

Rewilding Urban Spaces An Ecological Aesthetic Perspective on Camley Street Natural Park

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Abstract: This article explores the concept of urban re-wilding, which aims to reintegrate natural ecosystems into urban spaces, reintroduce wildlife, and enhance residents' quality of life. By examining the example of Camley Street Nature Park, it discusses how urban re-wilding can be viewed from the lens of ecological aesthetics, emphasizing both the sensory value and functionality of landscapes through the restoration of ecological dynamics. The role of landscape architects in these projects is highlighted as crucial, balancing natural ecology and human activities to create ecologically sustainable and aesthetically appealing spaces. This study addresses how re-wilding reflects its ecological and aesthetic value in urban landscapes, the contribution of landscape architects, and how successful examples like Camley Street Nature Park can inspire other cities.

Keywords: Urban re-wilding; Ecological aesthetics; Camley Street Nature Park; Landscape architecture; Ecological restoration; Urban design and planning

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1. Introduction

This article explores the redefinition of urban space through 're-wilding', a process aimed at restoring natural ecosystems, reintegrating wildlife into urban environments, and improving residents' quality of life (Lehmann, 2021). The purpose of this study is to provide theoretical support for urban spatial re-wilding and explore its practical potential in the field of landscape design and ecological aesthetics.

Taking Camley Street Nature Park as an example [Fig. 01,02], this paper discusses the manifestation and significance of urban 're-wilding' from the perspective of ecological aesthetics. Ecological aesthetics emphasizes the visual attraction of landscape and the sensory experience and emotional resonance brought by the interaction between humans and nature (Gobster et al., 2007). By restoring the complexity and dynamics of the ecosystem, the wilderness movement enhances the sensory and functional value of urban space (Lehmann, 2021). Therefore, this study will explore how re-wilding can enhance the landscape's sensory value and functionality by restoring the ecosystem's complexity and dynamics.

From the perspective of landscape architects, urban re-wilding is a strategy for ecological restoration and represents a new paradigm for urban design and planning. Landscape architects play a key role in this process. They need to balance the relationship between natural ecology and human activities and create ecologically sustainable and aesthetically attractive spaces through design strategies (U0rgensen, 2015). This article will focus on the following questions :

(1) How does re-wilding reflect its ecological and aesthetic value in an urban landscape?

(2) What is the role and contribution of landscape architects in the re-wilding project?

(3) As a successful case of re-wilding, how does the Camley Street Natural Park [Fig. 03, 04] experience inspire other cities?

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Urban wildness transcends ecological restoration and becomes a new paradigm for urban design and planning (Lehmann, 2021). It needs to balance natural ecology with human activities and adopt innovative strategies to create spaces that are both ecologically sustainable and visually appealing (Lehmann, 2021). This study highlights the role of wilderness in changing urban landscapes and its broader impact on design and ecological aesthetics.



Figure 01: Map of Carnley Street Nature Park entrance; Source: Author’s own Photograph, 2025
 Figure 02: Rain garden at the entrance to Carnley Street Nature Park; Source: Author’s own Photograph, 2025



Figure 03: Camley Street Nature Park site map analysis; Source: Author’s own diagram, 2025



Figure 04: Camley Street Nature Park overall layout map:
Source: Author's own diagram, 2025

2. Literature Review

(1) Rewilding and ecological aesthetics in urban design

1) Definitions and principles of rewilding and ecological aesthetics The concept of wilderness aims to enhance biodiversity and ecological resilience by integrating wild natural elements into the landscape (Corlett, 2016). 'Rewilding' is defined as restoring natural ecosystems to less human intervention and closer to their history or natural state through ecological restoration, reintroduction of species, or abandonment of human control over land (Irgensen, 2015). The main form lies in transitioning from a carefully planned environment to one that accepts the spontaneity and self-organization inherent in natural ecosystems (Schulte To Bühne, Pettoelli and Hoffmann, 2021). From a wilderness perspective, urban green space will be transformed from a mere leisure area into a key element of the urban ecological framework, supporting a variety of species and natural dynamics in a densely populated environment (Schulte To Bühne, Pettoelli and Hoffmann, 2021).

Ecological aesthetics in urban design is intrinsically linked to the principle of 'wildness', which emphasizes including natural processes in the urban environment. Aesthetic experience in the environment can be used as a source of cultural enrichment and entertainment and as a factor that enhances or hinders ecological functions (Gobster et al., 2007). For example, the Qingxichuan River Reconstruction Project in South Korea is one of the important applications of the concept of re-utilization in cities [Fig. 05]. By removing the concrete-covered river channel and restoring its natural water body and vegetation, the project not only reintroduces native plants and animals but also significantly improves the ecological function of the river while providing an open space for citizens to interact with nature. This shift fully reflects the intrinsic link between ecological aesthetics and urban design's 'wildness' principle. It emphasizes integrating natural processes in the urban environment, allowing ecological functions and human activities to coexist (Gobster et al., 2007).

