

Feilden Fowles reveals all-new plans for Natural History Museum grounds

9 April, 2020 By [Richard Waite](#)

Feilden Fowles has released images of its proposals to rework the Natural History Museum's grounds – a replacement for a shelved, bigger budget scheme by Niall McLaughlin Architects

The practice was chosen last summer for the Urban Nature Project, which will 'reimagine' the 2ha gardens surrounding Alfred Waterhouse's Grade I-listed landmark in South Kensington, London.

A previous [competition-winning design](#) by Niall McLaughlin Architects was abandoned after it secured planning permission in 2016.

McLaughlin and landscape architect Kim Wilkie's ambitious scheme featured a major cloistered entrance and open-air galleries, but it is understood their budget was 'dramatically reduced' following a change in the museum's management team.

Speaking about his departure from the project, McLaughlin told the AJ last year: '[In] early 2018, we were asked to make a new design for the grounds, based on a very limited budget. We produced [a] design, which was a set of quite modest garden spaces.

'[We] did not see the new project as having the scope to require our ongoing involvement.'

Subsequently, in August 2019, Feilden Fowles and landscape architect J & L Gibbons were appointed to 'lead the design for the transformation of the museum's gardens' following 'a full and rigorous tender process'.

Their new designs include 'immersive educational experiences and varied natural habitats' as well as a new garden building housing a visitors' café and space for storage and plant displays. The proposals also feature a learning and activity centre combining facilities for 'scientific work, education, maintenance and supporting the volunteer community'.

The reworked Eastern Garden is set to feature a full-size reproduction of Dippy, the diplodocus skeleton that was previously the centrepiece of the museum's Hintze Hall.

Practice director Edmund Fowles said that the project 'reflects our practices' social and environmental values.

'Along with our multidisciplinary team, we have enjoyed the challenge of bringing to life a walk through over 500 million years of the earth's history, from the pre-Cambrian era to the present day, translating vital messages about human impact on nature and the role we all have to play in revitalising urban biodiversity today.'

Building work is scheduled to start in 2021 with the gardens due to open in 2023.

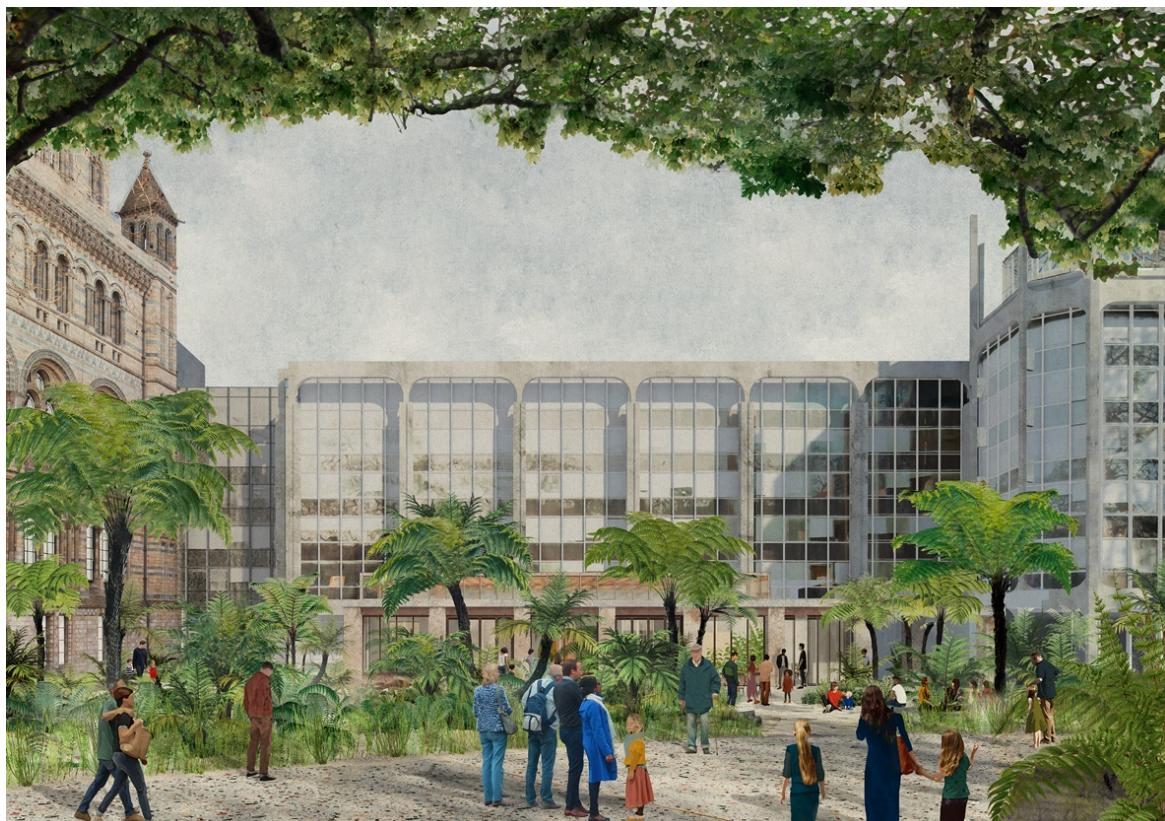
A statement from the Natural History Museum

