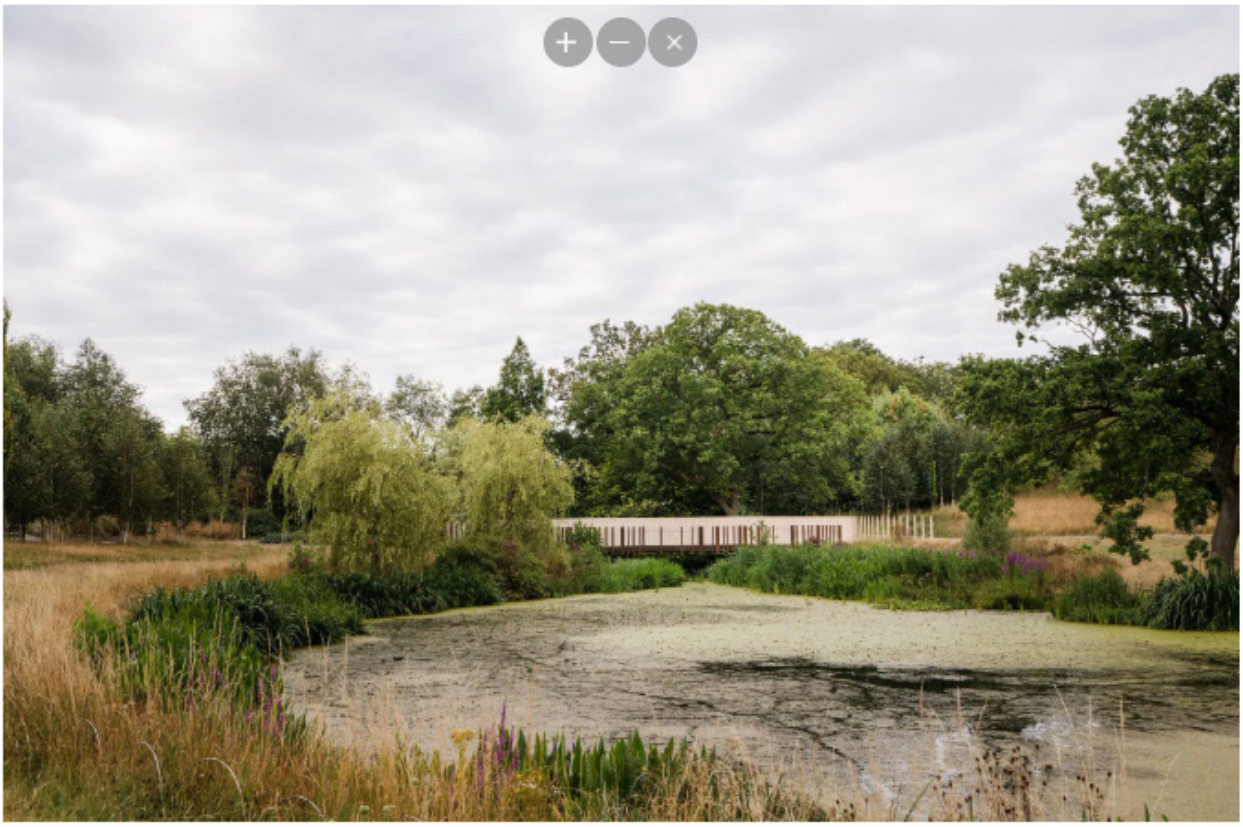
FIRST LOOK

Gagarin completes garden bridge at RHS's Harrogate gardens

14 SEPTEMBER 2026 • BY ROB WILSON, PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK NEWTON



1/12

Thaliana Bridge, constructed of weathering steel and Accoya, is tied into its surroundings by landscape works and planting

Halifax-based practice Gagarin, working in collaboration with structural engineer DeSimone, has completed Thaliana Bridge for the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) at Harlow Carr in Harrogate.

The sculptural bridge crossing spans the garden's Queen Mother Lake and is tied into landscape works and planting of the lakeside gardens.

The structure has an overall length of 42m and is 3m wide, and is built in weathering steel with an Accoya walkway. The bridge's name and geometry take their reference from Rachel Leech's genome sequencing research into arabidopsis thaliana – the first plant to have its genome fully sequenced and now a standard model organism in plant science.



Leech, who died in 2017, was a pioneer of organelle biology and carried out significant genetic analysis of the thale plant. The scheme was funded by her estate.

The bridge was installed in 2023, with practical completion taking place this year upon completion of the landscape works that connect and tie into the structure.

Gagarin won approval for the footbridge in June 2021.