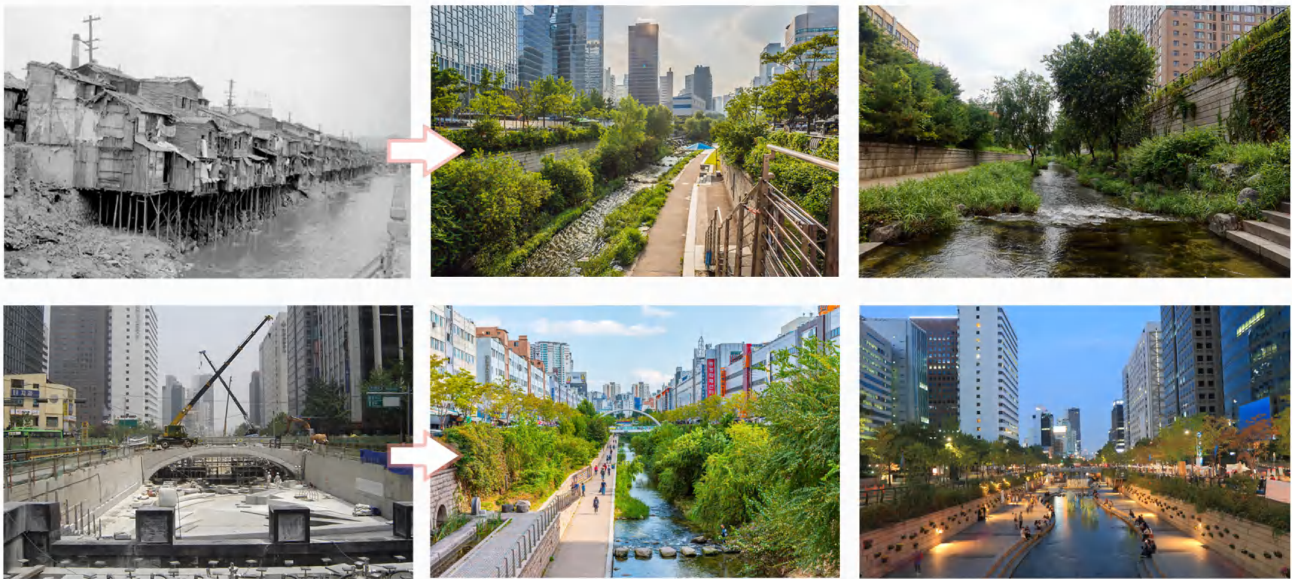


Figure 05: Pictures of Qing xi chuan River Reconstruction Project;

Source: Carrasco M(2024),The Qing xi chuan River Reconstruction Project/MikYoung Kim. https://www.archdaily.cn/cn/1022587/du-shi-lu-zhou-han-guo-qing-xi-chuan-he-dao-zhong-su-mikyoung-kim?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

2) Historical context and evolution of urban rewilding practices

The practice of urban wilderness has transformed from traditional protection methods to dynamic and inclusive strategies. Initially focused on rural areas, it is now extended to cities, aiming to restore ecological functions and connections destroyed by urban development (Lehmann, 2021). Urban wild life integrates ecological processes into the urban structure, promotes the coexistence of human and natural systems, and benefits both sides. Through ecological aesthetics, urban landscapes gain visual appeal and deeper sensory participation by restoring natural elements such as local vegetation and hydrological systems(Perino et al.,2019)[Fig. 06].

Designs such as community gardens and ecological parks provide habitats for biodiversity and create shared spaces for residents (Vazquez, 2021). Sustainable strategies such as rainwater collection, green roofs and ecological corridors further integrate urban ecological aesthetics into life. The focus of these efforts is to restore native plant species and create least-maintained, naturalized urban spaces to support local wildlife and promote biodiversity (Perino et al., 2019). The combination of wildness and ecological aesthetics has improved urban ecological health while generating visual, functional and cultural values providing a new paradigm for urban planning (Vazquez, 2021).

The evolving concept of urban wildness reflects a significant shift in society, that is, prioritizing sustainability and ecological health in urban development, The growing interest of the public and the scientific community underscores the importance of sustainable and resilient design strategies. These approaches aim to support biodiversity while providing ecological, aesthetic and recreational benefits further reinforcing their importance in shaping the future urban space (Massenberg, Schiller, and Schröter-Schlaack,2022).



Figure 06: Carnley Street Natural Park urban nature reserve
Source: Author's own Photograph, 2025

(2) Role of landscape architects in rewilding

Landscape architects play an important role in the wilderness, strengthening biodiversity and ecosystem services by designing and restoring areas that support natural processes (Corlett, 2016). However, they face challenges balancing human activities and ecological needs, especially when wilderness restrictions enter or change the landscape, which may lead to community conflicts. In addition, wilderness areas are often misunderstood as disorganized rather than vibrant ecosystems (Corlett, 2016). successful welding requires cooperation with stakeholders to coordinate interests and convey ecological benefits. By combining ecological science and design practice, landscape designers can create spaces with ecological, functional, and cultural significance that benefit nature and communities (Vazquez, 2021).

3. Case Study: Camley Street Natural Park

(1) Overview of the site

Camley Street Natural Park is a testament to the urban wilderness of London's King's Cross in an architecturally dense environment. The area was originally a coal yard near the Regent's Canal, close to bustling hubs such as King's Cross Station and St Pancras Railway Station, and experienced a massive transformation in the early 1980s [Fig. 07]. It has changed from a post-industrial wasteland to a lush nature reserve managed by the London Wildlife Fund [Fig. 08].

