

Factsheet - Eastville Park

By 1850, Bristol was declared the third most unhealthy city of mid-19th century England. Many people had left the countryside and moved into the city to find jobs in industry. There were no dustmen to take away rubbish, drinking water was polluted and there were not enough drains to take away the sewage. So much land had been built on that there was little room for recreation.



1 Eastville Park was the result of a public campaign to do something about the over-crowded and unhealthy parish of St Philips. If a city such as Bristol thought anything of itself why didn't it have better public parks? Eventually 70 acres were purchased for £30,000 in 1889.

2 The park was to be sited at the edge of late 19th-century Bristol. Some people were against the idea because they thought the area was too remote. Some mature trees growing there already were kept, the boundary walls were repaired and paths were laid out with 100 seats and several small wooden shelters.

3 Walks were created by planting an avenue of Lime trees (now partly replaced with Horse Chestnuts) and London Planes. The grass was managed with both sheep-grazing and mowing. Next came a caretaker's lodge, refreshment pavilion, bandstand, drinking fountains and mens' toilets. The outdoor swimming pool followed in 1905, the bowling greens in 1907, and the lake in 1908-09.



4 The lake is one of the best public park lakes in England. It was constructed by hundreds of unemployed applicants to the Distress Committee's Labour Bureau in 1905 and replaced a water-meadow. It was specially designed to be picturesque and its shape is known as 'Serpentine'. An advantage of this shape is that the boundaries curve around so that from wherever you stand you cannot see how big it is. The lake is bordered by lawns, specimen trees and a 'hanging wood'.

5 The first boathouse was burnt down in 1913. It is said that suffragettes were responsible. A replacement was built in 1925 but has recently been demolished. Plans to build a new boathouse are in place.

6 The park has lost most of its original built features. The bandstand and little kiosks had gone by 1950. Only the plinth and footings of the octagonal drinking fountain by the Fishponds Road entrance still survive, with a stand pipe which no longer supplies water. The Crimean War cannon which stood on a plinth near the bowling green was removed during the Second World War to be melted down to make weapons.

7 Three walls of the swimming pool have survived and were made into a community garden in the early 1980s. Fine railings and original cast-iron benches also remain. The bowling greens and tennis courts are still used. Late 20th century additions include the sports pavilion, football pitches and a playground.

8 The widening of Fishponds Road in 1909 involved cutting back the Park for nearly the whole of its edge by the road. The M32 took away the lower entrance, with its walls, gates and drinking fountain in the 1960s. The best entrance is the original one in the north-west corner, under the remains of a clump of London Plane trees.

9 An improvement plan has been ongoing since 2002. The plan includes raising the profile of the M32 roundabout entrance, providing a new multi-use building, restructuring the play area and incorporating a skateboard area, and re-introducing boating on the lake.

