

# Victoria Park Restoration

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## Long-term Community Benefits

London's 170 year old Victoria Park was the city's first designed Public Park. The 86 hectare Grade II listed landscape in the East End of London borders Bethnal Green, Hackney, and Bow and has many listed features. It is one of the largest local authority managed parks in London, visited by over 12 million people a year.

Reductions in funding meant that the park had been in decline since the 1980s with risk of the original Victorian features being lost and the park infrastructure failing. The brief was to apply to the Heritage Lottery Fund for funding under its Park for People funding stream and the Big Lottery Fund, to secure investment to restore and improve the historic park in partnership with Tower Hamlets Council.

Construction of the scheme was split into two, of which we were responsible for delivery of the civil, landscape and park structures. The two main building schemes, comprising restoration of the Victoria and Alexandra Shelter in the West and a new building "The Hub" in the East, were constructed simultaneously with our work by another main contractor.

## Realising the Vision

The complex scope required restoration to historic features and new design, to reinvigorate the park. These included: improved access to and within the park, lake restoration, improvements to poor water quality, ecological improvements, new cafes, toilets and a visitor centre, new bridges, restoration and re-creation of lost historic features as well as new designs and interventions to reinvigorate the park, which had areas previously perceived as unsafe and uninviting:

**Hard Landscaping Works** - The park's infrastructure was in need of repair and enhancement to improve the park access and overall connectivity. Hard landscaping works included new and refurbished paths; park-wide drainage improvements, paving, surfacing, new street furniture, and signage.

**Planting** - A review of the park's vegetation identified opportunities to diversify and improve seasonal interest and improve the park's

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TOP: Landscaping works

BOTTOM: Restoration of the model boating lake

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“ A key part of the restoration project was the reinstatement of the Chinese Pagoda which had been demolished during 1960s... The Pagoda and island have become a highlight in the West Park and a location to hold events.



TOP: New landscaping works

BOTTOM: Enjoying the restored bandstand

management regimes. The Old English Garden was transformed from the dark, secluded place it had become to a welcoming and relaxing garden, also providing the opportunity for the park maintenance teams to develop new skills in horticulture practices.

**Play Areas** - Two new, large play areas to the east and west parks included significant new play equipment and complex water play features; an urban beach; design and construction of a “Wheels Park” suitable for skateboarding and bikes. The large expanse of tarmac and black safety surface at the Victoria and Alexandra play area was replaced with natural materials and The Pools playground was refurbished and expanded to offer a huge range of play activities for adults as well as children.

**Lake Works** - An extensive restoration of the park lakes included restoration of a concrete model boating lake, regularly used by the oldest model boat club in the world – the Victoria Model Steam Boat Club, founded in 1904. Two other lakes were also excavated, restored and enlarged to their former profile: adding a new island in the West Lake; carrying out extensive de-silting, installing pump systems, spillways, edging and relining.

” **Structures Works** - A key part of the restoration project was the reinstatement of the Chinese Pagoda which had been demolished during 1960s. Local craftsman were involved in the construction, including the eight gold painted dragons manufactured by a Foundry in the Borough. The Pagoda and island have become a highlight in the West Park and a location to hold events. The newly restored island in the West Lake was completed with two new bridge structures to link the island with the rest of the park. The Rustic Bridge and Pennethorne Bridge were designed and positioned in the landscape using historic research - the Pennethorne Bridge was a copy of the Chinese style from Sir James Pennethorne's original design that was never constructed.

**Historic Restoration** - Historic restoration works to listed Park structures included the Burdett Coutts Fountain. This water fountain was donated to the Park by the first Baroness Burdett-Coutts, once the wealthiest woman in England, thanks to her receiving a £3m inheritance in 1837 when she was 23. Previously in poor condition

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TOP: Benefitting from landscaping works

BOTTOM: Maintaining the park's Victorian heritage

and closed off to the public, the restoration project has reversed the structures decline and loss of historic fabric. Bonner Hall Bridge, a Scheduled Ancient Monument, was also restored in full consultation with English Heritage at all stages; along with the Rustic Shelter; the Bandstand and all entrances and gates.

## Stakeholder Strategy

All works took place whilst allowing the park to remain open to the public through a busy summer events schedule. Hence, a critical success factor was management of the multiple works areas while keeping the park in use and safe for all visitors and staff. This required flexible and proactive planning, supported by excellent liaison with our customer London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH); the park teams; the other park contractor; and key stakeholders.

Through gaining local knowledge and expertise, we were able to improve our planning, phasing, methodologies and engagement techniques; and respond to the advice and concerns of the local community.

