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British Firm Lands Gorky Park Contract

By Irina Filatova

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LDA Design wants Gorky Park to be on par with its famous foreign peers. **Vladimir Filonov**

A year after trendy cafes and giant pillows on the lawns replaced cheap-looking grill restaurants with plastic chairs in Gorky Park, the venue is facing another wave of renovation, as a British design firm won a $200,000 bid to breathe new life into the popular leisure area in downtown Moscow.

The tender committee, which included City Hall officials and the park's administration, chose London-based LDA Design to develop the park over the next few years — an ambitious project aimed at creating a modern leisure area on 120 hectares of land, including the park's territory, Neskuchny Gardens adjoining the park and the Vorobyovskaya embankment of the Moscow river.

The bid by LDA Design was chosen from among over 20 applications submitted by teams from Russia, the Netherlands, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, India, Italy and the United States, according to Gorky Park's website.

The tender committee made its decision based on the teams' market reputation, their structure and their experience in implementing similar projects, said Olga Zakharova, director of Gorky Park and a committee member.

"LDA Design turned out to be the only team whose portfolio included rejuvenation projects. They understand what material they'll have to work with and what kind of task they'll have to solve," she said in e-mailed comments.

Among LDA Design's most prominent projects are designing

and developing the parkland and public areas for this year's Olympics in London, as well as restoration of London's Victoria Park.

The key priority outlined in the tender bid — a document describing the company's approach to developing the territory — is to preserve's the area's heritage and properly integrate it into the surrounding landscape, said Sally Prothero, a director at LDA Design.

The bid, worth about $209,000, envisages "making Gorky Park on a par with other internationally famous parks like Hyde Park in London or Central Park in New York to give it the status it deserves," she said by telephone from London, adding, however, that the park in Moscow "won't be similar" to those areas due to its "unique characteristics and landscape."

Gorky Park was opened in 1928 and was a popular leisure area to hold sports and cultural events — a status that it lost in the 1990s, when it was turned into an amusement park with entrance fees and exorbitant prices for roller-coaster rides.

In an effort to return Gorky Park to its initial status, the city authorities dismantled amusement rides and removed cafes and illegal kiosks from its territory last year — a move followed by the announcement of the tender in July.

LDA Design will have to submit a detailed design project for the area by late January 2013, and Prothero said that it should "respond to the needs" of both Muscovites and foreign visitors.

She didn't specify possible details of the project, saying that the company first needs to understand people's expectations of how to use the area, with research to be carried out in the near future.

The tender organizers hope that the park's facelift will help solve some existing problems, including a lack of parking space, Zakharova said, adding that the park should also be divided into several zones to make it comfortable for all groups of visitors, like young parents with children or pensioners, "who have come here for decades."

The project will be financed from the city budget, as well as by private investors attracted by the park, but its economic efficiency shouldn't contradict the initial idea to make the park a comfortable public area, Zakharova said.

The tender organizers hope that all changes would be completed by 2018, she said.

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