

THE PUBLIC LAND GRAB

By public works



LJ WORKS

LJ Works is a pilot scheme that tests how we, as citizens and architects, can claim land for long-term public use through the creation of self-sustaining economies governed by the community. The 2,000sqm site was designed and delivered by public works in collaboration with Architecture 00. It includes 1,300sqm of light-industrial workspace dedicated to local textile and food producers. These low-rent office and co-working studios operate alongside the Loughborough Farm and its community cafe.

PUBLIC LAND GRAB

LJ Works is a community-led affordable work and growing space in South London that tests how citizens can claim stewardship of land and protect existing public spaces (or assets) in the city. We refer to this area of our research as A Public Land Grab. public works have been involved in Loughborough Farm site since 2014, initially as residents and then practitioners. Our work began by bringing dispersed community organisations together in order to form a steering group for the site. The collaboration of this group, though not always amicable, led to the protection and development of the Loughborough Farm, who had been cultivating the land since 2013.

SITUATED DRAWING

Situated Drawing was a term coined by **public works** it describes a methodology which makes visible the relational architecture which sits behind projects like LJ works. Long term engagement projects which are highly dependent on creating a diverse and resilient set of stakeholder and networks. These enable meaningful co-authorship and form the base on which the (re-)innovation of on non extractive land practices can take place.

In this case a day long performance is captured in a single image bringing together the different aspects, networks and participants which form the extended network which constitutes LJ works. Food growers, educators, chefs, steering group members, adventure playground staff and children, architects, and many more.

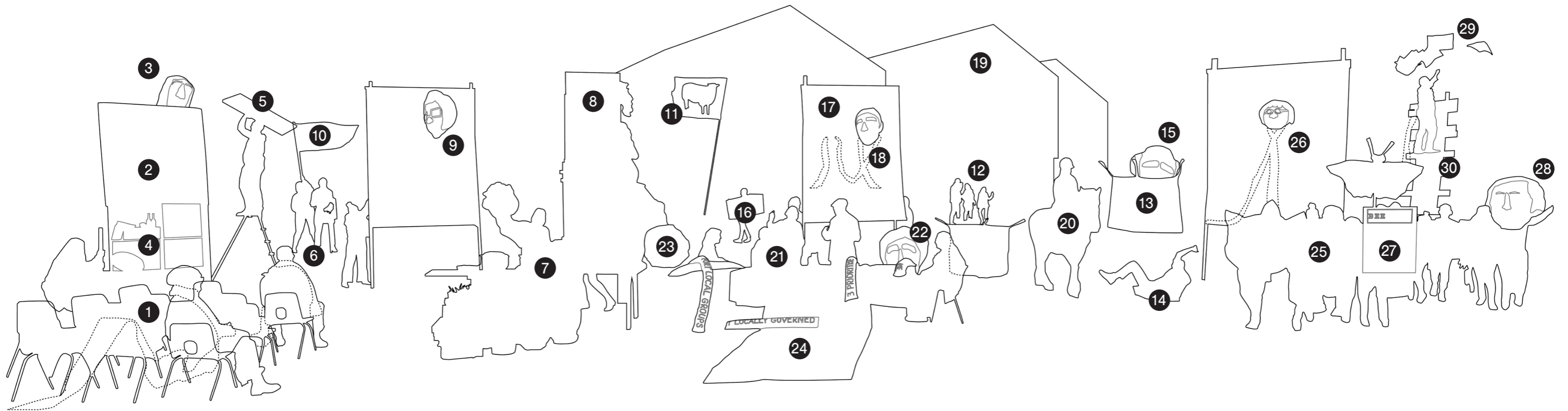
The piece consists of one 6m wide banner held up by 4 spades/pitch forks with two text sitting alongside it. (a key explaining the symbolism of the image and a narrative experience of the performance / day of capture)

