London's famous gardens get new life with Valto and Microsoft Power Apps

Valto

Challenge: The City of London used to manage all of its gardens with pen and paper

This system was inefficient, prone to human error, and slow.

Solution: A Power App designed for London's gardeners

Valto helped London modernize its garden upkeep processes with Microsoft technology.

Results: Enhanced visibility for administrators and streamlined processes for gardeners

With the app, issue reporting times fell from seven days to 24 hours and audit completion rates rose from 70 to 95 percent.

If you've ever taken a stroll through the City of London, you've likely wandered into one or two of their meticulously groomed public gardens. Their natural beauty, expertly integrated into one of the most urbanized cities in the world, provides Londoners a breath of fresh air – a momentary reprieve from the hustle and bustle of city life. It's common for people in these gardens to take a moment, stop, and admire their tranquility, but it's far less common for someone to peek under the bonnet and ask "how does the city maintain all of these immaculate gardens so well?"

Back in early 2020, the answer would have surprised you: pen and paper. This system left a lot to be desired. For example, city gardeners would travel between sites to conduct routine maintenance, but it was never readily apparent to them which tasks had already been completed by others, who had completed them, and when. This lack of visibility and communication often forced gardeners to repeat each other's work, hindering productivity and wasting time.

"Working with Valto has been a great experience. They were able to understand our business needs and design a value-for-money product that met our requirements. The team were professional, responsive, and able to explain technical issues clearly to very nontechnical people."

— Jake Tibbets, City Gardens Manager, City of London

This paper-based system wasn't just inefficient for London's gardeners – it also made garden oversight challenging for city administrators. Simple questions like 'which gardens have a history of vandalism' or 'how long do routine tasks actually take gardeners' were not easy to answer without sorting through piles of paperwork. It was also difficult to conduct audits of specific gardens or boroughs over time. The City of London knew that if they wanted their gardens to retain their world-class status, they would need to make some updates to their management processes, and they knew they couldn't do it alone. Thankfully, they found an experienced partner to guide them on their digital transformation in Valto IT Services.

Partnering with Valto to streamline garden management

Valto specializes in delivering Microsoft 365 Modern Workplace services and has been a Microsoft partner since its founding in 2017. Since then, Valto has done work in numerous industries and attained gold competencies in the Microsoft Partner Network for Cloud Productivity, Cloud Platform, and Application Development.

When the City of London decided it was time to find a partner for this project, they found Valto through the Microsoft website. Given Valto's breadth of industry expertise and its deep knowledge of Microsoft technology, the City of London was confident that it was the right partner for the job. Almost immediately, the partnership felt natural.

Their goal was simple: build a Microsoft Power App solution that would streamline garden management for London's field workers and administrators alike. The solution would have to be easy to use, scalable, and securely available on employee mobile devices. There was one catch – before the City of London committed to fully investing in such a solution, they wanted to see a proof of concept to make sure it would work and add value. It was time for Valto and the City of London to roll up their sleeves and get to work.

Rolling out an MVP (minimum viable product)

In just three weeks, Valto and the City of London built a pilot version of their desired Power App, backed by Microsoft Power Automate and SharePoint Online. Next, they put it to the test. A random group of approximately ten city gardeners were selected to demo the app for a few weeks as Valto and the City of London carefully collected their feedback.

"The Microsoft Power Platform enabled us to deliver a fantastic solution for our client quickly and easily. The Power Apps solution has really driven efficiency, auditability, and reporting for the City of London's garden team."

— Hugh Valentine, Managing Director, Valto

The feedback from the field was straightforward: the buttons should be a bit bigger for easier use on tablets and it should be a bit easier to find specific gardens in the app. Most importantly, *it made their lives easier.*

This was all that the City of London needed to hear before investing in the full app. Together, Valto and the City of London began scaling the app so it could support all of the city's garden-related employees and making all the requested UX improvements. Now, the City of London has over 100 employees using the app, reaping its benefits every day.

Managing solution security

Throughout the entire app development process, security was a top priority for Valto and the City of London. Because the app was going to interact with the City of London's secure infrastructure, it needed to be protected from bad actors and cyberthreats alike. Put simply, there were two layers of security that needed to be implemented: device-level and data-level.

