Major Milestone in Garden Restoration Project

14/02/2011

The Mayor of Antrim, Councillor Pam Lewis, welcomed Environment Minister, Edwin Poots MLA to the event that heralded the start of work at the former site of Antrim Castle by cutting a sod of earth in an area that will become a key focal point for visitors to this unique heritage site managed by Antrim Borough Council.

Commenting on the ceremony, the Mayor stated: “I'm delighted the Minister and our funding partners have joined us for this momentous occasion. I feel a real sense of history at this ceremony today. What lies beneath this area is the remains of a castle that was lost to us. However, I feel reassured that the work being undertaken by the Council will help interpret the significance of this site and the surrounding gardens for generations to come."

Minister Poots, commented: "My department has nurtured a very positive relationship with Antrim Borough Council on the complex restoration of this very historical site. So, it's a great pleasure to be here today to see for myself the progress which has been made."

Also present at the event was Paul Mullan, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in Northern Ireland. Paul commented: “Antrim Castle Gardens is one of the best surviving examples of an 18th-century Anglo-Dutch water garden, and is of huge historic significance both locally and nationally. The start of works at the former site of Antrim Castle is an important milestone which will see this unique heritage site restored and conserved for the benefit of us all, and we are delighted to be involved.”

Work has been progressing on-site since last year with the expectation that the majority of work will be completed by the end of 2011. Refurbishment work at the nearby building complex, which includes a new centre for garden heritage at Clotworthy House is expected to be completed by the Autumn. Other buildings within the complex will feature new community garden and arts facilities.

Nick Livingston, Strategic Director, Arts Council of Northern Ireland, said: “The Arts Council is committed to investing in arts facilities across Northern Ireland and creating opportunities for people to participate in the arts. We hope that the new arts facilities at Antrim Castle Gardens will create a vibrant space for the people of Antrim and we keenly await the opening of the refurbished buildings later this year.”

Over the past few months, Henry Bros Ltd of Magherafelt, appointed as main contractors working alongside an experienced design team, have dealt with many challenges of this multi-faceted building programme.

Notes to editors

Antrim Borough Council’s total capital budget for the Antrim Castle Gardens Restoration & Development Scheme is £5.8 million. The following grant aid has been secured:

- Heritage Lottery Fund - £3,359,000 (includes contribution towards management & maintenance costs over 5 years).
- Arts Council of Northern Ireland - £236,862.

- Northern Ireland Environment Agency Historic Buildings Grants - £108,860 (for eligible works to ‘listed’ features including Longs Canals & Round Pond, Deerpark Bridge, Clotworthy House and the Remains of Antrim Castle).

The consultant design team is led by MWA Associates.

Media enquiries

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