- Our project team liaised with the park staff and carried out weekly walk-throughs with the Park Manager: discussing any environmental/stakeholder issues, public route diversions or temporary closures, and general activities for the following week and supporting the park team's works. By establishing an excellent relationship we were able to discuss any concerns and resolve them before any problems arose.
- We worked closely with the other contractor to co-ordinate our site deliveries and reduce the impact in the busy, residential streets around the park.
- To minimise disruption to wildlife during the lake works we liaised closely with Thames Water, the Environment Agency, the RSPCA's Local Officers and local Swan Sanctuary.
- Park users were kept informed about the works plans and progress and we were highly responsive to any concerns raised.



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**We are committed to benefitting the local communities in which we work, regularly taking part in community events and gaining an understanding of where we can help. We used our Stakeholder Liaison Plan to identify the people who would be affected by our works and opportunities to develop our relationships with each.**  
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**TOP:** Restored Pagoda, maintaining the park's heritage and landscaping design

**BOTTOM:** Restoration of the model boating lake

- A local bird enthusiast was escorted into our site area, where we assisted in clearing fishing lines that she had noticed caught in trees and was posing a danger to the wildlife.

## Community Investment and Sustainable Construction

We are committed to benefitting the local communities in which we work, regularly taking part in community events and gaining an understanding of where we can help. As part of our sustainable construction process, we also maximised recycling both within our sites and to the local community. We used our Stakeholder Liaison Plan to identify the people who would be affected by our works and opportunities to develop our relationships with each.

- Equipment was donated to a local play group “Apes at Play”, and distributed to local schools. The old skate park equipment was donated to the community and it is now being used in other areas of the Borough.
- A local artist was allowed to search through the dredged lake beds to collect old bottles, balls and shoes which he used for a local exhibition.
- Paint and jumbo bags were donated to the Park Volunteers for restoration outside of our project works such as the park fence railings and leaf/rubbish clearance.
- Brushes were provided to the local skaters to use in the Skate Park; and workshops held to brief Friends of the Park and local residents before providing spring bulbs for a community planting project.
- The bandstand was cleaned and painted free of charge, ready for the opening ceremony.

- Sponsorship of £1,000 was given to The Mayor's Cup five-a-side football challenge.

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***A further aim of the project was for it to be an exemplar of sustainable design to help inspire other local developments to follow suit.***

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TOP: Historical restoration

BOTTOM: Park landscaping and walkways improvements

- By providing art materials and support to the Park Ranger, four murals were created, which were then painted by local schools, waterproofed and displayed on our hoardings.

A further aim of the project was for it to be an exemplar of sustainable design to help inspire other local developments to follow suit. Sustainability measures included:

- Lake extensions to improve water quality and enhance biodiversity
- New water supply from boreholes to top up lakes, irrigate gardens and supply grey water for the toilet system at the Hub building
- New water circulation system for Pools Playground, to minimise mains water usage
- Rain water harvesting
- Retaining construction and demolition materials on site for re-use
- Significant enhancements to biodiversity
- Opportunities for environmental study and education
- Use of locally sourced materials and skills
- Opportunities for community training and volunteering
- Crushed concrete was reused and felled trees chipped to use as mulch.
- Dredged silt was cultivated into one of the Park open areas, levelling a hollow in the ground - not only recycling the waste

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## Glen Addis of East London Business Place commented:

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**Osborne’s commitment and drive towards key localism and sustainability agendas, combined with their refreshing approach to working in partnership, meant that local businesses in East London won contracts.**

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onsite, but also removing the vast number of lorry movements which would have been required to take the silt away.

- Park benches and waste bins were restored and painted where possible, rather than being replaced; saving money, reducing waste and lorry movements.

### Local Supplier Initiative

We operated a Local Supplier Initiative and exceeded our 30% target, achieving 38% local supply chain; by offering apprenticeships and work placements and using local agencies for non-skilled work.

**Open Day** - Working in partnership with LBTH and East London Business Place (ELBP), we held an Open Day for local SMEs, during tender stage, where we identified opportunities and encouraged companies to approach us for work. We also took advice from “Skills Match” and investigated opportunities to support “Common Ground East” which helps local young people.

**Defining Suitable Work Packages** - Work packages were suitably defined to allow local suppliers with the necessary skill sets and commercial capability to apply for work. It also ensured that all suppliers who had attended the Open Day were invited to tender and that we were not asking for something unachievable.

**Local Apprentices** - We employed local apprentices to give them experience in groundworks and supported their training to achieve CSCS cards. This improved their CVs and should help them to continue in employment. We also employed local staff for office cleaning and general labour.

### Legacy

Victoria Park is an invaluable asset for LBTH and its diverse community and this project was a once in a life-time opportunity to bring a much loved park up to date. The regeneration will ensure the park continues to provide delight, pride and recreation for years to come.