To secure devices out in the field, Valto and the City of London use Microsoft Intune. This ensures that city-managed devices cannot be opened by unauthorized people and it enables the City of London to remotely wipe any lost devices.
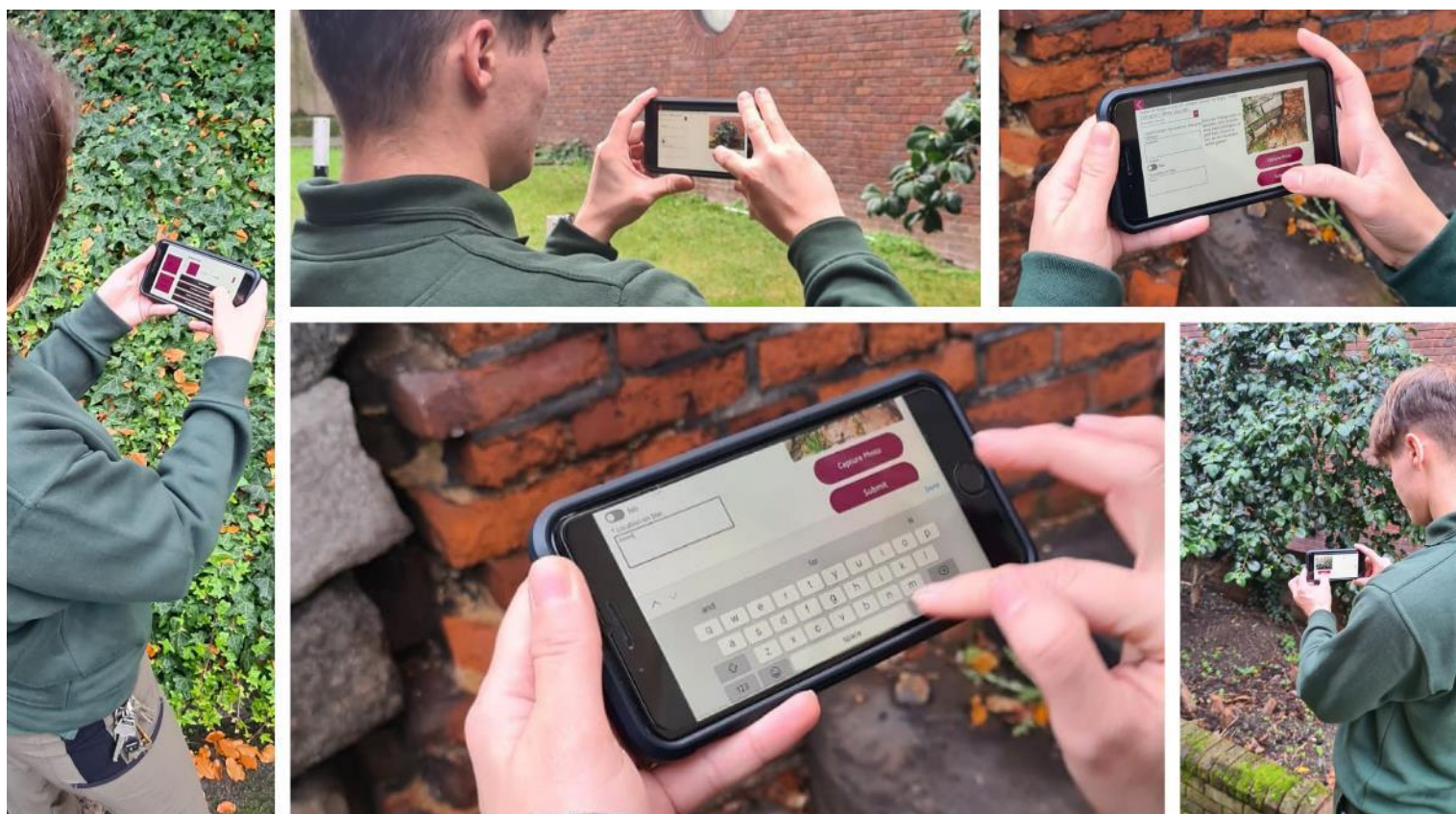
City of London employees using the Garden Management app (Photos courtesy of the City of London)

From a [data security](#) standpoint, Valto and the City of London added a retention label to their data that enables them to automatically purge data once it becomes obsolete. Additionally, all of the software used in this solution is secured by Microsoft 365, adding yet another world-class layer of threat defense.

Improving productivity in the field and visibility in the office

The City of London's new processes and Power App have streamlined garden maintenance in a few key ways.

First, pen and paper are now a thing of the past. Previously, gardeners had to report an issue by physically writing it up and delivering it to a central office where it was transcribed into a digital format. This process was slow, prone to human error, and no longer possible given the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, field workers can report an issue instantly via the app, enabling administrators to swiftly allocate resources towards issue resolution. *With this new app, issue reporting times have fallen from around seven days to within 24 hours.*

Second, Valto's solution has made audit completion easier. Garden overseers now have deep visibility into the status of every public garden in London and can easily track issues like overdue facility checks. For the first time, the City of London has business intelligence to guide garden upkeep and investment. *Each garden now enjoys a 95 percent audit completion rate, up from 70 percent before the app.*

Finally, *this solution provides a single reliable method for reporting issues and tracking their resolution.* Prior to its implementation, field workers would report an issue and forget about it – there was no way for them to track it once it was in the central office's system. Now, people in the field can see exactly how the issue will be resolved, the progress that's been made, and when it's slated to be fixed.

Looking ahead – innovation never rests

With one successful project under their belt, Valto and the City of London are eager to continue innovating together. "We will work together to further enhance the app," explains Hugh Valentine, Managing Director at Valto. "We're looking into other opportunities to build new Power Apps too. We've worked with Microsoft a lot on these, so we plan on continuing to upskill in this space."

When asked if he sees a broader appetite in the government sector for digital transformation, Valentine responded, "Absolutely, 100 percent. There are always questions around security when working with government data, but with Microsoft providing a trusted and secure platform, the opportunities for innovation are endless."