Members of www.publicworksgroup.net affiliated with CSM

Andreas Lang (founding director) - Course Leader M-Arch & KE placemaking lead
Carlotta Novella (director) - Stage 1 leader - BA Architecture
Torange Khonsari - (founding director) - Associate Lecturer
Tom Dobson - (director) - Associate Lecturer
Andrew Belfield - (director) - Associate Lecturer
Angharad Davies - (director) - Associate Lecturer



A Public Land Grab



A Public Land Grab: The Ministry of Common Land at LJ Works

LJ Works is a community-led affordable work and growing space in South London that tests how citizens can claim stewardship of land and protect existing public spaces (or assets) in the city. We refer to this area of our research as A Public Land Grab. public works have been involved in Loughborough Farm site since 2014, initially as residents and then practitioners. Our work began by bringing dispersed community organisations together in order to form a steering group for the site. The collaboration of this group, though not always amicable, led to the protection and development of the Loughborough Farm, who had been cultivating the land since 2013.

LJ Works is led by public works director Tom Dobson in close collaboration with Architecture 00, and is funded by the London Regeneration Fund. Since its inception the LJ works site has doubled as well as growing the capacity of the local community, enabling them to safeguard the nearby Grove Adventure Playground and support a network of mutually reliant resident-led spaces across the area. The site now includes 1300sqm of community managed workspace for studios, a kitchen incubator, co-work space, canteen/cafe and other community focused programmes that support local entrepreneurship and new ways of cooperative working.

The key below details the intricate network of relationships, negotiations, favours and histories that make up LJ Works. The image that it accompanies is a situated drawing; a tool developed by public works to render visible the social relations at play within their relational architectural practice.

City as Classroom

1 - Exploding School is a term coined by anarchist writer Colin Ward (see no.27) to describe his ideas relating to education and the urban environment. Through it he proposed that the environment be understood as an educational resource that above all upheld a problem-orientated approach to environmental education. Ward's writings have informed our thinking of the city as a classroom; an approach central at LJ Works and broader proposition of the Ministry of Common Land.

2 - This cloned section of our Venice Biennale installation is covered with hempcrete. Hempcrete is a carbon-sequestering, naturally produced alternative form of cavity infill with insulating and breathable properties. Other alternative building techniques and technologies have been tried, tested and (in some cases) failed across our projects including anaerobic digesters, moss walls, compost toilets and compost powered heating systems. Mixing the hempcrete (hemp / lime / water) is curator of British

Pavilion at the 17th Venice Architecture Biennale, architect and structural engineer, Madeleine Kessler. Nearby, her co-curator Manijeh Verghese waves the Loughborough Farm poem (see no.11).

3 - C17th English religious reformer, political philosopher and activist Gerald Winstanley looks down from the hempcrete panel. Winstanley was the leader and co-founder of the group known as the True Levellers (or Diggers). The group occupied public lands that had been privatised by enclosures, pulling down hedges, digging them over and filling in ditches to plant crops. His head was made by Six21 student Shanice Joao.

4 - Copies of *The New Enclosure* by Brett Christophers and *Who Owns England?* by Guy Shrubsole selected by Madeleine sit on the shelf above her.

Next to the books are bottles of Energy Garden Ale. Energy Garden (a sister project of Repowering London) partners with institutions to turn vacant plots, such as railway sidings, into productive spaces for community growing and solar energy production. This includes hops for making beer.

5 - Sister project of Energy Garden, Repowering London has been working with communities to fund, install and manage their own clean, local energy since

2011. They have installed solar panels across the rooftops of the Loughborough Estate adjacent to LJ Works, and have brought localised energy to residents in the London boroughs of Lambeth, Hackney and North Kensington.

6 - Local residents Sacha and Max are the children of allotmenteer, farm advisor and homeschooling advocate Grant Smith and his wife Paula Baraitser. Sacha and Max have been brought up using the city as a classroom with hands-on learning from keeping chickens to rearing bees.