Kim Wilkie and Niall McLaughlin Architects developed a design for the museum grounds when the decision was taken to transform them in 2014. Some elements of those plans have been included in the new designs, specifically the work on the main entrance to provide step-free access in a way that is sympathetic to our grade one listed building.

The museum took the decision to retender the design work as a considerable amount of time had passed since the original competition and substantial changes have been made to the original concept. It was also crucial that any plans reflect the museum's ambitious new strategy, a key element of which is to ensure the best care and conservation for the existing habitats across the gardens.

The design tender submissions were evaluated on six criteria: design excellence, heritage experience, arts and education project portfolio, landscape experience, sustainability and collaborative working and client focus.

Feilden Fowles demonstrated excellence in all areas and, along with their ethos and approach to sustainability and education, were considered the best design team to help the museum deliver learning, connection and action through the Urban Nature Project.



Feilden Fowles' proposed Urban Nature Project for The Natural History Museum (April 2020) - planned garden building

Garden building within Feilden Fowles' proposed Urban Nature Project for The Natural History Museum (April 2020)

[zoom in](#)[zoom out](#)

The architect's view

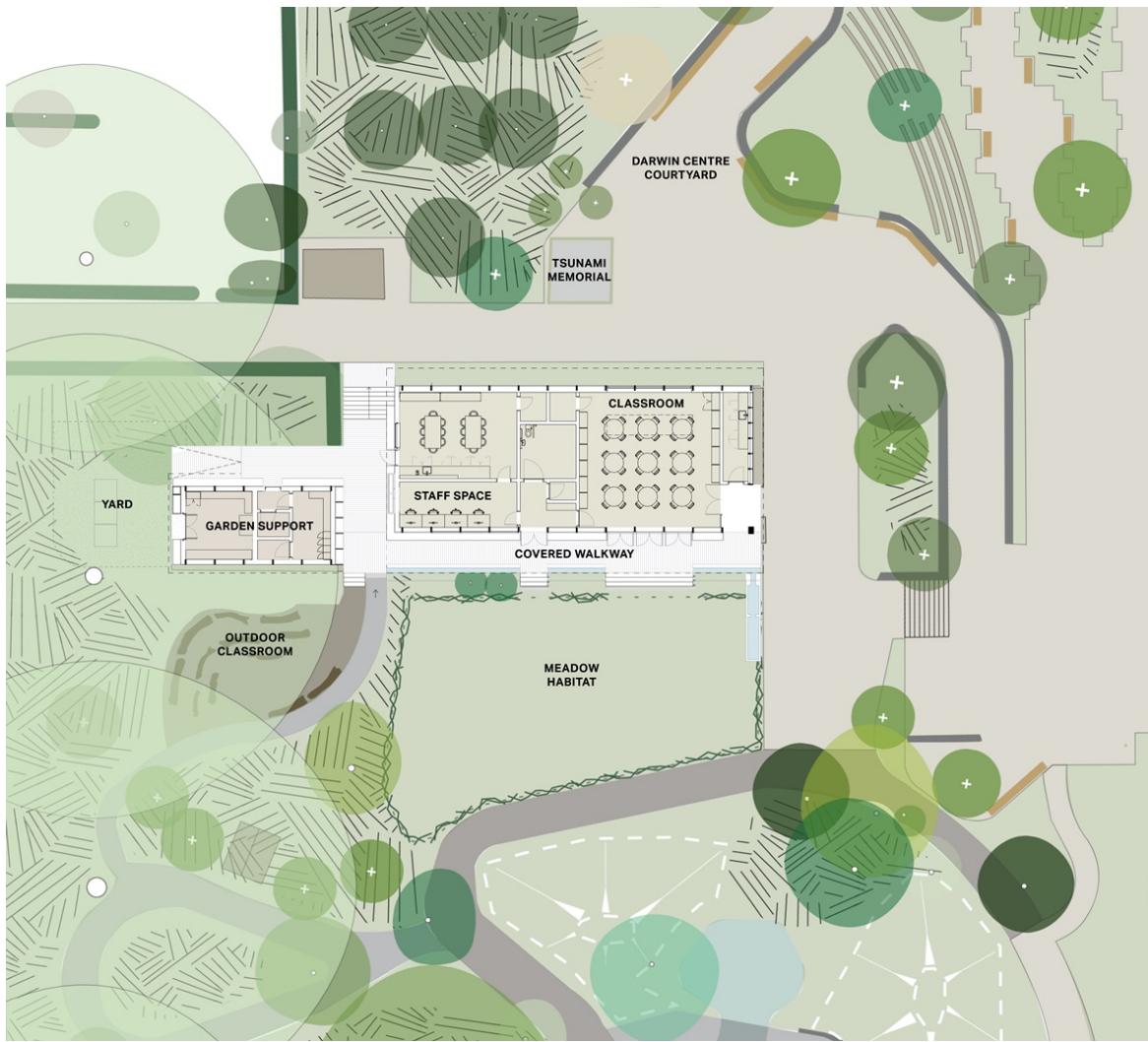
The key aims of the project are to increase the biodiversity, accessibility, opportunities for education and the usability of the museum's grounds.

The Eastern Garden will become an immersive, educational experience for visitors, telling the story of Deep Time, from the Cambrian period 540 million years ago to the present day, through geology, planting and interpretive exhibits. Early time periods will be characterised by low-level planting – mosses and liverworts – among rocks. Moving west, larger plants begin to appear – horsetails and tree ferns – growing further still into the Jurassic period where Wollemi pines and cycads will accompany a full-size reproduction of Dippy, the diplodocus skeleton previously located in Hintze Hall. Following this, flowering plants, fruits and grasses will create rich habitats of seasonal variety encouraging pollinating insects and bees, as visitors near the main entrance to the Waterhouse building.

A new garden building will emerge beyond the Carboniferous forest, at the foot of the Palaeontology building, in the spirit of historic Victorian garden structures, such as orangeries and palm houses, to provide both a café facility for visitors and a support space for the planting of the new Eastern Garden, offering vital seasonal storage and display of the more exotic plants exhibited in the eastern gardens.

