

VIEWPOINT EXTRA

# Parks by the people

In his Viewpoint in *The Garden* (January 2011, pp48-49), **Wesley Kerr** urged society in general to take more responsibility for our public green spaces. Here he describes the work of volunteers at London's Battersea Park and Victoria Park 

### Case study: Battersea Park

Battersea Park in London was a pioneering public space when James Pennethorne laid out its 81ha (200 acres) in the 1850–60s on the south bank of the River Thames. In 1951 it was part of the Festival of Britain and, much more recently, the park has been restored. It is a complex mix of woodland, promenades, ornamental and subtropical gardens, fountains, sports facilities and even a Peace Pagoda. The plant nursery, Herb Garden and Old English Garden are run by the charity Thrive, providing horticultural work and training for around 100 disabled people. In another area, The Friends of Battersea Park are laying out an elaborate Winter Garden for which they have raised £200,000 – and commissioned garden designer Dan Pearson to design – which will feature 300 trees and shrubs, 22,000 perennials and 46,000 bulbs.

Simon Cooper-Grundy, Wandsworth Council's wonderfully titled Head of Parks and Bereavement, is Battersea's proud ringmaster. 'I've got the best job in the Council,'

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CAROLINE AMES

Above: Thrive's herb garden in Battersea Park  
Below: Volunteers of all ages enjoy contributing



CAROLINE AMES

RHS / NEIL HEPWORTH

Above: gardens run by Thrive



he says. 'When you say you're in charge of parks, people smile.' Of Thrive he says, 'they have been here for 28 years, and are a credit to the park and a credit to themselves; they work with our contractors who are involved in their training.' Thrive 'bring a high level of care, attention and focus to the areas they garden.'

### **Case study: Victoria Park**

In London's East End, the 83ha (218 acres) of Victoria Park (another Pennethorne masterpiece) serve some of Britain's most deprived boroughs. The park is proudly embarking on a £13 million restoration, backed by Heritage Lottery Fund/Big Lottery Fund and Tower Hamlets Council. Around 500 local people have signed up as volunteers; they will get training in gardening, event management and security, and for some this could lead to employment.

The Council asserts that its budget for improved maintenance, more staff and apprentices is ring-fenced, and hopefully this will not mean lower standards elsewhere. It already raises £500,000 from events. There will have to be savings but, it claims, from back office, not frontline. For recreation, water management and social cohesion in a diverse area, the park is too valuable not to cherish.

*Wesley Kerr* is an historian, broadcaster, journalist, keen horticulturist and Chairman of the Heritage Lottery Fund's Committee for London

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