Platform Cafe

7 - Local produce dictates the lunches offered by Platform Community Cafe; an eatery and shop, initiated by Loughborough Farm volunteers, to celebrate the diverse food cultures of Loughborough Junction. Local volunteers help in the preparation and serving of homemade lunches with freshly harvested salads and vegetables. Seasonal and surplus food is used to make jams, pickles and cordials as well as herbal teas that are sold or given away. Throughout the last year of the pandemic the cafe was supplying free meals to local residents; one example of the informal, and often invisible, structures of care that permeate throughout LJ Works.

8 - Outside the cafe sits the surplus stall where the café gives away supermarket produce otherwise bound for landfill to the local community.

9 - Political economist Elinor Ostrom is deep in conversation in the cafe's kitchen. Ostrom's work focused on the governance of the commons. She disproved the idea that resources managed and maintained by the commons would eventually be overexploited and destroyed, and instead demonstrated how governance by the commons can be both economically and ecologically sustainable. Her head was made by Six21 student Ashley Vasudevan.

10 - "We come with nothing to this borrowed ground, the lost triangle between the railway bridge and the maisonettes. We scrape and clear, dig and plant, become wheelbarrow warriors, kings and queens of the spade and trowel. The rain is our sponsor, the worms our partners in crime. The sun sends a message of support through ninety-three million miles, to warm the soil, split the seed, start the shoot's climb to the light. So that nothing can stop us."

is the first verse of a poem written by a Loughborough farm volunteer, Stephen Blanchard, about the occupation and development of the farm site.

The Farm

11 - The Sheep Flag represents the central role that wool, England's first major export good, played in the enclosure of common lands. Over the course of several centuries, the fencing in or hedging of land, previously held in common ownership, meant that it no longer benefited all members of the community. Contemporary performance group Three Acres And A Cow have traced this history of privatisation from 1000 AD to the present day. It is available via Wikicommons.

12 - Since 2013 a group of local residents have been cultivating this land. These Loughborough Farm volunteers run the farm as a common space where decisions and produce are collectively shared. The hours these volunteers dedicated to growing, along with the food they produced, were recorded and used as evidence of the social value of the site. The farm runs today with the help of around 30 regular volunteers.

13 - When local residents (with a vague agreement from Lambeth Council) first occupied the site to establish the Loughborough Farm they filled builders' ton sacks with soil to create rubble grow bags.

These bags both occupied the land and allowed them to grow their first harvest. The builders bags were deemed temporary but led to permanence. As the farm expands to fill the space around LJ works buildings, the bags will be used to hold rich, fertile soil whilst the ground below is brought back to good health. This mechanism for occupation has both positive and negative connotations; whilst it allows for the farm to expand, it simultaneously keeps the earth separate from the ground below, and therefore prevents the plants from taking root. This quandary is shown in the floating bags.

14 - Underneath the floating grow bag lies The Captain

15 - American political economist and journalist Henry George peeks out of one of the rubble grow bags. George promoted what is now known as "single tax" on land. He inspired Georgism; an economic philosophy based on the belief that people should own the value they produce, while at the same time allowing for the economic value derived from land (including natural resources) to belong equally to all members of society. His head was made by Six21 student Davina Ravji.

16 - Local fire engines supported the farm by supplying water to the crops and filling butts throughout its first summer. Before taking over the land, local residents recall ringing the fire brigade to come to extinguish fires lit on the disused site by bored, young locals.

17 - The Plant Room was the first structure built on site. Designed by public works member Tom Dobson, it became a vital space for community dialogue and allowed farm volunteers and residents to meet with the council in their own space and on their own terms.

18 - Sydney Mary Bushell stands inside the Plant Room. Bushell is known for her contributions to the field of housing in the 1920s (in particular women's housing) as part of the Garden City and Town Planning Association and Women's Pioneer Housing. After working as a welder in the First World War she went on to study at LSE in 1918 where her interest in housing began. Her head was made by Six21 student Andre Galais.

