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The spirit of 'Capability' Brown lives on in Wimbledon

In 1765 Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, most famous of all English landscape architects, was commissioned to re-model an area of South London which has become Wimbledon Park. His revolutionary ideas created beautiful parklands that have survived virtually intact for over 240 years but far from being an overly protected historical relic, Wimbledon Park is a centre of community life. It feeds the needs of the local people for sporting and leisure activities and enriches the lives of all those that use it.

The custodians of the park have a responsibility to maintain it for future generations but also need to ensure it remains relevant to modern life with facilities that cater for the needs of the community. During recent years the paddling pool in one corner of the park fell into disrepair and became increasingly expensive to maintain. The local authority, London Borough of Merton, was keen to retain the facility but could not fund a replacement.

Fortunately, the Wimbledon Park Heritage Group, was able to help. Led by its Chairman, Sim Comfort, the Group considered various options but the feeling was that if the park was to continue to excite and entertain children today it would need a facility that was relevant for the 21st Century, not one that harks back to the ideals of the past; a sentiment that the group felt sure would appeal to the park's creator.

The Heritage Group was attracted by the innovative, award winning 'splash parks' developed by SSP Waterplay, of Windlesham, Surrey. A relatively new concept, Splash parks are rapidly gaining popularity with councils, theme parks and leisure facilities throughout the country. The combination of safe rubberised surfaces, a multitude of sprays, fountains and water jets, all controlled by the children enjoying them, has proved irresistible whatever the weather! But these facilities aren't just good fun, they dramatically increase accessibility for children of all ages and abilities, increase the popularity of parks and have received awards recognising their contribution to the improvement of tired, under-utilised local amenities

The splash park has proved a great hit with the local community and Sim Comfort believes that it also enhances this historical site. As he explains, "The new facility has added life and vibrancy to the park without undermining its essential character. The use of water was always an important element in Capability Brown's designs and I think that he would appreciate the way the park is evolving. It has certainly proved to be a magnet for children of all ages and fun is, after all, what parks should be about".

The bulk of the funding for the project came from a generous donation from anonymous contributors in memory of their daughter Elisabeth who loved to play in the paddling pool. The new splash park has been named after the little girl and will doubtless bring enjoyment to children for many years to come.

The Elisabeth Pool in Wimbledon Park is a graphic demonstration of how technically advanced and exciting play areas can be incorporated into even the most historically sensitive sites.

For more information contact Greg Seale, MD of SSP Waterplay on 01276 489999 or go to www.sunsafe.co.uk

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