Nestled in a significant urban redevelopment area, this two-acre park is a green refuge and an educational resource, highlighting the potential for integrating nature into urban planning. Camley Street Natural Park demonstrates the power of community-driven initiatives to create sustainable urban ecosystems that meet both the needs of wildlife and the needs of human residents. Its creation, survival and adaptation story provide valuable inspiration for the potential of similar wilderness projects worldwide (Barkham, 2021).



Figure 07: Historical map of the Camley Street Nature Park looking north in 1985
Source: David Goode in New Scientist, 25 March 1985



Figure 08: Camley Street Nature Park nature reserve
Source: Author's own Photograph, 2025

(2) Implementation of rewilding strategies

Innovative design elements and ecological interventions have played a key role in the revival of Camley Street Natural Park, transforming it into a thriving urban wilderness space. The park restoration aims to create a self-sustaining ecosystem that improves urban biodiversity while meeting the needs of local communities for green space.

Key design elements and interventions: Camley Street Natural Park's wilderness transformation focuses on improving native habitat and enhancing the site's ecological connectivity in the city matrix. By strategically planting native species, it aims to restore ecological networks disrupted by urban development. This includes the introduction of various plant communities to support urban wildlife, from pollinators to native birds; renewed transformation has restored water bodies, improved water quality, and created habitats for aquatic and semi-aquatic species (Barkham, 2021) [Fig. 09].

Sidewalks and viewing platforms have been built in the park [Fig. 10]. These facilities use environmentally friendly materials to reduce the impact of human activities and allow visitors to get close to nature (Barkham, 2021)

[Fig. 11, 12].



Figure 09: Camley Street Nature Park aquatic habitat; Source: Author's own Photograph, 2025



Figure 10: Camley Street Nature Park green viewing corridor; Source: Author's own Photograph, 2025



Figure 11: Camley Street Nature Park sidewalk path; Source: Author's own Photograph, 2025



Figure 12: Infrastructure in Camley Street Nature Park; Source: Author's own Photograph, 2025

The restoration of the ecosystem and the integration of wildlife: The restoration of Camley Street Nature Park has dramatically promoted the local biodiversity and turned the once-neglected area into a habitat for wildlife. This goal was achieved by carefully managing habitats to protect native species and improving the ecological environment of the park's ponds and grasslands. The structured wildlife corridors in the park facilitate the migration of species in the urban landscape and contribute to London's wider ecological network. This integration supports terrestrial and aquatic organisms and attracts various birds, insects and small mammals, making the park a model for urban ecological restoration [Fig.13]. Implementing the education program aims to improve tourists' ecological and protection awareness and further consolidate the park's role as an important green lung in the city centre (Kamvasinou, 2011).

Camley Street Natural Park shows how urban spaces can be transformed into biodiversity reserves for wildlife and humans through well-designed wildlife and ecological design, providing a blueprint for similar projects in densely populated cities worldwide (Cabau, Hernandez-Lamas and Woltjer, 2021).



Figure 13: At Camley Street Natural Park

Source: Woman, B. (2021). <https://bugwomanlondon.com/2021/11/04/at-camley-street-natural-park/>

(3) Ecological aesthetic qualities

In terms of re-planning urban space, Camley Street Natural Park has become a model for the successful application of the wilderness strategy through its thoughtful design and emphasis on promoting rich interaction between human and nature.

1) Visual, sensory and experiential aspects of the park

Camley Street Natural Park vividly demonstrates the power of wildlife in the urban environment, turning a once-neglected area into a vibrant ecosystem where wildlife thrives. The design of the park emphasizes local vegetation and creates a lush landscape. It provides a habitat for local animals and provides people with a sensory rest place away from the hustle and bustle of the city. Visitors are greeted by mosaic landscapes of woodlands, grasslands, and wetlands, each of which can provide a different sensory experience - from the rustle of the breeze blowing leaves to the quiet sound of the water and the visual wonders of various wildlife. Trails and hideouts are well-arranged to maximize visual and physical contact with these natural landscapes without compromising habitat [Fig. 14,15], making them immersive and highlighting the dynamic beauty and serenity of this urban oasis (Schulte To Bü Hne, Pettorelli and Hoffmann, 2021).

2) Design promotes the interaction between human and nature

The Design of Camley Street Natural Park promotes the direct and meaningful interaction between tourists and nature, thus deepening the appreciation and understanding of urban ecology. Educational signage and guided trails encourage exploratory learning, while the park's layout provides visitors plenty of opportunities to get close to nature [Fig. 16, 17]. This includes areas where children and adults can safely interact with natural elements, such as ponds for soaking and gardens designed to attract butterflies. These facilities enable the public to understand biodiversity and ecosystems and play an important role in enhancing mental health and environmental management. The park is a model of how urban green space can play the role of ecological and social resources and provides a blueprint for similar projects worldwide (Smith, 2019).



