

Case Study



Railway Gardens: Creating a community-led green space in Cardiff



Key words: Green space, Climate action, Community ownership

What is Railway Gardens?

Railway Gardens grew out of a long-standing local community garden in Adamsdown, Cardiff that was lost to development in 2015. A group of residents wanted to continue gardening and sought a new space. A derelict council-owned site on Railway Street in Splott was identified, with support from the Community Land Advisory Service and Social Farms and Gardens. Negotiations with Cardiff Council were lengthy and complex, with initial rejection and attempts to sell the land, but the community mobilised petitions and advocacy to secure it. Community visioning events, surveys, and creative consultations shaped a shared plan for the space.

Start date

- Community search for space began in 2015
- Lease signed October 2020
- Site opened June 2022

Key parties

Green Squirrel CIC

Cardiff Council

Community Land Advisory Service

Social Farms and Gardens

Local residents and volunteers

Local schools

Community groups

Advisory group members (including Noreen Blanluet, Co-production Network for Wales)

Partners such as Keep Wales Tidy, The Boneyard, and local social enterprises.



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What has been done?

The project involved years of negotiation, advocacy, and co-production. Hundreds of residents contributed ideas through surveys, events, street consultations, and school activities. They co-designed site features, selected the name 'Railway Gardens', and created the logo. Community members joined advisory groups, helped secure funding (e.g. Lottery People and Places, Welsh Government grants), and supported planning hurdles such as the Sustainable Urban Drainage application. During delays, activities like plant giveaways, litter picks, and logo competitions kept momentum. Since opening, the site has hosted community assemblies, skill-share Saturdays, growing groups, social events, and volunteer-led initiatives. Residents continue to shape and run the site, which is designed to eventually transition to full community ownership.

Numbers

- Thousands signed the petition to save the land
- Over **600** people attended the launch event in June 2022
- Advisory group engaged **60–70** local people
- Volunteer mailing list has grown to around **70** people
- Growing group of over **20** members maintaining rain gardens and planters
- Secured **20**-year lease (peppercorn rent) from Cardiff Council
- Funding secured: National Lottery People and Places (approx. **£100k+**), Welsh Government Community Facilities Grant, Keep Wales Tidy grants, and others
- Over **560** events/activities on site (focussed on community connection, wellbeing, and sustainable choices)
- The community have held **338** events/activities (open mic night, support groups, skill shares, creative writing group, a Men's Shed, crafting, mending)
- **Two** new constituted groups have come out of the project
- Over **16,000** people have participated in activities on site!
- Over **1500** people reached through outreach events
- Volunteers have given well over **1500** hours of their time
- **40%** of respondents visiting at least monthly - **15%** visit one or more times a week
- When asked what had changed for them as a result of Railway Gardens...
 - **56%** have tried something new
 - **72%** say they feel more confident
 - **28.2%** say they've made sustainable choices in their life
 - **72%** say they feel more connected to the community

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Real impact

Community members describe Railway Gardens as bringing new life to the neighbourhood and reclaiming a long-lost public space. One local resident initially sceptical of anti-social behaviour concerns is now a regular visitor who enjoys a cup of tea at the site. Another resident declared that 'it's so good to see this site being used again for the community'. Children from nearby schools have been actively engaged, including naming the site and cutting the ribbon at launch. Volunteers highlight pride, emotional investment, and the sense of ownership.

Today, Railway Gardens is a Community Resilience Hub with a community food growing space, 8 small business spaces including a cafe, community room & kitchen, outdoor classroom, wildlife areas & sustainability features, programme of events, support for community members to lead their own activities, and volunteering - all of which have built trust and inclusivity.

Challenges

- Lengthy and inconsistent negotiations with Cardiff Council
- Initial attempt by council to sell land for development
- Planning and legal hurdles (Sustainable Urban Drainage approval, close proximity to railway).
- COVID-19 delays requiring design changes for vulnerable groups
- Multiple rejected funding bids before success
- Rising costs of materials and contractors
- Managing local concerns about anti-social behaviour
- Team overwhelm/burn out
- Operational stresses leave little time for strategy and reflection
- Reaching more people in the community and supporting them to participate
- Supporting volunteers into lead roles
- The unfinished Hub building
- Expectations from public bodies & partners that RG can do lots of additional work with no budget



Key learning



The key to success has been involving the community from day one and throughout every stage. Transparency (sharing good and bad news), persistence, and diverse ways of enabling involvement built trust and ownership. Although slower, co-production led to stronger, more sustainable outcomes.

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Why is this co-production?

Assets

Recognised and built upon local skills, knowledge, and creativity (e.g. logo design, skill-sharing).

Networks

Partnered with local groups, schools, social enterprises, and advisory experts.

Outcomes

Delivered a thriving community hub shaped by and for residents.

Relationships

Built trust with sceptical residents, funders, and council; maintained momentum through open communication.

Catalysts

Community-led petitioning, assemblies, and volunteer action drove progress despite barriers.

Railway Gardens is a co-produced community space in Splott/Adamsdown, Cardiff, developed by Green Squirrel CIC. What was once a derelict and contested patch of land has been transformed into a vibrant hub with community growing spaces, shipping container work pods, rain gardens, a community kitchen, and areas for play, learning, and events. The project exists only because of strong community involvement at every stage - from petitioning the council to secure the lease, to co-designing the site, naming it, designing the logo, and leading activities such as growing groups, skill-sharing workshops, and assemblies. Despite numerous hurdles (planning, funding, council negotiations, and COVID), the project demonstrates how trust, persistence, and genuine co-production can create sustainable community infrastructure responding directly to local needs.

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Have a good case study example? Get in touch: hello@copronet.wales. For more tools & resources to support your co-production journey, including guidance for working with people in a wide range of settings, visit our website: copronet.wales

