, with over 14,000 visitors to the installation in just over three weeks.

• Winter 2009: Planning permission is secured for a temporary garden, with associated structures.

• Spring 2010: A short construction period includes an apprenticeship programme, working with young people from local Forest Road Youth Hub. A steering group of local community and cultural organisations is formed to manage the Garden. This group goes on to manage the Garden for two years, supported by volunteers and a small grant from the London Development Agency.

• Summer 2010: Garden opens to the public, with Exyzt Art Collective in residence for the first three months.

• Autumn 2010 - Summer 2012: Weekly volunteer gardening group set up to nurture trees and grow food and plants. Community events and childrens’ creative workshop programmes are established.

• Summer 2012: A new social enterprise is selected in an open competition to manage the Garden as a financially independent organisation. The enterprise is established by two local residents who had been part of the Steering Group and the community dialogue phases of ‘Dalston Mapping’ and ‘Making Space for Dalston’. A basic Café is set up to generate the main source of income for the Garden’s year round operation and programming.

• 2013: A very challenging year, with no grant funding. An unusually prolonged winter brings limited visitors for the first six months and despite the associated low takings, the Café has to be expanded to service the anticipated summer demand. From Summer 2013 the Garden and Cafe start to thrive, with the help of staff, volunteers and the public.

• 2017: The Local Authority launches the ‘Dalston Quarter’, a year of public consultation about land use in the immediate area. The redevelopment vision it contains is seen as having a significantly negative impact on the

Garden. The Garden team lead a campaign to fight for the Garden’s future, supported by muf architecture/art and J&L Gibbons. The consultation results in huge public support for the Garden and demands for it to become permanent.

• 2019: As an outcome of the ‘Dalston Quarter’ Consultation, the Local Authority take stock and commission a more extensive consultation, the initial phase inviting the public to take part in the ‘Dalston Conversation. Again, the Garden has overwhelming support for its permanent place in Dalston.

• 2020: The Local Authority launches further consultation on their draft to ‘Dalston Plan’ planning guidelines for the area and ask for public confirmation that the Garden should be an integral part of future development of the area. The Garden team prepares for its July launch of a year of birthday celebrations and to present its vision for the future of the Garden.

**Today**  
The Garden is open daily throughout the year, with night-time opening most evenings in Spring, Summer and Autumn. It welcomes approximately 200,000 visitors per year. The Garden’s number one mission is to offer beautiful, wild-life-rich planted public space for residents and visitors, in an area where green space is very limited. In addition it offers a year-round education, cultur-

al and community events programme with a particular focus on work with children, young people and adults. All of this is achieved by a small team of staff, freelance artist-educators and a core team of approximately 100 volunteers. This programme is financed with income generated from the small onsite café.

Highlights in the events programme include the celebrated annual Pumpkin Lantern Festival, which in 2019 attracted 20,000 visitors to see over 1,000 pumpkins carved by local children, young people and adults and the Festival of Light, which illuminates the winter nights with magical hand-crafted lanterns. Other regular events in the beautiful setting of the garden, include music nights, family friendly days and diverse creative workshops which encourage connection with, and learning about, Nature. The Garden also offers free space for local community and health based organisations to host their activities including performance rehearsals, language classes, mental health support groups, radio recordings, book launches, weekly domino club, art projects, campaigns, weekly music groups, and fundraisers.

For more information about the garden and activities please visit [www.dalstongarden.org](http://www.dalstongarden.org)

**1 Peace Mural Square**  
The public entrance to the Garden is located in a small public space where the Hackney Peace Carnival Mural is located. In recent years street artist Christiaan Nagel, added one of his iconic oversized mushrooms, high up at the entrance. Planters in this public space are cared for by the Garden’s volunteer team and the Garden team regularly host talks and events to celebrate the Mural.

**2 Pavilion**  
The Garden’s original design and build included a large wooden open-air pavilion which incorporated a tiny kitchen and a single toilet. Today, as the number of visitors and range of services and activities has increased, the Garden team has responded by adding more facilities and structures to support these changes. All of these new structures and additions reflect the 10-year evolution of the uses of the space and were made possible by the hard-work, support and creativity of the Garden’s staff, volunteers and community of local residents, businesses and organisations.

**3 Clay Oven**  
Soon after the Garden opened, a grant for promoting healthy eating helped fund a community project to build a clay oven for outdoor cooking. Since then it has become the focal point for the Garden’s popular outdoor cookery programme, with over 10,000 pizzas cooked from scratch, using fresh garden produce by children, young people and community groups. In addition, over 8,000 pizzas are sold annually from the oven by the social enterprise ‘Latto’s Pizzas’ who make a donation for every pizza to help fund the Garden’s children’s cookery programme.

