

SUSTAINABILITY



AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

We find out how specialist property managers MAPP approached placemaking at Spitalfields as a sustainability challenge

A hub of East London life for over 350 years, today Spitalfields is one of the UK's best-known destinations, drawing traders, tourists and locals alike. Faced with the moving parts of operating one of the capital's most-visited attractions, specialist property manager MAPP approaches placemaking at Spitalfields as a sustainability challenge, zooming out beyond carbon reduction and zero waste to create a regenerative relationship between Spitalfields and its occupiers, local community and environment.

It may seem strange to couch placemaking in sustainability terms, but Laura McGuigan, MAPP's director in charge of managing Spitalfields, says they take a holistic view of the resources they work with – not only energy and materials, but also community, local history and the activity of London at large.

"Spitalfields is the best renewable resource we could ask for," McGuigan says. "Our job is to preserve its energy which has been going for hundreds of years and to do that, we continuously engage with clients, vendors, visitors and the local community, so we're sure this space truly serves everyone."

Authenticity from the outside in

This starts with ensuring Spitalfields operates in sync with its host community, a historic centre for



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Bangladeshis in London. Local residents are given preference in hiring for site staff, and the team meets with surrounding neighbours on a monthly basis to allow space for community members to suggest events and provide feedback.

Dining offerings at Spitalfields also nod to the area's heritage as a nexus for residents and workers from around the world. Visitors can find food trucks serving an array of global cuisines, from Italian pasta from Chi Chi + The Pasta Family, to tandoori chicken and masala from Mr Bombay. The team ensures that dining options are mindful of Spitalfields' social and environmental footprint. A partnership with one food truck, Punk Chef, helps employ and train members of the deaf community, and Spitalfields has also worked to create a 360-degree zero-waste food economy.

East London's rich history of art and activism similarly guides the team in curating both rotating and permanent art installations, often inspired by social issues. Established artists like Gillie & Marc and up-and-comers are featured. The space also regularly exhibits work by students at the local art college, giving Spitalfields an active role in keeping the area's creative tradition thriving.

Involving everyone in sustainable placemaking

Retaining this local flavour is key in MAPP's calendar of events, which invites neighbours, visitors and tourists to participate in the placemaking process.

“Look around your community and take stock of everything that's great, and then think about how your team can uplift that and add to it

In addition to 100+ stalls operating each day, the space hosts everything from monthly tea dances for seniors to charity performances by local choirs to seasonal scavenger hunts for Christmas, doughnuts for Diwali and outdoor screenings for the summer sports season. Spitalfields also serves as an anchor in London's busy cultural calendar – last February, the site hosted a catwalk for London Fashion Week, for example.

Central to these activities is sustainability, and MAPP takes pains to involve everyone in making Spitalfields a climate-friendly destination. This includes incorporating sustainability into existing events, like eco-friendly gift-wrapping workshops at Christmas, as well as new initiatives like clothing repair classes and a zero-waste theatre pop-up, which sold over 4,000 tickets.

Creating future-proof landmarks

According to Spitalfields estate director Jason Dervin, this proactive engagement can serve as a model of how to evolve for other landmark spaces.

“Renewable energy solutions and zero-landfill interventions are great, but they're kind of old news at this point,” Dervin says. “To really cement yourself as a destination that will be viable 10, 20, 50 years from now, you need to make sustainability an indispensable part of how people interact with the space.”

This integrated approach to placemaking has helped Spitalfields log its highest-ever visitorship in the past year. Weekend footfall has increased from a pre-pandemic level of 46,000 daily visitors to over 60,000, a nearly 35% uptick.

For operators of other international destinations drawing up their five- to 10-year plans, the Spitalfields team would say to first look outward before planning inward.

“When you're thinking about placemaking, you've got to focus more on that first bit!” McGuigan says.

“Look around your community and take stock of everything that's great, and then think about how your team can uplift that and then add to it.” **RD**