19 - The LJ Works buildings will provide 1300sqm of light-weight multi-functional workspace for studios, a kitchen incubator, co-work space, canteen/cafe and other community focused programmes that support local entrepreneurship and new ways of cooperative working. LJ Works is designed by public works and Architecture 00 in collaboration.

The architectural intervention onsite is used as a strategy to retain the land in public ownership, retain the Loughborough Farm on-site and develop local governance and income generation which can feed back into the local community. public works calls this strategy 'The Public Land Grab'.

20 - Ebony Horse Club is a stables down the road from LJ Works in the railway arches that sit between the tower blocks and overground lines. The organisation, like the Loughborough Farm, aims to give hands-on experience of nature to local residents by bringing it into the heart of the city.

21 - The steering group is formed of local organisations deemed to represent Loughborough Junction. The steering group includes local residents, who work together with representatives from Loughborough Junction Action Group, Loughborough Farm, Meanwhile Space and Lambeth Council (all pictured), as well as local organisations including Loughborough Estate Management Board and Marcus Lipton Youth Centre. Together they make decisions (and passionately argue) about the management of LJ Works. These decisions are guided by the five demands developed by the group. These are:

- 1 Locally governed
- 2 Profits support local groups
- 3 Prioritise local people
- 4 Long term lease
- 5 Space of production

22 - Alongside the steering group rests Mary Barbour, a Scottish political activist, local councillor, bailie and magistrate. She was closely associated with the Red Clydeside movement in the early 20th Century, especially for her role as the main organiser of the Women of Govan in Glasgow who took part in the rent strikes of 1915. Her head was made by Six21 student Ibrahim Rashid.

23 - Sat on the table is a dark, pervasive void that represents Blackstone, one of the world's largest investment groups. The group is a backer of Arch Company, the subsidiary who recently purchased over 5000 railway arches from Network Rail, including those adjacent to the LJ Works site. Ruthless monetising of archways across inner cities has led to the dismantling of local creative and light industries which formally occupied these spaces.

24 - The Ministry of Common Ground Banner was drawn by public works for the British Pavilion at the 17th Venice Architecture Biennale. It pictures the core tenets of the Ministry - ownership, education, management and climate. LJ works is a detail of the Ministry, its focus being on similar processes of localized stewardship and governance that have the potential to be replicated at scale.

Grove Adventure Playground

25 - For over 50 years the Grove Adventure Playground has provided free play for all children of Loughborough Junction. After being threatened with closure, it was reopened in 2018 through the efforts of the community, coordinated by the Loughborough Junction Action Group. It is currently run by a dedicated group of workers and volunteers working in close collaboration with the Loughborough Farm and Platform Café.

The reclamation of the Grove Adventure Playground was enabled by the capacity developed through the 'public land grab' which resulted in LJ Works. The Grove Adventure Playground is an example of a reproducible strategy by which the public can become empowered and take over governance of space in the city.

26 - American-Canadian journalist and author Jane Jacobs stands atop the Grove Adventure Playground. Her writings and campaigning work influenced urban studies, sociology and economics. Jacob's book The Death and Life of Great American Cities (1961) argued that urban renewal did not respect the needs of city dwellers. Her head was made by Six21 student Jamie Vasudevan.

27 - In the early 1970s the Grove Adventure Playground was threatened with closure after its lease expired. Its children (and two goats) marched in protest. This was captured and published as the front cover of anarchist thinker Colin Ward's Bee Magazine. On 17 April 2021 we restaged this with children from the adventure playground. Holding cardboard painted animals, they marched across the LJ works site shouting "Who are we? GROVE!"

28 - Anarchist writer Colin Ward protests alongside the children. Ward wrote on everything from allotments, architecture, self-build housing, children's play, education, postcards and town planning to water distribution and anarchist theory. His head was made by Six21 student Unaisah Zannath.