**4 Kiosk**  
The Garden started to operate as a social enterprise in 2012, with the main source of income for its day to day operation and year round programming generated by sales from the onsite café bar. The original Garden design and build had not included café facilities and in the first year of the enterprise’s operation, refreshments were sold directly from the kitchen. As visitor numbers increased dramatically in 2013, a custom designed kiosk was built within the Pavilion. The design and build was supported by the local carpenter who also built the Pineapple House and who was himself a regular Garden visitor. This enabled the Garden to extend its offer of drinks to include locally produced draft beers and soft drinks, and to sell fresh soups and cakes baked on site, often using Garden produce. As demand has increased year on year, more space is now needed for the café operation.

**5 Toilet Block**  
The original Garden design included just one toilet, located in the Pavilion. As the number of Garden visitors increased substantially, an additional toilet was built next to the Pineapple House and in 2015 a raised block with three cubicles was also added. The build lasted several months, working first with a volunteer designer, then a group of corporate volunteers and finally with a contribution of carpentry work from a local business. It is surrounded by plants and includes a tapestry art installation on its outside wall.

**6 Fence / Planting Space**  
A local business donated in-kind to build the high wooden fence that now runs along the entire western border of the Garden. This helps secure the Garden and adds to its peaceful atmosphere. More than 20 new large raised planters have been attached to the fence over the years, to grow espalier fruit trees and climbing plants and to increase space for food-growing.

**7 Growing Communities Shed**  
A garden shed structure was built with the social enterprise ‘Growing Communities’ as a distribution space for their sustainably farmed fruit and vegetable weekly ‘bag scheme’.

**8 Oak Planter Herb Garden**  
A series of interlocking raised oak planters were designed and built in 2018 in a sunny area of the Garden, to grow herbs and bee-friendly flowers.

**9 Rainbow Greenhouse**  
Originally designed as a ‘botanical bar’, this small wooden greenhouse was donated by a local resident in 2014. It is used to grow seeds and seedlings every Spring and to house changing community art installations. It is the focal point for the Garden’s ‘Festival of Light’ every winter when nature-inspired paper cut-outs, created in community workshops, are added to brightly coloured gels to transform it into a magical ‘Glasshouse Lantern’.

**10 The Pineapple House**  
The Pineapple House was named to reference the pineapple’s historical association as a sign of ‘welcome’. It also pays homage to the famed ‘World’s Largest

Greenhouse’, run by the Loddiges family in the 1800s in Hackney.  
The space was designed around original structures from the adjacent industrial building and offers visitors shelter in winter, with a wood-burning stove and sofas. It accommodates a year-round programme of nature-inspired creative workshops, volunteer gardening sessions and regular community meetings and events, all surrounded by the Garden’s indoor plant collection.  
The Pineapple House was made possible by the collective effort of many contributors; the architects who designed it as pro-bono work; the Local Authority officers who managed the planning process; the local carpenter that managed the build and to the many residents and organisations who contributed to the Garden’s fundraising campaign in 2011.

**11 V22 Space**  
Dalston Curve Garden has always worked in partnership with V22, the organisation that provides low-cost artists’ studios in the large Victorian building that is attached along one garden boundary. Basement space in this building is leased to provide a much-needed storage area for garden equipment and café stock.

**12 Garden**  
The Garden’s original layout included Birch and Alder trees, wild-life friendly shrubs, Butterfly Bush, six raised beds for food-growing and expansive grassed areas. Within a couple of years the grass had failed, due to the high number of visitors walking on it and the increased canopy of the trees. The Garden team responded by replacing the grass with bark-chip paths and seating areas and balanced this with expansive new green areas of planting around the trees to create welcoming small ‘outdoor rooms’ for quiet contemplation or gathering, surrounded by abundant planting. Hundreds of pots and containers are used to provide changing seasonal displays. All of the Garden’s plants are carefully selected to support birds, bees, butterflies and other wildlife, to provide year round joy and increasingly for their ability to thrive in the shade of the now well established trees. New access points from the entrance and pavilion to the Garden have also been added, to improve circulation for the large volume of visitors.