Figure 14: Natural ecological design at the corner of the park; Source: Author's own Photograph, 2025

Figure 15: Formal design of natural spaces in park; Source: Author's own Photograph, 2025



Figure 16: Ecological water habitat in the park; Source: Author's own Photograph, 2025

Figure 17: A little collection of ferns in the park; Source: Author's own Photograph, 2025

(4) Social and ecological impact

1) Benefits for biodiversity and ecosystem services

The park design incorporates multiple habitats, including woodlands, wetlands and grasslands, each supporting multiple plants and animals. This biodiversity is critical to the resilience of urban ecosystems and enhances ecological functions such as pollination, water purification, and carbon sequestration (Barkham, 2021). The deliberate structural design of these spaces allows natural processes to flourish and form a self-sufficient ecosystem that supports multiple species [Fig. 18, 19]. Educational activities in the park further enhance these benefits, promote urban residents understanding and appreciation of biodiversity, and increase community participation and support for conservation efforts.

2) Contribution to the quality of life of urban residents

The ecological restoration work of Camley Street Natural Park has dramatically improved the quality of life of urban residents. The park provides a natural sanctuary in the city centre, providing a space for people to entertain, relax and socialize, essential for physical and mental health. Green space can serve as the lung of the city, relieve the city's heat, improve air quality, and serve as a public area to strengthen social ties within the community [Fig. 20]. Projects and activities aimed at education and participation enable residents to establish connections with nature and others and cultivate a sense of community and belonging [Fig. 21]. In addition, the park's aesthetic appeal and

its function as an educational resource can enhance local property values, attract tourists and contribute to local economic benefits (Kamvasinou, 2011).



Figure 18: Preservation and use of dead wood in the site; Source: Author's own Photograph, 2025

Figure 19: Eco-basin in the site design; Source: Author's own Photograph, 2025



Figure 20: Infrastructure layout for viewing and resting; Source: Author's own Photograph, 2025

Figure 21: Interactive and playful spaces for visitors; Source: Author's own Photograph, 2025

4. Methodology

(1) Site observation

The transformation of spatial layout in the park highlights the deliberate transformation from rigid linear design to dynamic curve space [Fig. 22]. Compared with the straight path usually associated with fast traffic and efficiency, the curved path largely ignores aesthetic considerations. It encourages visitors to pause, linger, and immerse themselves in the natural environment. These undulating spaces naturally draw people's attention to vibrant flowers or birds perched on the pond's edge, copying and imitating nature's irregular, ever-changing patterns. This method is reminiscent of the organic growth of natural ecosystems, creating an unpredictable and colourful feeling.

The choice of materials also reflects the spirit of wildness. The rigid pavement is replaced by soft surfaces such as soil and bark coverings, transforming the rigid boundary into a soft, porous edge [Fig. 14]. Upon entering the park, visitors are immediately surrounded by an atmosphere reminiscent of the wilderness. Although the park is not large, it is surrounded by greenery, creating a tranquil oasis. The quiet environment is full of subtle sounds of life: wild ducks play in the pond, sparrows rustle in the bushes, and insects fly among the branches. This immersive design allows visitors to temporarily forget the bustling urban scene outside and integrate with the vitality of nature. Untrimmed reed groves outline the park's shape naturally and concisely, setting up a sanctuary amid the towering city skyline.

Natural materials further enhance the beauty and ecological appeal of the park [Fig. 23]. For example, hedges are used to form fences, forming irregular organic boundaries, in stark contrast to externally rigid steel forged railings. This juxtaposition eases the transition between the park and the surrounding cities, adding a layer of warmth and harmony to the space. Through these thoughtful design choices, Camley Street Nature Park is a testament to the potential of wildness.

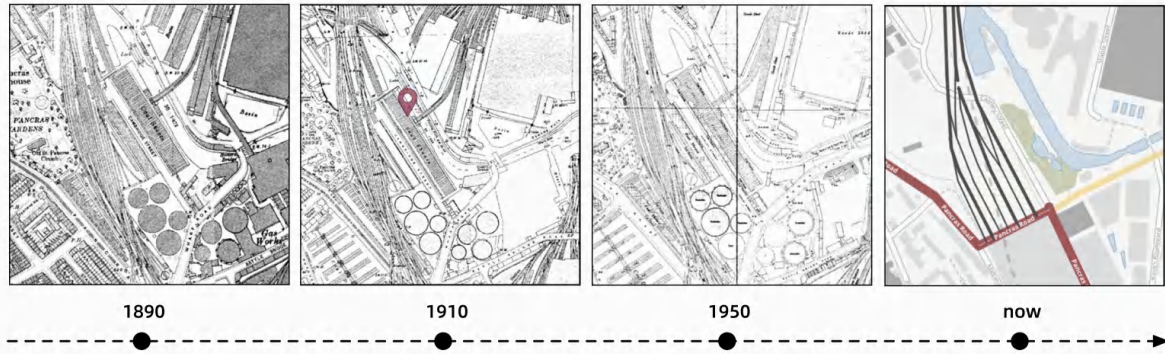


Figure 22: Strandkai plane engineering drawing

Source: Author's own Diagram, 2025. The original data for the chart was downloaded from Digimap



Camley Street Natural Park external paving material



Camley Street Natural Park internal paving material

Figure 23: Comparison of the materials used for the internal and external paving of camley Street Natural Park; Source:Author's own Diagram, 2025

(2) Selection of Camley Street Natural Park historical changes

Camley Street Nature Park's historical evolution is vividly reflected in its spatial outline change. Initially, the layout here was flat and monotonous, and it was an industrial relic of the past as a coal yard. Its regular, utilitarian geometry is designed to improve efficiency and has no aesthetic or ecological value. The terrain here is mainly barren, defined by rigid boundaries and hard surfaces, lacking any significant interaction with natural processes. This highly controlled linear environment has little room for biodiversity or sensory involvement.

