

Wren's view: the glass prism is the centrepiece of the new piazza surrounding the Monument



The success story: we can hardly remember what it was like to have traffic rumbling through Trafalgar Square

Landscaped public gardens are giving Londoners a traffic-free treat, says **Fay Sweet**



Dancing with happiness: Triton Square in Camden, by EDCO Design, combines a public space with sculptured lawns

Square deals

WITH its glimmering glass pavilion, freshly laid stone and granite paving, a new public square will be unveiled in the capital next Wednesday.

Where once cars, motorcycles and lorries wove their way through the tight mesh of streets around the Monument in the City, now peace reigns — and it is pedestrians only.

This small oasis in the heart of the Square Mile has been reclaimed to improve the environment and quality of life for City workers. With traffic banished, now there is space to take a break and enjoy the views from the 200ft-tall Monument tower commemorating the Great Fire of London, which began just a spark away in Pudding Lane.

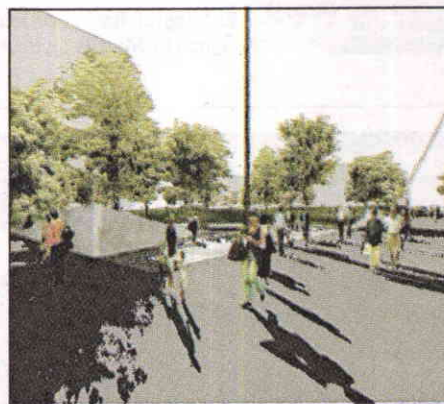
As one of the best of the capital's 21st century public spaces, the scheme is also featured in a new exhibition celebrating these urban havens.

Monument Square might seem a fairly modest affair, but it is a gem and forms part of a wider vision to improve public spaces throughout the capital. Recent successes include big set-piece schemes such as the pedestrianisation of the north side of Trafalgar Square, while, at the other end of the scale, dozens of tiny pocket gardens have been created on scraps of disused land.

"It's impossible to overstate the importance of open spaces in London. Not just for our quality of life, but for local birds, insects and plant diversity," says architect Justin Bere of bere:architects, which has created the shiny new pavilion that is a sculptural addition to the area, providing much-needed public loos and amenity space for staff at the Monument.

The unusual glass-prism roof gives visitors at the top of the Monument tower an unusual, reflected view of the golden orb at its summit.

The scheme is the latest of more than 50 projects undertaken by the City of London in the past three years. "Because the City is



Softener: the soulless area around the London Eye will be improved by Jubilee Gardens

undergoing a building boom with growing numbers of people coming to work here, we want to match the quality of new buildings with the public spaces around and in between them," says Victor Callister, head of the corporation's ongoing Street Scene Challenge.

The City, with local business sponsors, is spending about £5 million a year on upgrading public spaces and is calling on the talents of designers such as Sir Norman Foster, whose projects include works at London Wall and Moorgate, and Eric Parry, with his recently opened Aldermanbury Square.

Callister is particularly pleased with the latest new square. "It's been chaos at The Monument since 1870, when the Victorians created Monument Street for traffic travelling between old Billingsgate Market and London Bridge. Now, at last, we have been able to go back to Sir Christopher Wren's vision of making a piazza around this great landmark."

MEANWHILE, drawing together pictures and plans of more than 100 new public gardens, squares and walkways is an exhibition called Public City, at the New London Architecture Gallery. The show includes schemes at Trafalgar Square — it is almost impossible to remember that traffic used to thunder past the front doors of the National Gallery — Brixton Central Square, Triton Square in Camden, a new square at the Old Bailey, Arena Square at Wembley and West Smithfield in Clerkenwell.

Public City runs until 3 March at New London Architecture Gallery, The Building Centre, Store Street, WC1 (020 7636 4044; www.newlondonarchitecture.org). The gallery is closed on Sundays. Admission is free.



Grand design: Brixton Central Square in Lambeth fronts the civic building and Ritzy Cinema

FREE TALKS

A PROGRAMME of free breakfast talks, starting at 8.30am, accompanies the exhibition and includes:

■ **31 January:** Getting it Done for London. Ted Kyzer of the London Development Agency talks on preparations for the 2012 Olympics.

■ **5 February:** Public Spaces for a Changing Public Life, by landscape guru Jan Gehl of GEHL Architects. Please note that this talk will take place in the evening.

■ **7 February:** Parliament Square — Achieving the Right Balance, with Spencer de Grey of Foster & Partners and Deborah Saunt of DSDHA.

■ **14 February:** Civilising Streets and Public Spaces, with Gordon Chard of City of Westminster Council.

■ **22 February:** Designs on our Streets, with Sarah Gaventa, the new head of CABE Space.

■ **2 March:** Better Places for People: Proposals for Mayfair and Belgravia, with Peter Vernon from Grosvenor.

Registration is essential. Email talk@newlondonarchitecture.org. All talks take place at New London Architecture, The Building Centre, 26 Store Street, WC1.

GREENWICH GOES GREEN

CONTINUING the theme of greening the city, a major new scheme in Greenwich, which includes almost 700 homes, takes the highly unusual step of devoting more than half of its site to new parks and gardens.

Called Granite Wharf and standing on the site of four former wharves just east of the landmark Royal Naval College, the innovative design opens up a 1,000ft stretch of new views and riverside walkways and incorporates a sequence of exquisitely designed landscaped spaces, including a games pitch and tidal water gardens.

Comprising almost 667 homes, 43,055sq ft of offices and a 100-bedroom hotel, the innovative mixed-use scheme has been designed by Squire & Partners for developer London & Regional Properties. Landscape design is by Land Use Consultants. Planning permission was granted late last year, and work is expected to start in March, with completion due in 2011.