**13 Outdoor Art**  
Renowned street artist Stik painted one of his iconic figures on a wall of the Garden on the first day of opening and since that time the space has been used as an outdoor gallery for art. This is sometimes in collaboration with artists and art students but most often to display art works made in the Garden’s nature-inspired workshops, such as

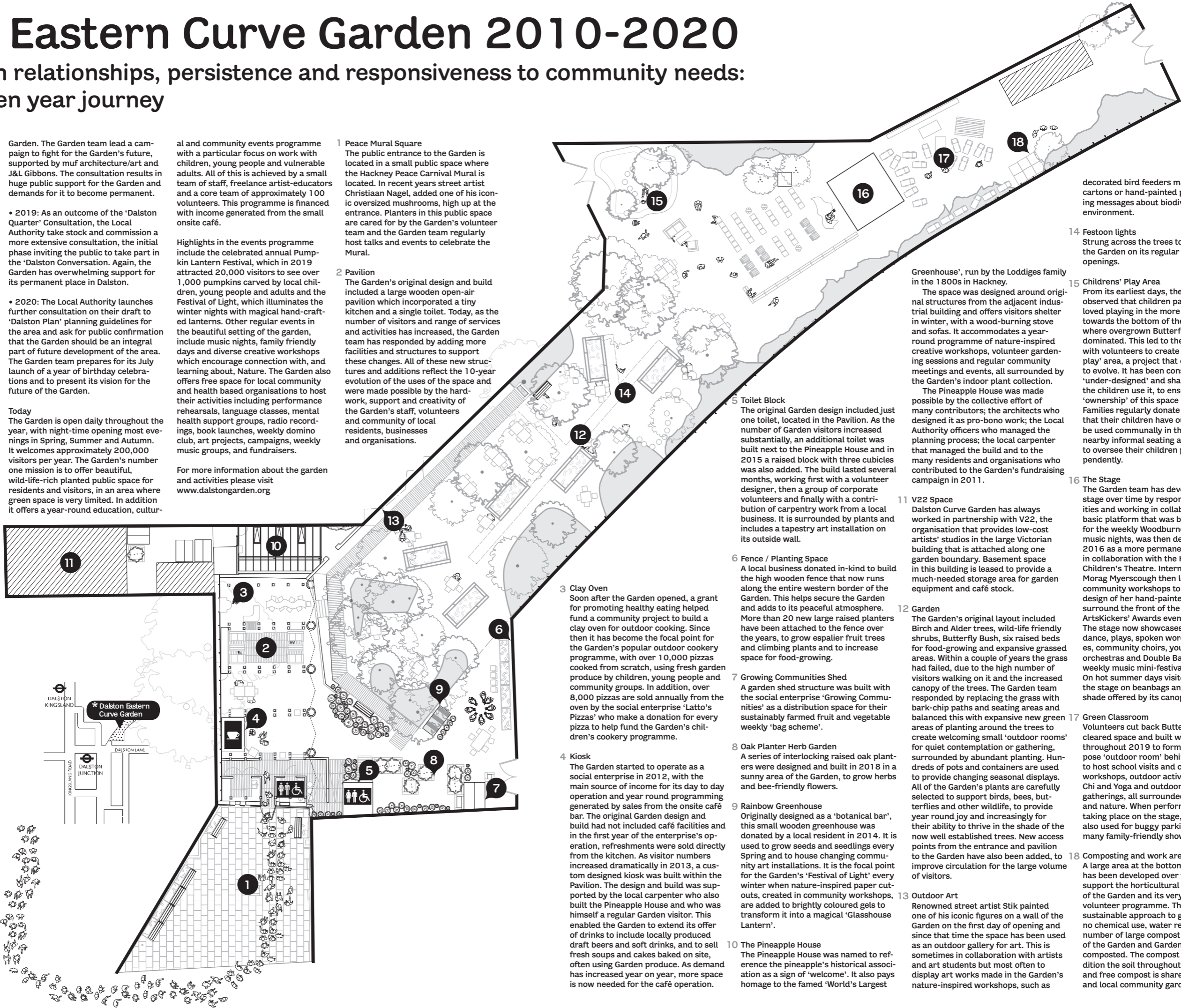
**14 Festoon lights**  
Strung across the trees to illuminate the Garden on its regular late night openings.

**15 Childrens’ Play Area**  
From its earliest days, the Garden team observed that children particularly loved playing in the more wild areas towards the bottom of the Garden, where overgrown Butterfly Bush predominated. This led to the team working with volunteers to create a ‘natural play’ area, a project that continues to evolve. It has been consciously ‘under-designed’ and shaped by how the children use it, to ensure that their ‘ownership’ of this space is not eroded. Families regularly donate outdoor toys that their children have outgrown, to be used communally in this space and nearby informal seating allows parents to oversee their children playing independently.

**16 The Stage**  
The Garden team has developed the stage over time by responding to activities and working in collaboration. The basic platform that was built in 2013 for the weekly Woodburner summer music nights, was then developed in 2016 as a more permanent structure, in collaboration with the Hackney Children’s Theatre. International artist Morag Myerscough then led a series of community workshops to inform the design of her hand-painted frame to surround the front of the stage, for the ArtsKickers’ Awards event in 2018. The stage now showcases music nights, dance, plays, spoken word performances, community choirs, young people’s orchestras and Double Bass Dan’s weekly music mini-festival for children. On hot summer days visitors can sit on the stage on beanbags and enjoy the shade offered by its canopy roof.