The park's appearance has profoundly changed since the start of the wild work in the 1980s. The terrain of the once plain began to become irregular and diverse, mimicking the natural contours of the wild landscape. Ponds and wetlands were introduced to form sunken and undulating surfaces, enhancing visual effects and creating habitats for aquatic organisms. Reed clumps and grass mounds soften the edges of these landscapes and blur the boundaries between land and water. These naturalistic interventions replace rigid, flat surfaces with dynamic, multi-level landscapes that are textured and dynamic [Fig. 24].

The transition from hard geometric lines to soft curves is one of the most striking aspects of park wildlife [Fig. 25, 26, 27]. The redesigned trail winds through the space with organic curves, encouraging people to explore and interact. The ground is no longer a hard paving pavement but a soft surface such as bark and soil, which makes people feel more immersed in the natural environment. This wilderness profile supports ecological processes and attracts visitors for a multi-sensory experience, making the park a vibrant and engaging sanctuary. The

transformation of the spatial outline of Camley Street Nature Park proves the potential of wilderness to redefine urban space through ecological aesthetics.



The winding paths in the park in Camley Street Natural Park



Variety of natural boundary styles

Figure 24: The design of the different natural boundaries of the winding paths in the park
Source: Author's own Diagram, 2025

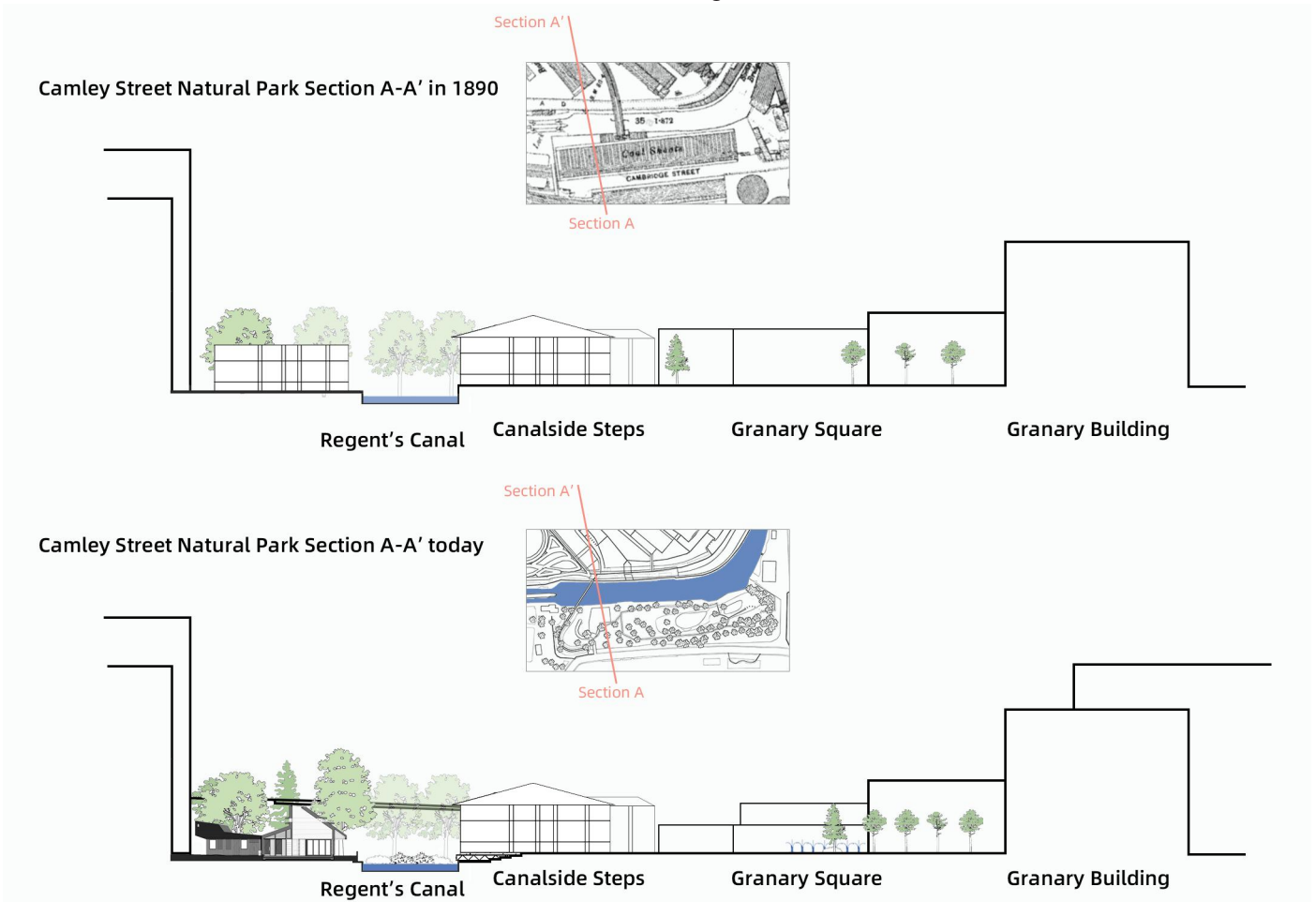


Figure 25: A comparison of the Camley Street Nature Park in 1890 (section A-A') and today
Source: Author's own Diagram, 2025

