



Above: how the gardens could look  
Below: the gardens today

# Inviting spaces

We take a closer look at plans to transform Christchurch Gardens on Victoria Street

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**A** last stretch of green space on Victoria Street, Christchurch Gardens has been open to the public since the 1950s. Since then the space has had little attention, but there are plans underway to transform it into a blooming public garden for Victoria's residents and workers to enjoy.

The project will see a complete transformation of Christchurch Gardens, explains David Beamont, operations manager at Victoria BID, with more natural light and biodiversity, and adding in paving and seating areas to encourage people to spend time enjoying the space.

"The design is now at a point where we want to share it with the community to get their views prior to submitting a planning application," says David. The renovation of the gardens will, he hopes, get underway in the autumn, to be completed and ready for workers and residents in Victoria to enjoy the space next summer.

### FLORA AND FAUNA

The scheme is being designed by landscape architect practice ReardonSmith. One of the aims is to improve the biodiversity of the gardens and increasing the time span in which flowers will be in bloom. "A lot of work has gone into where the

plants will go," says David. It involves selecting plants strategically to get a balance of flowers that bloom at different points in the year, and carefully placing them to make sure they get the natural light they need.

"Increasing the amount of pollinator-friendly plants and the flowering period is great for wildlife," says David. The plans will mean losing some of the trees that stand in the gardens, in order to increase the amount of natural light, which will in turn improve the health of the lawn.

### VICTORIA HERITAGE

As well as ushering in new growth in the space, the project will highlight the gardens' vivid history. The site's church that gave the gardens their name was destroyed by a bomb during the Blitz in 1941, but the graves of those buried in the churchyard still remain beneath the ground.

To ensure sustainability of the project, soil conditions have been checked, and the Museum of London Archeology has conducted investigations of the site. Among the more colourful residents of the yard is Thomas Blood, a self-styled colonel and conman who attempted to steal the Crown Jewels in the 17th century. "This is what makes London special – the history – so we want to bring that forward," says David.

The scheme will retain the gardens' sculptures, which include a memorial to 17th century composer Henry Purcell and the sculpture commemorating those who fought for votes for women (nearby Caxton Hall was a key meeting place for Suffragists).

David hopes that rejuvenating the gardens will encourage local families to spend more time in the space, in addition to office workers on lunch breaks and tourists visiting Westminster.

The gardens will remain unfenced and accessible 24 hours a day, and David says the plans include improving the lighting in the area with the Light Bureau [a design and consulting studio] and possibly installing a drinking water fountain. One element of the plan is a proposed area of hard standing to equip the site to host temporary events in the gardens, such as live music recitals.

"We think a lot more people will use it, so we want as many people to comment as possible," he says.

*To keep up-to-date with the project, visit [christchurchgardens.london](http://christchurchgardens.london)*