Architect's view

The Thaliana Bridge was a wonderful project to be involved with. RHS Harlow Carr is a beautiful setting, and the client team were ambitious and supportive of the proposals we put forward from the outset.

We like to approach bridges as a piece of land art. Beyond the pragmatics and pure function they perform, they're also great vessels to carry a concept and be overlaid with other meanings. The project was funded primarily by a donation from the estate of Dr Rachel Leech, and the bridge design reflects the research she undertook into the genome sequence of arabidopsis thaliana – the first plant to have its genome fully sequenced. We're not scientists, but we enjoyed researching the research (the plant has even been grown on the International Space Station in zero gravity, which was pretty fascinating).

After exploring several alternative design approaches, we developed a design that traces the plant's chromosome DNA sequence on to the front screen, while keeping the rear screen deliberately neutral to let the sequence read clearly.

I really like how simple the bridge feels within the landscape – it shifts from different angles and through the seasons. In winter, the garden is illuminated for the RHS Glow festival, and the bridge looks wonderful in the wash of coloured light and water reflections.

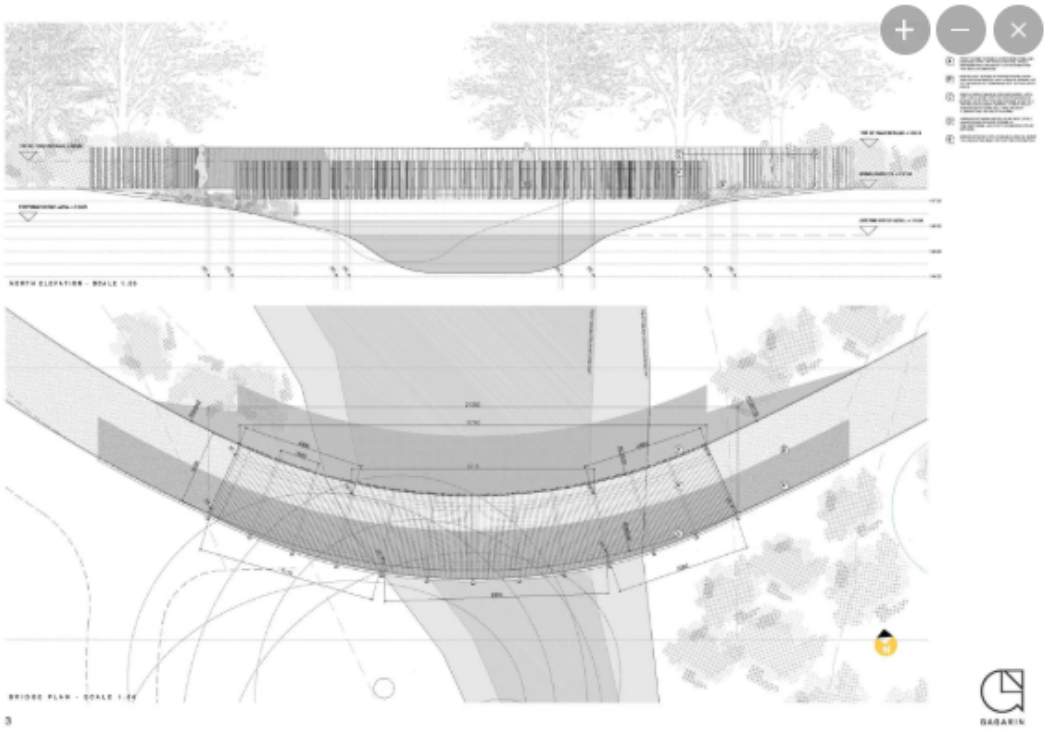
Steve Gittner, director, Gagarin



Client's view

The Thaliana Bridge has been a wonderful addition to the garden. Not only is it functional, but it has also created a focal point for people to admire as they walk round the lake. The design has created discussion and interest, and we look forward to it being in the garden for many years to come.

Fiona Slight, head curator, RHS Harlow Carr



Source: Gagarin

Plan and elevation

Source: Gagarin

Project data

Location Harlow Carr, Harrogate, North Yorkshire
Start on site October 2023
Completion date March 2026 (following completion of the connecting landscape works)
Gross floor area 126m^2 (42m long by 3m wide)
Form of contract or procurement route Direct
Construction cost £100,000
Architect Gagarin
Client Royal Horticultural Society (with funding from the trust of Dr Rachel Leech)
Structural engineer DeSimone Consulting Engineers
Landscape consultant Landscape Agency
Main contractor CTS
CAD software used AutoCAD