29 - In 2017 the UK government published the Guide for the disposal of surplus land. The white paper states how the disposal of government owned property deemed as surplus is an important part of the government's drive to improve estate management and create efficient, fit-for-purpose and sustainable estates that meet future needs. In the paper the Conservative-led government committed to freeing up land with capacity for at least 160,000 homes and raising at least £5 billion from land and property disposals by 2020.

30 - Sherry Arnstein wrote and published several papers that dealt with public participation in decision making. The rungs of her 1969 Ladder of Citizen Participation describe how empowered public institutions and officials deny power to citizens, and how levels of citizen agency, control, and power can be increased.

A Public Land Grab is a project by public works in collaboration with 30 Bird, produced for the British Pavilion at the 17th Venice Architecture Biennial. Photography: Peter Günzel. Text: Angharad Davies



Situating LJ Works for The Ministry of Common Land

On Friday 16th April 2021 I arrived in Loughborough Junction and was greeted by the scrappy wasteland that surrounds the new black and yellow LJ works' buildings (completed last year but as yet unused due to Lambeth Council's delay in putting in hard surfacing around the community-run workspaces). It was the rehearsal day for the public works' situated drawing. Director and long-time collaborator Mehrdad Seyf was flowing around the site; preparing and testing the elements that would be threaded together in post-production for the 5.5m by 2m banner. The image was to be composed around the key groupings that make up the LJ Works project; the farm, the cafe, the steering group and the adventure playground mingled with the wider educational and historical context/s of public works as a practice. The collaboratively composed compositions would be enacted over the course of the following sunny day by community members working with an assembly of handcrafted and ready-made props to create a situated drawing.

In its most basic sense a situated drawing is an image taken or produced on a specific project site. It is both a physical and metaphorical drawing, which includes the act of being drawn together, the pursuit of a line of thought or a rendering of relations. These actions exist both in the process of image making and the object that it produces. It is a way to capture, celebrate and converse with current community members and future stakeholders. It speaks to the merits and complexities of a project. It reveals the intricate network of relationships, negotiations, favours and histories that contribute to the work of public works. It is an attempt to represent their rippling, relational practice. Here in Venice, it also works to summarise the core tenets of the *Ministry of Common Land* - ownership, management, climate and education - through LJ Works. At arms length it can sound abstract or academic, but the reality of watching one unfold is a markedly moving experience.

On the day of the shoot I arrived at 1215pm. I had timed my visit to coincide with the horse. As I approached the slab blocks and maisonettes of the Loughborough Estate, a horse emerged dead ahead from behind the metal gates. Splash, a ten year old cob, was circling in the street before returning inside the LJ works site to be photographed as part of the third scene of the day. Two teenagers looked on. Usually stabled in the neighbouring arches of the Ebony Horse Club, Splash had been invited to represent nature in the city; a founding principle of Loughborough Farm, who have been cultivating this land since 2013. Having not left London's limits over the last eight months of the pandemic, the sight of the horse filled me with an inalienable joy. This feeling, coupled with a sense of grounded awe, continued over the following hours.

Anyone involved in community activism will be familiar with the fatigue that sets when faced with the forces of privatisation that perpetually bite away at our cities' public spaces. Watching from behind the pole of a towering banner, the dogged determination required to brush off this specific type of exhaustion

was alive and kicking in the LJ Work's steering group. They stood and sat around the table, arguing and joking and ignoring any insistences from Mehrdad. These five people are members of a larger group; a collection of individuals and local organisations who for the last 6 years have been agreeing and disagreeing. They represent the first formal intervention (the bringing together of disparate voices) that public works made as practitioners made in Loughborough Junction. Once established, the steering group worked to at first develop an alternative scheme to one proposed by Lambeth Council for the site, and subsequently work in a state of conflictual partnership with them. The steering groups proposal was based around the five demands:

Prioritise local people

Long term lease

Locally governed

Space of production

Profits support local groups

These five principles lie scattered around the chorus of consensus and chaos at the centre of the image. Placed unassumingly beside them is the sinister dark mark. This black blob is world-leading investment company Blackstone. A subsidiary of Blackstone recently purchased over 5000 railway arches (predominantly occupied by small, scale independent traders) from UK's network rail, including those that bound the southern edge of the LJ Work's site. So despite doubling in size, building 1300sqm of community-run workspace, safeguarding local assets like the Grove Adventure Playground and securing a 25-year lease on the LJ Works site, the threat of privatisation pervades. As does the battle.

A war cries out. *'WHO ARE WE?* The 50 year history of the Grove Adventure Playground (currently residing on land a few arches away) is one of play pitted with adversity. *'WHO ARE WE?* Carrying cardboard creations - cow, bees, butterflies - the children from Grove Adventure Playground arrive. *'WHO ARE WE?* Like me, they had been lured in by the promise of the horse. But a last minute schedule change meant that the horse had left. Visibly disappointed but still persuadable, they reenact the march of 1972 that saved their playspace. *'WHO ARE WE?* Enthusiastically one of the older children volunteers to wear a giant sculpted head of anarchist writer Colin Ward. After the fourth attempt at marching blind, through nettles and weeds across uneven ground, interest waning, he was propelled on by the torrential energy of their group leader. *'WHO ARE WE? GRO---VE!!!!'*

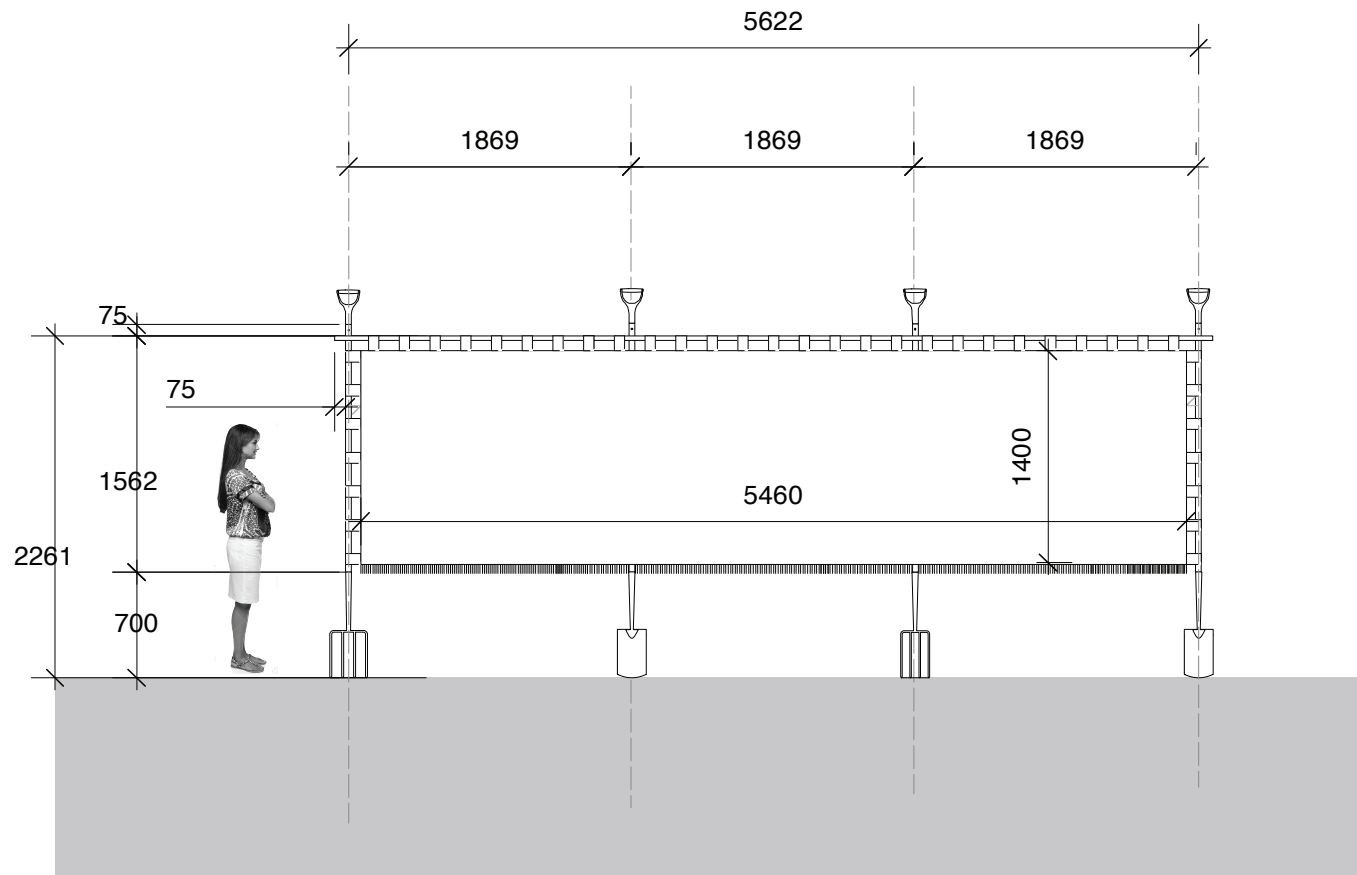
Other moments of oppositional thinking populate the day. These all locate the origins of their fight in a history of enclosure. This shift from public to private ownership was fuelled by the burgeoning wool industry of 15th Century England (here represented by the sheep-emblazoned flag) and led to loss of common land as well as the moments of resistance and reform that sought to reverse it. The champions