**17 Green Classroom**  
Volunteers cut back Butterfly Bush, cleared space and built woodland throughout 2019 to form a multipurpose ‘outdoor room’ behind the stage to host school visits and children’s workshops, outdoor activities like Tai Chi and Yoga and outdoor community gatherings, all surrounded by plants and nature. When performances are taking place on the stage, the space is also used for buggy parking during the many family-friendly shows.

**18 Composting and work area**  
A large area at the bottom of the Garden has been developed over the years to support the horticultural operation of the Garden and its very popular volunteer programme. The Garden has a sustainable approach to gardening, with no chemical use, water recycling and a number of large compost bins where all of the Garden and Garden Café waste is composted. The compost is used to condition the soil throughout the Garden and free compost is shared with visitors and local community gardens.





Peace Mural Square: Hollyhocks planted by Garden volunteers. Photo: Sandra Keating



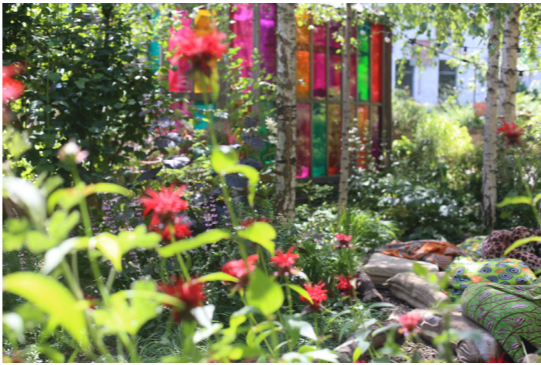
The Garden: Mindfulness activity taking place among Birch trees and flowers. Photo: Sandra Keating



The Garden: Local primary school children searching for Bees and Insects. Photo: Sandra Keating



Pumpkin Lantern Festival: Giant lantern illustrating the Garden, carved by volunteer Eco. Photo: Alex Sutherland



Rainbow Greenhouse: Surrounded by wildlife friendly planting. Photo: Sandra Keating



Pizza Oven: Children making pizzas. Photo: Sandra Keating



Juice Cartons transformed into bird feeders. Photo: Sandra Keating



Pumpkin Lantern Festival: Queue of 5,000 people on the first night of the Pumpkin Lantern Festival in 2018. Photo: Alex Sutherland



The Garden: 'Take a Pause' health and well-being event in the Garden. Photo: Sandra Keating



The Garden: Expansive areas of planting replaced grass. Photo: Sandra Keating



Cafe Kiosk: Freshly baked cake made with plums from the Garden for sale in the Garden Cafe. Photo: Sandra Keating



Stage: Performance of 'Lord of the Flies' by S+K Project - young BAME theatre group. Photo: Alex Sutherland



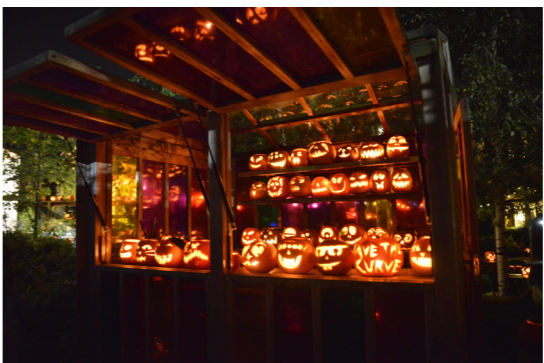
V22 Building: Festoon lights & Light projection on the V22 Building. Photo: Sandra Keating



Pavilion and Pineapple House. Photo: Sandra Keating



Clay Oven: Children making pizzas. Photo: Sandra Keating



Rainbow Greenhouse: Displaying carved pumpkins for the annual Pumpkin Lantern Festival. Photo: Alex Sutherland



The Stage: Children and parents enjoy weekly music session with 'Double Bass Dan'. Photo: Sandra Keating



Outdoor Art Gallery: Stik & Pineapple House with Alliums. Photo: Sandra Keating



The Garden: Glorious display of Tulips in pots. Photo: Sandra Keating



The Garden: Weekly 'Dalston Domino Club' among the plants. Photo: Sandra Keating



Pineapple House: Schoolchildren learning about pollination in a creative workshop. Photo: Sandra Keating



Fences: Espalier fruit trees 'green' the fences. Photo: Sandra Keating



The Garden: Planting for Bees and Butterflies.



Outdoor Art Gallery: James Brunt Environmental Art Autumn 2018. Photo: Sandra Keating