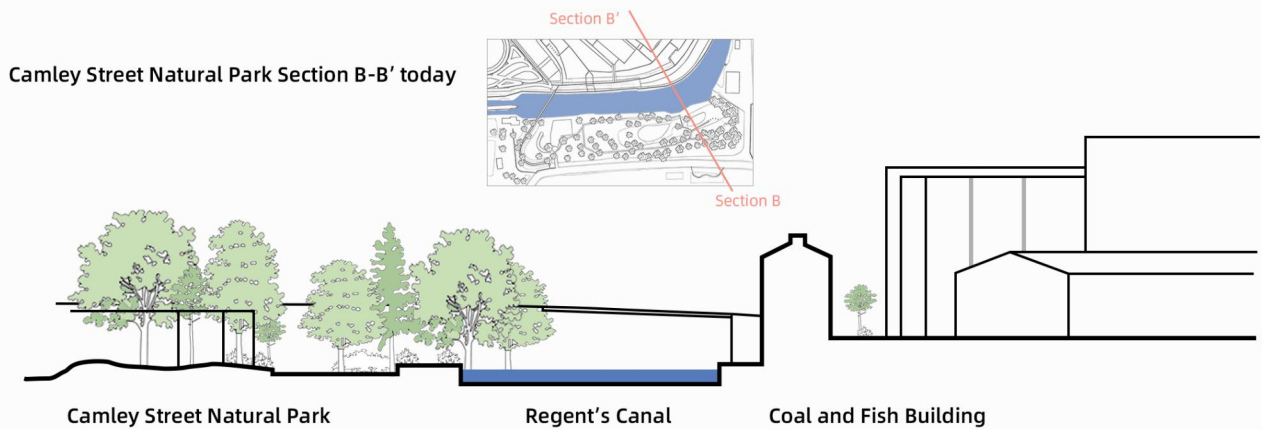
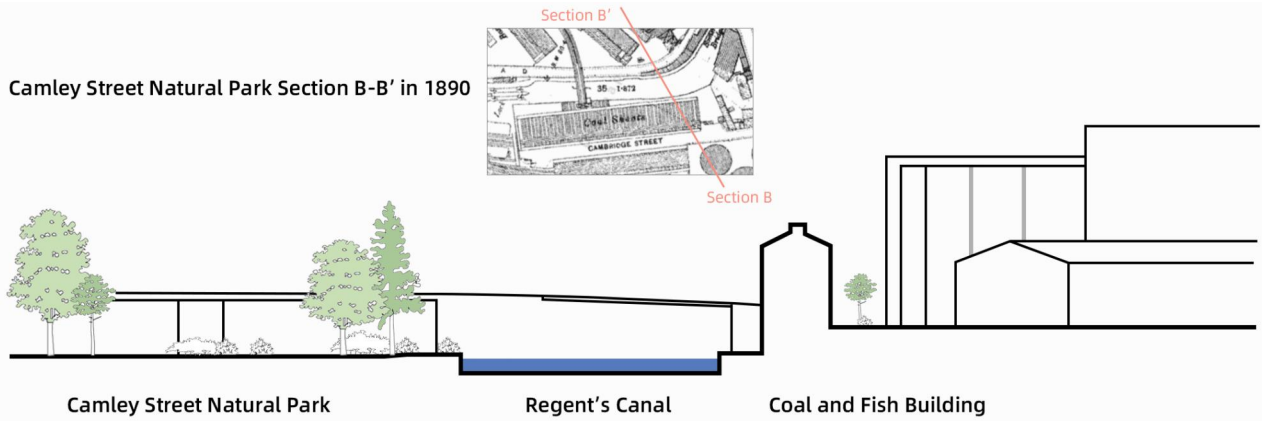


Figure 26: A comparison of the Camley Street Nature Park in 1890 (section B-B') and today; Source: Author's own Diagram, 2025