of this protesting past — Ostrom, Jacobs and George, Bushell, Barbour, Winstanley, and Ward — peer out. All inform the present of public works. This historical inheritance is countered by the intimacy of contemporary localism as found in the day-to-day distribution of free meals and local produce by the cafe or drawn by the children of allotmentee, farm-advisor and home-school advocate's Grant Smith and Paula Baraister (on the day poultry became paper after they decided that the chicken would find the experience too stressful). The chicken and the children sit within a wider desire upheld by the practice; for the city to be understood as an educational resource, as a classroom for all and as a space for all.

Towards the end of the afternoon the momentum of the farm-cafe-steering group-playground is replaced by a smaller group who have gathered for a separate portrait to mark the last seven years of determination. Farmers, family-members, a ward councilor, a sword-swallowing magician, and a woman holding a portrait of her son. In this moment - searching for something to begin an end - I crudely mistook one mother's loss for another's. Andrew Pratt was murdered in 2008 whilst walking home from work a few streets away from the LJ Works. At the time his death was seen as symptomatic of the neglect that the community felt. It rallied people of Loughborough Junction into action. These actions came to be situated in the cultivation of some land, in the protection of play, in work and free time, in education and eating. The man I'd mistaken Andrew for was in fact Hilme XXX, a local resident and farm volunteer. His family had come to pay tribute to Hilme, as one of many who had contributed to the systems of care, communication and community present in and around LJ Works.

The situated drawing that took place on 17th April 2021 was an attempt to recall the hours, actions and people that happen in between an idea and an outcome. To situate the 'stuff' of relational architecture that is the work of public works. Throughout the day Tom - resident, public works director and lead on the LJ Works project - worked. Moving calmly from friend to friend; explaining, listening, corralling. It was only later when piecing the image together did his absence become apparent. Concerned then calmed, we concluded; his absence fittingly indicative of the work that it takes to ensure no one else is.

angharad davies 2021



public works
 PUBLIC LAND GRAB
 BANNER FRAMES DIMENSIONS

TEL - 07866566162
 EMAIL - andreas@publicworksgroup.net