To the west of the carriage ramps, the wildlife garden is already home to thousands of species of British flora and fauna. More than 3,130 species have been identified in the garden since it opened in 1995. This project will greatly enhance and enlarge the areas of habitat and biodiversity, expanding the wildlife garden to the south of the museum. The gardens will encourage visitors to zoom in on nature which is all around us, to understand where it came from, the interrelationships between different species and people and to help explain how we all must adapt to changing urban conditions.

A new learning and activity centre will combine vital facilities for scientific work, monitoring, learning activities, maintenance and supporting the volunteer community so important to the upkeep of the wildlife gardens. The new centre will allow improved access, legibility and interpretation of the wildlife gardens, expanding the important scientific work of the museum and encouraging citizen science activities.



Feilden Fowles' proposed Urban Nature Project for The Natural History Museum (April 2020) - learning and activity centre [annotated plan]

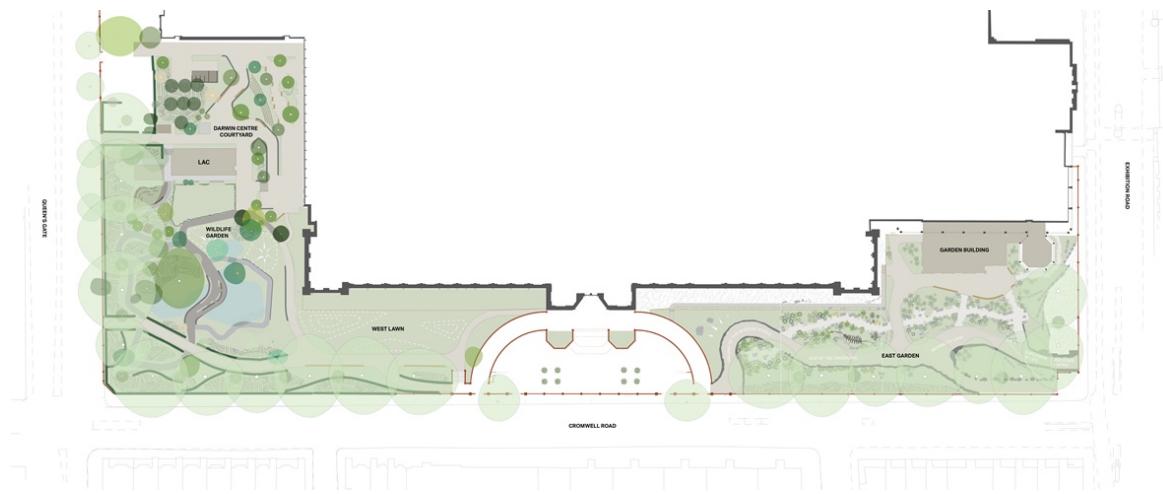
Feilden Fowles' proposed Urban Nature Project for The Natural History Museum (April 2020) - learning and activity centre [annotated plan]

[zoom in](#)[zoom out](#)

The east to west journey through the reimagined gardens will lead visitors to the Darwin Courtyard. As a conclusion to the narrative, here 'future nature' will be explored through emergent and pioneer species and possible approaches to climate adaptation, resilient communities and promoting improved bio-diversity within our cities. This ambitious project aims to capture the imagination of the museum's visitors, inspiring, informing and empowering visitors to take action, echoing the words of David Attenborough: 'The future of the natural world, on which we all depend, is in your hands.'

Project team

Architect Feilden Fowles
Landscape architect J & L Gibbons
Heritage consultant Purcell
Graphic and 3D Design Pentagram
Structural engineer eHRW
M&E, lighting and acoustic engineer Max Fordham
Pedestrian flow access Buro Happold
Project management Mace
Quantity surveyor Mace
Sustainability Mace
Planning consultant Deloitte
Specialist planting consultant Fossil Plants
Access consultant Earnescliffe



Feilden Fowles' proposed Urban Nature Project for The Natural History Museum (April 2020) - proposed site plan

Feilden Fowles' proposed Urban Nature Project for The Natural History Museum (April 2020) - proposed site plan

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