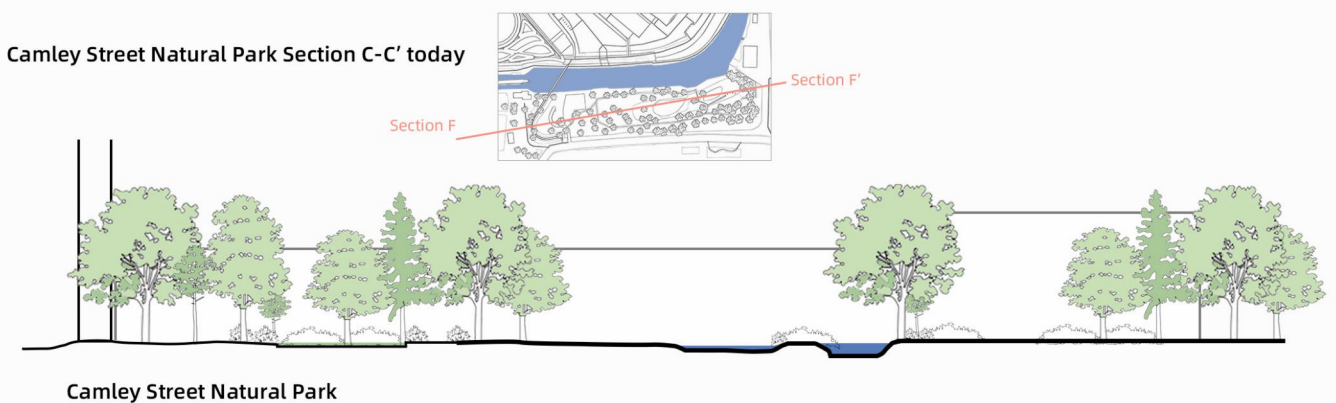
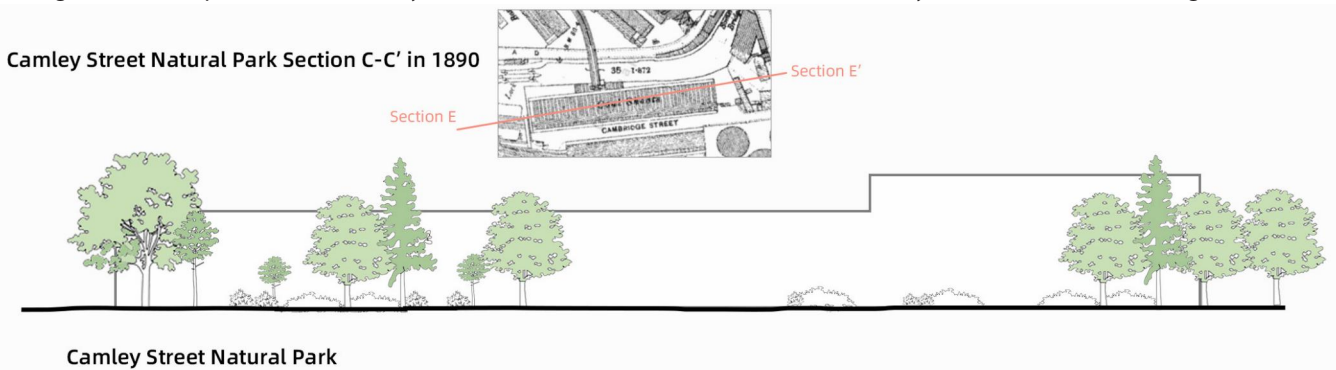


Figure 27: A comparison of the Camley Street Nature Park in 1890 (section C-C') and today; Source: Author's own Diagram, 2025

In the context of the Camley Street Nature Park and the urban wilderness strategy, the interaction between landscape patterns and perceptual processes provides important insights into the impact of ecology and aesthetics on human sensory and emotional experiences [Fig. 28]. The reintroduction of native species, the restoration of natural water bodies, and the design of landscapes that encourage the return of native animals are all fundamental elements (Barkham, 2021). These efforts have created a diversified and dynamic ecological network and promoted the deep sensory connection between man and nature. The irregular and multi-layered patterns of vegetation, water, and paths shape visitors’ visual and tactile perceptions, evoke emotional responses, and enhance appreciation of natural systems and emotional resonance.

Landscape patterns are characterized by organic and evolving forms influencing the perception process by promoting immersion and participation (Gobster et al., 2007). These perceptible elements symbolize ecological restoration and evoke positive emotional responses, such as tranquillity and curiosity. For example, creating corridors that connect scattered habitats has a dual purpose: to support biodiversity while providing visual and functional continuity to cater to human aesthetic tastes. Wilding promotes biodiversity and community participation by integrating ecological functions into attractive designs.

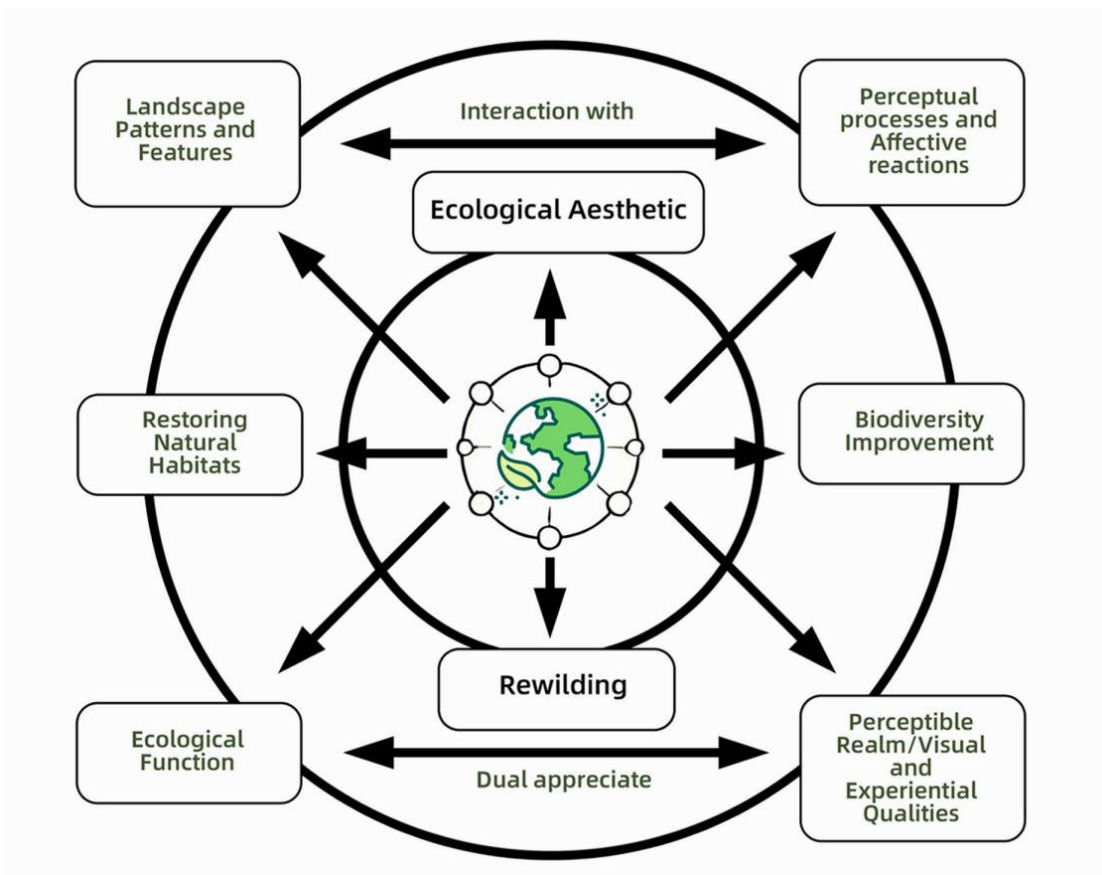


Figure 26: A comparison of the Carnley Street Nature Park in 1890 (section B B') and today;
 Source: Author's own Diagram, 2025

5. Discussion

(1) Camley Street Nature Park’s views on urban wilderness and ecological aesthetics

The transformation of Camley Street Nature Park from an abandoned coal yard to a vibrant oasis provides

valuable insights into the potential of wilderness and ecological aesthetics in the urban environment. Its irregular layout, the integration of different habitats and the emphasis on soft porous materials show how wilding creates immersive spaces full of biodiversity, even in densely populated areas [Fig. 29, 30]. By mimicking natural growth patterns and prioritizing organic forms, the park establishes an intuitive and resilient connection between visitors and nature, emphasizing the importance of sensory and ecological design in urban landscapes (Kamvasinou, 2011).

The strategy of restoring nature and ecological aesthetics adopted by Camley Street Nature Park redefines the spatial dynamics of the site. Elements such as curved paths, soft edges, and restored habitats such as wetlands, reeds, and grasslands integrate natural processes into urban structures [Fig. 31, 32]. These interventions enhance biodiversity and ecosystem functions and change how people perceive and interact with urban space. By integrating natural elements, the park creates a restorative environment conducive to human health and promotes sensory and emotional connections between man and nature; This balance between function, visual appeal and experience richness emphasizes the transformative potential of ecological aesthetics in urban planning (Kamvasinou, 2011).



Figure 29: Natural boundary outside the park; Source: Author's own Photograph, 2025
Figure 30: Park riverside environment; Source: Author's own Photograph, 2025



Figure 31: connection of park to canal; Source: Author's own Photograph, 2025
Figure 32: From the bridge, the park looks like an oasis in the city; Source: Author's own Photograph, 2025

(2) Lessons for future rewilding and urban planning

Camley Street Nature Park also provides important experiences for future wilderness projects and their integration with urban planning and design. Landscape architects play a key role in these initiatives as they must navigate the complex interactions between human activities and ecological processes. An important lesson is that wilderness involves a dynamic system that requires continuous management and improvement and, therefore, requires flexibility and adaptability. Designers must also prioritize public participation to resolve potential conflicts between aesthetic preferences and ecological goals, thereby winning community support for wilderness programs (Barkham, 2021).

The park's success highlights the importance of integrating ecological aesthetics into urban planning. In urban planning, form and function combine to create a sustainable and attractive space. Future wilderness projects should

consider Camley Street as a model for integrating biodiversity, ecological resilience and human experience into urban design (Barkham, 2021). These efforts should also be aligned with broader urban planning objectives, such as mitigating the effects of climate change, improving air and water quality and increasing urban livability (Barkham, 2021).

6. Conclusion

Camley Street Nature Park embodies the transformation potential of wildness and ecological aesthetics in urban space. Its evolution demonstrates the power of thoughtful design in creating biodiversity and immersive and sustainable environments. As cities face more and more ecological and social challenges, rewilding is an important way to balance urban development and environmental management (Gobster et al., 2007). Landscape architects and urban planners must continue to embrace these principles to ensure that future projects prioritize ecological health and the connection between man and nature (Gobster et al., 2007). By doing so, they can shape a more sustainable and harmonious urban future, allow biodiversity to flourish, and reconnect communities with nature.

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